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

University of Sheffield International College

November 2016

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at University of Sheffield International College. The review took place from 1 to 2 November 2016 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Emeritus Professor Brian Anderton
- Ms Kate Wicklow (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by University of Sheffield International College 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 threshold 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 provider is taking or plans to take.

In Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) there is also a check on the provider'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 6.

In reviewing University of Sheffield International College 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.

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about University of Sheffield International College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at University of Sheffield International College.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of the provider meets UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities meets UK expectations.
- The quality of the provider's information about learning opportunities meets UK expectations.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at University of Sheffield International College.

- The levels of cooperation between the Centre and its university partner that enable timely and effective engagement (Expectations A3.1, A1, A2.1, B1, B3).
- The effective support for student learning through the provision of the critical reading modules and subject-specific vocabulary on the virtual learning environment (Expectations B3, B4).
- The effective support arrangements that enhance student progression (Expectation B4).
- The interactive and effective communication tool for students provided through the Virtual Reception facility (Expectations C, B4).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendation** to University of Sheffield International College.

By April 2017:

- ensure current students have the opportunity to attend deliberative committees (Expectation B5).

Affirmations

The QAA review team **affirms** the following action that the University of Sheffield International College is already taking to make academic standards secure and improve the educational provision offered to its students:

- the steps being taken to ensure that mapping of learning outcomes to assessment tasks is fully in line with provider requirements (Expectations A3.2, A3.3, B6).

Enhancement of student learning opportunities

The provider is developing an Enhancement Strategy and the University of Sheffield International College (USIC) will work within this framework. The new partnership with the University of Sheffield has provided formal contact points between academic staff at the University and the Centre. Opportunities for students to engage with their prospective departments at the University have also been improved through the use of Link Tutors. These initiatives are seen as enhancing the support available for students to progress to the University.

The virtual learning environment (VLE) has been developed into an effective learning tool, especially the availability of the Virtual Reception facility which provides a one-stop source of information and support for students about their programme, their learning environment and being a student in Sheffield. Also identified as an enhancement was USIC's approach to progression monitoring and the provision of targeted interventions.

Theme: Student Employability

The Centre plans to fully implement the provider's CareerAhead Initiative in January 2017. An initial mapping exercise has been undertaken and many of the skills outlined in the CareerAhead Initiative are already well embedded into USIC programmes. Some students are additionally taking the Reach Higher Module, which aims to deliver the skills needed to excel in their chosen degree course at the partner university.

The Centre has developed a statement on what skills their graduates will achieve before they embark on the University programme. Students undertake a Personal Development Planning exercise that aims to improve attributes needed to obtain graduate-level employment in their chosen field.

About University of Sheffield International College

The aim of the University of Sheffield International College (USIC) is to prepare international students to progress and thrive at the University of Sheffield through successful completion of their programme.

USIC opened in September 2015. A project to manage the transition from the former private provider to Study Group extended over a period of around 18 months from March 2014, led by a transition project team. It was not possible to work directly with College staff since they continued to be employed by the former private provider. Development of teaching materials for the autumn term was undertaken by a team of module developers recruited from former USIC sessional tutors and tutors from other International Study Centres. The Study Group transition project team was mirrored by a University of Sheffield team and, together, the partnership collaborated closely to deliver objectives in the following workstreams: Academic (including governance); People & Communications; Head Office Operations; USIC Operations; Technology; Sales; and Marketing.

With the College moving into a newly acquired building, the design, construction and resourcing of the new premises straddled both Academic and Technology workstreams, working closely with the University's Facilities Management Directorate.

The College Director leads the Senior Management Team including the Academic Director, Head of Student & Partner Relations, and Head of Academic & Business Support, joined by the two Heads of Programmes. There is an academic complement of 33.3 FTE permanent staff supported by up to 26 FTE sessional tutors. There are 17.3 FTE permanent professional services staff and four staff on fixed-term contracts.

There are 933 students currently enrolled at the College. The College portfolio offers the following provider-approved programmes and pathways:

- International Foundation Year in Science & Engineering
- International Foundation Year in Business, Law & Social Sciences
- Pre-Masters Programme in Science & Engineering
- Pre-Masters Programme in Business, Law & Social Sciences.

Students studying pre-sessional English programmes in preparation for their main programme are taught at the University's English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC). A permanent ELTC Academic Director (ESUS) is based at the College, supported by a combination of full-time and sessional tutors employed by the University.

The College's priorities are reflected in the Centre Action Plan (CAP) and Senior Management Team (SMT) workstream plans and address the provider's aims to secure the best possible student outcomes through:

- high-performing staff teams
- effective governance, quality and compliance
- excellent partner relations
- superior sales, marketing and product development
- effective and efficient ways of operating.

This HER (EC) is the College's first engagement with QAA as a College in the Study Group network.

Explanation of the findings about University of Sheffield International College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

Explanation of the findings about University of Sheffield International College

1   Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of 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* 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   USIC opened in September 2015 as the successor to a previous private provider. As such, it needed to manage the transition to its own portfolio of programmers within a fairly tight time-frame. The process was managed through a Study Group transition project team which was mirrored by a University transition team. USIC offers two main types of programme: a) International Foundation Year (IFY) in either Science and Engineering (with four pathways) or in Business, Law & Social Sciences (with five pathways); and b) Pre-Masters Programmes (PMP) in either Science and Engineering (with three pathways) or in Business, Law & Social Sciences (with five pathways). USIC's programme portfolio is designed to facilitate progression to relevant programmes at the University. Study Group is responsible for the maintenance of academic standards and for academic approval of the IFY and PMP provision, and the University has endorsed this provision for progression to named undergraduate and postgraduate programmes conditional on students achieving specified progression thresholds.

1.2   The Study Group Transition Project Team had, as part of its operational arrangements, an Academic Workstream set up to work collaboratively with the University to develop the curricula for the USIC programmes. The objective of this close collaboration with the University was to ensure standards, benchmarks and sector-wide expectations informed the design, development and approval of the USIC curricula.

1.3   The USIC Academic Director is responsible overall for the assurance, management and enhancement of academic quality and standards, supported by the Heads of Programmes. In relation to external reference points, USIC International Foundation Year (IFY) programmes are located at Level 3 in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), and Pre-Masters Programmes (PMP) at Level 6. The development of the IFY programmes was informed by the Level 3 descriptor developed through the Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (NICATS). The development of the PMP has been informed by the Level 6 descriptor developed through the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ).

1.4   The approach adopted by USIC to develop the new curricula would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.5   The review team examined documentation relating to the development and approval of the curricula for the USIC programmes, and met with the College Director and other staff with curriculum responsibilities.

1.6   Documentation generated by the Academic Workstream group demonstrates collaboration with the University to ensure standards, benchmarks and sector-wide expectations informed the design, development and approval of the USIC curricula. It is clear that the process of cooperation between the University and Study Group in relation to curriculum development was interactive and iterative, involving University Faculty lead staff and Departmental lead staff, and with coordination of inputs through the University's committee structure. Development of both programmes used University templates for module and programme specifications. The IFY is designed to deliver threshold standards at RQF Level 3, while the PMP delivers threshold standards at Level 6 FHEQ. There are programme specifications for the IFY Business, Law and Social Sciences, and for the IFY Science and Engineering; and for the PMP Business, Law and Social Sciences and for the PMP Science and Engineering. In the case of the IFY programme specifications, they clearly indicate they are pitched at Level 3 NQF (RQF) and address the generic learning outcomes at this level, and in the case of the IFY Science and Engineering reference is also made to using A-level syllabi in science subjects to inform the programme. In the case of the PMP programme specifications, they clearly indicate they are pitched at Level 6 in the FHEQ. In the case of the PMP Science and Engineering, the programme specification also refers to the programme being informed by the UK Standards for Engineering Competence, and the QAA Subject Benchmarks in Maths, Statistics and Operations Research, Engineering, and Computing. In the case of the PMP Business, Law and Social Sciences, the programme specification states that specialist modules in each pathway have been referenced to the relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Statement. In collaboration with the University, USIC has also developed Foundation Generic Assessment Criteria at Level 3, and Pre-Masters Generic Assessment Criteria at Level 6. The review team formed the view that the levels of cooperation between the Centre and its university partner contribute to the good practice identified in section A3.1.

1.7   Neither the IFY nor the PMP are credit-rated as they do not lead to an award of credit. However, in designing the programmes, attention was given to reflecting standard higher education practice in relation to workloads and notional learning hours.

1.8   USIC has also made use of other external reference points in relation to programme development and delivery. The design of the English language component of the English and Skills for University Study (ESUS) modules was informed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), an international standard for describing language ability. The design of the professional services infrastructure which supports delivery of the programmes was informed by the work of the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA).

1.9   Overall, the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.10   USIC has a number of formal committees which assure standards and manage quality within the Centre. These feed into both the provider and partner higher education institution (HEI) committee structures with clear reporting lines. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG) is the central committee that all USIC committees feed into. QAEG minutes are then reported at the provider's AQAEC meeting and the Academic Management Board (AMB), which is a joint committee between USIC and the University. There is provision for student representation on QAEG and AMB for former USIC students who have transitioned into the University. Student representatives decide for themselves who attends these meetings. USIC and the University also operate a joint Steering Group, and programmes are managed through Programme Boards and Programme Assessment Boards.

1.11   The Centre Action plan assures that the Centre priorities, actions from committees and feedback from students and external experts are considered and completed. It is considered at QAEG and AMB as well as sent to the provider-level AQAEC.

1.12   The Centre Handbook provides the reference point for all policies, procedures and regulations that govern the provision and is available electronically through the VLE MOLE to USIC and relevant University staff, as well as external examiners. Students receive policies and procedures through the 'Virtual Reception' which is an information repository in the VLE.

1.13   These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.14   To test the Expectation the review team analysed Terms of Reference and minutes of key USIC committees, had access to both the Virtual Reception and the Staff VLE, and met with staff and students of the College.

1.15   USIC has a well-developed relationship between the University and its staff. It was clear to the review team from looking at the minutes of joint committees and from speaking to staff that the partnership is effective, supportive and proactive in ensuring academic standards. The University appoints faculty and department link tutors to the USIC programmes which provide an additional layer of scrutiny of academic standards and a support function to staff This has contributed to the good practice identified in section A3.1.

1.16   The review team found the committee structure to be effective at managing the provision, with actions clearly identified and appropriately logged on the Centre Action Plan which was monitored at QAEG and AMB. Staff who the review team met were articulate in how they use the plan to track actions from meetings, feedback from external examiners, and feedback from students.

1.17   Overall the review team finds USIC operates within transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations which secure academic standards. Therefore, this Expectation is met and the associated 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

1.18   USIC has Programme Specifications which constitute a definitive record of the course. These were developed by the Transition Project Team who oversaw the development of the new Study Group ISC at the University of Sheffield in collaboration with academic staff of the University, staff from other Study Group ISCs and the Academic Director for the new Sheffield ISC.

1.19   Each programme has a specification which details the programme aims, learning outcomes and module structure for each pathway in the programme as well as each pathway's additional learning outcomes. It clearly shows the ways in which students on the two-term programme are able to meet the same subject-level learning outcomes as those students who undertake a three-term course and highlights how each pathway connects to a University course once completed. These are approved using the provider's processes.

1.20   The review team found that the design of the processes allows the Expectation to be met.

1.21   To test the Expectation, the review team appraised documentation relating to the programme development and approval of the courses, saw the approved programme specifications of the Centre, and spoke with staff and students of USIC.

1.22   The programme specifications provide a clear record of the requirements of each pathway in each programme. These are further supplemented by Module Outlines for the constituent parts of the pathway and programme. They are student-facing documents and provide students with a clear sense of what is expected of them, and detail modes of delivery, assessment tasks and key readings. They are authored by Module Coordinators in collaboration with the teaching team, and signed off by Subject Leads. Students with whom the review team met with were clear that they understood what was expected of them to succeed in their course and transfer to their chosen University degree.

1.23   While these programmes were developed in unusual circumstances away from the delivery team, programme specifications were scrutinised at the approval panel by subject experts both externally and internally from other ISCs.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.25   USIC has a Centre Handbook which is made available to staff of USIC and relevant staff of the University as an electronic document through the VLE. The Handbook is informed by Study Group-level policies and procedures, it is endorsed by the University, and it is updated on an annual basis. The Handbook includes a section on responsibility for academic quality and standards. Study Group has responsibility to ensure that USIC complies as appropriate with standard Study Group operating procedures. This includes compliance with Study Group policies on programme development and approval. The USIC Academic Director is responsible to the Head of Centre for the assurance, management and enhancement of academic quality and standards, supported by the Heads of Programmes.

1.26   The procedures for programme development and approval, promulgated by Study Group and to which USIC's Handbook refers, should ensure that academic standards are set at the appropriate level, and would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.27   The review team reviewed documentation relating to programme development and approval, notably the programme approval report, and met with staff involved with programme development and approval at USIC to test whether the Expectation is met in practice.

1.28   The Study Group Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (AQAEC) convened a programme approval panel in March 2015, in accordance with Study Group's then Programme Approval Process, to consider the IFY and PMP programme proposals. The panel was chaired by Study Group's Director of Teaching and Learning, and included Study Group's Head of Quality, two external advisers from other universities (though one came from a university which also hosts an ISC), a student panel member drawn from another ISC and senior staff from other ISCs. The report from the approval panel event approved all of the programmes, subject to a number of conditions and recommendations. The conditions reflected the rapid pace of the transition, and the need to put in place aspects of the academic frameworks which would govern the programmes, for example a set of academic regulations and the production of generic grade-band assessment criteria for Foundation and Pre-Masters levels. Responses to the approval conditions were incorporated into the Centre Action Plan, and they were confirmed to have been met and approval of the programmes was given by AQAEC. The joint Academic Management Board (AMB) received the report at its April 2015 meeting and further considered the report and fulfilment of approval conditions at its July 2015 meeting. The approval panel made it a condition that a review panel should be convened in summer 2016, with externality and ideally with representatives from the original panel membership, to consider the programmes again once all curriculum documentation had been developed and endorsed by the University. This was scheduled for July 2016. The approval report did not specify the duration of the programme approval, and the review team queried whether approval had been given for 12 months, with the event scheduled for July 2016 a re-approval panel. However, it was told the absence of a period of approval on the report was an oversight, and that approval had been given for five years in accordance with normal Study Group practice. The panel meeting held in July 2016 was to review progress with the

programmes after their first year of operation but was not a re-approval event. Recommendations were made by the panel but it was not constituted to make conditions (see sections A3.3 and B8).

1.29   Overall, the review team saw a robust implementation by USIC of Study Group's policies and procedures for programme approval. The review team formed the view that the levels of cooperation between the Centre and its University partner constituted **good practice**. The Expectation was met with low risk.

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

1.30   The Centre Handbook contains detailed guidance for staff on the policies and procedures which govern assessment at USIC. The Virtual Reception provides accessible guidance to students on the assessment regulations, as well as key documents relating to late submission, special circumstances, academic misconduct, academic appeals and feedback.

1.31   The Programme Specifications and Module Overviews provide students and staff with the framework in which to develop assessment, using the approved learning outcomes. The Centre have developed a series of mark scheme and criteria for staff to use as a reference point in their marking, which are endorsed by the University. External examiners approve assessment tasks before students undertake them which ensures tasks enable students to meet the defined learning outcomes.

1.32   Staff use double marking and moderation as outlined in the assessment policy to ensure fairness, and work is sampled by the external examiner. New staff are observed in their marking of student work.

1.33   Marks are verified by a Programme Assessment Board (PAB) which is chaired by the Head of Programme and includes the external examiner. A report from these boards is considered at the Programme Committees and oversight of assessment is undertaken by QAEG.

1.34   These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.35   To test this Expectation, the review team evaluated policies and procedures relating to the assessment of students including marking sheets, learning outcomes and handbooks, and spoke to both staff and students at the Centre.

1.36   USIC has a comprehensive suite of policies and procedures in which to govern its assessment. As well as marking criteria and learning outcomes, the team saw examples of training for exam invigilators, and additional guidance to students on good exam practice. As a new Centre, Assessment Boards are being modified to ensure clarity and efficiency of the process. Virtual meetings have been trialled, but at the time of the meeting the data was not of sufficient quality to be effective on that occasion and the Centre reverted back to a traditional meeting with the external examiner.

1.37   USIC went through an end-of-year review event, using the provider's approval process. The panel saw documents relating to the assessment of students and learning outcomes of the programme. While there were no specific issues identified, it was recommended that the Centre ensure that assessment is clearly mapped to the overall and pathway learning outcomes as approved. At the time of the QAA visit the Centre was starting

to approach this task through working with subject teams, therefore the review team **affirms** the steps being taken to ensure that mapping of learning outcomes to assessment tasks is fully in line with provider requirements. This is linked to section B6.

1.38   Students who the review team met with were clear on what was expected of them in terms of assessment. The Centre has comprehensive policies to manage assessment, and standards are assured through the external examiner. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated 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

1.39　　The first annual review of academic programmes at USIC was due to coincide with the visit by the QAA review team. The basic building blocks in the monitoring and review process are the Module Reviews undertaken annually, after the module has run, by each Module Coordinator. Review involves the creation of a module file which, among other things, is made available to the relevant external examiner. Module Review considers the appropriateness of: a) the module's stated aims and intended learning outcomes; b) teaching processes; c) assessment strategies; d) specialist and generic skills development; and e) resources provided. A detailed pro forma guides module coordinators on the completion of their module files. The module reviews together with external examiner reports feed into the Subject Leaders' reports on the modules for which they have responsibility. In turn, the Subject Leaders' reports contribute to the annual programme review, together with the Academic Progression Coordinator's report to the Programme Board on progression management and student support, and the Faculty Link Tutor's report to AMB. Annual programme review reflects more widely on the programme as a whole, the coherence of its structure and content to deliver the overall aims and objectives, and the overall experience of students. Student achievements are evaluated at the Centre. Their progression to the University and their performance relative to their peers at the end of their first year at University will also be considered. Together with the annual review of professional service provision, the annual programme reviews will feed into the Annual Monitoring report considered at QAEG. The first annual monitoring reports at programme and Centre levels will be submitted to RQAEG in December 2016. Annual review is solely a USIC responsibility.

1.40　　The approach adopted at USIC for Annual Review appears robust and would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.41　　The panel met staff and students, as well as reviewing documentation, particularly the USIC Handbook.

1.42　　In due course, USIC will be subject to the Provider Centre Review process, with Study Group establishing a panel to undertake this review and agreeing the timing of the review. As well as serving the purposes for Centre Review established by Study Group, it will also assure the University that USIC is operating effective, regular and systematic processes for the monitoring and review of programmes. Following Study Group current practice and in compliance with a condition arising from the initial approval panel held in 2015, the programmes at USIC were subject to review in July 2016 by a panel whose structure mirrored that of the original approval panel by incorporating external members. When the time comes for periodic programme review, this will be conducted using the same Study Group policies and procedures as for initial programme approval.

1.43　　Although aspects of this review process have yet to be implemented at USIC, the review team were able to access the one-year programme review report. The purpose of the event was to review the academic standards and delivery of programmes at USIC after one year of operation. The report evidenced a rigorous process which mirrored the operation of

the initial programme approval panel. The panel report contained ten recommendations together with a number of affirmations and aspects of good practice. The review team questioned some of these recommendations which appeared to suggest significant omissions in the programme as initially approved. However, it was reassured that many of the recommendations reflected the fact that the initial approval panel had not been able to meet teaching staff or students, and some of the curriculum mapping being recommended reflected the desire to bring documentation in line with new Study Group pro formas. This has contributed to an affirmation in section A3.2.

1.44   Overall, the review team formed the view that, in relation to both annual review and programme periodic review USIC, operating within the policy framework of Study Group and as laid out in the USIC Centre Handbook, meets the Expectation with low risk.

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

1.45   USIC uses external expertise in the setting and maintaining of academic standards. It uses the provider's process for programme approval which includes subject specialists appointed to the approval panel, as well as other Heads from Study Group ISC centres. In the set-up of the USIC, the Transition Project Team included subject specialists from the partner university to provide expertise in the disciplines. Staff from other Study Group ISCs were also included in the development of programmes for the new Centre.

1.46   The provider appoints external examiners to scrutinise academic standards, approve assessment tasks and attend PABs. These appointments are endorsed by the University and serve for a period of four years. The University link tutor system also ensures additional external scrutiny.

1.47   The review team found that the design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.48   To test the Expectation, the review team evaluated documentation relating to the development and approval of the programmes at the ISC, saw the first external examiner reports for the Centre, and met with staff of USIC.

1.49   External examiners play an important role in the oversight and scrutiny of academic standards within the Centre. Examiners are provided with an induction to their role, and meet with relevant academic and professional service staff. They are required to attend at least one Programme Assessment Board (or Resit Board) and are sent students' work electronically to evaluate in preparation for the meetings.

1.50   External examiners produce reports at the end of the academic year. These are discussed at Programme Boards where student representatives are also present. Reports and the institutional response are also shared with students on the Virtual Reception. As the programmes of the Centre are still very new, the review team were unable to complete a full evaluation of how external examiners' reports are used effectively. However, the team saw the response to the external examiner which was written by the Subject Leaders.

1.51   Overall the Centre is making good use of external expertise in the development and scrutiny of its programmes. Therefore, the review team finds this Expectation to be met and the associated risk low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the provider: Summary of findings

1.52   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.53   All of the seven Expectations in this area are met with low risk. There are no recommendations, one affirmation and one feature of good practice identified in this section. The affirmation relates to the maintenance of academic standards and assessments, recognising the progress made by the Centre towards fully mapping learning outcomes in line with provider expectations. The feature of good practice, extending across four Expectations, focuses on the benefits resulting from the high levels of cooperation between the Centre and its HEI partner.

1.54   The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the provider at the College **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 USIC has a Centre Handbook which is made available to staff of USIC and relevant staff of the University as an electronic document through the VLE. The Handbook is informed by Study Group-level policies and procedures, it is endorsed by the University, and it is updated on an annual basis. The Handbook has a section on responsibility for academic quality and standards, and this includes compliance with Study Group policies on programme development and approval.

2.2 The procedures for programme development and approval, promulgated by Study Group and to which USIC's Handbook refers, should ensure that academic standards are set at the appropriate level, and would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.3 The review team reviewed documentation relating to programme development and approval, notably the programme approval report, and met with staff involved with programme development and approval at USIC to test whether the Expectation is met in practice.

2.4 The Study Group Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (AQAEC) convened a programme approval panel in March 2015, in accordance with Study Group's then Programme Approval Process, to consider the IFY and PMP programme proposals. The panel included two external advisers from other universities (though one came from a university which also hosts an ISC), a student panel member drawn from another ISC and senior staff from other ISCs. The report from the approval panel event approved all of the programmes, subject to a number of conditions and also with a number of recommendations. Responses to the approval conditions were incorporated into the Centre Action Plan, and they were confirmed to have been met and approval of the programmes given by AQAEC. The approval panel made it a condition that a review panel should be convened in summer 2016, with externality and ideally with representatives from the original panel membership, to consider the programmes again once all curriculum documentation had been developed and endorsed by the University. This took place in July 2016 and resulted in further recommendations with which USIC was dealing at the time of the review team's visit.

2.5 Overall, the review team saw a robust implementation by USIC of Study Group's policies and procedures for programme approval. It also observed the close working relationship in initial programme development between USIC and its University partner, which contributed to the good practice identified in section A3.1. The review team concluded that the Expectation was met with low risk.

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

2.6   The provider has overall responsibility for the management of admissions to all of its ISC partners. The admissions criteria and entry requirements are negotiated with the University during contract development, and are monitored through the Steering Group. The admissions teams refer exceptional cases to the College Director and Heads of Programmes where it is felt that a student narrowly misses the prescribed entry requirements.

2.7   The USIC website provides prospective students with access to indicative course content, potential progression routes (and requirements to progress) and entry requirements; as well as details on fees and how to apply. This information is supplemented with a marketing brochure, developed by Study Group centrally in collaboration with the College Director and University staff.

2.8   This would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.9   The review team saw the policies and procedures of Study Group for the admission of students, reviewed the programme specifications and contract between Study Group and the University and evaluated content on the internet aimed at perspective students to test the Expectation. The team also met with staff and students of the USIC.

2.10   The Study Group Admissions team are responsible for the admissions and enrolment of students onto the programme using the University-approved entry criteria.

2.11   The Centre have developed a Pre-Arrival Guide and a Welcome Site which is designed to help reassure students by giving them basic information about their arrival in the UK, information about the cost of living, and useful information about the city. An induction aimed at parents has also been produced.

2.12   Students whom the review team met with were confident that the information provided to them before and during the application process was timely, accurate and trustworthy.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.14   In its first year, the Centre operated with a Learning, Teaching and Assessment statement rather than a formal strategy. The statement was developed during the transition period, when USIC took over from the previous provider, and it was developed in parallel with the design of the programmes and premises for the Centre. It provided a framework for the development and implementation of learning materials, and the use of physical space and digital technology to support the delivery of programme outcomes. The intention is to reflect on the first year of operation of the Centre to produce a full Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (LTAS).

2.15   The objective of USIC's approach to Learning, Teaching and Assessment is to maximise student engagement with their learning. The approach recognises the diversity of student backgrounds and prior learning experience. Teaching practices and learning opportunities explicitly integrate subject knowledge and understanding, English language development, academic skills and academic practice. Feedback, for example on assessed work, is designed to be positive, reinforcing success and giving guidance on how improvements might be made. USIC's approach to giving feedback aligns with that of the University, and is detailed in the Assessment Principles and Regulations section of the USIC Handbook. This is further evidence which supports the high levels of cooperation between the Centre and its University partner endorsed as good practice in section A3.1. Students are entitled to receive feedback on examinations which are weighted over 50 per cent for the module, and feedback is given both orally and in writing.

2.16   The Centre's approach to Learning, Teaching and Assessment recognises that advice and support may come from both academic staff and also professional services staff who can advise on such things as regulations and student welfare. Students are allocated to an Academic Adviser through their teaching groups, and students are encouraged to monitor their own progress supported by their Academic Adviser (see section B4).

2.17   Student learning is supported by excellent resources on campus. The Centre is located in a purpose-built building which offers a range of different learning spaces and environments, including areas for private study and group work. Classroom learning is supported by modern learning technologies. In addition, USIC students are able to access all of the University's learning resources, and the learning model at USIC encourages use of the library and information resources of the University as part of the support for student transition to the University.

2.18   The Centre Action Plan identifies high-performing staff teams as a key priority. Staff are experienced, reflective practitioners who seek to improve and enhance students' learning opportunities. Most staff transferred to USIC from the previous provider, bringing that experience with them, albeit needing to be inducted into the Study Group ethos and way of doing things. New staff, full-time or sessional, are interviewed, have an observed teaching session or presentation, and undertake a marking exercise as a minimum requirement. Because of the pressures related to transition from the previous provider to SG, and because it was largely a stable staff group, the decision was taken to defer both teaching

observations and staff development activities to summer 2016. Nevertheless, some developmental activities have been undertaken. There is also a system of Professional Review and Development (PRD) which provides all staff with the opportunity to reflect on an agreed period of time, normally 12 months, to receive feedback on their performance and contribution and to set objectives for the coming year. Aspirations and development opportunities can also be explored at this time.

2.19   The systems and procedures which USIC has in place would allow this Expectation to be met.

2.20   The review team examined documentation relating to the Teaching and Learning Statement and the USIC Handbook, reviewed the VLE content and met with staff and students to confirm whether the Expectation was met in practice.

2.21   Although it was Study Group policy that all ISCs should produce their own LTAS and lodge this with the Curriculum and Learning Enhancement Committee (CLEC) for peer review prior to implementation in 2016-17, USIC has been given a dispensation by Study Group to delay submission of its LTAS until it has completed the annual review of the Centre's first year of operation. In due course, the USIC LTAS will be submitted to CLEC for peer review in the same way as the LTAS for all the other ISCs. The University has recently agreed its Learning and Teaching Strategy for 2016-2021, and opportunities for alignment with this have been and will be developed. Two current examples of alignment have been the emphasis in the IFY Science and Engineering programme on the development of laboratory skills, and the Reach Higher module on the IFY Business, Law and Social Sciences programme to encourage the development of team working skills.

2.22   Curriculum design seeks to build links across modules in each term, and also makes use of synoptic assessment, for example an oral presentation which is concurrently assessed as part of ESUS4 and as part of the module Designing a Research Project. Development of academic skills for the diverse student base is secured through the Study Group network-wide ESUS modules which integrate study skills development with English language development. The review team were told that USIC will continue with the ESUS framework in 2016-17 with separate assessments written by the Study Group central team, but will then switch to the Study Group Academic English Support (AES) framework from 2017-18. There are also specific academic skills modules which are bespoke to each programme, the 'Critical Reading' modules. These encourage critical reading skills through 'reading circles' using subject-based texts. The Centre has also recognised the importance of students building up subject-specific vocabularies, particularly to support learning in lectures, and it has developed subject-specific vocabulary sets which are made available to students through the VLE. The review team were able to ask staff about and to see and evaluate these learning initiatives, and formed the view that the effective support for student learning through the provision of the critical reading modules and subject-specific vocabulary on the virtual learning environment constituted **good practice**.

2.23   There is evidence of reflection by USIC on how to improve its approach to teaching and learning: for example, better support for learning and progression to the University, and the introduction and extension of the use of Turnitin for submission of student-assessed work and Grademark for the provision of more effective feedback linked to assessment criteria. Turnitin is routinely used for the submission of coursework, and students are able to upload drafts of their assessments to assist in the development of their work and their skills. Significant use is made of Grademark to provide feedback but the extent of usage depends on the nature of the subject. Students confirmed the feedback they received on assessed work is helpful. USIC uses student feedback to evaluate the effectiveness of its approach and whether student engagement is being achieved. This includes feedback on their learning experience from student representatives on the Programme Boards and a survey of

the effectiveness of the VLE (MOLE) in supporting independent learning. Students with whom the review team met mentioned that, in some programme areas, there was a tendency towards the concentration of students from a specific linguistic or ethnic group. This was felt to be disadvantageous to the learning and academic development of students. The review team asked staff whether there was a policy on diversity within the Centre. They were told that, wherever possible, there was a policy of ensuring diversity within classes, though there had been instances where it had been deemed advantageous to concentrate students with similar learning needs so that these could be better supported. There could also be a tendency towards concentration of certain groups in particular subject areas which made ensuring diversity more challenging.

2.24   Although USIC occupies purpose-designed accommodation, USIC acknowledges there will be additional opportunities to maximise use of the learning spaces it occupies. The review team asked about progress with this and was told USIC is planning to fund a placement student to undertake research into the use of learning spaces, study zones and equipment. Students have raised the issue of a silent study space, and USIC is reviewing where to locate this. The University's new Diamond Building has private study spaces available, and students of USIC were making use of these. The timetabling of teaching and other learning space had been reviewed, with new software having been introduced. However, timetabling remained an area of concern for students with whom the review team met. Students did indicate they were fully supported by the learning resources which were available to them. They confirmed they had full access rights to University learning resources, and commented particularly that science students were able to make use of laboratories outside normal class times. The VLE, which operates on the same platform as that used by the University, was much used and appreciated by students. The USIC Virtual Reception, mounted on the VLE, provides students with comprehensive information relating to their learning and acts as a virtual student handbook.

2.25   At its inception, USIC took over the employment of around 120 staff from the previous provider, including sessional teaching staff, around 35 full-time academic staff and a similar number of professional services support staff. Since these staff had been allowed only a limited amount of contact with USIC staff prior to their transfer, it was necessary to implement a very intensive three-week training programme to enable transferring staff to familiarise themselves with the new curriculum, teaching resources and the whole academic infrastructure which governs the management and operation of USIC. Senior management at USIC consider this exercise to have been carried out effectively and successfully, and staff with whom the review team met indicated they had felt well supported during the transition. Staff confirmed that Professional Review and Development was the system of staff appraisal employed at USIC. It involved management observation of teaching, self-evaluation and objective-setting. There is a system of peer observation of teaching at USIC, and it is supported by a Study Group template. It is developmental in character, not part of staff appraisal, though good practice is captured in a spreadsheet. Currently, staff are encouraged to engage with peer observation but it is optional whether they do so. In relation to Safeguarding and Prevent training, it was confirmed this was undertaken with staff within USIC and at Study Group level.

2.26   The approach adopted by USIC to the support of teaching and learning is very comprehensive, and meets the Expectation with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.27   The self-evaluation document states that support for student development and achievement starts pre-arrival, and continues through registration and induction. Students receive a Pre–arrival Guide and Arrival Form which they complete with information about their arrival in the UK and at the Centre. Students are introduced to the range of support services available to them, both academic and welfare, from USIC and from the University. Special provisions are in place for the support of students who are under 18 years on entry. Student views of the effectiveness of registration and induction are evaluated through a locally generated survey. Students have access to the USIC Virtual Reception through the VLE. This acts as a comprehensive virtual student handbook.

2.28   The Personal Development Programme (PDP) is the mechanism through which USIC's progression management strategy is delivered, and involves academic and professional services staff working together to monitor student engagement and progression across all modules. Advice and guidance to students is channelled through the Academic Progression Coordinator (APC) who is the PDP module coordinator, and through the programme Academic Advisers who are coordinated by the APC. All students are assigned an Academic Adviser who is their PDP tutor. USIC designed the Progresso approach to progression management during early 2015, launched this, ran a Progression Management Project Team during 2015-16; evaluated its work in Sept 2016 and then implemented enhancements to the process e.g. the development of student facing communication instruments and adjustments to the RAG criteria. Academic Advisers are able to monitor student engagement and progression at regular intervals using data generated by Progresso, the student information system, and to track their tutees' progress on each module.

2.29   The USIC Handbook has a statement which represents the position on the management of progression to the University and for consideration of borderline students. The detail of progression thresholds is located on the student-facing Virtual Reception so that information is kept updated in a single location. In the worst case, if students ultimately do not meet the requirements to progress to their chosen programme at the University of Sheffield, they are supported to progress to other UK higher education institutions.

2.30   The arrangements which USIC has put in place have the potential to meet the Expectation.

2.31   The review team examined the USIC Handbook and other documentation, both hardcopy and electronic on the VLE, and met with staff and students to ascertain whether the Expectation is met in practice.

2.32   Documentation relating to student induction to USIC shows a comprehensive schedule of activities lasting two weeks. Week one is a more general induction to USIC, and to living and studying in the UK, while week two is an academic induction including talks from University staff from the different subject groupings. There is a registration and induction stamp card which students are required to have stamped and dated to evidence they have participated in the various activities of the induction programme. There is also an academic induction programme which relates to subject induction and the use of learning technologies related to the subject area. Finally, there is a Parent Induction Programme

designed to inform parents or guardians about the experience students will have at USIC. This includes a copy of the Student Agreement which lays out the obligations of students and what they can expect of USIC. Students with whom the review team met confirmed they had experienced the two-week induction programme, and they had found it very useful. Where students arrived late and missed the formal induction programme, the picture was more mixed. Staff told the review team late arrivals received an induction programme 'equivalent' to what other students would have received. This included presentations, campus/city tours and videos of presentations given during the two-week induction programme. However, students presented a more variable picture. Some said they had been given written guidance and a 'crash' one-day induction, while others said they had struggled to obtain the information they needed. This may partly result from the fact that the review team met a mix of 2015-16 students who had now moved to the University, and current 2016-17 students, and that their respective experiences may have varied. USIC students may also access the University's very useful 'Big Sheffield Welcome' website, a guide for international students in Sheffield developed by international students.

2.33   The PDP module aims to assist students to become reflective and independent learners, able to identify their own strengths and areas where improvement is needed. A skills audit and target setting are recorded in the PDP workbook leading to the development of an e-portfolio of evidence of achievements recorded using the PebblePad facility. Each PDP group is coordinated by an Academic Adviser, and weekly tutorials are held. Academic Advisers are English for Academic Purposes (EAP) specialists able to advise students on academic skills and English language development. Academic Advisers are supported in their role by an induction given by the Academic Progression Coordinator, who is also the module coordinator for the PDP module. Academic Advisers act as an initial point of contact for students on academic matters. From induction, it is through the Personal Development Programme that students receive information and guidance about their programmes, progression requirements, policies, regulations and procedures. Students with whom the review team met identified their Academic Adviser as their first point of contact to resolve problems. Student pastoral and welfare support is provided by the Student and Partner Relations team at USIC. The team is the first port of call for welfare issues, offers guidance and is able to direct students to support services as required. Student and Partner Relations monitor student welfare and manage interventions. The team provides guidance on the rules and regulations of USIC and access to University facilities and resources, and acts as a point of liaison with the University's Student Support and Guidance Section. The team shares information with other colleagues about student welfare and pastoral issues on a 'need-to-know' basis.

2.34   Academic Advisers are able to track the progress of their students in their PDP group on each module using the Progresso facility. Each term, in weeks 3, 6 and 9, students are rated on a red/amber/green (RAG) traffic light system in each module based on their progress. The Progression Support Team meets with programme Academic Progression Coordinators and the Heads of Programme to review the outcomes for each student on the programme under the RAG system, together with information on the student from the Welfare and Attendance Group (WAG). WAG is a standing group which meets weekly, and which is responsible for discussion and decision on appropriate actions for student welfare and attendance cases. The aim is to identify students on a timely basis who are struggling, whether through academic, pastoral, or health and wellbeing issues. This triggers appropriate follow-up action for the student by the relevant staff. Students were aware of the additional support available to those identified as being at risk of non-progression. They also identified the efficiency and quality of support available from staff as one of the most positive aspects of their experience at USIC. An analysis of the operation and effectiveness of the RAG system in Science and Engineering has been undertaken as part of the Centre's evaluation of its progression support arrangements. The review team formed the view that the effective support arrangements that enhance student progression were **good practice**.

2.35   The Virtual Reception provides students with information on the detailed progression requirements for their chosen programme at the University. Students told the review team they had clear information from the outset on the progression requirements to transition to their chosen programme at the University, and that they had sufficient information about progression routes. The use of the Virtual Reception to provide interactive and effective communication that facilitates student development was considered good practice by the team (see also section C). The Centre has also recognised the importance of students building up subject-specific vocabularies, particularly to support learning in lectures, and it has developed subject-specific vocabulary sets which are made available to students through the VLE. These provide effective support for students and were identified as good practice in section B3. At the suggestion of USIC, the University has set up a network of Faculty and Departmental Link Tutors. Among their duties, they play a significant role in organising activities which help students to transition to the University.

2.36   Data on student progression to the University, for the 2015-16 cohorts of students, showed that overall 69 per cent progressed unconditionally, a further 8 per cent progressed conditionally at the discretion of the University and 23 per cent were non-progressors. However, these overall statistics mask significant variation between programmes. Progression on the PMP programmes was appreciably better than for the IFY programmes, with 84 per cent of PMP Business Law and Social Sciences (BLSS) students progressing unconditionally and 96 per cent of the PMP Science and Engineering (SE) students. On the IFY programmes, while 68 per cent of SE students progressed unconditionally, only 56 per cent of the IFY BLSS students did. The highest non-progression rate was for the IFY BSS at 31 per cent and lowest on the PMP SE at 0 per cent. This was the first year of operation of USIC, so there was no data from previous years with which to compare these figures.

2.37   The arrangements which USIC has put in place enable the Expectation to be met with low risk.

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

2.38   USIC state that from the outset, the student voice has been a feature of the Centre. The USIC programme approval panel appointed by AQAEC included a student representative drawn from Sussex ISC.

2.39   There are student representatives included in the membership of a number of committees within the governance structure of USIC. At the strategic level, Academic Management Board (AMB) and the Sheffield Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG) have student representatives drawn from former students who are now studying at the University. There are two Programme Boards, one for Business, Law and Social Sciences (BLSS) and one for Science and Engineering (SE), and both have current student representation from the IFY and PMP programmes. A recent innovation is the creation of representation at the teaching group level, with each teaching group having a student representative, and with these group representatives coming together in the new Student Forum. Students are elected by their teaching group to become Group Representatives on the Student Forum, and those on the Student Forum then elect from their number student representatives for the Programme Boards. Training for student representatives is provided by the University Students' Union, and the Head of Programme, who chairs the Programme Board, provides student representatives with the opportunity to go through the agenda and supporting papers ahead of the meeting to enhance their understanding of the matters being discussed. Student representatives are supported to meet their constituencies through 'surgeries', meetings and by email correspondence. Programme Board papers include the external examiners' reports and responses to these reports are agreed at Programme Boards which report to QAEG.

2.40   In addition to the representational system, student engagement is also secured by various questionnaire surveys of all students. Previously, there were Study Group network-wide surveys covering student views on registration and induction, at mid-programme and at end of programme using the SPARK facility. The central Student and Partner Relations group would collate and analyse student responses for each Centre, and the outcomes would be discussed at QAEG. However, from 2016-17, the SPARK facility has been withdrawn, and USIC is now responsible for undertaking these student surveys at local level. Students also complete module-level questionnaires where questions are aligned with those in the National Student Survey. The outcomes of the module questionnaires are made available to student representatives, and are discussed at Programme Boards and at QAEG

2.41   The arrangements which USIC has in place have the potential to involve all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience and would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.42   To ascertain whether this is the case in practice, the review team examined documentation including committee terms of reference and minutes, the VLE and in particular the USIC Handbook and the Student Virtual Reception. It also met with staff and students.

2.43   The review team sought to establish that the student representational system was working effectively and as described. The section on student representation, which is part of the student handbook for 2016-17 on the Virtual Reception, broadly corroborates this. It

makes clear that current students are only represented on the operational committees and groups, the new Student Forum and the Programme Boards. Each of the Programme Boards for BLSS and SE have two IFY and two PMP student representatives. From 2016-17, these representatives will be elected from the group representatives on the Student Forum. Students told the review team the teaching group student representatives have been elected, but elections for membership of the Programme Boards have not yet happened. In relation to student representation on the QAEG and the AMB, the review team noted minor discrepancies in student representation of these committees in different parts of USIC's documentation. In relation to QAEG, the latest terms of reference state that there will be two student representatives, one undergraduate student who serves a term of two years, and one postgraduate student who serves a term of one year. Although it does not specify former students of USIC now studying at the University, this appears to be the implied meaning, and this was confirmed by former students of USIC with whom the review team met. There is a variance between these terms of reference and the information given to students in the virtual student handbook, where QAEG is said to include 'a former student'. In relation to the AMB, the terms of reference state 'a student representative' whereas in the virtual student handbook, representation is said to consist of one former IFY student and one former PMP student now studying at the University. It would be desirable for USIC to ensure consistency in its documentation relating to student representation.

2.44   While seeing the advantage of including former students as members of the two strategic committees, since they would bring to discussion the experience of undertaking the whole programme of study in previous years, the review team sought to understand why current students were not also represented on USIC's strategic-level committees, particularly as this is common practice in other Study Group ISCs. Staff said they believed using former students as representatives provided effective student feedback on how well the programmes at USIC had prepared students for progression to the University; and they believed the nature of the discussions were less relevant to current students. Current students had other forums where their views could be represented, and they would not have the experience or expertise to be effective representatives on the strategic-level committees. It was also pointed out that, because of its size, USIC had functioned as a region within the Study Group Governance Structure, so that its QAEG had also been in effect an RQAEG reporting directly to AQAEC. The latter argument was less relevant from 2016-17, as Study Group has decided that USIC should report through RQAEG like other ISCs, rather than reporting directly to AQAEC. The review team formed the view that, by excluding current students from its strategic-level committees, AMB and QAEG, USIC was not enabling effective representation of the collective student voice at all organisational levels. Accordingly, the review team **recommends** that USIC ensures current students have the opportunity to attend deliberative committees.

2.45   Examination of the minutes of the QAEG shows that there was an undergraduate student representative throughout 2015-16, and there was evidence of contributions to discussion from the student representative. There did not appear to have been a postgraduate student representative. In the case of the AMB, student representation will start from 2016-17. The minutes of both Programme Boards show good levels of student attendance. There is space in the agenda for representatives to report the views of students, and there is evidence of students making an effective contribution.

2.46   In its initial year of operation, 2015-16, USIC had received information relating to the outcomes of questionnaires administered by the central Student and Partner Relations Group using the SPARK facility. Surveys included student views on registration and induction, at mid-programme and at end of programme. The outcomes from these SPARK surveys were presented to and considered by QAEG. There had also been a local survey of student views concerning MOLE, the VLE facility. During 2016, there has been discussion within the committee structure concerning the approach to gathering student feedback at

USIC. The decision was taken to set up a Student Feedback Working Group, with Programme Boards nominating members to serve on this working group. The objectives were, in the short term, to agree a feedback strategy to inform the review of the autumn term 2016-17; and to develop a broader strategy for student feedback to inform annual review. This work was ongoing at the time of the review. Staff confirmed that module questionnaires are employed and they were able to quote examples of how module delivery had been changed as a result of student feedback. Students confirmed they had completed online questionnaires relating to induction and modules.

2.47   Overall, the Expectation is met with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.48   The Centre Handbook contains detailed guidance on the policies and procedures which govern assessment at the Centre for staff. The Virtual Reception provides accessible guidance to students on the assessment regulations, as well as key documents relating to late submission, special circumstances, academic misconduct, academic appeals and feedback.

2.49   The Programme Specifications and Module Overviews provide students and staff with the framework in which to develop assessment, using the approved learning outcomes. The Centre has developed a series of marking schemes and criteria for staff to use as a reference point in their marking, which are endorsed by the University.

2.50   Staff use double marking and moderation as outlined in the assessment policy to ensure fairness, and work is sampled by the external examiner. New staff are observed in their marking of student work.

2.51   USIC monitor student attainment every three weeks through the provider's Progresso system and flag students of concern. The Centre also has a Welfare and Attendance Group who discuss students in need of additional support.

2.52   Marks are verified by a Programme Assessment Board which is chaired by the Head of Programme and includes the external examiner. A report from these boards is reported at the Programme Committees and oversight of assessment is undertaken by QAEG.

2.53   These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.54   To test this Expectation, the review team evaluated policies and procedures relating to the assessment of students including marking sheets, learning outcomes and handbooks, and spoke to both staff and students at the Centre.

2.55   The Centre has a comprehensive suite of policies and procedures in which to govern its assessment. As well as marking criteria and learning outcomes, the team saw examples of training for exam invigilators, and additional guidance to students on good exam practice.

2.56   Turnitin is routinely used to monitor plagiarism and for students to use as a learning tool, and GradeMark has been rolled out across the Centre. Feedback is provided to students on assessment through GradeMark, but not routinely on exams. The recent Approval Panel noted that some courses are very exam heavy and therefore there is a danger that students do not receive adequate feedback on their performance. The Centre models its assessment practices on that of the University course students will progress onto, and it was explained that for some courses this is also very exam heavy. Students can ask for feedback on their exam scripts and the Centre have been encouraged to inform students of this by the approval panel. Students who the review team met were clear that they were

able to ask for their exam scripts back and the Centre were working on making this process more transparent.

2.57   The Centre has identified that for some students, assessment regulations in the UK are very different to previous experiences, and subsequently harder to understand. They have reproduced the Assessment Regulations in a variety of media including video to aid students in understanding what is expected of them. Students have the opportunity to meet with staff from Academic Services for help and support. All information pertaining to assessment is available to students on the Virtual Reception.

2.58   USIC went through an end-of-year review event, using the provider's approval process. The panel saw documents relating to the assessment of students and learning outcomes of the programme. While there were no specific issues identified, it was recommended that the Centre ensure that assessment is clearly mapped to the overall and pathway learning outcomes as approved. This has led to an affirmation in section A3.2.

2.59   Students who the review team met with were clear on what was expected of them in terms of assessment, and understood regulations surrounding plagiarism, mitigation and referencing. The Centre has comprehensive policies to manage assessment, and standards are assured through the external examiner. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated 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

2.60   The provider appoints external examiners to scrutinise academic standards, approve assessment tasks and attend PABs. These appointments are endorsed by the University and serve for a period of four years.

2.61   External examiner reports are received by the Centre and Subject Leaders draft a response. These are then discussed at the Programme Boards and actions are entered onto the Centre Action Plan.

2.62   The review team found that the design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.63   To test the Expectation, the review team evaluated documentation relating to the role of the external examiner, saw the first external examiner reports for the Centre, and met with staff of the Centre.

2.64   External examiners play an important role in the oversight and scrutiny of academic standards within USIC. Examiners are provided with an induction to their role, and meet with relevant academic and professional service staff. They are required to attend at least one Programme Assessment Board (or Resit Board) and are sent students' work electronically to evaluate in preparation for the meetings.

2.65   External examiners produce reports at the end of the academic year. These are discussed at Programme Boards where student representatives are also present. Reports and the institutional response are also shared with students on the Virtual Reception.

2.66   As the programmes of the Centre are still very new, the review team were unable to complete a full evaluation of how external examiners' reports are used effectively. However, the team saw the response to the first external examiner report which was written by the Subject Leaders.

2.67   Overall USIC is making good use of external expertise in the development and scrutiny of its programmes. Therefore, the review team finds this Expectation to be met and the associated risk 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

2.68   The first annual review of academic programmes at USIC was due to coincide with the visit by the QAA review team. The arrangements for the conduct and oversight of annual review are detailed in section A3.3. The first annual monitoring reports at programme and Centre levels will be submitted to AQAEC in December 2016.

2.69   The approach adopted at USIC for Annual Review appears robust and would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.70   The review team had access to documentation relating to the implementation of the forthcoming annual review process at USIC, and also met staff engaged in the conduct of the review process. From this evidence and the work currently in progress, the review team concluded that the Expectation would be met in respect of annual review.

2.71   When the time comes for periodic programme review, this will be conducted using the same Study Group policies and procedures as for initial programme approval. Although aspects of this review process have yet to be implemented at USIC, the review team were able to access the one-year programme review report. The purpose of the event was to review the academic standards and delivery of programmes at USIC after one year of operation. The report evidenced a rigorous process which mirrored the operation of the initial programme approval panel. The panel report contained ten recommendations together with a number of affirmations and aspects of good practice. The review team questioned some of these recommendations which appeared to suggest significant omissions in the programme as initially approved. However, it was reassured that many of the recommendations reflected the fact that the initial approval panel had not been able to meet teaching staff or students, and some of the curriculum mapping being recommended reflected the desire to bring documentation in line with new Study Group pro formas.

2.72   Overall, the review team formed the view that, in relation to both annual review and programme periodic review USIC, operating within the policy framework of Study Group and as laid out in the USIC Centre Handbook, meets the Expectation with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.73   USIC have regulations which manage their approach to complaints and academic appeals. These are accessible to students on the Virtual Reception, and to staff through the Centre Handbook.

2.74   The Centre has an Academic Appeals Panel to manage the process which is composed of the Academic Director, Heads of Programmes and a representative from the USIC professional services team. Students are able to speak to Academic Services for personal advice and guidance in the complaints and appeals processes.

2.75   While the provider's standard operating procedure for complaints is that the Head of Centre considers all complaints, the size of USIC means that in practice it is more rational for the Heads of Programmes to deal with complaints in the first instance, with the College Director being available at an appeal stage if necessary. Complaints can also be escalated to the provider if required.

2.76   This design of these processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.77   To test the Expectation, the review team evaluated policies and procedures relating to student complaints and appeals, saw a worked example of how complaints are dealt with, and met with staff and students of the Centre.

2.78   USIC has a clear student complaints and appeals process which is easily accessible to students and staff. It conforms to the provider's process and provides a clear approach for the management of complaints and appeals.

2.79   Students who the review team met were clear on the procedures relating to complaints and understood the grounds in which they could submit an academic appeal. Students detailed a series of informal complaints submitted by the student body to their personal tutors and discussed by the programme teams. The review team also saw an example of a formal complaint submitted by a parent of a student. This was dealt with by the Academic Director without the need for a formal hearing to take place.

2.80   USIC has procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints that are fair, accessible and timely. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.81   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.82   All nine Expectations in this area are met with low risk. There is one recommendation concerning the opportunities for engagement at all levels available to current students. A cross-reference is made from Expectation B6 to the affirmation in Expectation A3.2, linked in this section to assessment. There are two features of good practice identified relating to the support opportunities available that facilitate both learning and achievement. Two further features of good practice, primarily situated in Expectations A3.1 and C, are also cross-referenced back to this section.

2.83   The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **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 Staff and students have access to the policies and procedures of the Centre through the online handbook and the Virtual Reception. Requirements for this information are set out in the provider's Academic Quality Handbook. The College Director is responsible for ensuring key documents are in place at each Study Centre and AQAEC receives a report confirming this. The provider produces templates for handbooks, but content is also broadly aligned to the University documentation to ensure continuity for students.

3.2 The USIC website provides prospective students with access to indicative course content, potential progression routes (and requirements to progress) and entry requirements, as well as details on fees and how to apply. This information is supplemented with a marketing brochure, developed by Study Group centrally in collaboration with the College Director and University staff.

3.3 Before arriving at the Centre, students and their parents have access to induction materials, a Pre-arrival Guide and a welcome website which is designed to help reassure students by giving them basic information about their arrival in the UK, the cost of living and the city.

3.4 The Centre Handbook provides the reference point for all policies, procedures and regulations that govern the provision and is available electronically through the VLE to Centre and relevant University staff, as well as external examiners. Students receive policies and procedures through the ISC Virtual Reception which acts as an information repository in the VLE. The University Learning and Teaching Services Department maintains the definitive programme documents for University programmes, which are accessible to staff through departmental and faculty link tutors.

3.5 These procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.6 To test the Expectation, the review team reviewed published information available to prospective students, current students and staff of the Centre and University. The team triangulated this evidence by meeting with staff and students.

3.7 The Centre and provider have comprehensive oversight of the quality of public information available. Documents are easily accessible digitally and are routinely monitored for accuracy by senior staff. Minor modifications to documentation after the first year of operation were reported to the programme review team at the approval event.

3.8 The Centre have produced an abundance of useful information for new starters to feel reassured about their studies, and students with whom the review team met were very complementary about the level of information received during induction.

3.9 As a new centre, the VLE was evaluated following the 2015-16 academic year and is continuing to be improved upon, but students give high praise to its structure and content.

The Virtual Reception provides current students with a useful reference point for all information pertaining to their programme. The Centre effectively manages this resource and responsibilities for checking accuracy are well understood. The Centre goes above and beyond the provider's requirements for making policies accessible to students, by creating additional guidance through a variety of media. The review team find the interactive and effective communication tool for students provided through the Virtual Reception facility to be **good practice**.

3.10   Overall, the review team finds the comprehensive information provided to prospective students, current students and staff is easily accessible, timely and trustworthy. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.11   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.12   The Expectation in this area is met with low risk. Systems are in place to ensure that the quality of information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. There are no recommendations or affirmations in this section. There is one feature of good practice identified relating to the use of the Virtual Reception facility.

3.13   The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **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 The focus for enhancement is primarily on links with the University. The new partnership is seen as providing an enhancement through the establishment of formal contact points between academic staff at the University and staff in subject groups at USIC. USIC is also fostering engagement opportunities for students with their prospective departments at the University through a variety of events facilitated through the link tutors. These are seen as enhancing the support available for students in progressing to the University.

4.2 The provider is developing an Enhancement Strategy and USIC will work within this framework. Staff were able to identify some key areas of enhancement to student learning at USIC. These included development of the VLE as an effective learning tool, and especially the availability of the Virtual Reception facility which provides a one-stop source of information and support for students about their programme, their learning environment within USIC and the wider University, and being a student in Sheffield. Also identified as an enhancement was USIC's approach to progression monitoring and the identification of students at risk of non-progression, which facilitated targeted support tailored to individual student need.

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   QAEG have strategic oversight of the Centre's approach to employability. An initial mapping exercise was undertaken to establish how the current curriculum develops students' employability skills. Many of the provider's skills as outlined in the CareerAhead Initiative are already well embedded into USIC programmes and assessed as part of the current curriculum. The Reach Higher Module undertaken by IFY BLSS students provides them with the necessary skills to excel in their chosen degree course at the University.

5.2   The strong relationship with the University means that students already have access to resources of the University including laboratories in which to hone their skills before embarking on the University degree.

5.3   A key feature of the Centre's approach to employability is the ability for students to assess their strengths and weaknesses with a view to identifying areas which would need to be enhanced to improve their chances of obtaining graduate-level employment in their chosen field. Students undertake a Personal Development Planning exercise as part of their programme. The Centre have developed a statement on what skills their graduates will achieve before they embark on the University programme which will influence their approach to developing employability activities in the Centre.

5.4   As part of the roll out of the CareerAhead Initiative, the Centre plans to identify a member of academic staff to lead the CareerAhead pilot for Sheffield. Their plan for the pilot is to focus on two groups of Pre-Masters students, one each from the September and January cohorts. They are working with other ISCs in the Study Group family and with the University Careers Service to develop the pilot programmes which will be rolled out in January 2017.

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 27 to 29 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.