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

# University of Surrey International Study Centre

**October 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 Surrey International Study Centre. The review took place from 20 to 21 October 2016 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Gaynor Taylor
- Professor Denis Wright.

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

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

- makes judgements on
  - the setting and maintenance of 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 5.

In reviewing University of Surrey International Study Centre the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The themes for the academic year 2015-16 are Digital Literacies and Student Employability,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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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 Surrey International Study Centre

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at University of Surrey International Study Centre.

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

## Good practice

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

- the use of detailed data analysis to inform programme development (Expectations B4, B1, B2, B8)
- the comprehensive and integrated support that enables students to develop their academic and personal potential (Expectation B4)
- the use of alumni as Ambassadors to support students during their programme and after progression to the partner university (Expectations B5, B4).

## Enhancement of student learning opportunities

The Centre Action Plan is used to record and monitor all actions identified by Study Group (the provider), QAA and the Centre. There are many examples of how this has led to enhancements including the use of alumni student representatives as student ambassadors, the in-depth analysis of tracking and progression data to inform curriculum developments and the introduction of pre-arrival information and revision material.

## Theme: Student Employability

Surrey International Study Centre (SISC) is currently in the process of introducing 'CareerAhead', Study Group's employability enhancement project. This employability enhancement theme was discussed with, and received favourably by, the HEI at a Liaison Committee meeting in March 2016.

Learning outcomes of all modules have been mapped to an employability skills grid and a member of staff has been appointed as an Employability/CareerAhead lead. The review team heard of an employability plan that includes an agreement to enable Centre students to access the HEI's Careers Service, of improving opportunities for students to engage in placement years, and of enabling all students to take a psychometric test to help develop individual employability plans.

# About University of Surrey International Study Centre

The University of Surrey International Study Centre (SISC) was established in 2007 and has seen significant growth in student numbers in recent years. This increase has led to the need for greater capacity and a higher level of staff resource. The Centre now operates within two key areas of the University of Surrey campus, who are the higher education institution (HEI) partner. SISC has access to eight classrooms and four offices, and the services of 24 teaching staff, four managers, an Academic and Welfare Officer, the Head of Centre and four Administrators.

The Centre currently has 269 students and delivers an International Foundation Year (IFY) programme with two pathways - Business, Economics, Law and Politics (BELP) and Engineering, Sciences and Mathematics (ESCM), commencing in September or February. The Centre also offers a one or two-term English Language Preparation Programme (ELPP) commencing in June (one and two terms) or September (one term).

Since the previous QAA visit in June 2015, the Centre Action Plan (CAP) has been used to address all actions identified by QAA, Study Group and the Centre itself.

There have been a number of changes within the Centre. In July 2015, the IFY was approved by Study Group for the period of one academic cycle, due to the introduction of a pathway split in addition to the 2015-16 cycle being a transition year between validated and approved provision. A new Deed of Variation of Contract was signed, commencing in September 2015, detailing the Centre's responsibility for the management of academic standards. A full re-approval took place in July 2016 and included the additional Life Sciences pathway.

The Head of Centre has taken on the responsibility of an additional Centre - Istituto Marangoni - and SISC has appointed an enhanced administrative leadership team. The arrangement has benefitted cross-sharing of best practice across the two centres.

As part of Study Group's initiative to improve alignment between the HEI, Centre and Study Group, a strategy document has been produced by way of the Partnership Development Plan.

Current Centre priorities include:

- use of data to inform and develop the curriculum
- improvement of curriculum/programme offer to better suit the needs of the individual students
- work in partnership with the HEI to improve the quality of students coming through the Centre.

# Explanation of the findings about University of Surrey International Study Centre

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

# Explanation of the findings about University of Surrey International Study Centre

# 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     Study Group (SG) is not a degree-awarding body, and does not offer credit, but its programmes are benchmarked, during initial development and at approval and re-approval (or validation and revalidation according to the specific partnership academic arrangement), against *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), for programmes set at Levels 4 to 6, and against the Regulated Qualifications Framework for preparatory programmes set at Level 3. It uses the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages programmes.

1.2     The University of Surrey International Study Centre (SISC) offers an International Foundation Year (IFY) programme with two pathways, one in Business Economics, Law and Politics (BELP), and the second in Engineering, Science and Mathematics (ESCM) leading to progression to the first year of a number of programmes at the University of Surrey. The Centre also offers one or two-term English language preparation programmes. IFY programmes were initially validated by the partner institution, but a decision was made in 2015 to move to provision approved by Study Group and to add an additional Life Sciences pathway. The most recent approval/re-approval took place in July 2016 using the current approval process which includes ensuring that the requirements of the FHEQ or the Regulated Qualifications Framework are met. The approval panel includes at least one external member, independent of Study Group and its partner universities. Programme and

module specifications, conforming to the prescribed Study Group format, must be circulated to the panel for scrutiny at least five days prior to the event.

1.3     The detailed scrutiny of the programmes at approval, in particular programme and module specifications, by a panel including external representatives would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.4     The team considered the papers relating to the approval process, notes from the approval and re-approval/review processes, the programme specification and external examiner reports received following the first year of operation.

1.5     The IFY was approved by Study Group in June 2015. The approval panel included two external members from UK HEIs without links to Study Group, one with a background in business, the second with a background in science. The conditions and recommendations from the approval indicate that consideration had been given to the appropriate level for the programme. In line with Study Group Policy a review of the programmes was carried out after the first year of operation. Three external panel members, without links to Study Group or any of its partner universities, with backgrounds in life sciences, business/marketing and computer science, were used. The review resulted in further conditions and recommendations demonstrating consideration of both the RQF Level 3 and the FHEQ Level 4 frameworks. The programme specification provides an explicit list of the benchmarks used (RQF Level 3 and FHEQ Level 4 as well as GCE AS and A level subject criteria as published by Ofqual and CEFR B2 standard for English). Learning outcomes are phrased in terms appropriate to the levels required and a map is provided between these and the different modules.

1.6     All the external examiner reports for the first year of operation following Study Group approval which had been received at the point of the review visit explicitly confirm that threshold standards 'are in accordance with the relevant frameworks for level 3 qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements'.

1.7     The processes, based on an approval panel including subject-related, independent external members, meet the Expectation with a low level of risk.

**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

1.8     Governance of SISC's quality assurance processes is overseen by Study Group, who is responsible for the approval of academic programmes (see section B1). While not a credit-awarding institution, Study Group's overarching quality assurance framework and processes are designed to ensure that SISC modules and programmes are in line with the partner HEI's credit structure.

1.9     SISC's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG) monitors academic standards within programmes. QAEG meets quarterly and reports to Study Group's Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (AQEAC) through the Regional Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (RQAEG).

1.10    The partner HEI, the University of Surrey, has oversight of the SISC provision through a Liaison Committee, which receives reports from a joint Academic Management Board (AMB) and a joint Operations Working Group (OWG). The Centre Handbook provides a detailed guide to the management of academic standards and quality. A Partnership Development Plan supports the development and enhancement of the SISC provision.

1.11    These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.12    In considering this Expectation, the review team examined the terms of reference and minutes of quality assurance committees, and scrutinised the Centre Handbook, IFY Programme Handbook and other relevant documentation. The team tested its findings through discussions with the Head of Centre and other SISC staff, and with representatives of Study Group and the HEI.

1.13    The Centre Handbook provides a comprehensive guide to the management and operation of SISC, including its governance structure and lines of reporting to AQAEC.

1.14    The review team found that there were effective and robust mechanisms in place for the assurance of quality and standards at SISC, with AQAEC maintaining oversight of SISC's academic framework and regulations through the Centre Review (CR), annual monitoring and the Centre Action Plan (CAP) process (see section B8). The CAP is a key document for development and enhancement of standards and quality at SISC, and is reviewed weekly by the Head of Centre and the Regional Director.

1.15    The Liaison Committee (LC) reports to the HEI and SG executive and is chaired by a member of the HEI's Executive; committee membership includes the Faculty Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching), the Study Group Director of ISCs and the Head of SISC. The LC receives an annual report from the Head of SISC and quarterly reports on student recruitment and progression, and produces a two-year rolling plan for the Centre.
The Liaison Committee also receives quarterly reports from the AMB, and an annual report from the OWG.

1.16    From scrutiny of academic structures, documentation received and meetings with staff, the review team found that the quality assurance framework and associated processes

ensure the SISC IFY programmes remain equivalent in terms of credit with undergraduate degree programmes at the partner HEI.

1.17    Based on the above findings, the review team concludes that the 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     SISC programmes have a set of required definitive documents, comprising a programme specification and module specifications, which are produced by SISC based on Study Group templates, and include information on alignment with subject benchmarks, learning outcomes and their assessment. Study Group maintains a central depository of definitive documents, together with other key documents, including module and student handbooks. A new definitive document, the Centre Specification, records additional information for each ISC, including entry requirements, external examiners and progression awards at partner HEI and their entry requirements. The Study Group Registry will take on responsibility during 2016-17 for publishing these documents as a record of what is being delivered at each ISC, and which programmes have been approved or validated. The Registry will be responsible for maintaining the accuracy of the information and publishing the Centre Specification (see section C).

1.19     Study Group's Academic Manager is responsible for ensuring stored documents are accurate and current, and works with the Quality Team to maintain a record of any changes to ISC modules and programmes; membership of the AQAEC subcommittee, the Programme Approval and Validation Committee (PAVC), facilitates this role.

1.20     The above structures and procedures would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.21     In considering this Expectation, the review team examined sample SISC module and programme specifications, the draft Centre Specification, student handbooks and other relevant documentation. The team tested its findings through discussions with SISC staff and students and senior representatives from Study Group.

1.22     Programme and module specifications seen by the review team confirmed that they provided definitive records of the SISC academic provision.

1.23     SISC staff confirmed the role of QAEG in developing and revising programme and module specifications, with input from tutors, students and external examiners. Discussion with students indicated they had a good knowledge of their programme modules, including assessment procedures.

1.24     Through a review of relevant documentation and meetings with staff and students, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation:     Met**
**Level of risk:     Low**

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

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

**Findings**

1.25     The programme was approved by Study Group in June 2015 using its current approval process. This involved independent, subject specialist, external approval panel members at both the approval process and the requisite review following the first year of operation.

1.26     The process would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.27     The team considered the papers relating to the approval process, notes from the approval and re-approval/review processes, the programme specifications and external examiner reports received following the first year of operation.

1.28     As indicted in section A1, the IFY was approved by Study Group in June 2015. The approval panel included two subject-related external members from UK HEIs without links to Study Group and the conditions and recommendations from the approval indicate that consideration had been given to standards for the programme. In line with Study Group Policy a review of the programmes was carried out after the first year of operation. The review resulted in further conditions and recommendations demonstrating consideration of standards. External examiners are explicitly asked to comment on standards in their reports and all reports available following the first year of operation of the IFY programme in its current form confirmed that threshold standards were being maintained.

1.29     The approval process, based on a panel including subject-related, independent external members, meets the Expectation with a low level of 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      SISC programmes have overarching learning outcomes to which module learning outcomes are mapped. Learning outcomes are defined in programme and module specifications and described in the Programme Handbook. All assessed assignments have marking criteria to inform students what they need to do to achieve particular grades. These are linked to assessment criteria of the HEI, which are in turn informed by criteria described by the FHEQ and RQF.

1.31      The programme approval and re-approval and monitoring and review processes ensure that the academic standard is at the appropriate level and assessments measure achievement of learning outcomes (see sections A2.1, B1, B8).

1.32      Module marks and grades for SISC modules and programmes of study are ratified at Module (Unit) Assessment Boards (UAB). The Programme Assessment Board (PAB) verifies achievement of designated learning outcomes at a specified FHEQ level.

1.33      The above arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.34      The review team tested this Expectation through examination of programme and module specifications, approval and review documents, and external examiner reports, and through discussions with Centre and Study Group staff, and students.

1.35      The review team found that learning outcomes for module and programme specifications were clearly linked and that they could be demonstrated through assessment.

1.36      The PAB incorporates academic oversight by external examiners, who confirm in their reports that learning outcomes and assessments are at the appropriate level.

1.37      To ensure learning outcomes remain appropriate, regional training events involving external experts are being held for ISC staff developing and reviewing programmes and modules.

1.38      A cover sheet on student assignments allows markers to provide feedback to students on how they have met the expectations set out in the assessment criteria. Students who met the review team confirmed that it was clear what was required for each assessment and to achieve a particular grade, and that the feedback they received on their work was helpful.

1.39      Study Group aims to enhance the consistency of assessment across the ISC network through implementation of a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework during 2016-17.

1.40    From scrutiny of relevant documents and discussions with academic staff and students, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation:    Met**
**Level of risk:    Low**

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

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

**Findings**

1.41 The key process for monitoring and review of the IFY programme is the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) and its associated action plan. Annual monitoring reports from the academic year 2015-16 onward will be based on Study Group's template. A process of periodic review/re-approval at least once every five years is in place and will use Study Group's approval/re-approval process. In addition Study Group uses a process of Centre Review.

1.42 These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.43 The team considered the Annual Monitoring Report for 2014-15, Study Group's template for annual monitoring, Study Group's process for approval/re-approval and its process for Centre Review. In addition a meeting was held with the Head of Centre.

1.44 The annual monitoring report for 2014-15 uses the partner university's template which includes detailed analysis of progression, and reasons for non-progression, as well as comments from external examiners, thus implicitly covering standards. The Head of Centre confirmed that the report for 2015-16, due in December 2016, will use Study Group's template which includes external examiners' reports and progression figures relating to standards. The Head of Centre explained that they would collate the report, guided by the template, and it would progress through QAEG, RQAEG and AQAEC for approval and to facilitate the sharing of good practice. The report will be shared with the University at the Liaison Committee and go to their executive board committee.

1.45 In addition to annual monitoring at programme level, Study Group has initiated a periodic Centre Review process by which it seeks, among other things, 'to assure itself that each International Study Centre (ISC) is effectively managing academic standards'. SISC was subject to Centre Review in April 2015, prior to the approval process for the current IFY. This considered standards, but highlighted no major concerns.

1.46 Re-approval when required will use Study Group's process and will include external panel members and, where possible, student members.

1.47 Use of Study Group's processes for approval/re-approval, for Centre Review and for Annual Monitoring ensure consideration of standards so that the Expectation is met 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**

1.48    SISC uses independent, external academic expertise in programme approval panels and for external examining.

1.49    These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.50    To test this Expectation, the review panel examined programme approval documents and external examiner reports, and held discussions with senior academic staff.

1.51    The quality assurance roles played by external panel members in the approval of programmes are outlined in the Study Group Approval Handbook and referred to in the SISC Centre Handbook. In the 2016 SISC IFY Programme Approval Event, the panel included three external academic experts, one for each pathway (see section B1), who subsequently became the external examiners (see section B7).

1.52    The review team saw the external examiner reports for 2014-15 and 2015-16; in each it was recorded that the standard of assessment was appropriate for the level. External examiner reports were also seen to inform the CAP.

1.53    The review team concludes that the use of external expertise in the Centre's quality procedures and processes is sufficient, and the Expectation is thereby met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation:    Met**
**Level of risk:    Low**

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

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

1.55    All of the seven Expectations in this area are met with low risk. There are no recommendations, affirmations or areas of good practice recorded for this section of the report.

1.56    The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards at SISC **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      Programmes are developed and designed in conjunction with both Study Group and the University partner to prepare students for entry onto a range of university courses as noted in section A1. Initial approval for development must be granted by Study Group's AQAEC Committee (a lead role in such approval is now taken by the new Programme Approval and Validation Subcommittee - PAVC). Programme design is discussed with the University partners and the proposed programmes subjected to Study Group's approval process which uses a panel including external members from other higher education providers. Once recommendations from the panel have been considered and any conditions met, the programmes are signed off by AQAEC.

2.2      The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.3      The team considered programme approval documentation, the programme specification, and information concerning the use of data analysis and held discussions with the Head of Centre, teaching and support staff and senior staff from the Centre and the partner University.

2.4      Programme contents are established by understanding the Level 4 subject benchmarks of receiving programmes. Most material offered is at Level 3, but a decision was taken to integrate some Level 4 outcomes in semester although the content is benchmarked at Level 3.

2.5      As indicated in section A1, the IFY was approved by Study Group in June 2015; the approval panel included two external members from UK HEIs without links to Study Group, one with a background in business, the second with a background in science. The conditions and recommendations from the approval indicate that consideration had been given both to the appropriate standards and to the quality of learning experience for the programme.

2.6      Re-approval/review in July 2016 made use of data from previous cohorts in redesigning units. For example, progression tracking data has been analysed extensively and analysis of the figures from the first year of programme operation contributed to programme review. This in turn led to the introduction of revision material for students pre-arrival , changes in assessment (not changing standards, but measuring outcomes in different ways), and ensuring assessment deadlines were not bunched together. In another example, data collected by the partner HEI relates to progression at university from year 1 to year 2 and measures how SISC alumni perform against other international student groups. As a result of this data analysis, an agreement was made to raise the entry requirement for English (see section B2).

2.7      The use of detailed data analysis to inform programme development is considered **good practice**.

2.8      The approval process is robust; the initial development considered articulation with the receiving partner University programmes and a range of feedback during the first year of operation fed into further development prior to the one-year review. The Expectation is 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**

2.9      Recruitment and selection of students for SISC programmes are processed centrally by the Study Group Admission Centre. The admissions process conforms to UK Visas and Immigration requirements. The Study Group Admissions Policy and Structure document describes the principles and structure by which admissions function.

2.10      Study Group Student Enrolment Advisors work with students who wish to apply directly to the ISC course of their choice without the use of an agent. The SISC website provides a direct, online application process. Students applying through a local agent contact the agent for an application form. Changes to programmes are managed though PAVC and any changes affecting the availability of a programme or progression (articulation) to the partner HEI are managed by the admissions team to ensure applicants are kept informed and any necessary actions taken. A Study Group Admissions Complaints and Appeals Policy is now available for applicants (see section B9).

2.11      The above admissions policies, structures and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.12      To test the Expectation, the review team examined published information on admission requirements and the procedures regarding admissions, and held meetings with Centre and Study Group staff, with new students, and students who had progressed to a degree programme.

2.13      The SISC website provides potential applicants with advice and guidance, including English language, academic and UK visa requirements, and information on fees. Entry requirements are maintained in centralised databases, and published on public-facing websites. The review team heard how data on student performance at the HEI was used to support a change in entry requirements to ISC programmes (see section B1). Entry requirements are managed and updated by the ISC Academic Manager at Study Group. Borderline cases are referred by the Admission Centre to the Head of Centre for a final decision on admission. Study Group and SISC encourage early disclosure of a disability, at the application stage, to enable reasonable adjustments to be made.

2.14      The students who met the review team found the admission process straightforward, and had received sufficient information about the SISC programmes, and of life at the Centre and in the UK prior to applying, and had been kept updated regularly during the application process. The students were complimentary about the induction process on arrival at SISC.

2.15      The review team concluded that the admission process managed by Study Group was transparent and fair, with clear delineation of the role of the Centre Head in ensuring the currency of entry requirements for SISC programmes and in considering borderline cases for admission. The review team found that the Expectation is met and the 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**

2.16    Appointment is by interview with the Head of Centre and a Senior Administrator with questions agreed prior to the process. A comprehensive induction procedure is in place for new staff.

2.17    In 2015-16 the Centre introduced Study Group's appraisal system for staff. This includes a Training Needs Analysis (TNA). Appraisal also helps identify continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities which are financially supported at both Study Group and Centre level.

2.18    External examiners' reports, unit reviews, Student Forums and Unit Evaluation Questionnaires are also used to inform curriculum development.

2.19    A draft Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy has been written in line with Study Group's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework.

2.20    These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.21    The team considered documentation concerning appointment, induction, appraisal, peer observation and CPD, Unit reviews and external examiners' reports. The Centre Handbook and draft Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy were also considered and meetings were held with the Head of Centre and with teaching and support staff.

2.22    Recent appointees had been interviewed by the Head of Centre and an Administration Manager using a selection from a bank of standard questions. Induction took place over a week and was timetabled with a list of training areas to be covered; this included online videos and one-to-one training. All had completed online modules in Safeguarding, Level 1 and Prevent Duty. An induction pack is provided and introduces staff members with photographs, contact details and a note of their roles as well as providing operational information. The Centre handbook provide a resource to bring together information about the aims, objectives and governance of the Centre, explains the expectations of teaching staff and details operational procedures such as the preparation and marking of assessments.

2.23    From 2015 appraisal has followed a Performance Review process specified by Study Group and including the setting of objectives followed by mid and end-of-year reviews. Staff who met with the review team said that appraisal was carried out by the line manager, that a skills review form was completed beforehand and that the process included observation of teaching by a manager. A training needs analysis and personal development plan are produced as a result of the performance review. Peer observation also takes place; staff can choose whether to have this feed into their appraisal.

2.24    Curriculum development is also informed by (i) external examiners' reports - an example of this is the inclusion of Biology lab sessions in the new Life Sciences pathway, and (ii) unit reviews which take place at the end of each semester.

2.25      Student Forums and Unit Evaluation Questionnaires are discussed at QAEG and the UABs and the resulting student feedback is used to influence learning, teaching and assessment in the Centre. An example of this is the request by students to have Unit Booklets for each of their courses in the Engineering pathway; these will be available from September 2016.

2.26      Staff informed the review team that they were offered, and took part in, a range of training and development both in terms of pedagogy and in terms of their subject specialisations. A record of Staff CPD and training is kept by the Centre. Attendance at Study Group's Teaching Conference is particularly strong in this Centre. The Centre believes its arrangements for staff development to maintain and enhance the quality of learning opportunities are moderately effective, but that more could be done to facilitate local staff CPD. This forms part of the Centre Action Plan.

2.27      The Centre has produced a draft Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy in line with Study Group's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework. The Strategy was written by the Head of Centre then forwarded to all staff for comment and discussed at QAEG. It has now been submitted to Study Group for approval.

2.28      Robust processes for staff appointment, induction, appraisal and development are in place and used so that the Expectation is met 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**

2.29      Access to a wide range of university resources is specified in the contract.

2.30      Students receive access to a pre-arrival page on the VLE and are welcomed to the Centre with an induction taking place over two weeks.

2.31      All students have a personal tutor who is responsible for delivering one-to-one and small group support sessions throughout the year.

2.32      Progression rates have always been seen as a key performance indicator for ISCs. Until recently these were considered individually by centres. There is now a central Progression Steering Group in place to monitor and report on student retention and achievement across the network of ISCs. A review of the pilot tracking system during summer 2015 culminated in a framework being established across the network where standard definitions of student achievement through a red/pink/amber/green 'RPAG' status were determined and a systematic and common process for tracking student achievement and retention was agreed. The progression risk system is in place at SISC.

2.33      Students have access to a virtual learning environment to support their studies.

2.34      The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.35      The team considered documentation including the induction timetable, Study Group's tracking package, the contract with the University partner and the Programme Handbook. Meetings were held with students, and with teaching and support staff.

2.36      Resources are agreed as part of the contract with the partner University and include access to the library and Learning Resources Centre, email and university internet, access to support services including the chaplaincy, the Centre for Wellbeing, University nurses and the University Health Centre and, by agreement with the Liaison Committee, access to specialised disability/learning support. SISC students are also able to access the partner University's sports facilities and clubs subject to the normal membership fees. Students confirmed that they had the same access to the partner University's resources and facilities as a student of the University.

2.37      Students who met with the review team indicated that they had been well supported prior to their arrival, and that the induction week was comprehensive and included a check of original qualifications and documentation. Late arrivals had catch-up sessions to ensure they were not disadvantaged. Following induction there is a timetabled weekly briefing session for all students to enhance communication and revisit key information offered during induction. This timetable slot also offers the partner University the opportunity to brief students on its application process and for University departments to offer guest lectures.

2.38      A Student Handbook is available digitally and offers guidance on a range of topics concerning the course and life more generally in the UK; students were aware of this and said it was comprehensive. They were aware of the results needed to progress to their chosen courses, with grades displayed prominently on noticeboards.

2.39     All students have a personal tutor and alumni students reported meeting with their tutors four to five times during the year, although more frequent meetings could be arranged if necessary. Students informed the review team that they could take a personal problem to their tutor or directly to the partner University's Wellbeing Centre. Personal tutors are volunteers from among the teaching staff and are supported by the Welfare Officer and VLE Champion with additional training in some staff meetings. They have access to a Personal Tutor Handbook.

2.40     To further support its students the Centre has introduced the use of 'Ambassadors' (alumni who were student representatives and are now pursuing their studies at the partner University) to meet new students at the airport, work during open days and induction and provide more information on different programme pathways. Ambassador contact details are provided on student noticeboards in the Centre. The use of alumni as Ambassadors to support students during their programme and after progression to the partner University is considered **good practice**.

2.41     Students have access to a virtual learning environment, including access to a pre-arrival page, and an E-Learning Champion has been appointed. All modules use the VLE and students said that the material available included past papers, materials for modules, links to quizzes and video links. External examiner reports are being made available to students via the VLE during the current year.

2.42     The Centre is tracking progression of its students using Study Group's approach with assessment and attendance information together with tutor comments used to assign ratings of red, pink, amber or green to each student. Software is in place to make this process easier. The resulting progression tracking spreadsheet informs the first Personal Tutoring session in Semester 2, so that students can receive specific one-to-one support and guidance following the release of their Semester 1 results. Where students are identified as being at risk of failing to progress, a number of free interventions are offered, for example additional support classes in English, maths, physics and economics, more one-to-one tutorials, signposting for counselling and advice and student-led study groups. Take up of the extra support is high and the data shows movement between colours throughout the year; occasionally this is red to green, although amber to green or pink to amber is more common.

2.43     An enhanced level of guidance support is available to those students deemed to be Red or Pink and therefore in danger of failing to progress to their chosen University programmes. The Centre has worked with Study Group in offering dedicated sessions onsite at SISC for students that were at risk of progressing and wanted to seek other options. These dedicated sessions were repeated throughout Semester 2, for both cohorts. Students failing to reach their progression grades can also be referred to other ISCs or can discuss other programmes at the partner University that may be appropriate.

2.44     The comprehensive and integrated support that enables students to develop their academic and personal potential is considered **good practice**.

2.45     Progression tracking data has been analysed extensively and a deeper analysis of the figures from the first year of programme operation contributed to programme review. This in turn led to the introduction of revision material for students pre-arrival , changes in assessment (not changing standards, but measuring outcomes in different ways), and ensuring assessment deadlines were not bunched together. In another example, data collected by the partner University relates to progression at University from year 1 to year 2 and measures how SISC alumni perform against other international student groups. As a result an agreement was made to raise the entry requirement for English.

2.46    The use of detailed data analysis to inform programme development is considered **good practice**.

2.47    The Expectation is met with a full range of processes in place to support student achievement, underpinned by careful and considered data collection and analysis.
The associated risk is low.

**Expectation:    Met**
**Level of risk:    Low**

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

**Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement***

**Findings**

2.48     SISC has a student representative system in place with up to two representatives appointed for each teaching group. A Student Forum, comprising all the representatives, meets once per semester. From 2016-17 there will be one student member on QAEG and two on the Academic Management Board. Alumni student representatives are invited to become Student Ambassadors, retaining a link with the ISC.

2.49     Feedback is also sought from students through module/unit and other questionnaires.

2.50     These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.51     The review team considered minutes of the Student Forum and QAEG meetings, an example of a unit evaluation questionnaire and the Centre Action Plan. Meetings were held with the Head of Centre, students and student representatives and teaching and support staff.

2.52     Students receive a general introduction about the role of student representative from the Academic Officer and the Head of Centre during induction and all students are given an opportunity to sign up to be a student representative. Elections follow where necessary. The Academic and Welfare Officer and the Head of Centre then meet with the student representatives and give training in their roles and responsibilities, with the students collectively agreeing on their roles.

2.53     All student representatives belong to the Student Forum which meets once each semester to discuss issues, concerns and feedback collected by the student representatives from the student body. Examples of development in response to the Student Forum include the introduction of unit booklets in all units of the Engineering and Physical Sciences pathway and timetable changes. Formal minutes of the Student Forum are discussed at QAEG and are published with response boxes from the Head of Centre, the management team and teachers. Minutes are circulated to all students via email and, from September 2016, will be placed on the VLE, enabling all students to have a record of the meeting and the proposed responses from staff. The feedback is discussed in the weekly staff team meetings following the Student Forum so that relevant issues regarding learning and teaching can be managed appropriately by the Head of Department.

2.54     Alumni who were student representatives and are now pursuing their studies at the partner University are offered the opportunity to become student ambassadors whose role is to meet new students at the airport, work during open days and induction and provide more information on different programme pathways. Ambassador contact details are provided on student noticeboards in the Centre. The use of alumni as Ambassadors to support students during their programme and after progression to the partner University is considered **good practice** (see paragraph 2.40).

2.55     Additional feedback from students is obtained via questionnaires post induction and at the end of each semester, when students are asked to complete a Unit Evaluation Questionnaire, which helps to inform the future development of module units and assessments. For the past two years this has been delivered online, but the response rate

has been poor. The Centre would prefer to keep it online rather than revert to a paper-based system and is looking at ways to improve the response rate for future intakes.

2.56    These processes, noting the intention to include student representative members on governance committees, meet the Expectation and the risk level is low.

**Expectation:    Met**
**Level of risk:    Low**

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

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

### Findings

2.57    The Programme Handbook and the Quality Section of the Centre Handbook include the Assessment Regulations, which indicate how SISC engages with the Quality Code through processes and procedures that ensure academic standards are set and maintained. Minor and major changes to assessment regulations are managed through RQAEG and AQAEC respectively.

2.58    Study Group has a set of minimum expectations for assessment. Subject coursework assignments and examinations are produced by SISC Subject Staff together with marking schemes and grade criteria. The programme approval and monitoring and review process ensures that assessments are mapped to the achievement of learning outcomes (see section A3.2). ESUS assessments are developed centrally across the ISC network. Examination papers are sent to external examiners for approval (see section B7).

2.59    Study Group is implementing a Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Strategy during 2016-17 to build upon and enhance the consistency of assessment across the ISC network. Study Group does not recognise prior learning in the assessment of students.

2.60    The accuracy of marks awarded for each student is confirmed at a UAB, which are held three times per year. The PAB confirms the programme outcome for each student, and the Board includes the Head of Centre, Head of English, Academic Lead, Senior Subject Managers and Tutors, and external examiners. Currently, HEI representatives are invited to attend the PAB.

2.61    These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.62    To test the arrangements against the Expectation, the review team scrutinised relevant regulations, procedures and processes, assessment information for students and staff in handbooks and other documents, and external examiner reports. The review team also held meetings with students and staff.

2.63    SISC uses a variety of assessment methods in supporting the curriculum, enhancing subject-specific knowledge and understanding, and in the development of English language skills. Draft assessments are produced internally by subject specialists or Heads of Department and submitted to the Centre's Academic Officer and forwarded to the second marker and the external examiner for comment (including links to learning outcomes). Formative assessment is used to help monitor student progress and engagement and to inform and support improved levels of summative performance. Feedback on formative assessment and its effectiveness is a current area for enhancement at SISC. A feedback pro-forma allows markers to provide feedback to students on how they have met the expectations set out in the assessment criteria. Students were very positive about the information provided on assessment, and the timely and helpful feedback they received on their work.

2.64     A computer-based system (Progresso) is used to track the progression of each student (see section B4), and to store student marks securely and accurately for PABs. Students at risk of not progressing meet their tutors to see how this can be addressed. The use of Progresso also ensures marks are stored and reproduced accurately for PABs.

2.65     Penalties for late submission of assignments are set out in the Programme Handbook. Students are given advice on plagiarism and on conduct in formal examinations and penalties are described in their handbook. All written assessments are submitted on the VLE via Turnitin.

2.66     External examiner comments on assessments for 2014-15 and 2015-16 were generally very favourable and included that the standard of assessment was appropriate for the level, and the assessments used reflected a range of skills and knowledge.

2.67     The CAP shows active consideration of assessment issues, including implementation of the LTA Strategy.

2.68     The review team found that the assessment procedures and processes are effective and robust, and concluded that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation:     Met**
**Level of risk:   Low**

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

### Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

### Findings

2.69     Study Group's External Examining Statement is aligned with the Quality Code. External examiners are nominated by SISC according to Study Group procedures, and are approved by AQAEC.

2.70     External examiners are sent draft exam papers for their programme for comment and approval. External examiners attend PABs and are invited to visit the Centre prior to the PAB to have the opportunity to scrutinise assessed work. Serious concerns are escalated to Study Group using an Escalation Protocol. All other matters raised by external examiners are considered at SISC and reported to AQAEC and are reported to the partner HEI at the Liaison Committee.

2.71     These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.72     The review team tested the external examination process by scrutinising relevant documentation, including external examiner reports and the response to their reports, and at meetings with Centre staff and students.

2.73     There is an external examiner for each IFY pathway, including Academic English Skills. The review team found that the nomination and appointment process for external examiners at SISC followed the prescribed procedures. On appointment, external examiners are provided with information on their roles and responsibilities.

2.74     The external examiner reports seen by the review team were very positive overall and confirmed they had the opportunity to see assessed work. External examiner reports, and the Head of Centre's response to their findings and recommendations, are reported at QAEG, and form part of the Centre's AMR. Any comments, issues or concerns raised by external examiners about marks or assessment processes are entered into the CAP. Progress made with the actions is reported via RQAEG to AQAEC, and to the Liaison Committee.

2.75     In accordance with Study Group requirements, external examiner reports are now being made available to SISC students on the VLE, and will be discussed at the Student Forum with student representatives for dissemination to all students. New students who met the review team knew what external examiners did but did not yet know where to look for external examiner reports.

2.76     The review team found that SISC makes good use of external examiners, and concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation:    Met**
**Level of risk:   Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.77     All Study Group-approved provision is subject to annual monitoring, to a review after the first year of operation and to re-approval at least once every five years. In addition there is a periodic Centre Review process by which Study Group seeks, among other things, 'to assure itself that each International Study Centre (ISC) is effectively managing academic standards'. Annual monitoring for the academic year 2015-16 for all approved provision will use a standard Study Group template. Re-approval follows the same process as approval including the use of external panel members.

2.78     These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.79     The team considered documentation including the 2014-15 Annual Monitoring Report, Study Group's template for annual monitoring, and a paper detailing the response of SISC findings of the 2015 Centre Review. A meeting was held with the Head of Centre.

2.80     The Annual Monitoring Report for 2014-15 was available. It used the partner University's template and covered both quality and standards together with proposed actions in considerable detail. It was confirmed by the Head of Centre that the report for 2015-16 will use Study Group's template which, in addition to external examiners' reports and progression figures relating to standards, includes sections on feedback from students via the module review process and an opportunity for the programme leader to reflect on programme delivery. The Head of Centre explained that they would collate the report, guided by the template; it would then be shared with Centre staff and the partner University before being approved by QAEG. The next stage would be peer review at RQAEG followed by consideration at Study Group level by AQAEC.

2.81     As noted in section A1, and in line with Study Group Policy, a review of the programmes was carried out after the first year of operation. The review team noted as **good practice** the use of detailed data analysis to inform the programme development.

2.82     SISC was subject to Study Group's Centre Review process in 2015. The outcome made a number of recommendations which have since been implemented.

2.83     The regular and detailed review processes meet 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**

2.84    SISC uses Study Group's Academic Appeals and Complaints Policy, and the policy and procedures can be accessed by students and staff in Programme and Centre Handbooks.

2.85    The procedures in place for academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.86    The review team tested this Expectation by examining documents relating to appeals and complaints, and in meetings with students and staff.

2.87    Academic appeals and complaints procedures are examined by Study Group at programme approval and re-approval events, at HEI validation and revalidation and at Centre Review. Study Group has developed an Academic-Related Complaints and Appeals Policy with a set of overarching principles and minimum expectations for the Centre network. This was approved at AQAEC in April 2016 and was implemented from the start of the 2016-17 academic year.

2.88    The students who met the review team were all aware of where to find details of how to make an academic appeal or complaint.

2.89    Study Group has an Admissions Appeals and Complaints process in place, which is managed centrally (see section B2).

2.90    The review team found that there are clear policies and procedures for academic appeals and complaints that are articulated by SISC to its students, and that the Expectation is thereby met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation:    Met**
**Level of risk:    Low**

# The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.92　　All nine Expectations in this area are met with low risk and there are no recommendations or affirmations in this section. There are three areas of good practice that span across five of the Expectations. The focuses of the good practice are the use of data, support for students and student engagement.

2.93　　The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at SISC is **commended**.

# 3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

**Expectation (C): UK higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the higher education they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.**

**Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision**

**Findings**

3.1     The quality of the information provided by SISC online and in hard copy is overseen by Study Group, which requires all centres to produce a prescribed set of documents for students and staff (see section A2.2). Templates for key documents are provided in the Study Group Academic Quality Handbook. In addition to Staff and Programme Handbooks, and Programme and Module Specifications, each Centre has its own marketing brochure, which is produced centrally by Study Group and includes information on programmes of study, progression requirements and opportunities, and term dates.

3.2     The Head of SISC is responsible for the accuracy of the academic content of internally and publicly available information and accountable for the formal review process. All documentation is reviewed and updated annually, or more frequently if, for example, changes to the relevant HEI provision necessitate changes in articulation information. Regional Directors report annually to AQAEC that all documents are in place for each of their Centres.

3.3     The above procedures are designed to ensure that the information provided about the Centre and its education provision is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy, and would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.4     The review team tested this Expectation by reading a wide range of information produced by and about SISC, including Centre, Staff and Programme Handbooks, module and programme specifications and marketing information. The team discussed the process for ensuring the quality of information with the Centre staff and representatives from Study Group, and the sufficiency, accuracy and accessibility of published information with students.

3.5     SISC conforms to Study Group expectations on information, having Centre, Programme and Staff handbooks, Programme and Module specifications and a Calendar of Business for the academic year.

3.6     The students who met the review team confirmed the accuracy and usefulness of the information provided to them before application, during the admissions process, and on arrival and subsequent study at SISC. The Head of Centre confirmed their responsibilities for ensuring the accuracy of published information on academic matters. Progress in checking information is reported in the Centre's CAP.

3.7     The Head of Centre works closely with Study Group's Marketing Manager and the partner HEIs to review and update public-facing information to ensure it is accessible, current and relevant. Regional Directors report annually to AQAEC that all documents are in place for all of their ISCs.

3.8     Centre Specifications were developed during 2015-16 to make key information available in one place, and these include information or links to information controlled at Study Group by the Academic Manager. AQAEC monitors the implementation and effectiveness of Centre Specifications through the PAVC.

3.9 The review team were informed that Study Group works with its legal team to ensure that centres produce information for students and prospective students that is compliant with current legislation on Consumer Protection published in the Competition and Markets Authority's advice for HEI providers.

3.10 Overall, the information provided by or about SISC and its programmes of study is clear, accessible and useful. Information was judged by students and staff accessing it to be helpful and trustworthy. The review team concludes that the Expectation is thereby met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**
**Level of risk: Low**

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

3.11      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, affirmations or areas of good practice in this section.

3.13      The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at SISC **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 Centre Action Plan is in place and includes actions from Study Group, QAA and the Centre. It is considered regularly at QAEG and provides a means of monitoring the deliberate steps taken to improve the quality of learning opportunities. There are a number of enhancements to note:

- the use of alumni student representatives as student ambassadors
- the in-depth analysis of tracking and progression data to inform curriculum development
- the introduction of pre-arrival information and revision material.

# 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

5.1 Following a pilot at Sussex ISC, SISC and other centres across the network are introducing 'CareerAhead', Study Group's employability enhancement project, during 2016-17. This employability enhancement theme was discussed with, and received favourably by, the HEI at a Liaison Committee meeting in March 2016.

5.2 SISC has mapped the learning outcomes of all modules to an employability skills grid and has appointed a member of staff as an Employability/CareerAhead lead. The review team heard of an employability plan that includes an agreement to enable Centre students to access the HEI's Careers Service, of improving opportunities for students to engage in placement years, and of enabling all students to take a psychometric test to help develop individual employability plans. SISC also intends to offer employability skills support in personal tutor sessions. Other possible developments include using the partner HEI's links with industry to offer 'Industry Specialist Masterclasses' for Centre students.

# 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](http://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](http://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.