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

University of Sussex International Study Centre

May 2016

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at University of Sussex International Study Centre. The review took place from 10 to 11 May 2016 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Jenny Gilbert
- Emeritus Professor Brian Anderton.

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

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

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

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 4.

In reviewing University of Sussex 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 Sussex International Study Centre

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

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

Good practice

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

- the strong partnership, working at all levels, that supports the re-approval process to ensure standards are set and maintained (Expectation A3.1)
- the multi-faceted and strategic approach to ensuring the quality of learning and teaching (Expectation B3)
- the central role of Academic Progression Advisors in supporting the quality of student learning opportunities (Expectation B4)
- the effective use of systems to provide constructive and timely feedback on non-examination assessments (Expectation B6).

Enhancement of student learning opportunities

The Centre Action Plan is the means whereby enhancements are monitored and reviewed. A range of areas are identified for improvement through Centre-based processes, Centre Review by Study Group and through QAA reviews and monitoring visits. Actions are identified, responsibilities for implementation allocated, and progress monitored. Centre Action Plans are reviewed regularly at both centre and Study Group level.

Theme: Student Employability

All of the newly validated courses now include a module entitled Academic and Employability Skills. This addresses commonly used recruitment techniques and includes a psychometric questionnaire, designed and delivered by a market-leading recruitment company using the nomenclature CareersAhead. Students receive feedback from the questionnaire also and produce a CV, personal statement and a career development plan. Students are encouraged to visit the University careers and employability centre. The incorporation of an employability module in all courses is a recent and positive initiative that is being evaluated and adapted as necessary and works towards implementing the Study Group CareersAhead initiative.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges).

About University of Sussex International Study Centre

The University of Sussex International Study Centre (USISC) was the first International Study Centre (ISC) in the network, established for the 2006-07 academic year. The Centre

currently offers Foundation, International Year 1 and Pre-master's programmes to around 800 students each year. The Centre has two start points per year for academic courses: around 80 per cent of students start their courses in September, with 20 per cent starting during January. Students can start pre-course English language courses in either September or June. The Centre currently has nine full-time academic staff and 76 part-time staff.

USISC was subject to a QAA Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight monitoring visit in June 2015. The Centre Action Plan has been used successfully to address actions needed and USISC continues to make good progress in monitoring, reviewing and enhancing its higher education provision.

The most notable change since the last review by QAA in 2012 has been the revalidation of all courses and the introduction of a new semester-based structure to the academic year. USISC moved to a new building on the University campus that allows space for an improved student services area and refurbished teaching accommodation. Success rates have continued to rise and there was a 30 per cent increase in students in 2015-16 which resulted in the recruitment of additional staff.

The Centre has ambitious targets for growth and is working to ensure the staffing and management structure is compatible with the increase in numbers. Options for new courses are to be explored in 2016 and validation sought for those options considered viable by the University of Sussex and Study Group.

Explanation of the findings about University of Sussex International Study Centre

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1   The University has ultimate responsibility for academic standards on the validated programmes at USISC, but it has delegated considerable responsibility to the Centre for the development and design of programmes, and the writing of programme documentation for consideration by the approval panel appointed by the University of Sussex (the University). Within the terms of the Progression Agreement, it is the responsibility of USISC to produce programme approval documentation which maps programme learning outcomes against modules, to produce a programme specification and new module specifications using University pro formas, and to pay due regard to external quality reference points.

1.2   The design of the process and oversight by the University allows the Expectation to be met.

1.3   The review team read the responsibilities check list, the agreements with the University, validation documents and Course Specifications. It also met senior, teaching and support staff.

1.4   Examination of a specimen Course (Programme) Specification demonstrates alignment with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), the Pre-Master's Management and Finance programme was

placed appropriately at Level 6 within the FHEQ using the level descriptors. There is also a mapping of the Business and Management Subject Benchmark Statement against the module learning outcomes for the programme. Modules are credit-rated and, while the basis of the credit and whether it follows the convention of one credit equals ten notional learning hours is not made explicit, at Provider-level this convention is followed.

1.5 The use of external reference points is also illustrated by the outcomes from the University Re-approval Panel. A condition for re-approval was to review the course and the module-level learning outcomes on the Computing Pathways for International Foundation Year (IFY), International Year 1 (IY1) and the Pre-Masters Programme (PMP) to ensure a clearer alignment with the Subject Benchmark Statement. A recommendation was to review the assessment modes on the IFY to ensure closer alignment with equivalent A Level courses, rather than Level 4 assessments in University first-year programmes. In relation to English language provision on the programmes, the English and Skills for University Study (ESUS) modules have been developed with reference to *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) which is an international standard for describing language ability.

1.6 Overall, working in partnership with the University, the review team were satisfied that USISC is securing threshold academic standards by referencing programme development and approval to relevant external reference points. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.7   All programmes offered at USISC are validated by the University, there are no Study Group approved programmes in operation. USISC works within the academic frameworks and regulations of the University in order to secure the standards of its programmes. These frameworks and regulations guide the Centre on delivery matters related to credit and level of study. This includes compliance with assessment regulations. Governance of the partnership is assured through an Academic Partnership Steering Group with regularly updated terms of reference and membership.

1.8   There is a checklist outlining the responsibilities of USISC, the University and the Provider and these responsibilities are also set out clearly within the Partnership Agreement. Appended to the Partnership Agreement is the University and Study Group Academic Handbook. In addition to the University's approval processes the stages of programme validation are reported to Study Group's Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (AQAEC) and the Programme Approval and Validation Committee (PAVC) is responsible for overseeing and ensuring appropriate support for partner/awarding body programme validation and revalidation processes.

1.9   Oversight by the University allows the Expectation to be met. The review team studied the validation documentation and course specifications and explored the application of University regulations through discussion with senior and academic staff.

1.10   The 17 courses within the Centre's three programmes, IFY, IY1 and pre-masters together with the two pre-course English language programmes were revalidated in May 2015. The re-validation was managed concurrently with the renegotiation of the contract between Study Group and the University and the re-recognition of Study Group as a partner. All processes were compliant with the quality assurance systems of the University. In order to redesign and revalidate the three programmes, a curriculum development working group was convened; its role was to plan the process, to support collaborative working and to enhance the quality of the student experience through closer integration between USISC's curriculum design and assessment practices and those of the University.

1.11   USISC staff understand and operate within University regulations and there is evidence of increased collaboration between USISC subject areas and University schools. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.12   Responsibility for the production of definitive programme information, such as programme specifications, lies with USISC and this is documented in the responsibility checklist. Programme specifications are stored on the USISC shared drive and any changes must be approved by the University as stipulated in the joint Study Group/University Academic Handbook. Study Group also maintains a central library of these documents, together with module handbooks and student handbooks.

1.13   The production of qualification transcripts is the responsibility of USISC. Students are provided with a transcript of their result produced through the management information system and a definitive record is maintained.

1.14   These processes allow the Expectation to be met.

1.15   The review team examined the Partnership Agreement, the Centre Handbook and the University Partner handbook and spoke to senior staff and students

1.16   Individual course specifications are held by USISC. Students can find all the information regarding their course on the University's VLE site. Students' module grades do not contribute to the University degree to which they progress. In the case of the IY1 course the pass grades that are required for progression to year two do not contribute to the final award. If a student does not progress to a University programme it is obliged to issue a transcript of university credit.

1.17   The responsibility for meeting this Expectation rests mainly with USISC and is met with a low level of associated risk.

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

1.18   All of the programmes which are offered at USISC are validated provision, and the University is therefore responsible for ensuring academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualifications. It does so through the Academic Partnership Steering Group. Programme approval is undertaken by the University within its own framework of academic regulations, and in accordance with the Partnership Agreement.

1.19   Programme development is a shared activity between USISC and the University. The framework which governs the respective roles and responsibilities of the University and USISC in relation to programme approval and re-approval is codified in the Academic Handbook which is Schedule 2 of the Partnership Agreement. The University and Study Group subscribe to the principle that new programme development is carried out collaboratively between USISC staff and academic staff in the relevant University Schools. The Academic Handbook makes clear that, while the University manages the programme development and approval process and takes ultimate responsibility for academic standards, it has delegated to USISC a substantial role in this process. This role includes convening a programme development team which must include the Centre Director and Deputy Centre Director at USISC as well as the University Partnership Tutors, and the Programme Team are expected to present the proposal to the validation panel. USISC is also responsible for producing programme documentation including the programme specification, module specifications and student handbook, using templates laid down by the University, and demonstrating to the validation panel consistency with external quality benchmarks (FHEQ, Qualification Descriptors and Subject Benchmark Statements). Finally, USISC is responsible for responding to any approval conditions imposed by the validation panel.

1.20   The design of the processes in place allows the Expectation to be met.

1.21   The review team examined the description of programme approval in the self-evaluation document, which was submitted as part of this review, and the evidence provided in the Academic Handbook, and held discussions with USISC and University staff

1.22   The evidence confirmed a process for programme development and approval with the potential to ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and which are in accordance with the University's and USISC's academic frameworks and regulations.

1.23   All programmes at USISC were subject to review and re-approval during 2014-15. The Academic Partnership Steering Group (APSG) is chaired by the University and has both University and USISC membership. Its terms of reference include overseeing the curriculum development process. Staff described a process whereby the University had set out the framework for re-approval, and had convened a joint Curriculum Development Working Group to support collaborative working on curriculum re-development ahead of the revalidation. A key principle had been to seek closer integration between USISC assessment practices and curriculum design and those of the University. Staff at all levels within USISC described a close working relationship with relevant University staff to ensure that academic

standards were set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification, and this was confirmed by University staff present in meetings with the review team. Formal notice of re-approval was given by the University in the autumn of 2015 subject to fulfilment of conditions and with recommendations. These conditions and recommendations were fully responded to by USISC.

1.24   The review team saw evidence, through its examination of the 2015 review and re-approval of the USISC programme portfolio, which showed the strength of the working relationship and cooperation between USISC and the University at all levels of the organisations. The strong partnership, working at all levels, that supports the re-approval process to ensure standards are set and maintained, is **good practice**.

1.25   The University accepts ultimate responsibility for ensuring academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualifications, but it has delegated a large part of the process through which this responsibility for standards is discharged to USISC, and the latter is addressing this effectively. The Expectation is met with low level of associated 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

1.26   The USISC Centre Handbook, approved by the University, includes the assessment strategy and the requirements on setting, marking and verification of assessment. The module specification designed at approval outlines the learning outcomes that the assessment must achieve. The University, as the validating body, ensures that modules and courses are designed such that UK threshold standards and their own academic standards have been satisfied.

1.27   These learning outcomes form the threshold standards for achievement at programme and module level. Assessments are described in programme and module specifications and included in programme handbooks and module handbooks.

1.28   The review team found that the design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met. The team tested its application by studying handbooks, programme and module specifications and by speaking to students and academic staff.

1.29   All assessment criteria are written and assessed in line with the Ofqual Regulated Qualifications Framework level 3 for the IFY and FHEQ level 4 for IY1 and FHEQ level 6 for the Pre Master's Programme. There is a set of common marking criteria that is tailored to specific subjects and to certain aspects of assessment including writing and presentation. The ESUS programme is delivered across all centres. Within the module outline the learning outcomes are mapped to assessments and assessment criteria are included.

1.30   In addition to the requirement to comply with the University's approach to assessment, USISC carries a set of assessment principles in its student handbook, this includes the need for assessment to be linked to learning outcomes. Study Group provides guidance to centres, through the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework, the Assessment Criteria Framework and the draft Assessment Framework. All centres are expected to have considered the framework documents and ensure that their practices are in line with the guidelines by September 2016.

1.31   The 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

1.32　The University has responsibility for academic standards on all the programmes delivered by USISC. The processes which are used for monitoring and review are those of the University, as laid down in the Partnership Agreement.

1.33　In the case of programme review, the University uses the identical process to that used in the initial approval of a programme. The University is responsible for ensuring that the re-approval process is managed within the terms set out in its own academic regulations. However, it has delegated to USISC a substantial amount of responsibility for setting up a course team, reviewing the existing programme and producing new programme documentation, presenting the revised programme proposal to the validation panel, and complying with the conditions set by the validation panel in re-approving the programme.

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

1.35　The review team examined Study Group's procedures for annual monitoring and periodic programme review, academic regulations, the Partnership Agreement and met senior staff and University staff.

1.36　Programme annual monitoring takes place using the University report pro forma, and meeting the requirements for annual monitoring as laid out in the Partnership Agreement. However, implementation of the annual monitoring process and the production of annual monitoring reports are entirely delegated by the University to USISC. The way USISC discharges its obligation to the University for conducting annual monitoring of its validated provision is fully described, and its effectiveness in securing academic standards is evaluated in section B8 of this report.

1.37　The evidence seen and heard by the review team, reported in section, demonstrates USISC operates effectively within the authority delegated to it by the University to ensure that, through programme monitoring and review, the academic standards required by the University as the validating body are being maintained. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation:　Met
Level of risk:　Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.38   Academic standards at USISC are set and monitored through the approval and review process of the University of Sussex as set out in the University and Study Group Academic Handbook. A new proposal is overseen by the University Portfolio Approval Committee; stages 1 and 2 of the University approval process considers academic coherence and the marketing and financial case. Once approved by this committee USISC programmes are approved or re-approved with the involvement of internal and external academic staff plus professional services and student representatives. The independent stakeholder must be an appropriately qualified academic from a peer institution.

1.39   External examiners are nominated by USISC and appointed by the University's Teaching and Learning Committee. Their appointment complies with the University Handbook on the Policy and Procedures for the External Examining of Taught Courses. The policy demands that external examiners have appropriate knowledge and experience and no conflict of interest.

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

1.41   In addition to reading the relevant policies in the joint USISC/University Academic Handbook and the University policies regarding approval and external examining, the review team discussed the processes with staff.

1.42   Recent Study Group Centre Reviews have included external expertise as part of the panel make-up. However, minutes of AQAEC in November 2015 indicate that having an external member on Centre Review Panels is only advisory. Staff confirmed that recent events, both the validation event and the centre review with external panel members, had been helpful in identifying actions to incorporate in the USISC Centre Action Plan. The processes ensure that external and independent expertise is used at key stages and the Expectation is 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 degree-awarding bodies: Summary of findings

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

1.44   USISC effectively follows the requirements of the University to maintain academic standards. These processes are supported by USISC's own internal procedures and guidance. There is one area of good practice identified that recognises the particularly effective working relationships that exist between the University and Centre.

1.45   All seven of the Expectations in this area are met with a low level of associated risk. The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered **meets** UK expectations

2   Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1   All programmes at USISC are validated by the University which has sole responsibility for academic standards and for the approval and re-approval of programmes. However, under the terms of the Academic Handbook (an annex to the Partnership Agreement) it is stated that programme development shall be a joint process carried out by USISC staff working with staff in the relevant schools of the University, and this is confirmed in the Responsibilities Checklist. Following approval of new course proposals by the University's Portfolio Approval Committee, the joint Academic Partnership Steering Group oversees the curriculum development process prior to validation, including through convening collaborative curriculum development teams. It also reviews progress on the fulfilment of conditions and recommendations resulting from validation and re-validation panels.

2.2   During 2014-15, the entire programme portfolio at USISC was subject to review and re-approval by the University. This involved the review of existing curricula but also the addition of a new Finance and Accounting pathway in the International Year One programme to mirror a new University degree programme. The key criterion underpinning the review and re-approval was to seek closer integration between USISC's assessment practices and curriculum design and those of the University.

2.3   A joint Curriculum Development Working Group was set up, the purpose of which was to support collaborative working on curriculum redevelopment ahead of the revalidation, and a set of Curriculum and Quality Principles was agreed to inform the programme redevelopment process. For the re-approval of all its programmes, USISC set up a project team led by the Deputy Centre Director, and employed a Project Manager to oversee the operational activity needed to design and develop the programmes. Staff at all levels in USISC were involved in developing the new curricula and assessment schedules, and they were supported through meetings with University Partnership Tutors and other relevant University staff.

2.4   The review panel was convened and managed by the University, and it re-approved the programme portfolio at USISC and approved the new Finance and Accounting pathway subject to conditions and recommendations. Subsequent to the validation, USISC was responsible for responding to the conditions.

2.5   The policies, procedures and structures established jointly by USISC and its University partner, and as evidenced in the Academic Handbook, provide a robust framework with the capacity to provide effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes. This allows the Expectation to be met.

2.6   To test whether this was the case in practice, the review team examined the core document governing the processes for the design, development and approval of programmes, the Academic Handbook, supplemented by the Centre Handbook and

Curriculum and Quality Principles. It also examined documentation specific to the re-approval of USISC's programme portfolio during 2014-15, including the Curriculum Working Group Terms of Reference, the Revalidation Summary Report, and USISC's Response to Conditions and Recommendations from Re-validation and Re-recognition May 2015. The review team discussed the review and re-approval process with staff at various levels within USISC and also with University staff.

2.7   There was evidence of a well-constructed process for the design, development and approval of programmes. It was well documented, well understood at all levels within USISC, and constituted a good example of the excellent and close working relationship between USISC and its University partner. The report of the 2015 review and revalidation of USISC programmes by the University panel commended the Centre's management of the process and quality of its documentation. From the evidence it saw and heard, the review team would echo this view.

2.8   The processes adopted by USISC and its University partner fully meet the Expectation. This is strongly supported by the evidence of their implementation in the review and re-approval of USISC's programme portfolio during 2014-15, which highlights the close and effective partnership between USISC and the University. The associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.9   Study Group holds responsibility for recruitment, selection and admission procedures. The process is as described in the Admission Policy for Study Group. Admission to the course is by application through the Admissions Centre that is responsible for admissions for all Study Group UK courses. It has expertise in the evaluation of international qualifications.

2.10   Entry requirements for the Centre's course are agreed with the University at validation and any changes must be agreed with the University. Normally the Admissions Centre staff make the decision on offering a place but in borderline cases they will discuss concerns with Head of Centre or nominee. This might lead to a need for an interview or personal statement.

2.11   Students may also make contact with the Centre through the dedicated website. The website is designed in partnership with the University. More details referring to publications and student facing material can be found in section 6 of Centre Handbook. A student making contact through the website will be put directly in communication with a Student Enrolment Advisor (SEA). These language specialists assist students through the application process. The SEA has an International Study Centre (ISC) specialist who is responsible for training the team of counsellors. Once a student has been counselled and makes an application, the booking is dealt with directly by the Admissions Centre.

2.12   The website provides clear information about entrance qualification for a wide range of countries. Applicants from countries not listed need to contact the Admissions Centre directly. The recruitment and admissions policy is available on the Study Group intranet. Study group issue the Confirmation of Acceptance to Stay (CAS) under its Tier 4 license. Both Study Group and the University comply with immigration requirements.

2.13   The design of the process would allow the Expectation to be met. After inspecting the relevant handbooks and websites the team asked students and staff about their experience of the admissions process.

2.14   Many students selected USISC due to agent endorsement or a verbal recommendation from a relative or friend. Information provided about the course and the progression agreement to the University's programme is clear and accurate. Detailed information about each course is available in advance and is welcomed by applicants.

2.15   The Centre Deputy Director deals with all exceptional admissions and makes the judgement without reference to the University or individual programme staff. They do not interview these applicants but uses a transcript from an earlier interview to inform her decision. Entry requirements are set at validation and, should there be occasion to change them, they will have to be modified through the University process. Then the Admissions Centre is informed. When USISC staff wish to feedback to the Admission Centre they contact the team in Brighton. The Centre Director has also trained the Admissions Centre staff based in the Singapore office.

2.16   The QAA annual monitoring report, 2015, stated that some pre-master's students were unsure about the different lengths of course available. As a result, the marketing team has reviewed information available on the website and in the printed prospectus in order to resolve the ambiguity.

2.17   Recruitment and admissions procedures are transparent, consistent and reliable. Therefore Expectation B2 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.18   USISC's strategic approach to teaching and learning is aligned with the University's Teaching and Learning Strategy in order to facilitate student transition to the University. The 'Student Profile' is a principal part of USISC's approach to learning and teaching, and it focuses on three key skill areas for transition to the University: participation, self-directed learning and academic skills. The Centre Handbook presents a detailed summary of its approach to teaching and learning, and is closely mapped against the indicators within *Chapter B3* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code).

2.19   The Learning and Teaching Group is a Centre-based quality-focused forum chaired by the Deputy Centre Director, with membership comprising key members of USISC's academic staff, but with membership open to all USISC tutors. The Group addresses matters relating to the assurance and enhancement of quality in relation to learning and teaching. It reports to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG). The Group is responsible for monitoring and updating relevant actions in the Centre Action Plan.

2.20   In recruiting staff, USISC lays down minimum levels of qualification and experience in conjunction with the University, and staff are expected to hold or be working towards a teaching qualification. There is an induction programme for new staff with resources to support them available through Staff Direct (on the VLE). There is a pro forma which supports the management observation of the teaching of new staff as part of their probationary review. USISC introduced a new approach to staff appraisal in 2015, which incorporates an agreed set of objectives and key performance indicators, and which allows the identification of staff development needs. It makes use of feedback from students at module level and student results. USISC supports learning and teaching through professional development and training activities. As well as 'line manager' observation of staff teaching, USISC has developed and implemented a system of peer observation, for which it is taking the lead across the ISC network.

2.21   In 2015-16, USISC has introduced progression tracker screens linked to its student management information system, which allow tutors to flag up areas of potential concern so that early intervention and support can be provided to students at risk.

2.22   The physical environment within which teaching and learning takes place has been enhanced by the move to new premises within the University. Students have access to the VLE (Study Direct) and minimum requirements for the VLE content are laid down for staff to ensure equality of learning opportunities for students. Students have full access to the learning resources provided by the University, comparable to that of the University's own students.

2.23   USISC provides various mechanisms whereby students are able to monitor their progress, including formative assessments, mid-semester reports and the use of an online marking tool to provide feedback. The Academic and Progression Advisor role is pivotal in helping students to understand how well they are progressing and advising on additional support where necessary.

2.24   USISC has a comprehensive and integrated approach to learning and teaching, which has been mapped against the indicators within this Expectation, and is therefore able to meet the Expectation.

2.25   The review team were able to examine documentation relating to the Learning and Teaching Strategy and its implementation at USISC. This included handbooks, documentation relating to staffing and staff development, and committee minutes. The review team also met senior managers, teaching staff and students, and were able to ask questions about how USISC's approach operated in practice.

2.26   Given that all programmes at USISC are validated by the University, and their objective is to support the transition of students to relevant University degree programmes, adoption of a Learning and Teaching Strategy for USISC which deliberately mirrors the University's Strategy is a rational stance. The Centre's Teaching and Learning Strategy is effectively communicated to staff through the Centre Handbook. USISC is aware of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy Provider Level Statement. The Centre will continue to keep its learning and teaching strategy aligned with the University, but Study Group's Statement is seen as useful in bringing in more of an international dimension as well as best practice from other ISCs.

2.27   Minutes of the Learning and Teaching Group show it making an effective contribution to the enhancement of the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices. In one case, the agenda covered a range of relevant matters including assessment feedback, standardisation of schemes of work and module handbooks, action planning to increase student progression rates, review of student induction, and planning for the January intake. In another case, a whole meeting agenda was devoted to the peer observation of teaching scheme, and its operation. The development of a standardised module template and schemes of work by USISC has enhanced the communication to and equality of opportunity for students to achieve their learning outcomes.

2.28   Staff confirmed they had an annual appraisal, and that a new system for undertaking this had been introduced in 2015 supported by staff performance and continuing professional development (CPD) documentation, and which included identification of staff development needs. For 2016, USISC is delaying implementation of staff appraisal pending the re-organisation of its management structure and to allow staff to be appraised by their new line manager.

2.29   There is evidence of an active and effective approach to staff development at USISC. Staff are able to use Study Direct, the VLE, to locate information about staff development opportunities both at USISC and at the University. There was also a Training and Meetings Week in February 2016 during which a number of training events were scheduled for staff. Staff with whom the review team met were able to identify training activities and mentor support arrangements in preparing new staff to undertake the pivotal role of Academic and Progression Advisor. Fourteen teaching staff are currently working towards the University's PGCertHE qualification, and four members of management are working towards the Higher Education Academy senior fellowship. There is also a well-documented and effective approach to the induction of new staff. This includes a staff induction check-list, a staff induction briefing, a new staff site on the VLE and induction activities including a Study Direct Site Quiz.

2.30   USISC has taken the lead, within the ISC network, in the development and implementation of peer observation of teaching. USISC's approach is developmental and allows the member of staff being observed to identify which areas they wish to have observed and receive feedback. There is a standard pro forma which supports the peer review process. Staff form their own pairings. These are not simply within subject areas,

but cross-institutional pairing has been encouraged, for example with ESUS tutors being paired with subject tutors, while a recent innovation has been inter-institutional pairings of USISC and University staff. Hourly-paid staff receive additional payments for undertaking peer observation activities. Line managers have responsibility to ensure all staff are subject to peer observation, and to maintain a register of the observations which have been undertaken. The decision has been taken that staff will have two peer observations each year. Training for staff has been provided on the peer observation approach, and on giving feedback to peers. The outcomes from peer observation are confidential between the observer and the observee, but part 4 of the Peer Observation Pro forma deals with staff development needs identified, and this must be given to the line manager. Overall USISC has developed a well documented and effective approach to peer observation.

2.31   Staff confirmed that the USISC Progression Tracker Screens made student progression data available to Academic Progression Advisers every three weeks, as well as supporting the formal mid-semester review of each students' progress. The role of Academic Progression Advisor (APA) plays a pivotal part in enabling students to understand their progress within the programme, as well as addressing support for students whose progression gives cause for concern.

2.32   In relation to learning opportunities, the Student Handbook clearly communicates these to students. It also makes clear USISC's expectations of students in relation to their conduct and interaction with staff and other students. Students with whom the review team met said Study Direct, the VLE, was 'one stop for everything'. This included availability of lectures and other teaching materials, upcoming assessments, submission of assessments and the receipt of feedback on assessments. It also had the advantage of being the VLE used by the University, so that transition to the University would be made easier. Overall, students were satisfied that the learning resources with which they are provided met their needs.

2.33   The multi-faceted and strategic approach to ensuring the quality of learning and teaching at USISC is **good practice**.

2.34   USISC has used the Indicators in *Chapter B3* to organise and present its approach to learning and teaching. This has helped to ensure that USISC has an integrated and effective approach which meets the Expectation with a low level of associated 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

2.35　　USISC has in place a number of ways whereby it communicates to students opportunities designed to enable them to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. These include the Student Handbook and the Course Specification for each programme, and the student induction programme.

2.36　　The Academic Progression Adviser (APA) system and tutorials are seen by USISC as the principal way in which it ensures students develop to their academic, personal and professional potential. APAs have a role and responsibilities description, they are given training for the role, and they are supported in their role by a folder on a shared drive. APAs have weekly tutorial sessions with their group of students, they are central to the monitoring of attendance, and they provide both personal and academic support. Attendance of students is rigorously monitored as an indicator of potential students at risk as well as for visa reasons, and there is a tool for APAs to escalate their concerns. APAs also play a central role in monitoring student progression using the Student Tracker information, notably at the time of the mid-semester review. They advise students on progression issues and work with the students on action needed to improve their chances of progression.

2.37　　Since September 2015, USISC has offered students the opportunity to analyse their employability skills through undertaking a psychometric employability test. They are able to meet with their APA to discuss their results, and this facility links to the development of a personal career development plan as part of the Skills and Employability module. USISC is developing this into a pilot CareersAhead scheme during 2015-16, and with the view of cascading this as best practice to the rest of the ISC network. Students also have the opportunity to engage in personal development by volunteering as part of the Building Futures Committee initiatives.

2.38　　Responding to student requests for more activities to ease the transition into the University, the Partnership Tutor (a University appointment) role has been developed and become more formal and an integral part of the student experience. Taster experiences are offered by some parts of the University. USISC is also responding to student concerns about students speaking their own languages, and focusing on enhancing the English speaking environment within the Centre.

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

2.40　　In order to test its application the team studied documentation including the Student Handbook, Course Specifications, induction materials and personal support. Meetings were held with managers, teaching and support staff, and students.

2.41　　The review team confirmed that students have their Student Handbook made available in hard copy and electronically, together with the Course Specification. Students with whom the review team met gave examples of how they used this information.

2.42　　The review team saw evidence relating to the one-week student induction programme incorporating a range of presentations and activities designed to support their successful entry to USISC. These include a comprehensive presentation about the programme; being a student at USISC and the University; the progression requirements for transition to the University; personal support including the role of the APAs; accessing

learning resources including those of the University; social and ice-breaker activities; and attendance at the University's freshers' fair. Students confirmed the same arrangements were in place for both September and January cohorts. They had found them useful though they would have welcomed a tour of the University.

2.43   Through the examination of programme documentation and in discussion with students and staff, it is apparent that the APAs play a pivotal role in enabling student development and achievement. From induction, students are organised into APA tutorial groups of up to 20 students. They meet weekly with the APAs whose role is to give general academic advice particularly relating to progression, personal tutorial support, and also to act as a conduit through which students are directed towards other support in both USISC and the University. APAs are selected for their particular empathy towards international students and prove effective in their roles. They are given training and are supported by a detailed role description, and an electronic APA Folder. They have the central role in attendance monitoring. They monitor student progression, using the USISC Progression Tracker screens, and play a key role in the mid-semester progress reviews which classify students using a red/amber/green (RAG) traffic-light approach to identify students falling short of the progression requirements. They are also the key to triggering additional support for students whose progress is not satisfactory, for example the compulsory Language Lift classes for those students whose performance in the ESUS 1 unit falls short of the progression requirement. Students met spoke highly of the APAs and confirmed the benefits that they provide to them through the support systems in place. The central role of Academic Progression Advisors in supporting the quality of student learning opportunities is **good practice**.

2.44   Neither teaching staff nor students with whom the review team met evidenced much knowledge of the USISC CareersAhead scheme. However, they were able to confirm arrangements relating to the psychometric testing facility, and its link to the Skills and Employability two-semester module facilitated by the APAs. Senior staff explained CareersAhead was a brand name, it had only been introduced in 2016 so that students and teaching staff may not be fully aware of it yet.

2.45   Activities designed to enhance the effectiveness of student transition to the University take place. For example, the Partnership Tutor for the Department of Media, Music and Film has developed a scheme whereby students on the IY1 Media are invited to attend a lecture and its associated seminar at the University, to reflect on this experience and to report back to other members of their IY1 group. The review team were also told about a joint University Business School and USISC working group which was considering ways of enhancing student transition arrangements. Current initiatives under discussion include students continuing to have a USISC APA after they have progressed to the University and the possibility of modifying the teaching and learning model in the final semester at USISC to put more emphasis on student learning and less emphasis on teaching, so that students do not experience such a culture shock as they transferred into the University. Students with whom the review team met all expressed the view that, though they realised the experience would be more challenging, they felt thoroughly prepared for it through their time at USISC. Alumni students now studying at the University commented on the development of skills at USISC for example time-management and referencing.

2.46   USISC states that it has excellent and improving progression rates. Statistics relating to student achievement are presented and carefully analysed through the annual monitoring process. The annual monitoring report for 2014-15 shows the highest progression rates so far achieved at the USISC, with 91 per cent of students starting and 99.7 per cent of students completing their course being offered progression. The retention rate for students was also high (95 per cent). Of the students who successfully completed their course, 95 per cent of them registered on a degree programme at the University. However, behind this,

the levels of automatic progression are lower and 39 per cent of students who progressed were allowed to do so on a discretionary basis by the University. This particularly reflected problems with the English language component, ESUS, and it was also more prominent among January cohort students. USISC recognises it needs to increase the proportion of students who achieve automatic progression, and it has introduced the compulsory Language Lift sessions in semester two for students who are showing weakness in ESUS 1. The Centre has used the revalidation of its programmes in 2014-15 to give January starters a resit opportunity without requiring a visa extension. The statistics available in its annual monitoring report allow USISC to look behind the global headline progression figures, and to analyse progression by date of intake, by programme and by pathway within each programme.

2.47   USISC has in place comprehensive and effective arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. These arrangements are effectively communicated to students, so that the Expectation is met with a low level of associated 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

2.48   The Centre states that provision for enabling student engagement has been developed taking the Expectation of the Quality Code, *Chapter B5* into account. USISC provides a range of opportunities for student engagement, and draws these to the attention of students through the Student Handbook and through the Academic and Progression Advisory Groups.

2.49   All students complete module evaluation questionnaires, the outcomes of which are discussed in the Module Assessment Boards (MABs) each semester. There are also Study Group-level 'Spark' electronic surveys which are sent to students in each ISC, designed to capture feedback at various points throughout their studies. The results are analysed at both Study Group and centre levels.

2.50   There is a student representative system and students are trained for their role. There is student representation for each Academic and Progression Advisory Group on the Centre Board, and this gives the opportunity for students to provide feedback on their programme of study and the student experience. There is also a Student Experience Group which reports to QAEG, and on which selected student representatives from the Centre Board are members, along with selected students who have progressed to the University and staff members. The issues discussed all relate to how the student experience and engagement can be improved.

2.51   Individual student feedback can be collected at the module level, and in relation to other aspects of the student experience such as induction. The student representative system allows student views to be presented and discussed collectively, and for appropriate action to be taken by USISC in response. Training to enhance the effectiveness of student representatives is in place, The mechanisms which USISC has put in place to support student engagement have the potential to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience and therefore allows the Expectation to be met.

2.52   The review team examined key documents relating to student engagement and feedback arrangements at USISC. These included the Centre Handbook, the Student Handbook, and specimen minutes from Centre Board and Student Experience Group meetings. The review team also met student representatives and relevant staff.

2.53   End of module questionnaires are used for students to provide information, on an anonymous basis, on their experience. The questions asked are aligned with the module evaluation questionnaires used by the University. Students confirmed the electronic deployment of module feedback questionnaires, with follow-up emails to encourage completion. The outcomes of the module feedback questionnaires are discussed in the MABs each semester. The QAA monitoring visit report 2015 stated that students were unaware of what happened as a result of module feedback and the Centre Action Plan includes an action relating to this. It proposes providing feedback to student representatives on the questionnaire results and action plan arising from each MAB. Students with whom the review team met were unable to confirm these arrangements, but this is not surprising since all students were from the January cohort, and would not yet have had the opportunity to

receive such feedback. Students were aware that issues they raised through their feedback would be likely to be responded to through the Centre Action Plan.

2.54   USISC also has a student representational system to secure feedback on courses and the student experience. The Centre Board has student representatives, one drawn from each of the Academic and Progression Advisory Groups. The Board is chaired by the Programme Manager and also attended by the Student Welfare Officer and other staff. Two meetings take place each term: the first providing an opportunity for students to raise issues related to any aspect of their course, while the second meeting provides an opportunity for the senior management of USISC to report back to the students on what action has been taken as a result of the previous meeting. Students said they had volunteered to become representatives and where more than one student volunteered an election was possible. They confirmed that all representatives had received training for the role from USISC, and this had included examples of typical issues representatives might face. Students confirmed that they were given time at the end of tutorial sessions to discuss issues students in the group wished to raise via their representatives.

2.55   The second grouping on which students are represented is the Student Experience Group (SEG), which meets termly. Membership is staff, a limited number of current students from different programmes drawn from the Centre Board student representatives, and some students who have progressed and are now studying at the University. The issues discussed relate to how the student experience and engagement may be improved. At the time of the review visit, the SEG student membership from the January Cohort of students was in the process of formation, and students with whom the review team met had only a limited understanding of the role and purpose of the SEG. Student representation is not present in the terms of reference of the QAEG supplied to the review team, but has recently been added as a result of a Study Group-level initiative.

2.56   USISC operates systems which allow students, individually and collectively, to engage as partners with the Centre in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. These arrangements are robust and effective, and well understood by students. The Expectation is met with low level of associated 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

2.57   The USISC assessment strategy is described in the Centre Handbook, it covers all elements of assessment on all USISC courses. All examination and other forms of assessment are evaluated against this framework. The strategy is also aligned with the principles of assessment undertaken at the University to ensure that students are given an effective transition from USISC courses to degree courses. Module handbooks have been developed for students showing alignment of learning outcomes to assessment tasks; there is a module handbook template that enforces this. Standardised USISC assessment criteria for both presentations and writen assignments are in line with the University.

2.58   Assessment regulations have recently been updated in the Centre Handbook and Student Handbooks and revalidated by the University. The issue of academic impropriety is covered in detail in the Student Handbook. This addresses poor academic practice and cheating, it describes the panel to investigate and judge cases and the penalties awarded. Students work is submitted through plagiarism-detection software. There is a mitigation circumstances protocol.

2.59   Student achievement and progression is monitored on a semester basis, the grades of each student are considered and confirmed by the Progression Board. Non-progressing students are provided with one to one support to identify alternative programmes. The Centre also analyses the historic trend of termly progression rates. As part of enhancements in quality assurance, the Centre has introduced MABs to complement the Progression Board and the Programme Assessment Board. There is no facility for the recognition of prior learning due to the level and function of the programmes.

2.60   In design, the processes in place allow the expectation to be met. In order to test their application the team studied documentation relating to the MABs and Programme Assessment Boards as well as the Centre Handbook, Student Handbooks and the University validation report. The team spoke to a range of academic and support staff, and to students, and were given a demonstration of the electronic submission and marking system.

2.61   During the validation of the new curriculum, approved in May 2015, the USISC team liaised with University link tutors to ensure that curriculum and assessment modes were aligned. The team were commended in the University validation report for the productive curriculum development activity undertaken with the University's schools.

2.62   The introduction of the revised programmes, alongside a different academic year structure, facilitated standardisation of module handbooks and schemes of work. To support this staff were made aware of new procedures through staff development sessions. Academic staff confirm that clarification of marking schemes and publication of marking criteria has reduced ambiguity, provided more consistency and supported students' understanding of how to improve their work

2.63   Assessment task rubrics and mark schemes are set and agreed by USISC teaching teams and signed off by the relevant Head of Subject and passed to University link tutors for approval. Academic staff describe a rigorous marking and moderation system.

2.64   The recent appointment of an Examinations and Assessments Officer has enabled restructuring of the examinations office and led to more efficient assessment procedures and processes. All exam papers and coursework are now handed to the exams office to improve security and the use of online marking has aided this process. Processes for marking assessments and for moderating marks have been addressed and clearly articulated in staff training at the beginning of the semester. The USISC action plan includes the continuation of this training in the application of the online system for marking and the application of standardised assessment criteria. Marking and moderation is monitored by Head of Subjects and line managers to ensure consistency.

2.65   All students now submit assessment online, where practical, using the University's easy to use online system. The work is checked for plagiarism and graded, with tutors giving written or oral comments. Students confirm that all assignments have clear assessment criteria and that they can seek additional guidance where necessary. They welcome the speedy and comprehensive feedback that they receive. In addition to the prompt and effective service provided by tutors using the streamlined electronic system students are able to discuss their grade and comments with their module tutor or with their APA. Staff have received training on the application of the online system together with ongoing online support. The application of generic assessment criteria, accompanied by some variances at a local level, has enabled standardisation. The effective use of systems to give constructive and timely feedback on non-examination assessment is **good practice**.

2.66   In the recently introduced MABs, a module report is completed using a template that requires comments on the performance of the cohort, student evaluation and tutor review of the module. Unlike in some centres, the MAB does not approve marks as this is the remit of the Progression Board and the Programme Assessment Board. This formal documentation of the module review contributes to enhancements in module delivery.

2.67   USISC have in place both effective procedures and continuing staff development opportunities to ensure equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, so the Expectation is met with a low level of associated risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.68   External examiners are nominated by Study Group and appointed by the University following the procedures outlined in the University Partner Handbook. Full details are set out in the University Handbook on the policy and procedures for the external examining of taught courses published by the Academic Development and Quality Enhancement Office of the University. The Handbook includes a nomination form and criteria for appointment. It confirms that external examiners are inducted, informed of their responsibilities and of the materials they will receive. There are procedures for acknowledging, circulating and responding to each report. Within this Handbook is a specific element relating to partners, outlining the procedure for responding to external examiner reports.

2.69   The external examiner's report and the proposed action plan is appended to the Annual Monitoring Report and submitted to the Academic Development and Quality Enhancement Office for consideration at the next meeting of the University Collaborative Provision Committee. Any issues raised by an external examiner are referred to the University Pro Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) and then raised with the partner.

2.70   These processes, along with rigorous monitoring by the University, would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team consulted a number of procedural documents, monitoring reports and action plans and discussed the role of external examiners with staff and students in order to test the Expectation.

2.71   Study Group maintains a list of all the external examiners allocated to each centre, for both approved and validated provision; this list indicates centre, programme and pathway; tenure start and finish dates; and name and institution of the examiner. In addition, the University holds details of all USISC external examiners.

2.72   Academic staff are involved in local induction of the external examiner in addition to the University induction; and the 2015-16 action plan includes an action to create an induction pack for new external examiners. Staff were aware of the procedure for interacting with the external examiner during moderation of assessments. They confirmed that the appropriate samples of assessment are sent each term to the external examiner through the USISC Examinations and Assessments Officer via the online system. This has become much easier since the introduction in 2015-16 of electronic submission, marking and sampling. The external examiner is requirement to visit and attend the Programme Assessment Board once a year.

2.73   In line with both Study Group and University expectations, all USISC external examiner reports are made available to students on the VLE and are discussed at Centre Boards with class representatives present. Students are aware of the role of the external examiner, understand that they may meet them during the course and most knew where to find their reports. The USISC annual monitoring report uses external examiners as a source of evidence and a number of their suggestions were incorporated into the revised courses at revalidation.

2.74   USISC makes scrupulous use of external examiners and the Expectation is met with a low level of associated risk.

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

2.75   The approach to annual programme monitoring and periodic programme review is outlined in the Academic Handbook, an annex to the Partnership Agreement. The University validates all programme provision at USISC, and hence has ultimate responsibility for the maintenance of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. However, USISC works closely and collaboratively with the University in implementing University processes for annual monitoring and programme review.

2.76   For annual monitoring, the process is undertaken and the report is written by USISC in the autumn term, coordinated by the Deputy Centre Head. However, the annual monitoring process and report is completed using a University pro forma available through the online University Partner Handbook, and there is a requirement that the report should incorporate the external examiner reports and USISC's response to them. MABs have been introduced prior to the Progression Boards held at the end of each semester. They enable a systematic review to be undertaken for each module, incorporating assessment results, student feedback on the module from the end of module questionnaires and tutor comments. The outcomes of the MABs feed into the annual monitoring process and the production of the annual monitoring report. The Annual Monitoring Report is signed off by the chair of the Study Group-level AQAEC prior to submission to the University. Actions arising from the annual monitoring report are incorporated into the Centre Action Plan.

2.77   Periodic programme review is a process of re-approval using exactly the same approach and processes as initial programme approval. The University is responsible for ensuring the maintenance of academic standards as an outcome of the re-approval and it manages the re-approval process, but it delegates to USISC a large part of the development of the revised programme, presentation of the programme proposal to the approval panel, and responding to the panel's conditions and recommendations. This is dealt with in sections A3.1 and B1 of this report which cover programme approval.

2.78   The design of the processes of annual monitoring and programme review used at USISC would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.79   To test whether the Expectation was met in practice, the review team examined the Annual Monitoring Reports for 2013-14 and 2014-15, committee minutes and other documentation relating to the annual monitoring process. It was also able to seek information in meetings with senior managers and other staff of USISC. The evaluation of the approach to programme re-approval at USISC has already been undertaken in sections A3.1 and B1 of this report.

2.80   The MAB module summary incorporates results for the current cohort together with comparison with the results from previous cohorts so that trends may be identified. It also incorporates a summary of student and staff feedback relating to the current delivery of the module, things that went well and things needing improvement. Through the MAB, it is possible to propose modifications to the module to be approved for delivery in subsequent academic years. The review team concludes the MABs constitute an effective approach to annual module monitoring, and to informing the annual programme monitoring process.

2.81   Examination of the annual monitoring reports for the last two completed academic years shows that USISC operates a systematic and robust process for annual monitoring. It confirms the use of the University's standard annual monitoring pro forma to write the monitoring report, with minor changes to reflect the wholly international-student focus of USISC, for example analyses of students on the basis of nationality. The reports also confirm the wide array of information sources used to support the annual monitoring process. The report contains a statement confirming that annual monitoring has been carried out in the manner required in the Progression Agreement and Academic Handbook.

2.82   In relation to student data, the report contains a comprehensive analysis of the current year's statistics with rigorous analysis at programme, pathway, cohort and nationality levels together with a commentary contextualising the statistical analysis. A full data set is provided as an appendix to the report. Other headings cover the full range of information needed to undertake effective annual programme monitoring. These include consideration of the previous year's action plan and the actions implemented; synopsis of the findings in relation to strengths and issues for each programme, together with a summary of generic issues and good practice; report on appeals and complaints during the year; consideration of the assessment process and its effectiveness; and external examiner reports together with USISC's responses to their comments.

2.83   From the evidence which it saw and heard, the review team concludes that USISC operates effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for reviewing programmes. The Expectation is therefore met with low level of associated 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   The partnership agreement with the University indicates that Study Group will establish and maintain a Complaints Procedure and an Appeals Procedure and will provide the University with a summary. Both procedures are vetted during the recognition process for USISC. The Complaints Procedure includes referral to the University only if the student has exhausted Study Group's complaints procedure and remains dissatisfied. Similarly, academic appeals proceed to the University Student Complaint Procedure following completion of the USISC and Study Group procedures.

2.85   The University indicates that the purpose of the appeals procedure is to provide a formal means for reviewing a decision on student progression and assessment, to resolve the student's concerns in a fair and consistent way. The grounds for appeal must accord with those of the University and students have ultimate right of appeal to the University. Therefore, if they remain dissatisfied following completion of the procedures at Study Group they may invoke the University's appeal procedures. The University's procedure permits no right to appeal against the academic judgement of examiners.

2.86   In addition to the procedures documented in the USISC Centre handbook and the USISC Student Handbook, there is a draft Study Group Complaints and Appeals Policy. While the policy itself is clear, it differs slightly from the USISC procedure; this could lead to confusion though staff appeared clear on process.

2.87   The procedures in place would allow the Expectation to be met. The team consulted various USISC handbooks and Study Group and University procedures and clarified the operation with students and staff.

2.88   There is a strong informal student support system using regular one-to-one meetings between students and their APA; this allows students to air problems so that APAs can deal with them. This routine support process reduces the number of formal complaints. Information about complaints and appeals processes is available for students in the Student Handbook and also available on the VLE. Most students report that they would raise any complaints with their APA or with support staff; a few were aware that the process is documented in the Student Handbook. Staff indicated that if necessary a complaint would then be escalated within USISC and senior staff confirmed that complaints and appeals would be escalated to Study Group prior to referral to the University processes. There is no complaints form but if a complaint is to be escalated the student is asked to produce a written statement. To date no complaints have been escalated to Study Group, so there have been no formal complaints.

2.89   The Student Handbook explains the situations under which a student has a right of appeal and there is a form for appeal. The Handbook states that there is no right to appeal against academic judgement; both students and staff clearly articulated their understanding that there is no right to appeal against academic judgement. However, the wording in the remainder of the section is contradictory and ambiguous making it difficult to interpret under what circumstances one could appeal a mark. In an attempt to write the section in a student friendly manner the precision of the University Appeals Procedure and the Study Group's procedure has been lost.

2.90   Despite the ambiguous nature of the section in the student Handbook, both the complaints and appeals procedures at USISC are fair, accessible and timely. Therefore, the Expectation is met with low level of associated risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.92   All nine expectations are met with low levels of risk. USISC has effective systems in place for programme approval, admissions, learning and teaching, student support, student engagement, assessment, use of external examiners, programme review, complaints and appeals. There are three good practices identified concerning; the quality of learning and teaching, support available for student learning opportunities and the use of systems to support assessments. There are no recommendations or affirmations.

2.93   The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the Centre 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.

Findings

3.1   Study Group requires each ISC to annually update a series of centre documents that have a range of audiences. The documents required are set out in the Provider Academic Quality Handbook. Each centre produces programme and module specifications and a Calendar of Business for the academic year. Centres are supplied with templates for these key handbooks with an indicative contents list.

3.2   USISC has a marketing brochure produced centrally by Study Group, with the Head of Centre responsible for confirming the accuracy of the information prior to publication. A number of Study Group departments are involved in providing information and images for the brochure, this includes Sales and Marketing, the Accommodation Team and Creative Services. Study Group is currently developing an enhanced information system whereby key data regarding an ISC and its provision is stored centrally, validated as complete and accurate by the Deputy Centre Director, that can be amended only following approval by Programme Approval and Validation Committee (PAVC).

3.3   The information regarding courses, modules, agreed progression requirements and progression degrees is established during validation by the University. Processes for maintaining this information are detailed in the contract.

3.4   This approach would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.5   The review team tested this Expectation by reviewing the policies and procedures and a range of published information, including web-based information about USISC and its programmes. The team also discussed the effectiveness of the practices and procedures for the publication of information with students and senior academic and professional support staff.

3.6   The website provides precise information about entrance qualification for students from a wide range of countries. Applicants from countries not listed are advised to contact the Admissions Centre directly. The Director of Centre is accountable for ensuring that internal and external documentation is in place, within the required time period, communicated to the identified stakeholders and is accurate. Students report that information provided before application and during their course is accurate and informative and matches their expectations. However, the review team notes some ambiguity in the student handbook with regard to the appeal process (see section B9).

3.7   The University link tutors check and sign off USISC information for each course and the University retains copies of documents. The Director of Centre checks the prospectus and website prior to University sign off and the Deputy Director checks the student and module handbooks. The Study Group Head of Marketing monitors traffic through the USISC website and social media outlets. This includes considering where traffic emanates from to inform marketing decisions.

3.8   The Expectation is met with a low risk

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

3.11   The review team concludes that the quality of information about learning opportunities at the Centre **meets** UK expectations.

4 Commentary on the enhancement of student learning opportunities

Findings

4.1 The Centre Action Plan (CAP) is identified as the means whereby enhancements are monitored and reviewed. Examination of the CAP shows a range of areas identified for improvement through Centre-based processes, Study Group-level Centre Review and through QAA reviews and monitoring visits. Actions are identified, responsibilities for implementation allocated, and progress monitored. QAEG has, within its terms of reference, responsibility for identifying local enhancement initiatives and activities for inclusion in the CAP, and monitoring and updating the CAP.USISC identifies a number of recent examples of enhancement activities.

4.2 The review team asked senior managers with whom it met about USISC's approach to quality enhancement. The management team confirmed that the approach is to identify possible improvements which would be incorporated into the CAP. Identifying areas for improvement involved a variety of mechanisms within the Centre including annual monitoring and Study-Group-level Centre Review. The process is driven by the Centre Director and his Deputy, but involved staff and students, for example through the module review process.

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   USISC introduced an employability module in the design of re-validated courses commencing September 2015. All of the newly validated courses now include a module entitled Academic and Employability Skills. It addresses commonly used recruitment techniques and includes a psychometric questionnaire, designed and delivered by a market-leading recruitment company using the name of CareersAhead. Students receive detailed feedback so they are aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Students also produce a CV and personal statement and a career development plan. They complete an appropriate assignment such as a presentation or report on volunteering work. Students are also encouraged to visit the University careers and employability centre when they have completed the module.

5.2   An evaluation strategy involving staff feedback and student responses through surveys, focus groups and one to one sessions with their Academic Progression Advisor was completed in March 2015 following the first semester of the module. As a result, the Academic and Employability skills module has been adjusted to incorporate more support. However, academic staff understood that evaluation of the newly validated modules, alongside evaluation of the changes to the course semesters, would take place at the end of the academic year. Senior staff indicated that piloting of CareersAhead was a significant feature in the Centre Action Plan. However, staff and students were unfamiliar with the term CareersAhead as this term was not used in the teaching. The team spoke to students who are January starters and who are studying the module in its second semester of operation. They reported teething problems with the assessment criteria for the module that had been addressed and showed limited awareness that the module aimed to develop their employability skills.

5.3   The incorporation of an employability module in all courses is a recent and positive initiative that is being evaluated and adapted as necessary, although it is too early to judge its impact. The introduction of the module as part of other significant curriculum change has resulted in some staff confusion around terminology and actions taken.

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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