Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd, June 2013

Section 1: Outcome of the monitoring visit

1   From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the monitoring team concludes that Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd (BES; the provider) is making acceptable progress following the May 2012 [Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight](#).

Section 2: Changes since the last QAA review

2   A further International Study Centre (ISC) opened at Leeds in January 2013. The Stirling ISC and the Wales ISC at Newport will close at the end of August 2013. Overall student numbers increased from 2,392 in 2012 to 2,824 in 2013. Significant changes in student numbers, and other developments, are reported in the annexes for the ISCs concerned. The provider's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC; formerly ISCQAEC) has formed a Validation and Approval Unit to lead the programme approval process, and the Teaching and Learning Committee has been redesignated the Teaching and Learning Enhancement Committee. The former Deputy Principal is now the Quality and Student Outcomes Director. BES has recently appointed a Director of Legal and Compliance, who will be the line manager for a Head of Quality Assurance yet to be identified.

Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

3   Most staff met by the review team were aware of the 2012 review report and annexes, and reported beneficial impacts in their centres. The 2012 report identified good practice in three areas: academic and pastoral support for students, staff development, and networking arrangements for staff with similar responsibilities. These three areas of good practice have been adopted by QAEC as enhancement themes to be addressed across the network, and the monitoring visits found evidence that ISCs are engaging with these themes. Good practice is being consolidated and further developed to some extent in all ISCs, and particularly good examples are noted in annexes to this report. However, examples of good practice in some areas (for example, student handbooks, regulation sets and websites) could be more widely identified and adopted across the network. Some ISCs are very actively sharing good practice; for example, three ISCs in the London area are benefitting from local networking, which may be a practice worthy of wider adoption.

4   The 2012 report made six advisable recommendations. One new inter-institutional agreement, for the Leeds ISC, had been signed since the review; this agreement explicitly stated that BES was responsible for the academic standards of current programmes at the ISC. All other agreements also now explicitly state which institution is responsible for the academic standards of each programme, though this could be expressed more clearly in one case. Glossaries of academic standards-related terms are in place at each centre, but clarifications would be helpful in some cases. There was evidence that the provider's programme approval process has been implemented effectively.

5   Assessment regulations are in place at all ISCs and most were clearly and fully set out in staff and student handbooks. In two cases, however, the regulations are inadequate in their scope and/or not fully communicated to students. Academic requirements for progression to programmes in partner higher education institutions (HEIs) are not always clearly set out, and some students reported that they had not been made aware of them until after their arrival.

6   In some ISCs, students who passed their courses but did not achieve the marks required for progression to their chosen university programmes had been strongly supported by individual managers or tutors as they looked for alternative progression routes. However, structured and systematic support arrangements in this area are generally lacking. In some ISCs, students receive transcripts of performance which assist them in finding alternative progression opportunities, but this practice is the exception rather than the rule.

7   BES' procedures to secure the accuracy and completeness of information supplied to partner HEIs for their final sign-off are working as intended in most centres. However, two ISC websites do not clearly communicate progression requirements. Students or their representatives do not routinely see external examiners' reports but this is under consideration in some ISCs and at provider level.

Section 4: The provider's use of external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education

8   BES has made some progress in working with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), most notably in its review of quality assurance structures and procedures in 2012. Heads of ISCs were informed about the Quality Code at a conference early in 2013, and they in turn briefed their staff teams. ISCs have used the Quality Code to greater or lesser extents. Some have used it in programme design and preparation for validation or approval. Two ISCs also make use of appropriate level descriptors to establish academic standards at level 3 for International Foundation Year programmes.

Section 5: Background to the monitoring visit

9   The monitoring visit serves as a short check on the provider's and its embedded colleges' continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress with the action plan since the previous review. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider and its embedded colleges of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring visit or review.

10   The monitoring visit to the provider's head office was carried out by Alan Hunt, QAA Officer, and Professor Alan Jago, Reviewer, on 25 June 2013.