

## Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd (Study Group UK), June 2014

### 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) has made acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [previous monitoring visits](#) in June 2013.

### Section 2: Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 During 2013-14, BES and Heriot-Watt University agreed to close the Heriot-Watt International Study Centre at the end of August 2014. Changes to programmes delivered, and significant increases or decreases in numbers of students, are reported in the annexes for the International Study Centres (ISCs) concerned. A Head of Quality (ISCs) was appointed at provider level in December 2013: the postholder, along with the regional directors, will have a key role in monitoring quality assurance and enhancement in ISCs.

### Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

3 BES is strengthening its quality management structure for its ISCs, and particularly its ability to monitor and audit their performances. The new structure will be underpinned by a provider handbook which will specify minimum requirements to be maintained at all ISCs.

4 Heriot-Watt University, Kingston University London, University of Leicester, University of Lincoln, and University of Sussex ISCs were visited during this monitoring process. Most staff were aware of the 2013 monitoring reports and reported beneficial impacts in their ISCs.

5 The ISCs have continued to develop the areas of good practice identified in the original 2012 review report and the June 2013 monitoring visit reports. In particular, all ISCs continue to provide a high level of academic and pastoral support for students. This includes the provision of additional classes for students identified as having particular needs, providing opportunities for current students to meet former students and regular structured tutorial sessions. These practices have been reinforced by some additional local initiatives, including the introduction of student ambassadors, student link tutors, and formal policies on when assessments should be returned to students. Although there has been some progress in all ISCs, with evidence of significant sharing of good practice between two particular ISCs, BES is considering ways in which good practice can be further shared and implemented across the network. BES is strengthening its mechanisms for supporting its heads of centres, including peer mentoring, a stronger national and regional management structure, and a revised role description.

6 The quality of staff development remains a strength across the ISC network. Staff attend conferences and often participate in partner universities' staff development activities and cascade their learning to colleagues. Networking is particularly and consistently strong among teachers of English. Staff also benefit from peer observations, though this is not yet formalised at all ISCs; it will be reviewed at the end of 2013-14.

7 External examiners approve assessments prior to their use and are invited to meet students. Not all ISCs currently make available to students the complete external examiner reports but BES intends that all will do so in 2014-15, in consultation with their partner university where appropriate.

8 Assessment regulations are set out in the student handbooks but assessment regulations can also be appended to programme documentation. While the two differently constituted sets of regulations are not inconsistent, their use is potentially confusing. Some assessment regulations continue to use different terms to describe the same assessment outcomes. Students are typically able to resit an element of assessment if they are required to improve their mark. However, in at least one ISC some students were unable to retake all final term assessments. BES is reviewing resit arrangements to ensure that students are aware of any restrictions prior to joining an ISC, and that they are not unduly disadvantaged compared to other students.

9 BES is also strengthening its management of the admissions process. All changes to entry requirements must be approved by the Principal, ISCs; however, this policy is not yet applied to changes in progression requirements. The recently introduced Student Support and Transfer Commitment procedure is designed to facilitate movement of students between ISCs, or progression to other partner universities, if necessary. The new Reliance project is expected to reinforce systems for management of information for prospective students, particularly by auditing the website.

10 ISCs are currently considering introducing student representation on their Quality Assurance and Enhancement groups. Students are now invited to complete a Student Satisfaction Survey that provides feedback directly to BES on issues such as the quality of pre-arrival information and the admissions process.

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

11 Staff at all ISCs have engaged with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) though the extent of this engagement varies from a systematic mapping of all relevant sections of the Quality Code to a focus on particular areas where improvements can be made. It is BES's intention to ensure that the Quality Code is used more systematically in the future to review and enhance provision at all ISCs.

## **Section 5: Background to the monitoring visit**

12 The monitoring visit serves as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous monitoring visit. 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.

13 The monitoring visit to the provider's head office was carried out by Alan Hunt (QAA Officer) and Professor Graham Romp (Reviewer) on 27 June 2014.

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