



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

Keele University International Study Centre

October 2016

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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 Keele University International Study Centre. The review took place from 3 to 4 October 2016 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Sylvia Hargreaves
- Dr David Houlston.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the Keele University 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 opportunities
- provides a commentary on the selected theme
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

In reviewing Keele University 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 2016-17 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.

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 Keele University International Study Centre

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

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

Good practice

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

- the application of good practice shared across the ICS network to enhance the appraisal process and develop peer observation (Expectation B3)
- the 'whole-centre' approach to learning and teaching which is designed to ensure that every student has an equitable, challenging and enriching experience (Expectation B3)
- the effective operation of the systems in place to engage students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experiences (Expectation B5).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- the steps being taken in partnership with the University to improve the quality and consistency of student data with regard to tracking students' progress over their degree courses (Expectation B4).

Enhancement of student learning opportunities

Deliberate steps are being taken by Keele University International Study Centre (KUISC) at institutional level to enhance students' learning opportunities. Enhancement is based on the whole-centre approach to learning, teaching and higher-level skills development (discussed in section B3 of this report), emanating from planning activity initiated at institutional level and involving all teaching staff and adopted by tutors in 2015-16. KUISC has taken deliberate steps to enhance student engagement and enhanced support for students in preparing for transition to the University, through the formal establishment of the link student role.

The design and development of appraisal and more formalised peer review processes, currently underway, is informed by practice shared across the ISC network and proactively sought and explored by KUISC; and student feedback is used effectively to identify and take forward enhancements to academic provision.

Theme: Student Employability

KUISC is in the process of refreshing its curriculum content to promote the development of student employability skills. This planned development will complement the KUISC's current integration of its academic provision with the University's Graduate Attributes scheme. KUISC has confirmed the recently piloted Study Group *CareerAhead* Employability Skills framework is starting to be embedded in the International Year One programme from September 2016 and will be supported by the University's Careers Team. Transferable and interpersonal skills are being promoted within the academic curriculum of the International Year One. This supports the 'whole-centre' approach adopted by KUISC.

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

About the Keele University International Study Centre

Keele University International Study Centre (KUISC) was established in 2009 by Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd (Study Group) in partnership with Keele University. In December 2013, a 10-year contract was agreed. KUISC initially operated from several buildings on the University main campus, but moved to its current self-contained location on the Hawthorns site of the University in 2013. KUISC has exclusive use of seven modern teaching rooms, one of which is a computer suite.

KUISC offers Study Group-approved programmes including an International Year One (FHEQ Level 4) across four subject pathways: Business and Management; International Relations and Politics; Computing and Media; and Communications and Culture, which also include English and Skills for University Study (ESUS) modules. There are two start dates of September and January for the current three-term programme. In addition, although the International Year One is pitched at Level 4, extended four-term and 3.5-term study options are offered starting in September and October respectively. The extended options include intensive English and subject study at Level 3, with progression to Level 4 in January. Students may progress to Keele University to study at Level 4 or 5, depending on whether they meet the progression requirements, with the majority progressing directly to Level 5 study.

KUISC also offers a FHEQ Level 6 Pre-Master's Programme (PMP) over two terms with pathways in Business and Management and Computing. Although this has very small numbers (three students in 2016), for the English component, students join a larger ESUS group at the appropriate level. An English for Pre-Master's programme (EPM) is also offered for those who do not meet the English requirements for direct entry onto the PMP. This offers an intensive English programme of one or two terms, depending on prior qualifications, with assessment through the UK Visas and Immigration-approved IELTS tests. However, this also has very small numbers (two students in 2015-16).

In the academic year 2015-16, a total of 110 students were registered at KUISC. The composition of the student body is rich and diverse, particularly in comparison with previous years, with 26 nationalities represented.

Changes since the last review include the appointment of a new Head of Centre in February 2015. The KUISC management team includes a Head of English and there is also one full-time tutor (Business and Management) who has been appointed in the role of ILT Champion and 12 part-time tutors. KUISC has a Senior Administrator who has the role of Examinations Officer, undertaking a range of responsibilities in relation to the arrangements for examinations, results recording and reporting. Study Group and the Head of Centre have appointed a designated Safeguarding Lead in the Centre, who is fully trained and provides

welfare support for all students but with particular attention to the small number of 17-year-old students who are recruited to the Centre each year. Additionally, Study Group has engaged the services of College Guardians, who also support under-18-year-olds across the Study Group network. In June 2016, Study Group re-approved the International Year One at KUISC for implementation in September 2016, including a move to semesterised delivery. This programme and Study Group's new Academic English Skills (AES) programme was endorsed on 6 July 2016 by a Keele University panel chaired by the University's Dean of Internationalisation.

KUISC has identified the following priorities and challenges.

- Achieving greater consistency across the Centre in teaching strategies and resources to embed opportunities for the development and promotion of critical analysis, problem solving, personal reflection, student responsibility for own learning and independent study skills.
- Enhancing the virtual learning environment (known as the Keele Learning Environment or KLE) through the use of set standards.
- Developing greater team-working between English and subject staff to maximise the impact of English and Skills for University Study (ESUS) modules and reduce the assessment burden for students.
- Embedding academic enhancements through relevant visits, fieldwork and guest speakers.
- Supporting student transition through additional events with academic schools and establishing a student mentoring programme.
- Developing a new curriculum to achieve a better balance between learning and assessment, more effective preparation for progression and greater alignment with Keele University provision.
- Enhancing the opportunity for students to develop strong employability skills and mindset through embedding in the new curriculum the provider's exciting new initiative Career-Ahead.
- In addition, the Centre has also been piloting the use of electronic coursework submission and feedback across all subject pathways and using a Module Lead process.

In 2014, QAA identified five advisable and three desirable recommendations. KUISC comprehensively tracked these through its Centre Action Plan. All the recommendations have been thoroughly addressed and recorded as completed.

Explanation of the findings about Keele University 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 the provider

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 KUISC offers the International Year One (IY1) (at Level 4) across four subject pathways (Business and Management; International Relations and Politics; Computing; and Media, Communications and Culture) and a Pre-Master's programme (at Level 6). Both programmes are approved by Study Group and endorsed by the University. Although the IY1 is set at Level 4 and extends over two semesters, alternative 2.5-semester and three-semester options are also offered, depending on a student's entry qualifications. The alternative options provide intensive English, in addition to the Academic English Skills (AES) module (at CEFR B2+ level, RQF Level 4 and FHEQ level 4) which is incorporated into the IY1, and an additional introductory subject module at Level 3. AES for the Pre-master's programme is set at CEFR B2+-C1, RQF Level 6, FHEQ Level 6.

1.2 The Study Group programme approval process, which is explicitly informed by the precepts of the UKQC, is designed to ensure that Study Group-approved programmes are academically sound, that the academic standards are appropriate, the curriculum can deliver to the required standards, learning and teaching methods allow achievement of standards, and the assessment appropriately measures achievement of learning outcomes. In particular, the process incorporates scrutiny of programme specifications (in the Study Group template) and module specifications, allowing appropriate scrutiny of the use of external points in programme design.

1.3 The University external examiner template, which is used by KUISC, asks external examiners to confirm that the academic standards set are appropriate and comparable with similar programmes in other UK institutions, by reference to Subject Benchmark Statements, qualifications descriptors and programme specifications.

1.4 These arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

1.5 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team examined the effectiveness of the practices and procedures by reviewing process and other documentation including re-approval documentation, programme and module specifications, and external examiner reports.

1.6 The review team examined documentation relating to the most recent programme re-approval event, for the IY1 in June 2016. The process, undertaken by a panel including two external members, was conducted in line with Study Group requirements. The approval panel considered the rationale for the changes to the existing IY1 programme, including the impact of a move to semesterisation on programme structure, and benchmarking to the FHEQ; and noted, in particular, the account taken of new Subject Benchmark Statements which had recently been made available. The panel examined a range of programme and other documentation including programme and module specifications.

1.7 Re-approval was made subject to eight conditions, two of these associated with the use of external reference points, the mapping of module learning outcomes to ensure that programme learning outcomes are met, and amendment of the programme specification to reflect the two extended study routes, through a programme map. The conditions were subsequently satisfied, as is evidenced by the definitive programme specification, and signed off by Study Group's final approval of the programme.

1.8 The IY1 and PMP programme specifications reference the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements; define the respective levels of study; and set out positively defined learning outcomes. The IY1 programme specification also defines credit value equivalences, aligned with relevant national credit frameworks. However, the PMP programme specification provided to the review team referred to the English Skills for University Study (ESUS) module, now replaced by AES.

1.9 External examiners confirm the appropriateness of the academic standards set and their alignment with the FHEQ, relevant subject benchmarks and qualifications descriptors.

1.10 Relevant external reference points are used to secure, and ensure consistency in, academic standards. The review team concludes that 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

1.11 Study Group is responsible for ensuring academic standards are managed effectively through the Head of Centre and in accordance with Study Group and University procedures. The University's Quality Handbook provides the regulatory framework for the governance of academic programmes and is complemented by the Study Group Quality Handbook.

1.12 A Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG) convenes quarterly and provides KUISC's forum for the maintenance and monitoring of academic standards within programmes. The QAEG is chaired by the Head of Centre, with support from the Lead Student Representative, and reports to the Study Group Regional Quality Assurance & Enhancement Group (RQAEG) and the University's Joint Board of Studies.

1.13 These arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

1.14 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team scrutinised the PAVC, QAEG and AQAEC minutes and met with senior, teaching and support staff.

1.15 The approval and development of academic programmes is the responsibility of Study Group in collaboration with KUISC. These are overseen by the Programme Approval and Validation sub-Committee (PAVC) that reports to the Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (AQAEC).

1.16 The University provides subsequent endorsement of programme provision and KUISC's Handbook, which is reviewed annually. Development of an enhanced responsibilities matrix was recommended in a recent Centre Review to clarify and add detail to the responsibilities of Study Group, the Keele ISC and the University in the management of academic standards.

1.17 Through discussion with the Head of Centre and academic staff, the review team confirmed the assessment regulations for students seeking to progress to an articulated degree programme were consistent with those of the University. Students the team met were unsure of the Study Group use of the term *credit equivalence* for each of the International One Year modules, although this terminology did not impact on the achievement of the appropriate academic standards for successful completion of Level 4 study.

1.18 In partnership with the University, KUISC has transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications. Therefore the Expectation is met and 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

1.19 The Study Group programme approval process requires the provision of detailed programme specification documents for each award. These follow a prescribed template that requires definitive information on alignment with relevant subject benchmarks, programme outcomes, teaching and learning strategies, assessment demands and processes, and student guidance mechanisms.

1.20 A KUISC Student Handbook provides comprehensive information on programme procedures, content, assessment, pastoral support and behavioural expectations. Students also receive a specific handbook for each module of study that includes the intended learning outcomes and associated teaching, assessment and support details. Where necessary, these handbooks are revised each academic cycle following the annual Module Review process.

1.21 These arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

1.22 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team scrutinised programme specifications, student handbooks, and the VLE and met senior, teaching and support staff and students.

1.23 Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) and action plans for each academic programme are produced by the Head of Centre and reported to the QAEG. These reports and plans are subsequently reviewed by the RQAEG, AQAEC and the University's Joint Board of Studies. Student attainment and progression is considered at Module Assessment Boards (MABs) managed by the Centre and Programme Assessment Boards (PABs) managed by the University.

1.24 Programme and module specification documents provide definitive records of the academic provision at KUISC. Subsequent discussion with students revealed their understanding of the academic procedures and assessment regulations of the ISC's study programmes. The Student Handbook and module handbooks were available on the Keele virtual learning environment (KLE).

1.25 In meeting with academic staff, the review team confirmed the Module Handbooks are updated annually. Any programme amendments are processed and authorised through the PAVC before incorporation. However, the PMP programme specification provided to the review team referred to the English Skills for University Study (ESUS) module, now replaced by AES.

1.26 The provision and maintenance of programme documentation ensure a clear understanding of the academic expectations by students and staff. The Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.27 The International Year One (IY1) programme, with its constituent subject pathways, and the Pre-Master's programme are approved by Study Group and endorsed by the University. Study Group has responsibility for academic standards, and in exercising this responsibility is supported by the quality assurance mechanisms applied by the University.

1.28 The Study Group approval and re-approval process, which incorporates appropriate externality, is designed to ensure that programmes are at the correct academic standard and that the learning opportunities for students are appropriate. The current Study Group process was approved by QAEC in September 2015.

1.29 The University external examiner template, which is used by KUISC, asks external examiners to confirm that the academic standards set are appropriate and comparable with similar programmes in other UK institutions, by reference to Subject Benchmark Statements, qualifications descriptors and programme specifications.

1.30 The arrangements in place to ensure that academic standards are set at the appropriate level allow the Expectation to be met.

1.31 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team examined the effectiveness of the practices and procedures by reviewing contractual, programme re-approval and other documentation including external examiner reports; programme and module specifications; and internal committee meeting minutes. The team also held meetings with current and former students who have progressed to the University, teaching and administrative staff, senior staff and University representatives.

1.32 The team had available a range of documentation relating to the design and re-approval of the IY1 programme, which was approved by Study Group and endorsed by the University for commencement in September 2016. Although the programme had approval for a further two years, the planned modifications were so extensive as to trigger Study Group's full re-approval process.

1.33 The design of the proposed new curriculum was discussed extensively by staff and students within KUISC, with the Regional Director, University Link Tutors and other University representatives at the Steering Group and Joint Board of Studies. The discussion addressed academic standards matters, including entry standards; FHEQ levels; credit values; learning outcomes and their alignment with relevant subject benchmarks; and assessment strategy and approaches. External examiner feedback was obtained on curriculum design. The re-approval submission, and subsequent documentary amendments, were signed off by QAEG via Chair's action.

1.34 The Study Group re-approval process was undertaken by a panel including appropriate externality and culminating in an event incorporating a meeting with the course team. The panel considered a range of documentation including detailed programme and module specifications and Keele University and Study Group generic assessment criteria,

allowing appropriate scrutiny of standards-related matters: alignment with external reference points, entry requirements, learning outcomes and assessment strategy and regulations.

1.35 Re-approval by Study Group was made subject to KUISC meeting eight conditions, four of these relating to assessment (assessment criteria, volume and information for students, and learning outcomes mapping). In the light of these conditions, the final programme re-approval was subsequently signed off at Study Group level, by AQAEC Chair's action.

1.36 The new programme was formally endorsed by the University, subject to conditions (subsequently signed off by the University as satisfied) concerning the currency of the curriculum, articulation with University study for dual award programmes, updating of progression requirements and the revision of module specifications to meet University requirements.

1.37 External examiners confirm that the academic standards set are appropriate and comparable with similar programmes in other UK institutions.

1.38 The review team concluded that programme approval and re-approval processes ensure that academic standards are set at the appropriate level. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

1.39 The award of a qualification and credit for successful completion of KUISC programmes is underpinned by the achievement of respective programme and module learning outcomes. These are defined in programme specifications and module handbooks, and underpin the associated assessment tasks within each module.

1.40 Minor adjustments to the alignment of programme and module learning outcomes were required by the University following the re-approval of the International Year One programmes in July 2016. These are now consistent with UK threshold standards.

1.41 To ensure consistency in making assessment decisions, the Centre's tutors use assessment criteria guidelines provided by Study Group. Where a student is seeking to make the transition to a University programme, further reference is made to the Keele University Generic Assessment Criteria.

1.42 These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.43 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team scrutinised the assessment regulations, programme and module handbooks. It met with senior, teaching and support staff and students.

1.44 Student attainment and progression is considered through a two-stage process with MABs managed by KUISC and the PAB by University. Provisional module marks are presented, initially, to the University's Module Assessment Board before verification of final marks is confirmed at a Programme Assessment Board, which incorporates oversight of academic standards by external examiners.

1.45 KUISC is developing a new Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy that aligns with the Study Group's revised Learning, Teaching & Assessment framework and the University's Learning & Teaching Strategy. This is intended to create a more cohesive 'whole-centre' approach to teaching and learning that places a greater emphasis on the development of academic skills. This approach was implemented from September 2015 and will be aligned with in the revised Study Group Learning and Teaching Strategy.

1.46 KUISC ensures that credit is awarded only where the learning outcomes have been achieved and demonstrated through assessment. The Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.47 Under the contractual arrangements with the University, the University applies annual review mechanisms, culminating in a KUISC Annual Report to the University in the University template, to assure itself that students receive an appropriate foundation to succeed on their destination programme at the University. KUISC must also comply with Study Group's monitoring and review processes, comprising ongoing programme monitoring through the Centre Action Plan (CAP), annual monitoring and Centre Review. Periodic programme review is undertaken by Study Group through programme re-approval.

1.48 Under Study Group processes, monitoring at ISC level, recorded in annual monitoring reports (AMRs), draws on module and programme review. Academic standards matters are addressed through the presentation and analysis of student progression, achievement and completion data, and analysis and commentary on external examiner reports. These matters are included in Study Group templates which have been introduced for use in module review and annual reporting for Study Group-approved programmes from 2015-16. With respect to KUISC, Study Group has approved the continued use of the University programme monitoring template (rather than the Study Group template).

1.49 The processes require ISC-level oversight of programme monitoring to be maintained through Quality Assurance and Enhancement Groups (QAEGs).

1.50 The University external examiner template, which is used by KUISC, asks external examiners to confirm that the academic standards set are appropriate and comparable with similar programmes in other UK institutions, by reference to Subject Benchmark Statements, qualifications descriptors and programme specifications.

1.51 Centre Review is the process by which Study Group seeks to assure itself that each ISC is effectively managing academic standards, managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities and publishing reliable information. Heads of Centre report directly to QAEC regarding Centre Review outcomes and their responses.

1.52 The Centre Action Plan (CAP) is designed to ensure the implementation of actions emanating from the review and monitoring of modules and programmes. The CAP, which is a live document recording continuous review, is monitored at ISC level by QAEG (as well as at regional and provider levels, respectively by RQAEG and QAEC).

1.53 The arrangements for monitoring and review allow the Expectation to be met.

1.54 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team explored the effectiveness of the arrangements by examining contractual and other documentation including process documents; monitoring and review reports; the CAP; internal meeting minutes; and external examiner reports. The team also held meetings with current and former students who have progressed to the University, teaching and administrative staff, senior staff and University representatives.

1.55 The review team examined the AMRs for 2013-14 and 2014-15, which are set out in the University template. These reports provide data on student recruitment profile, retention and progression to the University (including, in 2014-15, data by pathway as well by total cohort), with clear and appropriate analysis, commentary and evaluation, including comparison with the previous year. They address external examiner comment and responses. The 2014-15 AMR refers specifically to module reviews which, although not setting out detailed performance data, report qualitatively on student performance.

1.56 The CAP records generally carefully track actions identified at local and Study Group level; and arising from QAA review and monitoring, external examiner reports, and Centre Review. The CAP is routinely presented at QAEG, which monitors progress on an ongoing basis.

1.57 External examiners confirm that academic standards are maintained at an appropriate level, in line with relevant external reference points. External examiner reports are reviewed by QAEG, which considers and approves the associated responses. QAEG also considers the draft AMR for approval before it is submitted to the Joint Board of Studies.

1.58 The Study Group Centre Review, completed in October 2015, addressed KUISC's management of academic standards. Reporting its overall effectiveness, the panel made recommendations associated with academic standards, notably concerning the review of KUISC's academic regulations. This recommendation, together with the other Centre Review recommendations, was captured and followed through in the CAP, which records completion of the necessary action.

1.59 The Head of Centre reported directly to AQAEC on KUISC's completed and ongoing actions in response to the review findings. The Centre Review outcomes were discussed at QAEG and the actions taken in response tracked by QAEG via its ongoing monitoring of the CAP.

1.60 Processes for the monitoring and review of programmes explicitly addressing whether academic standards are maintained at the appropriate level are in place and implemented effectively. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.4): 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

1.61 A recent Study Group review of its KUISC provision and operation, conducted in October 2015, included representation from senior University staff and from another Study Group centre. . This Centre Review process does not incorporate the need for an independent and external panel member. The Study Group's programme approval and re-approval process does incorporate scrutiny by independent and external experts.

1.62 The arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

1.63 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team scrutinised the Centre Review, external examiner reports and annual monitoring reports.

1.64 External examiners are engaged in monitoring and evaluating the comparability and equity of academic standards on the Pre-Masters programmes in accordance with University quality assurance requirements. The KUISC requires its external examiners to use the University's reporting template. Subsequently, external examiner reports inform the Centre Action Plan and the Annual Monitoring Report.

1.65 External examiners are approved, appointed and managed through the University's regulatory framework. These regulations identify the expected duties and responsibilities of an external examiner to ensure academic standards are upheld, and assessment processes are rigorous and equitable.

1.66 KUISC use external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards. 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 the provider: Summary of findings

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

1.68 All of the seven Expectations in this area are met with low risk.

1.69 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards at KUISC **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme Design and Approval

Findings

2.1 The International Year One (IY1) programme, with its constituent subject pathways, and the Pre-Masters programme, are approved by Study Group and endorsed by the University.

2.2 The Study Group programme approval and re-approval process is designed to ensure that programmes are at the correct academic standard and that the learning opportunities for students are appropriate. The current process, approved by QAEC in September 2015, incorporates appropriate externality and includes panel meetings with senior, administrative and teaching staff and, optionally, with students. It draws on an evidence base allowing an assessment of the quality of learning opportunities, including student, staff and centre handbooks, and programme and module specifications.

2.3 The University external examiner template, which is used by KUISC, asks external examiners to comment on the quality of learning and teaching; student feedback; and areas of good practice.

2.4 The arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

2.5 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team examined the effectiveness of the arrangements by reviewing contractual, process and other documentation including re-approval reports and documents; external examiner reports; programme and module specifications; and internal meeting minutes. The team also held meetings with current and former students who have progressed to the University, teaching and administrative staff, senior staff and University representatives.

2.6 The team had available a range of documentation relating to the design and re-approval of the International Year 1 programme, which was approved by Study Group and endorsed by the University for commencement in September 2016.

2.7 The design of the proposed new curriculum was discussed extensively by staff and students within KUISC, with the Regional Director, University Link Tutors and other University representatives at the Steering Group and Joint Board of Studies. The discussion addressed the quality of student learning opportunities, including module development and curriculum design; articulation with University modules; learning and teaching strategy; the integration of academic study and employability skills; the 'scaffolding' of learning and skills development; assessment loading and variety of assessment modes. External examiner feedback was obtained on curriculum design.

2.8 The Study Group re-approval process was undertaken by a panel including appropriate externality and culminating in an event incorporating a meeting with the course team. The panel considered a range of documentation including programme and module specifications; Centre, staff and student handbooks; Keele University Graduate Attributes; the Study Group 'CareerAhead' employability skills matrix and descriptions; and the

academic calendar. The panel commended KUISC's approach to the wider student experience (induction, the VLE and student contact with the University).

2.9 External examiners comment favourably on the quality of learning opportunities, with specific mention of a stimulating approach, one-to-one attention, diversity of teaching methods and personalised feedback to students.

2.10 KUISC operates effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes to ensure the quality of student learning opportunities. The Expectation is met and 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*

Findings

2.11 The KUISC website provides an online application process for students and the admission procedures and requirements for each programme are identified clearly. The KUISC website also provides potential applicants with a range of advice and guidance, including a programme brochure and definitive information on English language, academic qualification and UK visa requirements.

2.12 Recruitment and selection of students for the Centre's programmes follow a corporate system and are managed centrally by the Study Group Admissions Centre. Where there might be exceptional cases, the Head of Centre is involved in the decision-making process and specialist guidance is sought where concerns are raised about English language proficiency or subject expertise.

2.13 These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.14 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team examined regulations regarding admissions and published information on admission requirements, and met with staff and students.

2.15 Modifications to entry requirements or programmes have to be considered and approved by a Joint Steering Committee. The Head of Centre is responsible for ensuring the accuracy of published information for prospective applicants.

2.16 A recently introduced Study Group Admissions Complaints and Appeals Policy is available for prospective students who believe there might be grounds to challenge an admissions decision. This policy document provides guidance on the appeals process and complaints management procedures.

2.17 The Study Group Admissions Manager oversees the appeals process, which requires the Head of Centre and Regional Director to review the appeal and communicate the outcome to the Admissions Manager. The Study Group is completing a restructure of its admissions procedures in 2016 to strengthen links to marketing and creative services provision.

2.18 In discussion with new and progressing students, the review team heard that local agencies in the students' country of residence usually provided the initial guidance on the KUISC provision. The information received about KUISC was deemed to be accurate and reliable, and students were very impressed by the induction programme once they arrived at KUISC.

2.19 KUISC operates a transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive admissions system which is supported by appropriate organisational structures and processes. The Expectation 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

2.20 KUISC is progressing the development of a Learning and Teaching Strategy, aligned to Study Group principles. A draft strategy was recently presented and discussed at the Study Group Curriculum, Learning and Enhancement Committee, and further work on its development is continuing, with a view to submission for Study Group approval later this year.

2.21 The draft strategy aims to ensure the best possible programme of study for students, together with a seamless transition onto their programme at the University, and provides for the development of staff through the promotion of innovation and experimentation, scholarly activity, individual CPD and the further development and implementation of formal appraisal and observation processes. The draft strategy sets out six core principles founded on the whole-centre approach to learning and teaching adopted in 2015-16 and emanating from a Staff Planning Day, monitored at Curriculum Committee and already embedded in the new International Year One (IY1) curriculum. The key features of this approach, which is designed to ensure that there is a focus on thinking, deep learning, critical analysis and employability skills, linked to Keele University Graduate Attributes, especially reflection, responsibility, initiative, autonomous learning and independence. The 'whole-centre' approach to learning and teaching which is designed to ensure that every student has an equitable, challenging and enriching experience is **good practice**.

2.22 KUISC has responsibility for the selection of teaching staff, who must be approved by the University Link Tutor before appointment.

2.23 Formal appraisal and teaching observation systems, designed to monitor and maintain the quality of teaching, are in place. KUISC's Continuous Professional Development Plan records staff development needs, and tracks staff development and professional networking activity completed within KUISC, at the University and through the Study Group.

2.24 The annual monitoring process provides a formal mechanism for review and evaluation of learning, teaching and assessment developments across KUISC and their impact on the student experience; and staff development. Module surveys, which inform annual monitoring, seek student views on their learning experience.

2.25 The arrangements for the systematic review and enhancement of the provision of learning opportunities allow the Expectation to be met.

2.26 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team reviewed the effectiveness of the arrangements by examining process documents, templates and other documentation including programme specifications; staff and student handbooks; annual monitoring reports; module survey documentation; the CPD plan; and the Centre Action Plan (CAP). The team also held meetings with current students and former students who have progressed to the University, teaching and administrative staff, senior staff and University representatives.

2.27 Overall, the evidence confirms that the arrangements work effectively to support and enhance student learning opportunities. The CAP records the positive impact of the whole-centre approach to learning, based on analysis of student performance data, tutor reports and anecdotal feedback. This approach is formalised in the design of the revised IY1 introduced in September 2016. This design embeds academic study skills and employability skills within both learning activities and assessment, and all modules are specifically mapped to the Study Group CareerAhead Employability Skills Matrix and the Keele University Graduate Attribute statements. Staff whom the review team met indicated that they were closely and actively involved in programme design.

2.28 All current tutors hold subject qualifications to at least first degree level, with a number holding master's degrees and one a doctorate, and all have appropriate teaching qualifications.

2.29 Teaching observations, carried out by the Head of Centre or a line manager and recorded in KUISC's template, are designed to identify key strengths, areas for improvement, agreed actions and staff development needs. All the staff whom the review team met confirmed that they are formally observed at least once each year, and that they find the process helpful in providing the opportunity for reflection on and enhancement of their practice.

2.30 All KUISC staff are subject to an annual appraisal conducted by the Head of Centre or Head of English. Objectives for the coming year are recorded in Personal Development Plans. The CPD plan captures the outcomes of the appraisals.

2.31 KUISC's formal appraisal and teaching observation tracker, and staff comment to the review team, confirm that appraisal and observation systems are comprehensive in their coverage of the teaching staff body.

2.32 Plans to introduce a formal process for peer observation, which currently takes place informally, and further develop the appraisal process, are being progressed, based on the model piloted at the University of Sussex ISC. The application of good practice shared across the Centre network to enhance the appraisal process and develop peer observation is **good practice**.

2.33 KUISC's rolling CPD plan evidences a full range of staff development opportunities. Staff undertake CPD activity provided by KUISC, the University and Study Group, and also take up opportunities to network with colleagues from other ISCs. KUISC is providing financial support for a number of tutors who are currently undertaking higher-degree study at the University.

2.34 In accordance with its aim to ensure that the VLE (the 'KLE') provides an engaging, interactive and rich learning experience for students, KUISC has established key KLE standards, with clear timelines for phased implementation, and the provision of tutor training and individual support by the ILT champion. The standards were commended in the Study Group Centre Review. The ILT Champion, who led on these developments, has provided support for VLE activities at other ISCs.

2.35 Students are clearly very happy with the teaching and the provision of learning materials, including online materials. They said that they valued, in particular, the interactive nature of classes, providing an opportunity for active engagement.

2.36 Module review and annual programme monitoring reports provide evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching strategies, including the adaptation of approaches to meet the differing needs of international students, and of the enhancements implemented during the

year under review, with particular reference to student feedback on their learning. Further enhancements to teaching styles and delivery are clearly identified.

2.37 KUISC articulates and systematically reviews and enhances the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices. The Expectation is met and the level of associated risk is low.

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

2.38 KUISC aspires to deliver the highest-quality student experience. It regards the synchronisation of academic delivery with student support and welfare systems, to enhance that experience and improve progression, as a core strategic principle associated with students' journey through their programmes.

2.39 Accordingly, KUISC has in place arrangements for student induction and support; for monitoring student progression; and for preparing students for progression to the University and degree study. Skills development, already a feature of the whole-centre approach to learning, has been formalised through the embedding of thinking, critical analysis and employability skills into the re-designed International Year One (IY1) curriculum.

2.40 These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.41 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team explored the effectiveness of the arrangements by examining a range of documentation including Study Group policy documentation; programme re-approval, annual monitoring and Centre Review reports; student handbooks; induction materials; student progress monitoring documentation; and minutes of internal meetings. The team also held meetings with current students and former students who have progressed to the University, teaching and administrative staff, senior staff and University representatives.

2.42 Overall, the evidence demonstrates the arrangements to be effective in practice. The student induction programme provided for both September and later arrivals, aims not only to provide information and help students settle in but also to inspire and motivate them to set high standards for themselves. The programme incorporates enrolment and registration, tours of KUISC, the University campus and facilities, a library induction and talks on student life and academic study. A notable feature of the programme, the 'Tag Teams', designed to make sure that all students have a place within a group to which they can relate for friendship and peer support, was commended by the Study Group Centre Review. Students whom the review team met, including those who had arrived after the start of teaching, were very happy with the support and information provided at induction.

2.43 Ongoing academic and pastoral support is provided through the tutorial system. All students are allocated a personal tutor on arrival at KUISC, and timetables include group and individual tutorials. The role of the personal tutor, which includes guidance and support on planning and improving study skills and working with others within the group, is clearly defined in the student handbook. KUISC attributes improved retention rates over the last two years, in part, to the introduction of a personal tutorial system based on a small team of four experienced personal tutors, together with the work of KUISC's Safeguarding Lead. This analysis was consistent with external examiner comment and students' confirmation, at the review visit, of the helpfulness of the support provided by the tutorial team.

2.44 Students with special educational needs may be identified on self-declaration at the admission or induction stages, or subsequently through tutors' observation of learning behaviour and/or assessed work. Under a formal agreement, the University provides diagnostic assessment services for special needs students. A case study examined by the

review team provided evidence that tutors are vigilant in looking out for students with special needs. In this particular case, a need was identified and a formal assessment completed by the University. Support was offered, though this was declined by the student in question.

2.45 In accordance with its aim of engendering in students autonomous learning skills, KUISC designs the timetable, where possible, to include a day free from formal teaching sessions and designated for independent study. The expectation that students make effective use of this time is made clear in handbooks. Expectations regarding punctuality at classes are also made clear, and students whom the review team met confirmed the effectiveness of the 'Late Card' tracking system in this respect. Staff indicated that an online personal development portfolio, designed to incorporate and enhance students' own reflection on their learning, is currently under development.

2.46 Student progress is tracked through mid-term reviews and end-of-module assessments, followed by Head of Centre review, and formally recorded using a RAG-rated report, in accordance with Study Group requirements. Students identified as 'at risk' are offered additional academic or pastoral support.

2.47 KUISC has recognised a need, also identified in the recent re-approval of the IY1, to continue to work with the University to ensure the provision of data enabling KUISC to track former students' progress throughout and on completion of their degree studies. This work is being progressed, with reports through Joint Board of Studies, and it is anticipated that data sets will be provided by the University to inform the current AMR cycle. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken in partnership with the University to improve the quality and consistency of student data, with regard to tracking student progress over their degree course.

2.48 Students are entitled to use the full range of University student facilities, and the University media centre is used for relevant teaching sessions. KUISC is located within easy reach of all these facilities. Students said that they feel very much part of the University.

2.49 KUISC prepares students for transition to the University in various ways: the whole-centre focus on teaching thinking, critical analysis and independent leaning skills; the phased introduction of lecture/seminar-styled sessions to mirror University delivery; and effective liaison with University Link Tutors on the provision of a series of University faculty transition events for KUISC students. A link student role has been developed by KUISC, providing opportunities for former students who have progressed to the University to volunteer to act as ambassadors and mentors to current students. Following a pilot, this initiative is now being progressed formally for the current academic year.

2.50 KUISC monitors and evaluates arrangements and resources to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.51 KUISC regards students as partners in their learning. It has in place arrangements designed to provide students with the opportunity to engage individually and collectively in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. KUISC has established formal systems to seek student input to enhance academic quality through student representation; induction surveys; end-of-term module surveys; and student focus groups. Student representatives receive training for their role.

2.52 The arrangements for engaging students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience allow the Expectation to be met.

2.53 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team explored the effectiveness of the arrangements by examining student and staff handbooks; annual monitoring reports; the student representative training schedule; analysis of student evaluation questionnaires; internal committee meeting terms of reference and minutes; and student focus group notes. The team also held meetings with current and former students who have progressed to the University, teaching and administrative staff, senior staff and University representatives.

2.54 Student representatives are elected by their peers, one for each class. At the date of the review visit, which took place very early in the academic year, class representative elections were already underway. Training and briefing on the class representative role, which former KUISC students whom the review team met confirmed to be helpful and informative, is provided at induction and during group tutorials.

2.55 Three lead student representatives, elected by the class representatives, cover, respectively, the three different programme durations. Lead representatives are members of QAEG. They attend and participate in QAEG meetings (non-confidential business only), where their active participation is facilitated and encouraged, in particular, through their role as co-chairs of the non-confidential part of the meetings. Lead student representatives are also given the additional responsibility of co-chairing SSLC meetings. Students whom the review team met commented that the chairing role, which involves leading on specific agenda items, presents considerable, but clearly valued, challenge. Focused training and pre-meeting briefings are provided to lead representatives by the Head of Centre.

2.56 QAEG effectively discharges its responsibility to consider relevant actions from the minutes of the SSLC and discuss outcomes. A report from SSLC, together with discussion of actions arising, completed and ongoing, is presented at each QAEG meeting as a standing agenda item. Meeting minutes confirm that QAEG undertakes appropriate monitoring of these matters.

2.57 The SSLC, which meets termly, addresses, in accordance with its formal terms of reference, a range of quality-related matters, including the review of external examiner feedback, the Centre Action Plan, and student feedback from the various sources; and agrees actions to be taken forward to QAEG by the lead student representatives. The comprehensive meeting minutes, and students whom the review team met, confirm that the committee works effectively in addressing these matters, with the active engagement of students. Meetings are well attended by staff and students. Meeting minutes, and student comment to the review team, confirm that student representatives understand and actively

seek to fulfil their responsibility to provide the communication link between staff and students. All students have access to external examiner reports on the KLE.

2.58 Student focus groups, used to gather student feedback on the proposed new IY1 programme, provided an opportunity for students to contribute directly and effectively to curriculum development.

2.59 Module surveys seek student views on teaching, feedback to students, the KLE, resources, and assessment. Induction surveys gather student feedback overall and with respect to each of the three programme durations. KUISC undertakes and clearly records a thorough analysis of the data and students' qualitative comment, providing a comprehensive account of KUISC actions in response. Module and induction survey outcomes and follow-up action by KUISC are presented and discussed at SSLC, and the analysis and findings are placed on the Student Notice Board and the KLE. Student feedback informs annual reporting.

2.60 Students whom the review team met said that KUISC listens to the student voice, not only through formal mechanisms, but also less formally through ongoing communication between students and staff, and is responsive to student feedback. Examples include the splitting of some modules into shorter 2.5-hour blocks; spreading modules over two days; ensuring the provision of regular homework activities to build skills and knowledge; and support for student representatives in organising an International Day at KUISC. The effective operation of the systems in place to engage students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience is good practice.

2.61 Through student representation and formal feedback systems, KUISC takes deliberate steps to engage all students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience and the team considered the effective operation of the systems in place to be **good practice**. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.62 KUISC aligns its assessment processes as closely as possible to those of the University and these are reviewed annually. The generic Study Group principles governing the KUISC assessment regulations are made available to students in the Centre and Student Handbooks, which confirm that all assessment tasks are explicitly linked to the intended learning outcomes of the respective programme and module.

2.63 KUISC tutors are guided to consult the University's Generic Assessment Criteria to ensure module assessments are consistent with the expectations of the FHEQ Level descriptors. Diagnostic assessment of English and Maths proficiency is undertaken when students arrive at the Centre.

2.64 Following a Centre Review by Study Group in 2015, a revised Student Handbook provides clearer information to students on the resubmission of coursework or when retaking examinations. Discussion with staff and students also revealed a consistent interpretation and adherence to the timely return of assessment feedback.

2.65 The role of Module Lead tutors is being piloted in 2015-16 to help promote greater responsibility for the timeliness of assessment feedback and moderation processes. Some academic staff from the Centre have attended Study Group professional development workshops to enhance assessment writing and feedback skills.

2.66 These arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

2.67 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team scrutinised assessment regulations, assessment information in student handbooks and the VLE and external examiner reports. The review team also met with students and academic and support staff.

2.68 Information on assessment processes and procedures is provided in the Student Handbook and available through Keele University's virtual learning environment (KLE). The internal marking and moderation of assessment items follows the University regulations, which requires a minimum 10 per cent sample of each summative assessment item to be moderated.

2.69 Internal marking and moderation is undertaken by module tutors, University Link Tutors or Study Group tutors from other centres in accordance with the relevant marking scheme. Where several tutors are involved in marking a particular assessment item, a standardisation meeting is convened to ensure consistency of application. External examiner scrutiny of assessment marking and moderation is undertaken for all academic-subject programmes.

2.70 Student attainment and progression is processed through the University's two-stage Module Assessment Board and Programme Assessment Board procedure. The review team discussed with academic and senior staff the progression requirements of International Year

One students to either Level 4 or Level 5 study at the University, which is determined by the level of assessment outcome on completion of the programme.

2.71 The academic staff promote and adhere to valid and reliable assessment practices in accordance with Study Group and University policies and procedures. The Expectation is met yet the level of risk to academic quality across the International Year One provision is partially dependent on the attainment and accomplishments of students.

2.72 Student assessment records are collated by tutors and stored securely on the Study Group Progresso system with executive oversight by the Centre Administrator and Head of Centre. This systematic recording enables students to receive a Termly Provisional Record of Results, including an attendance record. Following discussion with staff and students, the review team remained uncertain how students independently and systematically evaluated their own academic strengths and shortcomings during their studies. KUISC is piloting the use of electronic submission through GradeMark to promote the timely return of feedback and enhance development planning for students.

2.73 Academic appeals against the decision of an Assessment Board are permitted where there might be evidence of procedural irregularity or extenuating circumstances. A defined Appeals Procedure details how appeals can be made and informative guidance is provided in the Student Handbook.

2.74 The review team concludes that assessment processes are equitable, valid and reliable. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.75 External examiners are required for all academic-subject and Pre-Masters programmes and are approved, appointed and inducted according to University regulations and Study Group policy. A revised External Examiner Policy has been introduced by the Study Group, which is working with KUISC to implement the policy. Induction training for newly appointed external examiners is provided in cooperation with the University procedures.

2.76 These arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

2.77 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team scrutinised external examiner reports, the External Examiner Policy, the Centre Action Plan and annual monitoring reports. It met with senior, teaching and support staff and with students.

2.78 University templates are used for the submission of external examiner reports, which are reviewed by the QAEG and Joint Board of Studies, and inform the Centre Action Plan and Annual Monitoring Report. Beyond the nominated programme representative, discussion with students revealed minimal awareness of external examiner duties or reporting mechanisms.

2.79 Attendance of an external examiner is expected at one Programme Assessment Board during the academic year, and the University and Study Group monitor attendance and the timely provision of a written report. These reports are made available to students through the VLE and considered at the Staff-Student Liaison Committee. Formal responses to the examiner reports are presented to and approved by the QAEG. An accurate and up-to-date record of external examiner appointments and period of office is maintained by the KUISC and the University.

2.80 The review team confirms that external examiner reports are scrupulously used by KUISC. They are used to develop and enhance the programmes. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.81 Under the contractual arrangements with the University, the University applies annual review mechanisms, culminating in a KUISC Annual Report to the University using a university template. This seeks to assure itself that students receive an appropriate foundation to succeed on their destination programme at the University. KUISC must also comply with Study Group's monitoring and review processes, comprising ongoing programme monitoring through the Centre Action Plan (CAP), annual monitoring and Centre Review.

2.82 Monitoring at KUISC level, recorded in annual monitoring reports (AMRs), addresses the quality of student learning opportunities. Typically, AMRs cover learning, teaching and assessment, student support, feedback from students, staffing and staff development. Study Group templates requiring commentary and evaluation of external examiner and student feedback, quality assurance and enhancement, and incorporating action planning have been introduced for use in module review and annual reporting for Study Group-approved programmes from 2015-16. With respect to KUISC, Study Group has approved the continued use of the University programme monitoring template (rather than the Study Group template).

2.83 Through the Centre Review process, Study Group seeks to assure itself that each ISC is effectively managing academic standards, managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities and publishing reliable information. Heads of Centre report directly to QAEC regarding Centre Review outcomes and their responses.

2.84 The Centre Action Plan (CAP) is designed to ensure the implementation of actions emanating from the review and monitoring of modules and programmes. The CAP, which is a live document recording continuous review, is monitored at ISC level by QAEG (as well as at regional and provider levels, respectively by RQAEG and QAEC).

2.85 The arrangements for monitoring and review allow the Expectation to be met.

2.86 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team explored the effectiveness of the arrangements by examining contractual and other documentation including process documents; monitoring and review reports; the CAP; and internal meeting minutes. The team also held meetings with current and former students who have progressed to the University, teaching and administrative staff, senior staff and University representatives. The review team examined a range of module review reports and the AMRs for 2013-14 and 2014-15. Module review reports provide thorough analysis and clear commentary on aspects that went well, areas for improvement and plans for consequent action. AMRs, which are completed in the University template, provide commentary on and evaluation of the quality of student learning opportunities, including commentary on feedback from students and external examiners, with KUISC actions in response. The 2014-15 AMR is demonstrably informed by module reviews and Link Tutor feedback. It categorises and addresses specific aspects of the student experience, including programme operation; learning, teaching and assessment, with separate commentary on each of the pathways; and curriculum development. QAEG considers the draft AMR for approval before it is submitted to the Joint Board of Studies.

2.87 The CAP, as a live document, is regularly reviewed and updated by the Head of Centre. It records generally careful tracking of actions identified at local and Study Group level; and arising from QAA review and monitoring, external examiner reports, and Centre Review. A RAG analysis is supported by useful notes on completed and ongoing actions. The CAP is routinely presented at QAEG, which monitors progress on an ongoing basis.

2.88 The Study Group Centre Review, completed in October 2015, considered how effectively KUISC fulfils its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. In its comprehensive and evaluative report, the panel commended KUISC on its arrangements for student induction and student engagement and its use of the VLE and online marking. It recommended the introduction of mentoring arrangements to support students in their transition to University study (an action which is now being progressed). The recommendations and commendations were systematically captured and followed through in the CAP.

2.89 The Head of Centre reported directly to QAEC on KUISC's completed and ongoing actions in response to the review findings. The Centre Review outcomes were discussed at QAEG and the actions taken in response tracked by QAEG via its ongoing monitoring of the CAP.

2.90 The processes for monitoring and review, which provide an effective mechanism for assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, are implemented systematically and consistently. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

2.91 The KUISC Academic Appeals and Complaints procedures are contained in the Centre Handbook and Student Handbook, which is also available online through the Keele Learning Environment (KLE). The academic appeals policy for students studying at KUISC adheres to University of Keele procedures.

2.92 The arrangements for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities allow the Expectation to be met.

2.93 The review team examined the key documents relating to appeals and complaints. It met with staff and students to discuss these processes.

2.94 In discussion with students, it was evident to the review team they were made aware of the appeals and complaints process during their induction and at meetings with personal tutors.

2.95 Consideration of academic appeals and complaints follows a three-stage process that begins at an informal level and can escalate into formal procedures. Initial informal consideration of an appeal or complaint is normally undertaken by the Head of Centre (HoC). Where a formal appeal or complaint has been made, the HoC or Regional Director will investigate and when a resolution cannot be determined, the matter is passed to the ISC Appeals Committee.

2.96 The Regional Director for Study Group is engaged at the second stage where the decision of the Appeals Committee is subject to further evidential challenge. Subsequently, an unresolved appeal or complaint can be presented to the Principal Director of Study Group.

2.97 The Study Group has recently developed an Admissions Complaints and Appeals Policy and it was unclear to the team if this had been approved and implemented. It was not an item in the CAP.

2.98 A record of all appeals and complaints is maintained by the Centre and Study Group. At the time of writing this report no formal appeals or complaints had been received by KUISC. The review team found the procedures for managing academic appeals and student complaints at KUISC are fair, accessible and enable enhancement. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.100 All nine Expectations in this area are met with low risk. There are three areas of good practice regarding appraisal and peer observation, learning and teaching and student engagement and one affirmation concerning working with the University to track student progression on their degree programmes.

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

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The Study Group Academic Quality Handbook includes templates for key handbooks that assist centres in compiling and presenting information for students, staff and the University. KUISC is able to customise this information to reflect local arrangements.

3.2 The Head of Centre liaises with the Regional Director to oversee the accuracy and completeness of these information sources and the timely production of any updates. The Regional Director provides an annual report to AQAEC to ensure KUISC's information sources are accessible and precise.

3.3 The KUISC academic brochure is produced and reviewed centrally by Study Group in cooperation with the University to ensure the accuracy of articulation information for students seeking to progress onto a degree programme.

3.4 The validity and reliability of the KUISC website information is monitored at regular intervals by Study Group Content Managers and the International Marketing Manager. Responsibility for the accuracy and completeness of KUISC information rests with the Head of Centre.

3.5 Academic staff at KUISC adhere to the Study Group's recently introduced baseline entitlement for module information provided on the virtual learning environment (KLE). An e-champion within the academic staff promotes further development of online information sources for students in support of their study.

3.6 KUISC produces information for their intended audiences about the higher education they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.8 The Expectation in this area is met with low risk. KUISC has systems in place to ensure that the quality of information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. There are no recommendations.

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

4 Commentary on the enhancement of student learning opportunities

Expectation (Enhancement): Deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

Findings

4.1 Developments in curriculum design, learning and teaching approaches, student engagement and support for students in preparing for progression to the University, together with progress on plans to further develop mechanisms to maintain teaching quality and share good practice, exemplify deliberate steps taken by KUISC at institutional level to enhance students' learning opportunities.

4.2 The whole-centre approach to learning, teaching and higher-level skills development (discussed in section B3), emanating from planning activity initiated at institutional level and involving all teaching staff, adopted by tutors in 2015-16, monitored through the deliberative committee structure and subsequently embedded in the new International Year One curriculum, provides an example of institutionally led, sustained enhancement activity.

4.3 KUISC has taken deliberate steps to enhance student engagement, through the introduction of the lead student representative role, and to provide enhanced support for students in preparing for transition to the University, through the formal establishment of the link student role.

4.4 The design and development of appraisal and more formalised peer review processes, currently underway, is informed by practice shared across the ISC network and proactively sought and explored by KUISC; and student feedback is used effectively to identify and take forward enhancements to academic provision.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 Through its Centre Action Plan, KUISC is in the process of refreshing its curriculum content to promote the development of student employability skills within its programmes for the academic year 2016-17. This planned development will complement KUISC's current integration of its academic provision with the University's Graduate Attributes scheme.

5.2 The Keele Graduate Attributes are designed to enable and promote the development of a range of interpersonal, knowledge-based, communication and reflective skills through the academic curriculum. KUISC has confirmed the recently piloted Study Group *CareerAhead* Employability Skills framework was starting to be embedded in the International Year One programme from September 2016 and will be supported by the University's Careers Team.

5.3 From discussion with academic staff and a review of module handbooks, the review team found that transferable and interpersonal skills were being promoted within the academic curriculum of the International Year One. This supports the 'whole-centre' approach adopted by KUISC.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 27 to 29 of the [Higher Education Review \(Embedded Colleges\) handbook](#).

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

Embedded college

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

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations.

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of programmes of study,

containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

QAA1814 - R4982 - Feb 17

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