



Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd (Study Group UK), March 2016

Keele University International Study Centre

Section 1: Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the monitoring team concludes that Keele University International Study Centre (the Centre) is making commendable progress with implementing the action plan following the September 2014 [Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight](#).

Section 2: Changes since the last QAA review

2 The Principal of the Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd (BES) network of international colleges left in 2015 although the proprietor remains the same. The Chief Operating Officer is acting Principal.

3 A new Head of Centre has been in position since February 2015. Programmes and student numbers remain unchanged from the time of the last review.

Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The 2014 QAA review made five advisable recommendations and three desirable recommendations to be addressed. The Centre has developed an action plan covering the actions arising from this visit and also from the Centre, its related University and from BES. This is reviewed and updated regularly by the Centre's internal Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG) as part of non-confidential business, thus allowing input from the two student members of the group. It is further scrutinised by the Regional Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (RQAEG) and the BES Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (AQAEC), and discussed at formal meetings with the partner University, for example at the Steering Group. The action planning is strengthened by a new approach that clearly demonstrates that all the actions have been fully implemented and have led to improvements.

5 The first advisable recommendation was to keep under review the implementation and effectiveness of the new quality assurance framework and the use of the new data management system. The new data management system is now in place and used effectively. It is reviewed by various committees at the Centre and with BES. The action plan indicates that it will be discussed and progressed at the local QAEG, which feeds into RQAEG. QAEG meets quarterly and communicates with the regional and BES committees RQAEG and AQAEC respectively, and will review the new quality assurance framework in 2016. Staff indicated that they find the reporting structure clear and transparent. QAEG has three student members who have been encouraged and supported to co-chair the non-confidential part of the agenda.

6 The second advisable recommendation required the completion of the Centre Handbook and its communication to staff and students. The Handbook is comprehensive and staff reported that it is accessible and useful. Students have their own Student Handbook and appreciate this and the information it contains.

7 The third advisable recommendation related to ensuring that assessments covered learning outcomes and that associated marking criteria aligned with the University's generic Level 4 assessment criteria. Staff development has been provided to support module teachers to develop a standard assessment criteria grid. There are now standard assessment procedures in place. External examiner reports indicate that there are robust assessment processes. The assessment criteria were aligned and implemented for September 2014.

8 Fourthly, it was recommended that students and prospective students be advised in a timely fashion of changes to the criteria for progression to the University. Current criteria are published in the Student Handbook and on an information board in the Centre. The website and prospectus also include criteria with a statement to indicate that these are for illustration only and that criteria will be confirmed on arrival at the Centre. At the time of the monitoring visit the website was undergoing modification, leading to a brief period without the information being available. However, students whom the team met reported that they were aware of progression criteria at the time of application.

9 A final advisable recommendation was to complete the process of mapping to demonstrate alignment to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code). BES considers that mapping should be undertaken at provider level and that centres should engage with the Quality Code on a thematic basis on a three-year cycle. A workshop has been held for Heads of Centre and other such activities are planned. Staff whom the team met are aware of the Quality Code and how it impacts on their activities.

10 There were three desirable recommendations. The first was to provide information to Centre staff and students on the exercise of discretion when considering borderline marks for progression. This was completed in March 2015 and considered in the annual monitoring report (AMR). The second recommendation was to introduce standard assessment regulations. The Centre has produced a set of generic assessment regulations, which it has applied. The third recommendation was to clarify regulations concerning the retake of a year. These have been made clear in student handbooks.

11 All the recommendations from the September 2014 review have been taken into consideration. Implementation has been monitored and results evaluated primarily by QAEG. All the actions have been fully implemented and have led to improvements in the Centre's management of its higher education provision.

Admissions

12 Admissions criteria are set in conjunction with the partner University at the time of programme approval and may be amended only through discussion and approval by the partner University. All admissions to International Study Centres (ISCs) are processed centrally either in Brighton or Singapore by the Study Group Admissions Centre, which checks that students are academically qualified and meet the English level entry requirements for the chosen programme, that the chosen ISC has an appropriate degree progression route and that students' circumstances meet UK Visas and Immigration entry regulations. All reference letters from previous study in UK are also checked. The Centre and the University become directly involved in the consideration of marginal cases, most often when an applicant is offering work

experience in lieu of some formal qualifications. Student evaluations of the admissions process are positive and students whom the team met confirmed that the admissions process operated well. Students informed the review team that they had to produce their original qualification documentation prior to acceptance.

Assessments

13 The Annual Return Form states that assessments are designed with reference to the Quality Code, *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning*, relevant module specification and the FHEQ level criteria/Keele Generic Assessment Criteria. Development events have supported staff in achieving this and also in ensuring that assignment briefs are clearly written for the needs of international students. As noted above, module tutors develop a standard assessment criteria grid for their modules.

14 Coursework is submitted using a plagiarism-detection programme. Students whom the team met understand the feedback they receive through this programme and have been able to use such feedback to improve their academic writing skills. More general feedback on assessment is provided within two weeks of the submission date, and the Centre has piloted electronic feedback with comments added to the work as it is being marked. Students reported that they receive feedback in good time, and gave examples of where this had been helpful. External examiner reports note that feedback has improved, although there is still some variation in the quality of feedback.

15 Assignments and examination scripts are marked by tutors with a moderation process aligned to that of the partner University. External examiners are able to scrutinise moderated samples and also check that the assessment process has been fairly and consistently applied. Some issues with discrepancies between the original and moderated mark were noted and appropriate actions have been taken by the Centre. Programme assessment boards operate effectively in the scrutiny of student progress.

Annual monitoring

16 AMRs were available from 2013-14 and 2014-15. The second of these represents the current approach whereby the Centre uses the process of its partner University, based on a template 'P-card', which is used by the University for annual monitoring with all partners. The document covers feedback from students and external examiners as well as offering opportunity for reflection on programmes. The template is completed in draft form in September, with key information obtained from meetings with staff and link tutors, external examiner reports, module review and student feedback. The draft is discussed with the Regional Director and then presented to Centre staff prior to discussion at QAEG. A revised version is presented at the Joint Board of Studies and, after any further updates, to the Steering Group for scrutiny by Keele University Deputy Vice-Chancellor and BES Managing Director. In addition to committee processes, a peer review process enables the AMR to be reviewed by another ISC Head of Centre. This offers the opportunity for the spread of good practice, and the effectiveness of this approach is likely to be of interest to future review teams. BES signs off the process through RQAEG.

17 Completion and progression rates for the centre are high, with no cohort of statistically significant size showing less than 81 per cent progression and the majority being in the 90-100 per cent range. The Centre considers progression data in the AMRs and through the Partner Curriculum Annual Review.

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

18 As indicated above, the Centre engages with the Quality Code following a thematic approach led by BES. Standards are set with respect to the FHEQ and this is confirmed by external examiners. In discussions with the team, staff demonstrated effective engagement with the Quality Code, with references being made to, for example, assessment, engaging in module and annual reviews and learning and teaching. The Centre engages with the Code on a thematic basis over a three-year cycle.

19 The learning outcomes for the English and Skills for University Study (ESUS) modules have been developed in line with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) global descriptors. Mark schemes for these units are informed by International English Language Testing System marking criteria and CEFR descriptors.

Section 5: Background to the monitoring visit

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

21 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Philip Markey (Review Manager) and Professor Gaynor Taylor (Reviewer) on 3 March 2016.

QAA1599 - R4983 - May 16

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