



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

## Leeds International Study Centre

October 2016

### Contents

<b>About this review .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Key findings.....</b>	<b>2</b>
QAA's judgements about Leeds International Study Centre .....	2
Recommendations .....	2
Affirmation of action being taken .....	2
Enhancement of student learning opportunities.....	2
Theme: Student Employability.....	2
<b>About Leeds International Study Centre .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Explanation of the findings about Leeds International Study Centre.....</b>	<b>5</b>
1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the provider .....	6
2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities.....	18
3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities .....	35
4 Commentary on the enhancement of student learning opportunities .....	37
5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability.....	38
<b>Glossary.....</b>	<b>39</b>

## 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 Leeds International Study Centre. The review took place from 25 to 26 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 Leeds 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)<sup>1</sup> 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 Leeds International Study Centre the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The [themes](#) for the academic year 2015-16 are Digital Literacies and Student Employability,<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges).<sup>4</sup> For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

---

<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code).

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106).

<sup>3</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us).

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): [www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx).

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Leeds International Study Centre

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Leeds 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 **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Leeds International Study Centre.

By April 2017:

- expedite the Progression Improvement Plan to address the continuing low progression rates to the universities (Expectation B4)
- provide focused staff development to ensure consistency in internal marking (Expectations B6, B7).

### Affirmation of action being taken

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

- the actions being taken to ensure that external examiners receive adequate and appropriate samples of students' work (Expectations B7, B6)
- the steps being taken with the universities to ensure access to degree progression data (Expectation B4).

### Enhancement of student learning opportunities

Leeds International Study Centre's (LISC's) overall approach to enhancement could be identified through the available documentation. LISC uses information from staff, students and external examiners. Enhancement is referred to in the routine review and monitoring processes discussed in sections of this report.

Teaching staff provided some examples of enhancement, for example the recent review, redesign and re-approval of the International Year One and the development of a system of peer observation of teaching.

### Theme: Student Employability

Integration of the Study Group employability enhancement programme 'CareerAhead' forms the basis of LISC's future commitment to improve the academic and interpersonal skills of its students to underpin the formation of a personal career development plan. LISC has introduced 'CareerAhead' into part of its curriculum for students in September 2016. This will involve a Project Study and the 'Skill Questionnaire'. Discussion with students revealed their

awareness of deliberate interpersonal and transferable skills development within the academic programmes but reported no knowledge of the CareerAhead initiative. Study Group staff development resources will be devoted to providing employability training opportunities for LISC academic tutors.

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

## About Leeds International Study Centre

Leeds International Study Centre (LISC) opened in 2012 (first student cohort in January 2013) in partnership with the University of Leeds (UoL) and Leeds Beckett University (LBU). The provision is under the Study Group 'approved provision' category. There are three main programmes: English Language Programme; International Foundation Year: Science, Engineering and Computing; and International Foundation Year: Business, Law and Social Studies.

LISC has seen significant growth in student recruitment numbers which includes: 34 students enrolled in 2012-13; increasing to 98 students enrolled in 2013-14; 176 students enrolled in 2014-15; and 213 students enrolled in 2015-16.

In August 2015 a new, permanent Head of Centre was appointed and the following appointments were been made: in May 2016, a new, permanent Deputy Head of Centre was appointed. There has been a change to permanent teaching staff at the Centre, which includes 1.5 FTE Science, Engineering and Maths tutors; one FTE Personal Tutor/UCAS Coordinator and two FTE English tutors. LISC is also committed to appointing a further 1.5 FTE permanent staff members in the remainder of the 2015-16 academic year, to teach across Science and Business and English. There will be new appointments made for a Head of Subject: Science, Engineering and Maths and Head of Subject: Business, Law and Social Studies, for implementation in September 2016.

LISC moved to new premises in October 2016. The host remains the same (Leeds Beckett University). The premises are a short distance from the city centre. The intake of students in September 2016 were accommodated in the premises.

LISC has identified priorities for development:

- regular reviews of programmes offered
- new structure for staff recruitment and development
- a new model of student support
- the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy
- VLE champion
- Digital Module Boxes
- tracking student progression
- development of CareerAhead.

The ECREEO review of February 2015 made four advisable recommendations concerning implementing the quality management framework, ensuring external examiners receive an appropriate range of student work, student progress data and staffing policy. LISC continues to act on these recommendations, although this HER (AP) review also made a recommendation concerning student progression and affirmations concerning access to student progression data and providing external examiners with adequate samples of student work. There were three desirable recommendations regarding the module review process, of a Head and Deputy Head of Centre and the staff development policy. LISC is

undertaking the completion of these recommendations. At the time of the review, an Interim Head of Centre had been appointed (maternity cover).

## Explanation of the findings about Leeds 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 LISC currently offers the International Foundation Year (IFY) in Business, Law and Social Studies and Science Engineering and Computing, at Level 3, and the International Year One (IY1) in International Relations (approved in April 2016 for introduction in 2017), at Level 4, under contractual arrangements with the University of Leeds and Leeds Beckett University. The IY1 was approved in April 2016, and the IFY was re-approved in June 2016. The programmes are approved by Study Group and endorsed by the respective universities.

1.2 The Study Group programme approval and re-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 reference points in programme design.

1.3 These arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

1.4 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

approval and re-approval documentation, and programme and module specifications. The team also held meetings with students, teaching and administrative staff, senior staff and University representatives.

1.5 In accordance with Study Group processes, the IY1 approval and the IFY re-approval were undertaken by panels including appropriate external membership. The panels examined a range of documentation, including programme and module specifications, and the reports confirm the use of subject benchmarking and relevant national qualifications frameworks to inform programme design. Programme specifications, completed in the Study Group template, reference relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, the FHEQ and the UKQC, and set out positively defined learning outcomes. Module specifications assign credit values that align with the relevant national credit framework.

1.6 With respect to each programme, an approval/re-approval condition requiring the submission of programme documentation demonstrating the mapping of module learning outcomes to programme learning outcomes (together with other conditions) was satisfactorily met and signed off.

1.7 Relevant external reference points are used to secure, and ensure consistency in, academic standards. The review team concluded 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**

1.8 The Study Group Academic Quality Handbook defines policies and procedures that provide a corporate framework to secure academic standards across its centres. The academic standards of programmes delivered at the LISC are governed by the Study Group academic framework and regulatory processes. LISC has defined management responsibilities for the governance of academic standards in its programmes endorsed by the University of Leeds or Leeds Beckett University. LISC has strengthened its commitment to the *Quality Framework* following previous critical review through adherence to its academic management framework and procedures.

1.9 This governance incorporates approval, re-approval and review of LISC's academic programmes. The approval and re-approval of programmes is managed by the Study Group's Programme Approval and Validation sub-Committee (PAVC) with final endorsement provided by the Academic and Quality Assurance Enhancement Committee (AQAE).

1.10 The arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

1.11 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team scrutinised the Provider Academic Quality Handbook and minutes of the PAVC and the AQAE. It met with senior, teaching and support staff and students.

1.12 Recent amendments to these centralised approval and review processes have encouraged centres to identify opportunities for enhancement. As a consequence, the LISC has moved from a three-term (trimester) delivery structure to a semesterised academic year in 2016-17. A customised Academic and Assessment Regulations document has been approved by Study Group.

1.13 The provision is approved by StudyGroup which is ultimately responsible for academic standards which are maintained by LISC through LISC's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG). This group reports upward to the SG Regional Quality Assurance Enhancement Group (RQAEG) and the LISC's Academic Management Board (AMB), which includes membership from the partner universities. The LBU Link Tutors are also members of the Module Assessment Board (MAB) and Programme Assessment Board (PAB) meetings that consider and determine the standard of academic attainment and progression of students. Scrutiny of Module and Programme assessment board minutes by the review team revealed infrequent attendance of Link Tutors at these boards.

1.14 In discussion with senior management staff at LISC, the review team confirmed the Study Group's routine Centre Review procedure to evaluate the effective management of academic standards and the quality of academic provision had been postponed and is scheduled for 2017. The review team heard from senior management staff that this deliberate rescheduling of the academic year through semesterisation is part of a plan to improve student progression rates. There have been interim appointments at Centre and Regional levels of management. Alongside this delayed senior management appointment, LISC did not have a Head of Science, and a Finance or a Biology tutor in place for the beginning of the 2016-17 academic year. The review team also met two academic tutors

who were travelling from the Keele ISC to cover additional shortcomings in staffing provision at Leeds. In discussion with the interim Head of Centre, Study Group senior managers and academic staff, the review team was told that additional sessional and full-time staff had been employed to support the increased number of students studying at LISC. Study Group senior management made visits to the centre and integrated LISC into the Sheffield Region. An interim Head of Business, pastoral and professional service staff were appointed.

1.15 The review team found no evidence to suggest these challenges had affected academic standards beyond an inconvenience in programme scheduling for students studying Biology. From further discussion with senior staff from LISC and Study Group, and following a review of documentation governing academic standards in LISC, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A2.2): 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**

1.16 Each programme of study has a definitive specification document that includes the educational aims and learning outcomes, teaching, learning and assessment strategies, admission requirements and transition arrangements to University programmes. The programme specifications use a Study Group template and identify links to relevant subject benchmarks and the level of educational study as defined by the FHEQ.

1.17 These arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

1.18 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team scrutinised programme specifications, handbooks, contracts with the universities, centre action plans and monitoring reports. The review team also met with senior, teaching and support staff.

1.19 Through discussion with student representatives, the review team confirmed that Module Handbooks provide students with specific detail on module content, learning outcomes, assessments and resources. A catalogue of the programme, module and student handbooks is maintained by Study Group.

1.20 The PAVC has to approve any amendments to existing programmes, and the Centre Action Plans and Annual Monitoring Reports are managed through the QEAG and scrutinised by the RQAEG and QAEC.

1.21 The review team's scrutiny of documentation and meetings with senior management staff confirmed that a definitive record of programmes is maintained and serves as the reference point for the delivery and assessment of academic standards in LISC. As a consequence, the Expectation is met and the associated level of 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**

1.22 All the programmes within the scope of the current review are approved by Study Group and endorsed by the respective universities. Ultimate responsibility for academic standards rests with Study Group. 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 AQAEC in September 2015. The Study Group external examiner template, which is used by LISC, asks external examiners to confirm that the threshold standards set are appropriate and comparable with similar programmes in other UK institutions.

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

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

1.25 The review team examined a range of documentation relating to the approval of the International Year One (IY1) International Relations and the re-approval of the International Foundation Year (IFY), completed in April and June 2016, respectively. These provide confirmation that Study Group's formal processes were followed, from initial 'in principle' approval through to academic approval and sign-off by AQAEC.

1.26 Students, as well as staff, participated in programme design. Programme teams sought, obtained and responded appropriately to comments and feedback from university schools on standards-related matters (as well as on matters relating to the quality of learning opportunities), notably on assessment design and the mapping of modules to the relevant degree programmes. With respect to the IY1, LISC drew on subject experience at the University of Keele ISC.

1.27 The respective approval and re-approval panels, which included appropriate external membership, scrutinised a range of documentation in advance of the approval and re-approval events including, with respect to academic standards, programme and module specifications and assessment regulations. The approval and re-approval reports, together with the respective programme specifications, confirm the use of subject benchmarking and relevant national qualifications frameworks to inform programme design. Standards-related approval/re-approval conditions, including the submission of learning outcomes mapping and subject-specific assessment criteria, were satisfied and subsequently signed off by AQAEC.

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

1.29 Leeds Beckett University endorsed the new IFY programme through the Articulation Standing Panel. Representatives of the University of Leeds attended the Study Group approval event and held their own endorsement event later that day.

1.30 The review team also examined documentation relating to the withdrawal of the IY1 and the Pre-Masters programmes (both with Leeds Beckett University), and found that appropriate processes were followed. In each case, the formal submissions to the Study Group PAVC and Senior Management Team set out a clear rationale, consider transitional arrangements to enable students to complete the course (not applicable in either case) and (where applicable) provide details of arrangements for prospective students who had been offered a place.

1.31 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**

1.32 The programme specification documents reveal the intended learning outcomes associated with attainment of the qualification and module handbooks identify how assessment tasks relate directly to the achievement of module learning outcomes. This outcome-based approach defines the threshold standard for achievement at programme and module levels.

1.33 These arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

1.34 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team scrutinised programme specifications, module assessment board minutes and assessment regulations. The review team also met with senior, teaching and support staff and students.

1.35 Scrutiny of the Study Group templates used for programme and module specifications in the Centre revealed they did not contain a definitive record of the level of study in accordance with the FHEQ. However, the associated learning outcomes at programme and module levels were consistent with the appropriate FHEQ-level expectations. Closer alignment of programme and module learning outcomes formed a key development in the approval and re-approval of some of the Centre's academic programmes in June 2016.

1.36 Assessment tasks are mapped against module learning outcomes and SG generic assessment criteria inform the associated marking schemes. Through discussion with student representatives, the review team confirmed this approach was complemented by the provision of specific assessment criteria for each assessment task.

1.37 Student attainment in modules is managed through presentation of assessment marks at a Module Assessment Board. These marks are provisional until considered at the Programme Assessment Board, which confirms programme decisions based on each student's module profile.

1.38 Discussion with academic staff in the Centre revealed that professional development training has been provided at the Centre to support academic tutors in their comprehension of the assessment regulations and procedures for each programme. The review team found the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

1.39 LISC must comply with Study Group's monitoring and review processes, comprising ongoing programme monitoring through the Centre Action Plan (CAP), annual programme monitoring and Centre Review. Under these processes, monitoring at LISC 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. The processes require LISC-level oversight of programme monitoring to be maintained through Quality Assurance and Enhancement Groups (QAEGs).

1.40 LISC operations are also kept under review through the regular meetings between Study Group and University representatives, via the Steering Group and the Academic Management Board (AMB). The external examiner template used by LISC asks external examiners to confirm that the threshold standards set are appropriate and comparable with similar programmes in other UK institutions.

1.41 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.

1.42 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).

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

1.44 To test whether the Expectation is met, the team explored the effectiveness of the arrangements by examining quality assurance process documents; annual module review and programme monitoring reports; the CAP; internal committee terms of reference and meeting minutes; and external examiner reports. The team also held meetings with students, teaching and administrative staff, senior staff and University representatives. The review team examined a small sample of module review reports and the AMRs for 2013-14 and 2014-15, which are completed in the relevant Study Group templates.

1.45 With respect to academic standards, module review reports provide student performance and outcomes data based on defined module mark bandings, together with planned developments informed by these outcomes, and set out actions taken in response to feedback from external examiners.

1.46 AMRs, which are explicitly informed by module reviews, set out and analyse data on programme completion and progression (to the universities). Actions arising from this analysis, together with the proposed methodology for evaluating the outcomes, are drawn together in action planning for the following year. Commentary on and analysis of external

examiner reports and the outcomes of QAA reviews also inform AMR action planning. Matters identified for action are generally captured and followed through effectively in the CAP. This approach is exemplified by action planned, recorded and monitored with respect to improving student progression rates to the universities; though, as senior staff acknowledged, this matter continues to be a cause for concern (see section B4). QAEG receives and considers module reviews and AMRs, and AMB receives and considers AMRs.

1.47 To date, LISC has not received degree progression data. The respective universities have recently agreed to provide this, as was confirmed by University representatives at the review visit. The review team affirmed the progress being made on this (see section B4).

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

1.49 The review team learned that, due to the appointment of a new Head of Centre, the chair of AQAEC decided that the planned November 2015 Centre Review should be rescheduled. The review is now planned for spring 2017, following the move to new premises in October 2016. In the light of continuing concern about rates of student progression to the universities, the review team considered that the completion of the Centre Review as originally scheduled would have provided Study Group and LISC with a timely opportunity to formally review and report on ongoing progress in this respect (see section B4). However, management scrutiny of LISC took place prior to the 2016 annual monitoring, with the Head of Quality spending a week in the centre.

1.50 As already noted above, the CAP is generally used effectively to capture and follow through actions arising from annual programme review, including the analysis of data and of external examiner feedback. The CAP is monitored by QAEG on an ongoing basis.

1.51 Overall, processes for the monitoring and review of programmes explicitly addressing whether academic standards are maintained at the appropriate level are established and implemented effectively. 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**

1.52 LISC uses external and independent expertise and experience in the programme approval and re-approval process, and in the annual examination of approved programmes. Study Group rescheduled the Centre Review for 2017 (see section A2.1).

1.53 External examiners for LISC programmes of study are nominated by LISC and proposals follow the designated Study Group approval and appointment procedures. LISC has acknowledged the need to develop a more comprehensive induction programme for new external examiners to support their understanding of LISC and the respective programme of study.

1.54 These arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

1.55 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team scrutinised external examiner reports, annual monitoring reports, and minutes of module assessment boards and met with senior, teaching and support staff and students.

1.56 External examiners attend Programme Assessment Boards that evaluate, compare and report on the academic standard of programmes and student performance levels. A database of external examiner appointments and terms of office is maintained by SG.

1.57 A review of external examiner reports by the team revealed some concern over the consistency of moderation practices in some programmes. Following discussion and subsequent meetings with senior management staff, the review team remained uncertain how staff development was specifically focused on the needs of the academic tutor, particularly in the development of consistent and effective sampling and moderation practices. This matter is raised under Expectation B7.

1.58 The oversight provided by external examiners ensured the academic standards of all programmes were met and appropriately maintained. 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

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

1.60 All Expectations are met with low risk. LISC has systems in place to ensure that relevant reference points are used, there are transparent and comprehensive quality frameworks, definitive records of programmes are maintained and the approval process ensures programmes are at the appropriate level. LISC also ensures that credits are awarded only through assessment, has monitoring and annual reviews in place and makes effective use of external examiners.

1.61 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards at LISC **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 As noted under Expectation A3.1, all the programmes within the scope of the current review are approved by Study Group and endorsed by the respective universities. Ultimate responsibility for academic standards rests with Study Group. 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 AQAEC 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.

2.2 The external examiner template used by LISC asks external examiners to comment on areas of good practice and suggested enhancements to the quality of students' learning opportunities.

2.3 The arrangements in place for the design, development and approval of programmes allow the Expectation to be met.

2.4 To test whether the Expectation is met, the team reviewed the effectiveness of the arrangements by examining contractual, programme approval, programme re-approval and other documentation including quality assurance process documents, internal meeting minutes, and external examiner reports. The team also held meetings with students, teaching and administrative staff, senior staff and University representatives.

2.5 The review team examined a range of documentation relating to the approval of the International Year One (IY1) International Relations, and the re-approval of the International Foundation Year (IFY), completed in April and June 2015, respectively.

2.6 Students, as well as staff, participated in programme design. Programme teams sought, obtained and responded appropriately to comments and feedback from university schools on the quality of learning opportunities (as well as on matters relating to academic standards), notably on curriculum design, learning outcomes, module content, and assessment modes and weightings. With respect to the IY1, LISC drew on subject experience at the University of Keele ISC. The IY1 approval panel commended the use of the cross-Centre working in developing the programme.

2.7 The respective approval and re-approval panels, which included appropriate external membership, scrutinised a range of documentation in advance of the approval and re-approval events including programme and module specifications and documentation. The panels met with programme teams, University representatives and, for the IFY re-approval, student representatives. The reports record extensive discussion of the quality of students' learning opportunities, covering academic governance, teaching, learning and assessment, employability, and learning resources including the VLE.

2.8 Approval and re-approval conditions relating, for instance, to hours of study, use of the VLE, employability and entrepreneurial skills were subsequently satisfactorily addressed and signed off by AQAEC.

2.9 External examiners report positively on the provision of learning opportunities, commenting on the 'well-paced' learning, the high level of student engagement and the contribution of small group teaching to 'an excellent student experience'.

2.10 The review team concluded that processes for the approval of programmes, and LISC arrangements for the design and development of programmes, work effectively to assure 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 recruitment, selection and admissions policies and procedures for LISC are managed centrally by the Study Group and defined in an Admissions Policy & Structure document. Corporate oversight of these policies and procedures is the responsibility of the Academic Manager aided by the Operational Support Services team.

2.12 These arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

2.13 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team scrutinised the admissions policy and information about applying on the website for Study Group, and met with senior, teaching and support staff and students. It also examined the admissions database and the appeals policy for admissions.

2.14 The LISC Head of Centre is engaged when exceptional cases for admission merit wider consideration, typically when further consideration of entry qualifications is required. Guidance from University partners can also be sought in complex admissions cases that might impact on subsequent articulation with University programmes. The Centre has formal agreements with Leeds Beckett University and the University of Leeds that define the progression entitlements for LISC students.

2.15 Students informed the review team that their first point of contact was usually with international recruitment agents prior to engagement with the Study Group selection and admissions procedures. Students expressed their general satisfaction with the admissions procedures they experienced at the Study Group's international hub in Singapore and the centralised admissions service in the UK. They raised a minor concern over the lack of information provided to them about the relocation of the LISC.

2.16 The Study Group Admissions Team maintain a centralised and secure database of student recruitment and admissions information and communications. A newly developed formal Admissions Appeals & Complaints policy is invoked when a student challenges an admissions decision that cannot be resolved or explained informally. The review team heard that there had not yet been any cases in the Centre that required this policy to be employed.

2.17 Through a review of documentation and meetings with student representatives, and senior Centre and University staff, the team were reassured that admission of students into University partner programmes upon successful completion of appropriate ISC provision was managed effectively. The review team concludes the structures and processes for managing the recruitment, selection and admissions of students by Study Group on behalf of LISC are fair and reliable. 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**

2.18 LISC has been progressing the development of a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, designed in line with Study Group's and the respective universities' strategies. In accordance with Study Group requirements, a draft strategy was recently presented and discussed at the Study Group Curriculum, Learning and Enhancement Committee. Work is continuing on further development, with a view to submission for Study Group approval later this year.

2.19 The core principles and aims set out in the draft strategy are already embedded in LISC's strategic approach, as articulated in programme specifications and handbooks: learning as a holistic, continuous and transformational experience in preparation for university study; and the development of reflective, self-directed learning, and communication and employability skills through varied modes of delivery and assessment, including an aspiration to develop online and blended learning.

2.20 Lesson observation, peer observation and appraisal systems, together with an ongoing CPD programme, are in place to support and develop staff in the achievement of these aims.

2.21 The annual monitoring process, including the analysis of student evaluation and actions in response, provides a formal mechanism for review and evaluation of the quality assurance and enhancement of students' learning opportunities. The external examiner template used by LISC asks external examiners to comment on the quality of learning and teaching; student feedback; and areas of good practice.

2.22 The Centre's arrangements for the maintenance, review and enhancement of the provision of learning opportunities allow the Expectation to be met.

2.23 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team explored the effectiveness of the arrangements by examining strategy, teaching observation, appraisal and staff development documentation, programme specifications, staff and student handbooks, annual module review and programme monitoring reports, and external examiner reports. The team also held meetings with students, teaching and administrative staff, senior staff and University representatives.

2.24 Programme documentation for the International Foundation Year and the International Year 1 International Relations demonstrates the embedding of strategic learning approaches in programme design. Students whom the review team met were happy with the teaching and referred, in particular, to teaching methodology that encourages interaction within groups and the development of self-study, research, team-working and communication skills.

2.25 Programme assessment strategies describe a range of assessment modes, including examinations, essays, oral presentations, group exercises, reports, and portfolios allowing students to demonstrate the acquisition of higher education study skills. However,

while external examiner feedback confirms the effective use of varied assessment modes in some areas of the provision, the feedback indicates some over-reliance on tests and examinations in other areas. Leeds ISC acknowledges a need for increased diversity in assessment, and improvements in the timeliness of marking and feedback to students.

2.26 Responsibility for staff recruitment, selection and appointment rests with Study Group. As part of the appointments process, candidates deliver a 'micro-teach' in a live class situation observed by a class teacher and feedback is gathered from students. Leeds Beckett University requires the provision of teaching staff CVs and retains the right to participate in staff recruitment and sit on interview panels. Staff said that they felt well supported on joining LISC and subsequently, through informal mentoring by the line manager and other colleagues.

2.27 Teaching and learning (lesson) observations, conducted by senior managers and reported in the LISC template, incorporate annual formal appraisals. The process monitors teaching quality, including tutors' subject knowledge and the impact of delivery on student learning; incorporates feedback from students; and identifies areas for development. Sample observation documentation viewed by the review team records thorough observation and analysis of these areas, notes good practice and makes recommendations for enhancement. Tutors whom the review team met confirmed that individual staff development needs are identified through the observation/appraisal process, and subsequently addressed. Peer observation, which is used to carry forward themes from lesson observation, is supported by a LISC template record sheet covering good practice, areas for development and specific focus areas.

2.28 Staff have available a range of CPD opportunities. Annual CPD planning covers sessions provided within Leeds ISC, by Study Group, by University staff and at other ISCs, and all Leeds ISC staff are able to access a large number of training guides, tutorials and training sessions offered by Leeds Beckett University. Recent in-house sessions have included an employability workshop, invigilation training and training on assessment regulations.

2.29 The annual programme monitoring process considers the effectiveness of learning approaches, in particular through analysis of student feedback, and identifies focus areas for staff development. External examiners confirm that learning is well paced, and comment on the high level of student engagement and the contribution of small group teaching to 'an excellent student experience'. Nonetheless, low progression rates to the universities remain a key challenge for LISC. The review team make a recommendation regarding this in section B4.

2.30 Overall, LISC keeps its learning opportunities and teaching practices under systematic review and development. Students confirm their satisfaction with the learning opportunities provided. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of 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**

2.31 LISC identifies the synchronisation of academic delivery and student support as one of its core strategic principles. It has in place systems and arrangements designed to support the achievement of its key aims, to provide international students with an opportunity to progress to degree programmes at the partner universities, comprising induction arrangements; personal tutorial and student monitoring systems; additional English and Maths support where a need is identified; and preparation for progression to the universities and university study.

2.32 These arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

2.33 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team explored the effectiveness of the arrangements by examining induction material; student progress monitoring documentation; QAA review and monitoring reports; student progression data; and annual programme monitoring reports. The team also held meetings with students, teaching and administrative staff, senior staff and University representatives.

2.34 The team found that poor student progression rates to the respective universities, first identified by LISC in 2013-14 and which continue to be a concern to LISC and Study Group, are being addressed.

2.35 Students whom the review team met (who at the date of the review were relatively new to the LISC, having commenced their programme five weeks previously) were happy with many aspects of provision and support, though they referred to problems that have arisen concerning the issue of student cards, access to the VLE and biology teaching. Overall, the review team concluded that LISC had taken appropriate action to address these matters.

2.36 Induction, spread over two weeks, includes a session on life and studying in the UK; visits to the respective universities (though the team heard from students that the visit to Leeds Beckett University was yet to take place this year); diagnostic testing in English and Maths; meetings with ISC tutors; receipt of timetables and handbooks; and a comprehensive briefing from the Head of Centre covering a range of areas including the programmes, student support, attendance requirements and UCAS timelines. Individual student need identified by diagnostic testing is subsequently addressed through the provision of 'plus' English and Maths classes. Students found induction helpful and informative and, in particular, enjoyed the treasure hunt.

2.37 An enhanced tutorial framework, introduced in September 2016, is delivered by two tutors whose role is to offer a full UCAS, pastoral and progression support service to students. The framework incorporates a programme of weekly group tutorials and three-weekly one-to-one sessions, together with the Study Group RAG-rating system for monitoring individual student progress and identifying students at risk of failure. Students said that staff are accessible, approachable and friendly.

2.38 Generally, students were satisfied with the available resources and said that talks from University staff, meeting former students and the use of Leeds Beckett University (LBU) facilities and student services help prepare them for university study. However, five weeks into their programme, students were still awaiting access to the LBU VLE, as a result of

some technical issues caused by the Lisc's relocation and the issuing of student cards had been delayed. These problems were expected to be resolved imminently. LISC staff had used email communication with students for messaging and uploading learning and other materials, and the review team formed the view that LISC was doing all it could, under the circumstances, to provide an adequate, temporary alternative to VLE access.

2.39 Students also expressed concern about the absence of biology teaching throughout the first five weeks of the relevant programme. The review team heard from staff and students that this matter would not be fully resolved until early November when a biology tutor (to replace a tutor who had originally been appointed but had resigned before commencing duties) was due to take up appointment. LISC had taken steps, and had in place future strategies, to mitigate the impact on the student experience, comprising the rescheduling of biology and other classes over the first two semesters, rescheduling of assessments, and the provision of additional biology classes once the new tutor had commenced duties. While this situation was clearly far from ideal, the review team concluded that LISC had responded appropriately, in so far as the circumstances allowed.

2.40 A QAA review team reported in March 2015 that the key issue faced, and identified, by LISC during 2013-14 (following the completion of 2012-13, the first year of operation) was the poor rate of progression to the universities achieved by students. The team considered it advisable that LISC take action to address this issue. The subsequent QAA monitoring report of March 2016 confirmed that this recommendation had been fully implemented, through analysis of the reasons for non-progression, and initiatives including the redesign of English delivery and the use of diagnostic testing on arrival, attendance monitoring and an alert system to identify student students at risk of failure, followed by mandatory extra classes where necessary.

2.41 The current review team learned from staff of other measures taken to improve progression rates, comprising the introduction of the enhanced tutorial system described above and the implementation of the Study Group RAG-rated individual student tracker through the online Progresso system, followed by appropriate interventions on the identification of students 'at risk'.

2.42 In addition to the action described above, LISC was simultaneously progressing a full review of the IFY, which was identified, in particular, as a means to improve progression rates. The new IFY, approved in June 2016 and implemented for September 2016 starters, is based on semesterised, rather than termly, delivery. Staff told the review team that this change, together with a revised curriculum and a review of the assessment strategy leading to redesign of the assessment regime and assessment scheduling, provides more space for deeper, reflective learning and addresses assessment overload. Programme management and delivery is supported by a new, extended staffing structure. All posts have now been filled, with the exception of Head of Science.

2.43 Senior staff indicated that student performance in English is an inhibitor to student progression, and that the Study Group review of English provision and the introduction of Academic English Skills to replace ESUS in September 2016 across most of the ISC network, including LISC, aims to address this issue. As the new IFY and AES were introduced in September 2016, it was too early to assess their effectiveness as strategies to improve progression rates.

2.44 Data available for the current review shows a positive three-year trend in progression rates (of students who completed the programme and were eligible to progress), with an overall rate of around 60 per cent from the 2014-15 LISC cohort. Definitive progression data for the 2015-16 cohort was not yet available. While senior staff indicated that they did not anticipate that this would show significant further improvement, and that

progression rates continued to give rise to concern, the review team acknowledged that the impact on progression rates of the new IFY curriculum, the introduction of AES and the new LISC staffing structure would not be apparent until data for 2017 entry to the universities became available. LISC recognises the need for continued and sustained action, monitoring and review, and work on a Progression Improvement Plan is ongoing. The review team **recommends** that LISC expedites the Progression Improvement Plan to address the continuing low progression rates to the universities.

2.45 The review team heard that action to improve progression is monitored on a continuing basis, notably in discussion between Study Group and LISC senior managers. As noted under Expectation A3.3, the Centre Review planned for November 2015 was postponed and put back to spring 2017. The review team considers that the completion of the Centre Review as originally scheduled would, in particular, have provided Study Group and LISC with a timely opportunity to take stock of overall trends in student progression and formally review and report on ongoing progress.

2.46 LISC has worked with the respective universities to ensure that LISC has access to data on student achievement on their degree programmes. University representatives confirmed that this data will be made available to LISC this year. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken with the universities to ensure access to degree progression data.

2.47 The review team noted the steps being taken to address the continuing low progression rates to the universities, and the progress made on working with the universities to ensure that LISC has access to degree progression data. Overall, the team concluded that 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**

2.48 LISC regards student feedback and involvement as key to assuring the quality of teaching, learning, and assessment opportunities offered to students, and commits to put in place actions to address any shortcomings. The achievement of this strategic intention is supported by mechanisms designed to engage students as partners in quality assurance and enhancement collectively, through the student representative system, and individually, through the gathering and analysis of feedback from evaluation questionnaires.

2.49 These arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

2.50 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team explored the effectiveness of the arrangements by examining staff and student handbooks; annual module review and programme monitoring reports; student representative training materials; and internal committee minutes. The team also held meetings with students, teaching and administrative staff, senior staff and University representatives.

2.51 Student representatives are elected by their tutorial groups, and students confirmed that all have been appointed for the current year. Representatives are prepared for their role through training delivered by the Head of English and an engagingly presented student representative handbook. The training materials and the handbook provide generally useful information about the responsibilities of the role; its benefits for representatives' personal development, for other students and for LISC; guidance on representation at Student Consultative Committee meetings; and tips on collecting feedback from peers.

2.52 The Student Consultative Committee, which meets once each semester, is chaired by the Head of Centre (or nominee), with membership comprising student representatives and academic and support staff. Student representatives are also members of the Course Committee. Student comment to the review team, meeting minutes and other documentary evidence confirm that students attend meetings and participate in discussion on a range of matters concerning the student experience, including assessment, timetabling, resources and curriculum content.

2.53 Both staff and students mentioned lead student representatives, elected by group student representatives. While the review team found no documented reference to 'lead student representatives', there was evidence that 'senior student representatives' were in place in 2015-16, to represent students on QAEG. Meeting minutes confirm that student representatives attended QAEG during 2015-16 (for non-confidential business), providing the opportunity to participate in discussion of quality assurance and enhancement matters through consideration of the Centre Action Plan, module reviews and the minutes and actions arising from the Student Consultative Committee. However, current students whom the review team met (who were relatively new to LISC) did not appear to be aware of QAEG, and neither the student representative handbook nor the training materials viewed by the team refer to this committee.

2.54 Students give individual feedback on their experience at LISC through induction and module evaluation questionnaires. The outcomes are summarised and analysed in annual module and programme review. Annual programme monitoring reports comment on feedback from Student Consultative Committees, with meeting minutes appended.

2.55 Documented evidence of LISC responses to student feedback was somewhat limited, though action recorded in meeting minutes and annual reports, together with staff student and staff comment in meetings with the review team, confirmed that, generally, LISC listens and responds to the student voice. Examples include timetable adjustments to spread classes more evenly across the week; the move from terms to semesters, with an associated review of assessment loads; and the provision of additional communal space for students.

2.56 Through student representation and formal feedback systems LISC takes deliberate steps to engage all students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The review team concludes that 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**

2.57 The Student Handbook supplies students with detailed information on the assessment principles, regulations and procedures of LISC. These are replicated in the definitive regulatory conditions governing assessments available to academic staff in the Centre Handbook and are consistent with the Quality Code and Study Group expectations. Wherever possible, the LISC assessment principles are aligned with those of the University partner to facilitate student transition and progression.

2.58 The Centre Handbook and Student Handbook also provide detailed information to staff and students on academic misconduct in assessments and guidance on the assessment appeals process.

2.59 These arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

2.60 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team scrutinised the LISC Centre Handbook, the Student Handbook, the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, minutes of assessment boards and external examiner reports. It also met with senior, teaching and support staff and with students.

2.61 Discussion with student representatives confirmed the induction programme and personal tutorial system reinforces student awareness of academic regulations governing assessment and academic misconduct. This was supplemented by the use of plagiarism software as a diagnostic tool for students prior to submission of written assignments. An assessment regulations professional development workshop was provided by SG and attended by some LISC staff in 2015.

2.62 The Study Group generic assessment criteria guide the development of assessment tasks and associated marking schemes. The assessment tasks are set and marked by module tutors, scrutinised by external examiners and linked to the learning outcomes of the module and programme.

2.63 A standardisation process is used prior to marking, where a number of tutors are engaged in marking one particular assessment item (e.g. Student Project). This ensures a common interpretation of marking criteria and expectations.

2.64 The internal moderation of a 20 per cent sample of assessment items is normally conducted by ISC staff within the Centre. Internal moderation by LISC staff is only permitted where the Head of Centre or Head of Subject determines staff possess the appropriate competence.

2.65 External examiners' reports referred to inconsistencies in the sampling and internal moderation procedures, the nature and extent of feedback provided by tutors and generous marking in some programmes. Formal responses by academic tutors and within the Centre Action Plan only partially address these inconsistencies. Subsequent discussion with academic tutors and senior managers revealed that staff development activities were often

self-selected according to personal interest rather than on developmental needs to support the quality of learning opportunities. The review team **recommends** the provision of focused staff development to ensure consistency in internal marking.

2.66 Student assessment marks are considered and approved through the Module Assessment Board (MAB) and a subsequent Programme Assessment Board (PAB). These are chaired by the Head of Centre or Deputy Head of Centre, and the PAB requires an external examiner presence. . The progress identified in the Centre Action Plan will ensure suitable assessment samples are provided for external examiners' scrutiny.

2.67 The review team concludes that LISC operates an equitable, valid and reliable process for assessment. 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**

2.68 LISC identifies prospective external examiners and the subsequent approval, terms of appointment, roles and responsibilities of examiners are defined by BES/SG, which maintains a log of all external examiner appointments at the ISCs. Nominations, appointments and extensions are managed through the QAEC.

2.69 External examiners review and endorse draft examination papers, scrutinise an agreed sample of student assessments across the respective programme and can recommend adjustments are made to marks. External examiner presence is expected at the PAB, where an interim report might be provided; and an external examiner is not expected to attend the Module Assessment Boards.

2.70 These arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

2.71 To test this Expectation the review team scrutinised external examiner reports, annual monitoring reports, responses to examiner reports and assessment boards. It also examined minutes of RQAEG and QAEC. It met with senior, teaching and support staff and with students.

2.72 The LISC external examiner reports are submitted on a Study Group template, scrutinised by the Centre's QAEG and the Academic Management Board (AMB), and a formal response produced by the Centre.

2.73 Actions arising from issues identified in external examiner reports inform the Annual Monitoring Report and the Centre Action Plan (CAP). LISC has acknowledged the need to ensure sufficient samples are provided to external examiners for scrutiny and accompanied by simple descriptive statistics for student cohorts. The Centre Action Plan (CAP) affirmed the need for external examiners to receive an adequate and appropriate sample of student assessment items to improve external scrutiny of the quality of student learning opportunities. The review team **affirms** the actions being taken to ensure that external examiners receive adequate and appropriate samples of students' work.

2.74 As identified under Expectation B6 in this report, external examiners also reported inconsistencies in some internal moderation and marking practices, with generous marking and limited student feedback being reported in some programmes.

2.75 LISC monitors issues emanating from external examiner reports and these responses are then monitored by RQAEG and QAEC. External examiners' reports are made available to students on request but have yet to be made accessible to all students through the VLE.

2.76 The regulatory framework and external scrutiny surrounding the assessment of students mitigate the external examiner reporting of inconsistencies in some internal marking and moderation practices within the Centre's 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**

2.77 As noted under Expectation A3.3, LISC must comply with Study Group's monitoring and review processes, comprising ongoing programme monitoring through the Centre Action Plan (CAP), annual programme monitoring and Centre Review.

2.78 Under these processes, monitoring at ISC level, recorded in annual monitoring reports (AMRs), addresses the quality of student learning opportunities. Study Group templates for use in module review and annual programme reporting for Study Group-approved programmes require commentary and evaluation of external examiner and student feedback, and quality assurance and enhancement; and incorporate action planning. Typically, AMRs cover learning, teaching and assessment, student support, feedback from students, staffing and staff development. The processes require ISC-level oversight of programme monitoring to be maintained through Quality Assurance and Enhancement Groups (QAEGs).

2.79 LISC's operations are also kept under review through the regular meetings between Study Group and University representatives, via the Steering Group and the Academic Management Board (AMB).

2.80 The external examiner template used by LISC asks external examiners to comment on the quality of learning and teaching; student feedback; and areas of good practice.

2.81 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 AQAEC regarding Centre Review outcomes and their responses.

2.82 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 AQAEC).

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

2.84 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team explored the effectiveness of the arrangements by examining quality assurance process and other documentation including annual module review and programme monitoring reports; the CAP; and internal meeting minutes. The team also held meetings with students, teaching and administrative staff, senior staff and University representatives.

2.85 The review team examined a small sample of module review reports and the AMRs for 2013-14 and 2014-15, which are completed in the relevant Study Group templates.

2.86 With respect to the quality of students' learning opportunities, module review reports provide evaluation of module delivery, including teaching strategies and approaches; commentary on and analysis of student evaluation of the module; and associated planned developments. AMRs, which are explicitly informed by module reviews, address feedback from external examiners and QAA reviews, programme development, student satisfaction

ratings, staff development activity, and the effectiveness of quality assurance mechanisms; report on actions from the previous year, with evaluation of progress; and incorporate action planning for the following year, with proposed methodologies for evaluating the outcomes.

2.87 Matters identified for action are generally captured and followed through effectively in the CAP. This approach is exemplified by action planned, recorded, monitored and progressed with respect to the extension of the use of the VLE for the provision of learning materials and the enhancement of feedback to students, in particular on examination assessments. QAEG receives and considers module reviews and AMRs, and AMB receives and considers AMRs.

2.88 The review team learned that, due to the appointment of a new Head of Centre, the chair of AQAEC decided that the planned November 2015 Centre Review should be rescheduled. The review is now planned for spring 2017, following the move to new premises in October 2016. The review team considered that the completion of the Centre Review as originally scheduled would have provided Study Group and LISC with a timely opportunity to formally review and report on ongoing progress on improving student progression rates to the universities (see section B4).

2.89 The CAP is generally used effectively to capture and follow through actions arising from annual programme review, including the analysis of data and external examiner feedback. The CAP is monitored by QAEG on an ongoing basis.

2.90 Overall, the Centre operates effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and review. The review team concludes that 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 Student Handbook provides detailed information on the circumstances and procedures governing academic appeals and complaints by students. These adhere to Study Group's guiding principles.

2.92 Students are made aware of appeals and complaints procedures in meetings with a personal tutor; and additional support for students considering an appeal or complaint is available through Leeds Beckett University.

2.93 These arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

2.94 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team scrutinised the complaints and appeals policy. It met senior, teaching and support staff and students.

2.95 The appeals procedure follows a two-stage process with initial appeals being considered informally by the Head of Centre prior to submission to the LISC Appeals Committee for formal appeals. If the decision of the LISC Appeals Committee is challenged, the appeal is passed on to a second-stage hearing by the Regional Director.

2.96 The Complaints procedure follows a similar informal to the formal process, with initial informal consideration by a personal tutor or academic tutor prior to the involvement of the Head of Centre, where necessary. Escalation to a formal complaint requires a written submission to the Head of Centre who is the investigating officer. Further challenge to the outcome of this formal complaint can be made to the Regional Director. Students are aware of where to access information relating to complaints and appeals. .

2.97 LISC has procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints which are fair, accessible and enable enhancement. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

## The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.99 LISC has effective processes in place for the approval of programmes, admissions, learning and teaching, supporting students, assessment, student engagement, external examiners, monitoring and reviewing programmes and complaints and appeals. There are two recommendations, one concerning the Progression Improvement Plan and another on staff development. There are two affirmations, one regarding access to degree progression data and another to ensure external examiners receive an adequate supply of student work.

2.100 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at LISC **meets** UK expectations.

### 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 LISC is responsible for the provision and publication of a series of documents prescribed in the Study Group Academic Quality Handbook and supported by a series of templates. These documents include a Centre Handbook, Staff and Student Handbooks, programme and module specifications, and a Calendar of Business for the academic year.
- 3.2 There are effective processes in place at LISC, working with Study Group, to check on the information. The accuracy and completeness of these documents is the responsibility of the Head of Centre, checked and verified by the Regional Director, and reported to the QAEC.
- 3.3 The arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.
- 3.4 To test the Expectation, the review team scrutinised the website, information for prospective students, and marketing materials and met with senior, teaching and support staff and students.
- 3.5 LISC's marketing brochure is developed and produced in cooperation with SG centralised service teams and the University partners. The University partners are engaged in the development of recruitment information and have oversight of LISC information on University websites.
- 3.6 New LISC students expressed dissatisfaction at the limited information made available to them about the Centre's relocation of premises in Leeds. This was acknowledged by LISC and the Centre Action Plan was revised to ensure the location of the LISC is made clear to prospective students.
- 3.7 The students reported that information made available about progression to the partner universities was clearly explained during the induction programme and in presentations made by University partners. There are documents on public display that confirmed the progression requirements for Leeds Beckett University and University of Leeds programmes.
- 3.8 From discussion with students and staff, and a review of published information, the review team considered the information 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

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

3.10 There are effective processes in place to monitor and check information for the intended audiences to ensure that it is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.11 The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at LISC **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 LISC's overall approach to enhancement, while not confidently articulated by staff in meetings with the review team, could be identified through the available documentation. Quality assurance processes enable the gathering of useful feedback from students, staff and external examiners. This information is systematically considered at LISC institutional level through the routine review and monitoring processes discussed in earlier sections of this report (see sections A3.3, B8 and B5). Strategic initiatives are identified and subsequently captured and monitored through the Centre Action Plan, which senior staff described as key to LISC's enhancement mechanisms.

4.2 The review team learned from staff, and from documentary evidence, of examples of the use of this enhancement framework and the associated outcomes, which are described in more detail in previous sections of this report. A notable example is the recent review, redesign and re-approval of the International Year One, initiated in the light of quantitative and qualitative management information indicating the need for review and enhancement (see section B4). Other key strategic initiatives include the new personal tutorial framework, now implemented; the range of other measures completed and being progressed under the progression improvement plan; and the development of a system of peer observation of teaching, which is still in progress (see sections B3 and B4).

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 Integration of the Study Group employability enhancement programme 'CareerAhead' forms the basis of the LISC's future commitment to improve the academic and interpersonal skills of its students to underpin the formation of a personal career development plan.

5.2 Building on a successful ISC pilot-project, LISC has introduced 'CareerAhead' into part of its curriculum for a small cohort of students in September 2016. To facilitate this enhanced curriculum design, re-approval of some modules has been completed to embed the skills development components. Discussion with students revealed their awareness of deliberate interpersonal and transferable skills development within the academic programmes but reported no knowledge of the CareerAhead initiative.

5.3 Study Group staff development resources will be devoted to providing employability training opportunities for LISC academic tutors.

## 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 27-29 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](http://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](http://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**

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2017  
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01452 557 050  
Website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)