



## Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd

# Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

December 2013

## Annex: Leeds International Study Centre

### Introduction and background

Leeds International Study Centre (LISC) is an embedded college forming part of Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd (BES). The latter manages 13 embedded colleges operating on the campuses of partner UK universities. For LISC, BES has signed contracts with both Leeds Metropolitan University (LMU) and the University of Leeds (UL) to provide programmes for international students which lead to progression onto undergraduate degrees at both universities and to master's degrees at LMU. In addition there is a separate agreement with LMU to cover the provision of teaching accommodation and access to a range of services including library, student support and sporting facilities. Responsibilities for academic standards, learning opportunities and information are shared with LMU and UL for specific areas such as curriculum development, student recruitment, admission and induction, monitoring of student admission retention and achievement, periodic review of higher education provision, student support, as well as providing and managing the accuracy of information about learning opportunities. LISC is solely responsible for assessment setting, marking, moderation and feedback, staff appointment, development (in conjunction with BES) and appraisal, teaching and learning observation, and appeals and complaints.

At the time of the review, LISC offered the following higher education programmes:

- International Foundation Year Engineering, Science and Computing
- International Foundation Year Business, Law and Social Sciences
- Pre-Master's Business and Management (only for LMU).

### Key findings

#### Academic standards

There can be **confidence** that academic standards at LISC are managed appropriately and in accordance with the policies and procedures of Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd.

#### Quality of learning opportunities

There can be **confidence** that the quality of learning opportunities at LISC is assured and enhanced appropriately and in accordance with the policies and procedures of Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd.

#### Information about learning opportunities

**Reliance can** be placed on the information that LISC produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

## Good practice

The review team noted the following features of good practice at LISC:

- support available for students' transition into the UK higher education environment (paragraph 18).

## Recommendations

The review team makes the following recommendations in relation to BES:

The team considers that it is **advisable** for BES to:

- review the use of the central bank of exam scripts and marking schemes (paragraph 5).

The team considers that it is **desirable** for BES to:

- review the criteria concerning the independence of external members of approval panels and external examiners (paragraphs 2 and 10).

The review team makes the following recommendations in relation to LISC:

The team considers that it is **advisable** for LISC to:

- ensure the alignment of all published information concerning student progression to degree study at the respective partner higher education institutions with the relevant contractual provisions (paragraph 21)
- clarify written information to students concerning resitting and retaking examinations (paragraph 22)
- clarify and communicate to students and staff the criteria to be applied with respect to allowing failed modules and marginal failure to meet the progression requirements (paragraph 6).

## Detailed findings

### **How effectively do Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd and Leeds International Study Centre fulfil their responsibilities for the management of academic standards at this college?**

1 The Academic Management Board, with membership comprising the Head of Centre, LISC tutors and link tutors from the universities, is responsible for overseeing the academic management of all programmes, for aspects of quality control, and for preparation of submissions for all teaching-related reviews. The first meeting was held in November 2013 and the minutes, while rather brief, include a record of discussion of items such as the draft Annual Monitoring Report and external examiners' reports relating to academic standards. While the review team feels it is too early to comment on effectiveness, members consider that, provided meetings are scheduled as indicated in the terms of reference and continue to be well attended by LISC and university members, the Academic Management Board is likely to make a significant contribution to the management of standards. The Steering Group, which comprises members from each university and from BES, also considers some items of business that have a focus on the management of standards, for example membership of approval panels.

2 Standards are defined at the stage of programme approval and monitored and maintained by the annual monitoring process. The International Foundation Year and the Pre-Master's Programme were approved by BES's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee following consideration by a panel chaired by the Principal International Study Centres (ISCs) from BES (who is also the chair of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee) and comprising the Head of the LISC, the Regional Director ISCs, the English Coordinator ISCs and two external panel members. Both external members were from the same university which is also host to a BES ISC. It would be **desirable** that BES review the criteria concerning the independence of external members of approval panels.

3 Although partner higher education institutions (HEIs) are not represented on the approval panel, they are involved in the process. HEI representatives confirmed that progression opportunities had been mapped in discussion with the HEIs and that, where necessary, changes had been made before the approval event. The panel met virtually, with documentation including the LISC Centre Handbook and programme and module specifications for the programmes under discussion considered first by the internal members and then sent to the externals for comment. The external approval panel report made available to the review team confirmed that standards were appropriate.

4 The first annual monitoring report for the International Foundation Year programme is evaluative and self critical, although the information on which it is based is limited due to the very small cohort size. The report follows the standard format for the group and includes statistical information, feedback from examiners, from the Steering Group, from the LISC and LMU Operations Group and from students, and an action plan to address issues. As the programmes have only been in place for just over a year periodic review is not yet applicable.

### **How effective is the management of student assessment?**

5 Assessments for the English component of the programmes are set centrally by BES. Subject assessments are determined by LISC through the use of an extensive bank of examination questions and marking schemes held by BES. Tutors are able to select and modify questions from this bank. In the case of LISC, selection is made by the Administration and Exams Officer, with no input from subject tutors. BES does not monitor the use of questions in different embedded colleges and it is not clear how it ensures that the resulting examination papers are of an appropriate standard and how it avoids the risk of pre-knowledge by students. It is **advisable** that BES reviews the use of the central bank of exam scripts and marking scheme.

6 Assessment results are considered first by a module board and then by a progression board. Module boards are chaired by the Head of Centre and include relevant tutors and representatives from the HEIs. The review team was informed that, as part of this process, the Head of Centre identifies any borderline cases, takes the view of module tutors about the student concerned and recommends to the board whether a marginal fail should be allowed. LISC regulations do not describe this process or indicate the level of failure which might be permitted or the criteria used. The full set of module results is considered by a programme board, which is chaired by a link tutor from one of the HEIs and includes external examiners. The programme board makes the decision for each student as to whether they are eligible to progress to their chosen university course. It is **advisable** that LISC clarifies and communicates to students and staff the criteria to be applied with respect to allowing failed modules and marginal failure to meet the progression requirements.

## **Where appropriate, how effectively are UK external reference points used in the management of academic standards?**

7 The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) is used as a clear point of reference in the approval of programmes. The template sent to the external validation panel members asks specifically about subject benchmarks and also whether engagement with the relevant sections of the Quality Code is demonstrated. With respect to the approval of the LISC Foundation programmes, the completed template available at the review recorded positive responses in this regard.

8 The template for external examiners' reports also contains questions concerning the appropriateness of module threshold standards and their comparability with those of similar subjects at an equivalent level in other UK institutions. Reports seen by the review team gave positive responses to these questions.

## **How effectively are external examining, moderation, or verification used to assure academic standards?**

9 Assignments and examinations are marked by tutors and there is a moderation process in which at least 20 per cent of scripts are second marked. Any serious discrepancies which cannot be resolved between the two markers can be referred to a third marker. In the case of the single small cohort of students who have completed the programme at LISC all scripts were seen by the second marker. As numbers increase, the sample is expected to include a range of grades and all borderline scripts. As staff numbers are very small at present, second marking was carried out by a colleague at another International Study Centre.

10 External examiners are appointed by BES to all programmes. The review team noted that one of the proposed external examiners was from an HEI which also works with BES. It would be **desirable** that BES review the criteria concerning the independence of external examiners. External examiners do not see assignments or examination questions prior to the assessment being undertaken by the students, but do have the opportunity to comment on a sample of marked assignments prior to the progression board.

## **How effectively is statistical information used to monitor and assure academic standards?**

11 LISC collects a range of data on its students as they apply for, join, progress and leave the centre. Such data forms a part of the annual monitoring process. Given that there has only been a single, small cohort complete the programme so far there is as yet no possibility to look at the figures in a statistically significant way or to examine trends. However, the structures are in place for effective production and use of statistical information as LISC grows its provision.

12 With regard to the successful progression of LISC alumni as they move through their chosen university courses it is, as yet, too early to provide figures. However, both universities indicated that it was their intention to monitor ongoing performance of LISC students and to share this information with the embedded college.

## **How effectively are responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities fulfilled?**

13 LISC's quality assurance framework involves staff (including teaching and support staff as well as senior management) and students through the formal mechanisms of staff-student liaison meetings, staff team meetings and senior management meetings.

This framework links directly into BES's quality assurance systems, via the Regional Director and the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee. It also links into the mechanisms established to provide formal communication and monitoring channels involving LISC, BES and HEI staff, comprising the Steering Committee, the Academic Management Group and the Programme Assessment Board. Regular quality monitoring is maintained through formal reporting by the Head of Centre, in the form of monthly reports to the Regional Director and annual monitoring reports, which are scrutinised both by BES and by HEI representatives. These reports, together with meeting minutes and evidence of ongoing action planning at Centre level, demonstrated that effective oversight of the quality of learning opportunities is maintained, that any issues are identified and appropriately addressed, that opportunities for enhancement are pursued and that response to the student voice is a key feature of the Centre's approach to the management and enhancement of learning opportunities.

### **How effectively are external reference points used in the management and enhancement of learning opportunities?**

14 External reference points are used effectively in the management and enhancement of learning opportunities and work is continuing on extending awareness of the direct impact of the Quality Code on teaching practice. As indicated in paragraph 7 the Quality Code is used as a clear point of reference in the approval of programmes. Use of the Quality Code was also evident in the formulation of Centre-level policy covering areas such as assessment, disability and support for student learning and achievement. Teaching and support staff had awareness of the Quality Code and that it was used by LISC. They had attended briefing sessions led by the Head of Centre concerning the Quality Code but were uncertain about its impact on their practice.

### **How effectively do Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd and Leeds International Study Centre assure themselves that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced?**

15 LISC specifies as essential requirements that teaching staff should have good degree qualifications, relevant teaching experience, knowledge of the further education and higher education sectors and the ability to motivate and teach students and carry out pastoral functions. Staff confirmed that appointment processes verify these attributes as well as further desirable features, such as experience of teaching international students. Staff also indicated that they had been supported after appointment through induction and informal mentoring by the Head of Centre. The Head of Centre had observed their teaching and they had found this experience helpful in developing their practice. The Centre has produced an extensive and detailed pro forma for use in lesson observations. The academic staff whom the review team met were relatively new to the post and had not yet undergone appraisal but spoke of their expectation that they would be formally appraised annually. Staff described the ISCs' English tutor network as a very helpful means of sharing good practice and enhancing teaching. Students said that teaching is good and confirmed that they are able to give feedback on the modules and the programme as a whole through module questionnaires and student surveys. Through all these mechanisms, BES and LISC effectively assure themselves that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained.

### **How effectively is student feedback used to assure and enhance the quality of learning opportunities?**

16 Written student feedback is captured through module questionnaires and student surveys, which canvass student opinion on a broad range of matters concerning teaching, learning and assessment as well as the wider student experience. Staff said that response rates were high and that students engaged well with the 'closed questions' sections of the

questionnaires; staff were seeking to encourage students to provide more extensive, free text, qualitative feedback. Students confirmed that the student representation system, comprising two student representatives for each of the Foundation pathways, works well. Together with the Head of Centre, the Administrator and Examinations Officer and subject tutors, student representatives attend the staff-student meetings, which are held on a monthly basis. Students indicated that matters raised by them are appropriately addressed. They offered the review team the example of the previous cohorts' request to staff for a change to the examinations timetable to avoid Eid, a request that had been suitably accommodated. The Head of Centre's first Annual Monitoring Report, 2012-13 includes comprehensive coverage of the student voice, providing an analysis of questionnaire and survey results and reporting on staff-student meetings, with actions taken and to be taken in response to student feedback. By all these means, LISC uses student feedback effectively to assure and enhance the quality of learning opportunities.

### **How effectively do Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd and Leeds International Study Centre assure themselves that students are supported effectively?**

17 Students are welcomed and supported on entry to LISC through an induction programme which runs over five days and incorporates a range of academic, social and administrative sessions including English and Maths diagnostics testing, a session on life in the UK, tours of the universities and the city, meetings with university staff and students, and a theatre or cinema outing. Students confirmed the usefulness of induction. Students are provided with extensive academic and pastoral support throughout their programme; they confirmed that academic support is readily available from subject tutors, and that the Head of Centre is always available to help with any personal matters. LISC and BES assure themselves that students are supported effectively through the formal mechanisms of the student feedback questionnaires and surveys, staff-student meetings and the Causes for Concern process, which involves continual monitoring of students' attendance and progress and the identification, through staff team meetings, of any problems arising generally or with respect to individual students, and the remedial action to be taken. The support available for students' transition into the UK higher education environment is **good practice**.

### **How effectively do Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd and Leeds International Study Centre manage the recruitment and admission of students?**

18 Admissions (including marketing, recruitment and admissions) are centralised at BES. Admissions are undertaken by the International Admissions Centre at Brighton. The International Admissions Centre liaises with the respective HEIs on the Confirmation of Acceptance of Studies, which is currently issued by the destination university. Students met by the review team were content with the information and assistance provided by agents prior to entry and described the induction programme as comprehensive and helpful.

### **What are the arrangements for staff development to maintain and/or enhance the quality of learning opportunities?**

19 Staff development arrangements to maintain and enhance the quality of learning opportunities are provided within LISC, with other ISCs and by BES. Since the establishment of LISC, these have included a Head of Centre briefing to teaching and support staff on quality assurance; work shadowing by the Head of Centre and Administrative Officer at the head office in Brighton and at a number of other ISCs; training and peer observation undertaken by the English tutor within the Study Group English Tutor network; and, for Heads of Centre, budget training and training on Study Smart (the BES intranet), guidance on employment contracts and sharing good practice across ISCs on academic and personal development planning. Further planned developments include sharing good practice across centres in the teaching of Economics. The Head of Centre had attended the

most recent BES annual teachers' conference and had led sessions. Although teaching staff who met the review team had not yet had the opportunity to attend the conference, they had been briefed on aspects relevant to their practice. The review team concluded that the arrangements for staff development are effective in maintaining and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities.

### **How effectively do Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd and Leeds International Study Centre ensure that learning resources are accessible to students and sufficient to enable them to achieve the learning outcomes?**

20 The agreement with LMU stipulates availability and access to LMU resources for LISC students on pathways progressing to LMU and UL. LISC is located in a LMU building and has office space and some teaching rooms used exclusively for LISC students. Currently, with the low numbers of students, these are deemed sufficient. LISC students have access to library and other LMU campus facilities, and they confirmed that this arrangement is satisfactory.

### **How effectively does Leeds International Study Centre's information communicate to students and other stakeholders about the higher education it provides at this college?**

21 For the most part, the information provided to students prior to entry is accurate. Students who met with the review team knew to which course they hoped to progress and what grades they needed to obtain for progression. They understand that progression is automatic provided they obtain these grades. Indeed, in practice, students who achieve the required grades are admitted to their planned degree programmes (as confirmed also by the HEI representatives), however, information on the website regarding eligibility for progression is inconsistent with the contractual provisions which give more control over admissions to the respective university. Partner universities confirmed it is their intention to provide automatic progression to those achieving the required level and that contracts would be modified to reflect this. It is **advisable** for LISC to ensure the alignment of all published information concerning student progression to degree study with the relevant contractual provisions.

22 Students who met with the review team had all received a handbook. The handbook gives generally clear information about the programme and about studying at LISC. However, the section concerning resitting failed modules and retaking modules in order to achieve a higher grade does not exclude third-term modules, although students believed they could not resit or retake anything from the third term. Further, information about applying to retake suggests using the mitigating circumstances form which appears to be an error. It is **advisable** for LISC to clarify the written information to students concerning resitting and retaking examinations.

### **How effective are the Leeds International Study Centre's arrangements for assuring that information about learning opportunities is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy?**

23 BES's Marketing teams work with the Head of Centre and the two universities to ensure that both printed and web-based information on programmes at the Centre are kept up to date. Changes are signed off by the universities before publication - this was confirmed during the review by university representatives.

## Action plan<sup>1</sup>

Leeds ISC action plan relating to Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight February 2014						
Good practice	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date(s)	Action by	Reported to	Evaluation (process or evidence)
The review team identified the following areas of <b>good practice</b> that are worthy of wider dissemination within the Bellerbys Education Services Ltd:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support available for students' transition into the UK higher education environment (paragraph 18).</li> </ul>	<p>Continue to build on positive structures and practices to ensure that students receive high-quality support in their transition to higher education</p> <p>Leeds International Study Centre (LISC) shares its actions and processes with other international study centres (ISCs) across the UK network</p>	<p>Head of Centre to monitor, review and report in Annual Monitoring Report</p> <p>Head of Centre to summarise key points (sharing good practice) at Heads of Centre Conference 2014</p>	<p>June 2014</p> <p>March 2014</p>	<p>Head of Centre and Annual Monitoring Board</p> <p>Head of Centre</p>	<p>Higher education institutions, student representatives and Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee</p>	<p>Gather feedback and add to Annual Monitoring Report; Student feedback, staff/student engagement, Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group and Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee</p>

<sup>1</sup> Bellerbys Education Services Ltd has been required to develop this action plan to follow up on good practice and address any recommendations arising from the review. QAA monitors progress against the action plan, in conjunction with the partner higher education institution.

Advisable	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date(s)	Action by	Reported to	Evaluation (process or evidence)
The team considers that it is <b>advisable</b> for the Bellerbys Education Services Ltd to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the use of the central bank of exam scripts and marking schemes (paragraph 5)</li> </ul>	The planning, administration and management of exam scripts and mark schemes is secure, rigorous and of appropriate standards	<p>Bellerbys Education Services Ltd to review the use of the central exam bank to include consideration of security, provenance, rigour and probity</p> <p>This will apply to the ISC network, not only LISC</p> <p>Subject tutors to be involved in the selection and modification of exam papers appropriate to the curriculum at LISC</p> <p>Head of Centre, tutors and Exams Officer at LISC schedule exam writing prior to examination periods, giving sufficient time to</p>	<p>By end July 2014</p> <p>March and June 2014 Exam periods</p> <p>March and June 2014</p>	<p>Head of Quality</p> <p>Head of Centre</p> <p>Exams officers, Head of Centre, Regional Director</p>	<p>Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee</p> <p>Regional Director, Module Assessment Board and Programme Assessment Board</p> <p>Regional Director</p>	<p>Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee minutes</p> <p>ISC team meetings; Annual Monitoring Report</p> <p>Module Assessment Board and Programme Assessment Board</p>

		prepare				
		External examiners review a sample of papers and mark schemes prior to being finalised	March and June 2014	Head of Centre	Regional Director	Module Assessment Board and Programme Assessment Board
		Leeds ISC ensures that access to papers and use is controlled and secure	March and June 2014	Head of Centre	Regional Director	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure the alignment of all published information concerning student progression to degree study at the respective partner higher education institutions with the relevant contractual provisions (paragraph 21)</li> </ul>	The contract with each higher education institution is clear regarding the process of progression from LISC to the higher education institution, that is the Programme Assessment Board considers the grades and confers the decision, and this is reflected in all online and offline published material	<p>The Bellerbys Education Services Ltd and each higher education institution to sign an amendment to the relevant contracts to this effect.</p> <p>Note: Bellerbys Education Services Ltd has begun this process and amended the wording of the contracts with the Universities to reflect the agreement between LISC and the two universities</p>	End March 2014	Director, Legal and Compliance (Study Group)	Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee; Senior Management Team Operations and Academic	Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee and Senior Management Team Operations and Academic minutes; Steering Group minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarify written information to students concerning resitting and retaking</li> </ul>	The rules and regulations are amended to give a clear description of the resit and retake opportunities for students	<p>The Head of Centre to amend all relevant documents</p> <p>Head of Centre to issue verbal and written</p>	<p>End March 2014</p> <p>End June 2014</p>	Head of Centre	Regional Director	Student feedback processes; comments from higher education institution and external

<p>examinations (paragraph 22)</p>	<p>Staff, students, external examiners and higher education institution partners understand the rules and regulations</p>	<p>amends to staff and students and higher education institution partners and external examiners</p> <p>(Note: these areas will be scrutinised during Bellerbys Education Services Ltd's review of the Programme Approval Process in 2014)</p>				<p>examiners at Module Assessment Boards and Programme Assessment Boards; Action Plan and Annual Monitoring Report and at academic management meetings</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarify and communicate to students and staff the criteria to be applied with respect to allowing failed modules and marginal failure to meet the progression requirements (paragraph 6).</li> </ul>	<p>The rules and regulations are amended to give a clear statement of discretionary awards</p> <p>The Glossary is amended with clarity on the terminology; all stakeholders understand the rules and regulations</p>	<p>Head of Centre to amend all relevant documents</p> <p>Head of Centre to issue verbal and written amends to staff and students and higher education institution partners and external examiners</p> <p>(Note: these areas will be scrutinised during Bellerbys Education Services Ltd's review of the Programme Approval Process in 2014)</p>	<p>End March 2014</p> <p>End June 2014</p>	<p>Head of Centre</p> <p>Head of Centre</p>	<p>Regional Director</p> <p>Regional Director</p>	<p>Student feedback processes; comments from higher education institution and external examiners at Module Assessment boards and Programme Assessment boards; Action Plan and Annual Monitoring Report and at Academic Management meetings; Glossary; student and staff handbooks;</p>

						all documents where the assessment regulations are published
<b>Desirable</b>	<b>Intended outcomes</b>	<b>Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes</b>	<b>Target date/s</b>	<b>Action by</b>	<b>Reported to</b>	<b>Evaluation (process or evidence)</b>
The team considers that it would be <b>desirable</b> for the provider to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the criteria concerning the independence of external members of approval panels and external examiners (paragraphs 2 and 10).</li> </ul>	<p>Bellerbys Education Services Ltd establishes an appropriate protocol for the appointment of and independence of external examiners and panel members to ensure independence</p> <p>Head of Centre liaises with link tutors from higher education institutions to recruit any additional external examiners</p>	<p>Bellerbys Education Services Ltd conducts a review of the Programme Approval process to include a consideration of the appointment of external examiners and panel members</p> <p>Head of Centre notifies higher education institutions of needs for any additional external examiners</p>	<p>End December 2014</p> <p>March and June 2014</p>	<p>Head of Quality</p> <p>Head of Centre</p>	<p>Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee</p> <p>Regional Director</p>	<p>Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee minutes and Bellerbys Education Services Ltd's Annual Monitoring Report</p> <p>Action Plan and Annual Monitoring Report and at academic management meetings</p>

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© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2014

Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000

Email [enquiries@gaa.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@gaa.ac.uk)

Web [www.gaa.ac.uk](http://www.gaa.ac.uk)

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786