



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

Leeds International Study Centre

Section 1: Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Leeds International Study Centre (the Centre) is making commendable progress with implementing the action plan from the February 2015 [Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight](#).

Section 2: Changes since the last QAA review

2 The Principal of the Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd (BES) network of international colleges left the Study Group in 2015, but the proprietor remains the same. The Chief Operating Officer is acting Principal. A new Head of Centre was appointed in August 2015. Programme and student numbers remain the same.

Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

3 At the QAA visit in February 2015, the review team made four advisable and three desirable recommendations. These were incorporated in the Centre's Action Plan. This covers actions arising from the most recent QAA visit, from the Centre and its related universities, and from BES. The Action Plan is reviewed and updated regularly by the Centre's internal Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG). It is further scrutinised by the Regional Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (RQAEG) and BES's Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (AQAEC). The action planning is strengthened by a new approach that clearly demonstrates that all the actions have been fully implemented and have led to improvements.

4 The first advisable recommendation required the Centre to implement fully the quality management framework and to evaluate and report on its effectiveness at the end of the 2014-15 academic year. This has been completed, with all relevant meetings taking place in 2014-15 and a Calendar of Business in place for the current academic year. Staff informed the review team that the new committee structure is clear and enables them to understand the location of responsibilities and the flow of business within the Centre, and from the Centre to the network more generally. The effectiveness of the quality management framework will be tested during the re-approval of the Centre's programmes during summer 2016.

5 The second advisable recommendation related to the Centre ensuring that external examiners have access to a range of assessed student work. Improvement in this area is clear from the external examiners' reports, with one report in 2014-15 confirming that they had received a sufficient number of examination scripts and coursework to allow a judgement on standards to be made. A second report, while indicating a preference for receiving a greater number of examination scripts, indicated that the method of selection

was satisfactory and that the consistency and standard of marking was appropriate. All reports demonstrate that the Centre has improved the external examiner process.

6 The third advisable recommendation was to ensure implementation of actions to address identified student progression issues and to evaluate and report on their effectiveness. Discussion with Centre staff demonstrates that considerable thought has been given to the reasons for non-progression, with figures broken down by country of origin and whether non-progression is based in language or subject modules. One particular initiative has been to stream the four key English skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) into short, one-hour sessions. This enables tutors to focus on particular skills, rather than students attending generic sessions. Initial feedback from both staff and students indicates that this has been a positive step. In addition, the Centre has implemented diagnostic tests on arrival and uses the BES alert system for students who are performing below the necessary level in order to provide extra mandatory classes for such students. Attendance monitoring also informs risk monitoring for non-progression. This recommendation has been fully implemented and has led to improvements in the Centre's processes for identifying and evaluating student progression.

7 The fourth advisable recommendation was for the Centre to review and report on the effectiveness of its staffing policy and its appraisal, peer review and teaching observation process to ensure the quality of learning and teaching. All staff have been subject to observation of their teaching this year. In addition, an active peer review system is in place with both management observation and peer review feeding into appraisal and decisions around staff development. The Centre has introduced the processes with full consultation of staff. In setting up peer review, partnership areas requiring development are targeted and the effectiveness of this approach in practice is likely to be of interest to future review teams.

8 The first desirable recommendation was to continue to implement the module review process and evaluate and report on its effectiveness. In June and July 2015, module reviews were undertaken, which feed into the annual monitoring process. Tutors gave a verbal report on module reviews at the Module Assessment Board, indicating improvements required. The module reviews are evaluative, evidenced and indicate areas for development.

9 The second desirable recommendation was to expedite the consolidation of the Centre management team through the appointment of a permanent Head of Centre and Deputy Head of Centre. The Head of Centre has been in post since August 2015. Interviews for the Deputy Head of Centre will take place during April; meanwhile, a colleague from a nearby Centre is seconded two days per week to support the Head of Centre. There was a decision made by the Senior Management Team that all the centres should have a Deputy Head of Centre.

10 The third desirable recommendation was for the Centre to continue to implement its staff development framework and to evaluate and report on the effectiveness of this approach. A range of activities has taken place with respect to this, including a staff planning day, invigilation training and exam board/assessment regulation training. A continuing professional development plan is in place for 2015-16. Staff were positive about the opportunities offered. The recommendation has been fully implemented and shows that the Centre has improved its staff development activities.

11 Overall, actions have been fully implemented and have resulted in improvements to the Centre's higher education provision.

Admissions

12 Admissions criteria are set in conjunction with the universities at the time of programme approval and may be amended only with approval of the universities. All admissions to International Study Centres (ISC) are processed centrally either in Brighton or Singapore by the Study Group Admissions Centre, which checks that students are academically qualified and meet the English level entry requirements for the chosen programme, that the chosen ISC has an appropriate degree progression route and that students' circumstances meet UK Visas and Immigration entry regulations. All reference letters from previous study in the UK are also checked. The Centre and the universities become directly involved in the consideration of marginal cases. Student evaluations of the admissions process are positive; this was confirmed in meetings with students. Students informed the review team that they had to produce their original qualification documentation prior to acceptance.

Assessments

13 Assessments are designed by module staff and subject to comment and approval by external examiners. Guidelines on the processes to be followed by tutors and the Examinations Officer when producing assessments are provided in the Centre Handbooks. These include the procedure for checking assessments and the required timeframes. Care is taken to maintain security of examination papers prior to the examination date.

14 Feedback on coursework is provided within two weeks of the submission date. This was confirmed by students, who indicated that feedback is helpful. Results of mid-term examinations are not always available in time to inform students of work necessary before final examinations. This has been discussed with staff and a proposal to move to a semester-based, rather than a term-based, system is expected to alleviate this issue.

15 Subject tutors mark assessments and a sample is moderated by another subject specialist. External examiners and link tutors comment on the rigour of the process. External examiners are able to scrutinise moderated samples and check that the assessment process has been fairly and consistently applied. At the end of the academic year, each external examiner submits a report and provides comment at the Programme Assessment Board.

Annual monitoring

16 Annual monitoring reports (AMRs) from both 2013-14 and 2014-15 were available. The second of these represents the current approach whereby the Centre uses a template designed by BES. The document covers feedback from students and external examiners as well as offering opportunity for reflection on programmes. The draft is discussed with the Regional Director and at QAEG and is presented to the Steering Group, allowing comment by the partner universities. In addition to committee processes, a peer review process enables the AMR to be reviewed by another ISC Head of Centre. This offers the opportunity for the spread of good practice, and the effectiveness of this approach is likely to be of interest to future review teams. It is also an effective mechanism for tracking actions and ensuring their completion. It is an open process that enables staff and students to participate in annual reviews. BES signs off the process through QAEC. Actions arising from annual monitoring are entered into the action plan for ongoing monitoring.

17 Completion rates for programmes at the Centre are high, with 95.6 per cent of students completing their programme in 2014-15. However, only 59.8 per cent of those completing students were eligible to progress to their preferred course. The Centre is taking action to improve support for students, to increase progression (see paragraph 6). While this is an improvement on earlier years, and reflects the high grades required by the University of

Leeds, the Centre continues to work to understand where issues are arising and how to combat these. Recent annual reports and the Centre Action Plan identify language problems as reasons for the rates. The Centre has introduced a more robust system for supporting students (see paragraph 6). Students who complete, but who fail to meet progression requirements, are supported to apply to other higher education courses. This process is very much appreciated by students.

Section 4: Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education

18 BES considers that centres should engage with the Quality Code on a thematic basis on a three-year cycle. A workshop has been held for Heads of Centre and other such activities are planned. Staff were aware of the Quality Code and how it informed their activities, explaining that new or revised policies and procedures are developed to align with the appropriate expectations of the Quality Code. In discussions with the team, staff demonstrated highly effective engagement with the Quality Code, with references being made to, for example, assessment, engaging in module and annual reviews and learning and teaching. The Centre engages with the Code on a thematic basis over a three-year cycle. Standards are set to reflect Level 3 provision and this is confirmed by external examiners.

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

Section 5: Background to the monitoring visit

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

21 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Philip Markey (Review Manager) and Professor Gaynor Taylor (Reviewer) on 18 March 2016.

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557050
Web www.qaa.ac.uk