



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

## Strathclyde University 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 Strathclyde University International Study Centre.....	2
Good practice .....	2
Enhancement of student learning opportunities.....	2
Theme: Student Employability.....	2
<b>About the Strathclyde University International Study Centre .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Explanation of the findings about the University of Strathclyde International Study Centre .....</b>	<b>4</b>
1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the provider .....	5
2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities.....	16
3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities .....	31
4 Commentary on the enhancement of student learning opportunities .....	33
5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability.....	34
<b>Glossary.....</b>	<b>35</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 Strathclyde University International Study Centre. The review took place from 25 to 26 October 2016 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Brian Anderton
- Ms Kate Wicklow (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the Strathclyde University International Study Centre and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (the Quality Code)<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 threshold 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 5.

In reviewing Strathclyde University International Study Centre the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The [themes](#) for the academic year 2014-15 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.

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<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 Strathclyde University International Study Centre

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

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

### Good practice

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

- the focused staff development initiatives, which provide staff with the skills to support students with particular needs (Expectations B3, B4)
- the effectiveness of the academic and pastoral support arrangements that enable students to develop their potential (Expectation B4).

### Enhancement of student learning opportunities

The Centre Action Plan (CAP) is central to the identification and monitoring of enhancement activities. There are some specific examples of enhancement activities at Strathclyde International Study Centre (SUI SC) including focus on e-learning through the virtual learning environment (VLE). This is in line with the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and the desire to increase digital literacy to enhance learning opportunities. Staff regard the Curriculum Committee as a key part of the deliberative structure supporting enhancement, and also the external inputs, for example from external examiners and the University.

### Theme: Student Employability

SUI SC has developed a number of initiatives to enhance students' employability. There is a unique module which specifically focuses on students' transferable skills, titled Personal Awareness Communication and Employability Skills (PACES). This module will ensure that SUI SC is adhering to Study Group's CareerAhead Initiative. In addition to this specific module, SUI SC has undertaken a curriculum review to ensure that transferable skills are explicit within all modules. Students are also able to access careers advice and guidance from the University Careers Service team.

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

## About the Strathclyde University International Study Centre

Strathclyde University International Study Centre (SUISC) began operating in September 2013 under an approved provision status. It is housed in one of the University's main buildings at the heart of the campus. SUISC offers five programmes, Undergraduate Foundation Programme in Business and Social Studies, Undergraduate Foundation Programme in Engineering and Science, International Year One Bachelor of Business Administration (since 2014), and two Pre-Masters programmes, one for Business and Social Studies, the other for Engineering and Science. English Language programmes are also offered to support students specifically in their language improvement, prior to their joining the academic pre-degree programmes; implementation of the new Academic English Skills modules began in September 2016. The Centre's Head of English was closely involved in the development of this programme. Further English provision includes the English Language for Pre-Masters programme, and pre-programme English Study, Language for Study 1 and 2. SUISC has grown from 78 students in 2013-14 to 104 in 2014-15 and 131 in 2015-16. There are currently 12 teaching staff, supported by two full-time admin staff, a Head of English and a Head of Centre. Since the last review, SUISC has appointed a new Head of Centre and a Head of English.

The key challenges facing SUISC include: implementing the Employability Framework and the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, developing further the progression monitoring, staff professional training and the VLE. It is also reviewing the contract with the University.

The ECREO in 2014 made four recommendations relating to the Quality Code: the development of learning and teaching, the professional development of staff and the VLE. The annual monitoring report in 2015 noted acceptable progress being made. All the recommendations have been addressed.

## Explanation of the findings about the University of Strathclyde 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 *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* 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 All programmes offered by SUISC are approved provision, therefore Study Group is responsible for academic standards on these programmes. However, as part of the programme approval process, the University endorses the programmes signifying it will accept suitably qualified students from the SUISC programme on to its own degree programmes. The current portfolio of programmes was approved at the inception of SUISC in 2013, and there has been no further programme approval since then. The University approves SUISC's arrangements for the management of academic standards through the joint Academic Management Board (AMB), while the partnership with the University is overseen by the joint Steering Group.

1.2 The self-evaluation document says that the programmes at SUISC were designed with reference to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels 7 to 9, and with reference also to relevant subject benchmarks. This is reflected in the programme specifications for each programme. Module specifications confirm the credit tariff in the case of the International Year One Bachelor of Business Administration but not for the Undergraduate Foundation Programme (UFP) or the Pre-Masters Programme (PMP), though the UFP and PMP module specifications do show taught and private study hours which provide an indication of the scale of the module. No award is made in relation to any of the programmes at SUISC. Rather, successful completion of the programme with grades

specified in the agreement with the University permits students to progress to a degree programme of the University.

1.3 The arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

1.4 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team scrutinised documentation relating to programme design and approval, through examination of previous published review and monitoring reports relating to SUISC. It held meetings with senior, teaching and support staff.

1.5 From the evidence collected, the review team was able to ascertain that appropriate reference had been made to external quality reference points. The programmes at SUISC have been approved at the appropriate levels on the SCQF, though this is implicit rather than explicit in the programme specifications. The programme specifications also refer to the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements which have informed programme development. The ECREO Review Report in 2014 noted that: 'link tutors were closely involved in the development of the curricula for the programmes in order to ensure articulation into the relevant programmes at university level. Such articulation ensures that UoSISC curricula reflect, where appropriate, the Subject Benchmark Statements and this is noted in programme specifications'. This remains pertinent since there has not been any further programme approval since that date.

1.6 Overall, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (A2.1): In order to secure their academic standards, degree-awarding bodies establish transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards**

**Findings**

1.7 SUISC has a number of committees to assure standards and manage quality within its organisation which feed directly into both the provider and host University committee systems. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG) is the central committee in which a number of deliberative and management committees feed into and reports to Study Group's Regional Quality and Enhancement Group (RQEG). Subcommittees of the QAEG include SSLC, the Curriculum Committee, PABs and MABs. It then reports to the Academic Management Board which is jointly run by SUISC and the University. It also submits an Annual Monitoring Review report (AMR) to the University's Quality Assurance Committee.

1.8 There is provision for student membership on QAEG and AMB, and students decide themselves from the pool of course reps who attends the meeting.

1.9 University staff are also in attendance at PABs and MABs where link tutors' presence is required for quoracy. A University Vice Dean Academic chairs each of the PABs and is a member of the Academic Management Board.

1.10 The Centre Action plan captures the Centre's priorities for the year which are generated through provider expectations, actions from committees and institutional strategy. It is considered at QAEG and AMB as well as sent to the provider-level RQAEG. The Centre Action Plan is also considered at joint Steering meetings. The Centre Handbook provides staff at the Centre to access policies and procedures of the ISC quickly, and is revised annually with the student and staff handbooks by QAEG.

1.11 These arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

1.12 To test whether the Expectation is met the review team scrutinised the minutes of SUISC's committees both internally and with the University and Study Group. It met with senior, teaching and support staff and students.

1.13 SUISC is making effective use of its committee system and while many minutes of meetings are sparse in content of discussion, decision making was clearly tracked. Because SUISC is working with both the University and Study Group, it must ensure that appropriate nomenclature is used when receiving papers and decision making in each of its committees to reflect where the locus of responsibility ultimately lies. SUISC has a very supportive relationship with the University, and it was clear to the review team that this relationship was seen as mutually beneficial.

1.14 The review team found limited examples of where students were attending and actively participating in the AMB and QAEG. While it was assured that students are able to attend AMB, they are yet to be formally listed as members in the terms of reference.

1.15 The Centre Action Plan (CAP) is used in line with Study Group's expectations and is a live document and widely discussed in meetings. The CAP is regularly updated. SUISC

staff demonstrated an articulate use of the plan to track actions from meetings, feedback from external examiners, and feedback from students.

1.16 The University appoints link tutors to the SUISC programmes to provide an additional layer of scrutiny of academic standards. They are members of MABs and PABs and the Academic Management Board, and University Vice Deans (Academic) chair each of the PABS and are members of AMB. Link tutors also formally comment on programme structure and delivery, and provide advice on assessment, and they attend MABs and PABs where they confirm academic standards have been met.

1.17 SUICS has a well-developed relationship with the University. As well as an embedded link tutor system, there is Joint Operations Group which meets to discuss induction and transition for students between SUISC and the University. This group reports to the Marketing and Operations Group which reports to Steering Group.

1.18 The review team concludes that SUISC has well-established relationships with the University, uses Study Group's structures effectively and operates within transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations which secure academic standards. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (A2.2): Degree-awarding bodies maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they approve (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards**

**Findings**

1.19 SUISC uses Study Group's template for programme specifications which are the definitive course record. These are approved using Study Group's processes. The programme specification provides details of the learning outcomes of the programme, details of the assessment strategy, admissions criteria and structure of the course. This information is then transcribed onto module specifications which provide students with more detail about individual modules that lead to the overall learning outcomes.

1.20 The arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

1.21 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team evaluated programme specifications, module specifications and handbooks. The review team met senior staff, teaching staff and students.

1.22 Programme specifications provide clear reference to the aims of the course and are a clear reference point for the admissions criteria and assessment strategies used in the programmes. Teaching staff and internal and external examiners use this as the definitive record for delivery, assessment and monitoring and review. Programme and module specifications have been recently altered to ensure there is a clear focus on employability. Students told the review team that they were clear what was expected of them and how to find information on the content of their programmes.

1.23 The review team concludes that the programme documentation provided by SUISC is of sufficient detail to be used as the reference point for the delivery and assessment of its programmes. 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**

1.24 All programmes at SUISC are approved provision, and Study Group has responsibility for the academic standards on these programmes. SUISC uses the Study Group procedures for programme approval (and re-approval). The current Study Group procedures are incorporated in the Centre Handbook, and include the convening of an approval panel incorporating external advisers.

1.25 This should ensure academic standards are set at the appropriate level for any future programme approval. However, there has been no further programme approval since the inception of SUISC in 2013, so there is no evidence available on how SUISC would implement these procedures in practice. However, the Review Report 2014 found that the programmes offered by SUISC had been properly approved in accordance with the Study Group procedures which applied at that time.

1.26 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (A3.2): 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**

1.27 The programme specifications provide detail on the learning outcomes of the programmes. Students are provided with summative assessment to show how they have achieved these, and this is operated in accordance with the SUISC assessment regulations which are mapped against the University's regulations. SUISC operates Module Assessment Boards (MABs) and Programme Assessment Boards (PABs) to confirm student achievement. Students do not receive credit or a formal award for completing courses at SUISC, but instead their learning is recognised by being admitted onto a University pathway if the student meets the progression requirements.

1.28 The arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

1.29 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team considered a range of evidence (including information provided to students, external examiners' reports and meetings of the MABs and PABs), met staff responsible for assessment and oversight, and met with students.

1.30 Programme documentation provides a clear steer to students on what is expected of them to achieve the learning outcomes. Students are confident that they know what they need to do to pass and progress onto the University pathway. They were also clear where they could find information on the assessment regulations that governed their programme.

1.31 Assessment tasks are moderated by the University link tutor and then by the external examiner. The moderation process for marking is clearly detailed in the student handbook and staff demonstrate a clear understanding of the moderation process. The Centre uses MABs and PABs, with University Link tutors as full members, to confirm student achievement and discuss the assessment strategies of the modules and programmes.

1.32 To ensure students are achieving at the right level to progress well onto the University programmes, link tutors are members of MABs and PABs. The University Vice Deans (Academic) also chair each of the PABs.

1.33 Study Group has developed a staff development workshop on the creation of learning outcomes and assessment marking. Staff with whom the review team met were aware of this additional training opportunity and some had attended.

1.34 Overall the review team concludes that SUISC ensures students are achieving the relevant learning outcomes through assessment. 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**

1.35 SUIISC's approach to periodic review of its programmes uses Study Group's procedures which are identical to those used for initial programme approval. This would meet the Expectation as it relates to programme periodic review. However, the review team were unable to test this, since none of the programmes at SUIISC have operated long enough to have required re-approval.

1.36 Annual programme monitoring is coordinated by the Head of Centre on behalf of QAEG. Annual monitoring for 2014-15 (the latest monitoring outcomes available to the review team at the time of their review visit) was conducted using the current approach and documentation. However, for the annual monitoring of 2015-16 (scheduled for completion in December 2016), SUIISC will adopt the revised Study Group templates for presentation of the outcomes of annual monitoring, including Annual Module Review Reports, Programme Review Reports and the Annual Monitoring Review Report (AMR). The AMR is completed during the autumn term, and goes forward for consideration by the AMB and RQAEG/AQAEC.

1.37 The arrangements for annual monitoring allow the Expectation to be met.

1.38 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team examined the effectiveness of annual monitoring in practice through consideration of monitoring reports, the minutes of QAEG, AMB, Curriculum Committee and the Module Assessment Boards, and in discussion with staff.

1.39 The AMR for the academic year 2014-15 includes data relating to achievement, progression and withdrawal or failure of students; progression of students within the University; student feedback; external examiner reports; feedback from SUIISC tutors; and an action plan. It is reasonably evaluative though the Head of Centre has indicated they would wish to include more narrative detail in future AMR reports. As an integral part of the process, module review folders are produced, with information on student results in the module, student feedback from the module evaluation questionnaires, external examiner comments where appropriate, and a report from the module tutor(s). These module reviews are considered at the Curriculum Committee. The review team's attention was drawn to the Psychology modules as an example of module development through module review. The two Psychology modules had been modified on advice from the external examiner and University link tutor, considered through the Curriculum Committee, and the changes were approved through the provider-level PAVC.

1.40 The terms of reference of QAEG indicate that it should agree the draft AMR for approval by AQAEC. However, in examining the minutes for the three QAEG meetings held during 2015-16, the review team was unable to find any record of QAEG having considered or agreed the AMR report for 2014-15. The self-evaluation document states that the annual monitoring of programmes is 'conducted through the presentation of the Annual Monitoring Report to the Academic Management Board'. The terms of reference for AMB indicate that 'it receives the ISC Annual Monitoring Report'. However, examination of the minutes for the

two AMB meetings held during 2015-16 showed no reference to the AMR for 2014-15 being reported to AMB. The self-evaluation document also states that 'a further provider review of the Annual Monitoring report is conducted through presentation to the RQAEG and reporting to AQAEC'. The review team asked where the locus of final responsibility lay for academic standards within SUIISC. It was told that the ultimate responsibility was discharged through the governance structure of Study Group, going through RQAEG to AQAEC. AMB receives the AMR report as part of its role of monitoring the academic standards of the programmes and the quality of student learning opportunities.

1.41 The review team was satisfied that the implementation of annual programme monitoring/review at SUIISC meets the Expectation. However, in approving and considering the AMR report in the future, a closer adherence to the respective roles and responsibilities of its various committees would be advantageous.

1.42 Study Group also conducts a periodic Centre Review which provides it with oversight of the maintenance of academic standards at the ISCs. The last Centre Review for SUIISC was completed in October 2015, and its report made a number of recommendations for action. These were incorporated into the CAP, and have been completed or are in progress towards completion. The Expectation is met and the 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**

1.43 SUIISC uses external expertise in setting and maintaining academic standards. It uses Study Group's process for approval. A subject specialist is appointed for the approval panel. External examiners are also routinely used to approve assessment tasks and attend PABs. Study Group's Centre review process also ensures externality through an external panel member being present and include a Head of Centre from another ISC. The University link tutor system also ensures additional external scrutiny.

1.44 The arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

1.45 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team reviewed SUIISC's and Study Group's policies and procedures, relating to approval, monitoring, review and the role of external examiners. The team also received documentation in relation to reports of periodic and centre reviews by Study Group, external examiner reports and the responses to them. The review team met with staff and students of SUIISC and discussed arrangements for the involvement of external and independent expertise in the assurance of standards.

1.46 The University appoints link tutors to the SUIISC programmes to provide an additional layer of scrutiny of academic standards. They are members of MABs and PABs and the Academic Management Board, and University Vice Deans (Academic) chair each of the PABS and are members of AMB. They also comment on course structure and delivery, and make formal comments on the appropriate levels of assessment.

1.47 External examiners are appointed by the University and act as a formal external panel member of PABs, working too to sample student work and approve assessment. The review team saw examples of how SUIISC effectively use external examiners' comments to assure standards and improve the student experience through annual monitoring and in committees.

1.48 While Study Group processes detail the need for an external panel member on Centre review, the review of this Centre did not have an external panel member to Study Group. However, a Head of Centre from another Study Group centre was present and a University Vice Dean (Academic). Study Group has signalled that the policy will be modified so that it is not a requirement for an external panel member to participate in a Centre Review.

1.49 The review team concluded that SUIISC has transparent arrangements to use external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards for its programmes. 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

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

1.51 SUISC has systems in place to maintain the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the provider. All the Expectations are met with the associated level of risk low.

1.52 The maintenance of the academic standards of the awards at SUISC **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 SUISC fulfils its responsibilities for assuring academic standards are set and maintained appropriately, and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities through its adherence to the Study Group processes for programme approval and review. These are discussed in section A3.1.

2.2 The review team concludes that 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**

2.3 Study Group centrally manage admissions on behalf of its partner ISCs. Students apply directly to Study Group and the University and Study Group work together with SUIISC to develop recruitment targets at the Steering Committee.

2.4 The contract between Study Group, the University and SUIISC clearly states the entry requirements. Where a student applies to study at SUIISC but does not quite meet the admissions criteria, the Head of Centre will see whether a student is deemed an exceptional case. These cases are also discussed with the University Recruitment and International team for further scrutiny.

2.5 The arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

2.6 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team evaluated the admissions policy of Study Group, documentation and information on the website relating to admissions, and minutes of committees. The review team met senior staff as well as asking students about their admission experience.

2.7 The Study Group admissions policy provides a clear approach to the admissions process for all of its International Study Centres. Its offices in Brighton and Shanghai provide students with the necessary information to progress their application and the team use predefined entry criteria to offer places to students. SUIISC provided evidence of how it approaches exceptional cases highlighted to them by the central admission team and staff are able to track the progress of students.

2.8 As part of their mid-cycle contract with the University, SUIISC are reviewing their performance against recruitment targets, reviewing the breadth of diversity and working with the University to track student progression when in the University.

2.9 Students are very clear about what is expected of them to be successfully admitted to SUIISC. The website provides comprehensive details on the admissions requirements for all programmes and the potential transition courses at the University. Students found agents and Study Group admissions staff helpful and were happy with their experience.

2.10 Study Group has clear and comprehensive policies and procedures for the recruitment, selection and admission of students. These adhere to the principles of fair admission and are applied transparently. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of associated 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**

2.11 Study Group promulgated its Learning, Teaching and Assessment provider statement in January 2016 to act as a framework for individual ISCs to develop their own Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategies (LTAS). They were required to do so by September 2016, and submit them to Study Group-level Curriculum and Learning Enhancement Committee (CLEC) for evaluation and approval. SUIISC has done this, having consulted with the University and teaching staff, and is awaiting approval of its draft LTAS by CLEC.

2.12 All modules are reviewed on a termly basis following delivery to ensure their continued effectiveness. Modules are discussed at the Module Assessment Boards (MABs), allowing tutor and link tutor inputs, and student evaluation is provided through the Module Evaluation Questionnaires (MEQ). External examiner comments and data from Progresso on grade distributions are also used to review modules. Discussion of module reviews and the need for any changes takes place in the Curriculum Committee.

2.13 The arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

2.14 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team scrutinised the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy minutes of CLEC, the Staff Training and Development Plan, the Centre Review and CAP. It met with senior, teaching and support staff and students.

2.15 SUIISC has highly qualified staff with a great deal of teaching experience. This is evident from the staff qualifications provided. There is provision for a range of staff development activities, with those incurring resource costs needing to be approved in conjunction with the Regional Director against a recommendation from the Head of Centre. The Study Group Centre Review recommended that SUIISC should have a staff development policy. This has been implemented.

2.16 All SUIISC staff are subject to an annual appraisal, and a record of this is kept on staff files. Appraisals are carried out by the Head of Centre or Head of English, who will meet with each member of staff to consider performance since the previous appraisal (or since joining SUIISC) and to establish objectives for the coming year. Staff appraisal also includes observation of teaching by the Head of Centre or Head of English.

2.17 Arrangements are also in place for the induction and support of newly appointed members of staff including a 'buddy system' with a more experienced member of staff. There is also peer observation of teaching in place with supporting documentation.

2.18 Students are able to access the full range of learner support resources and services offered by the University, on the same basis as students registered with the University. They are supported by a VLE which is the same VLE as that used by the University. The Centre Review identified a need for more and better social learning space and private meeting

space. This has been incorporated into the Centre Action Plan. Information on the learning opportunities and support available is provided to students through the Student Handbook.

2.19 The review team saw evidence of the recently drawn-up LTAS, learned about the process which had been adopted to develop it, and were told that the intention was to implement the goals of the SUISC LTAS by setting them up as objectives within the Centre Action Plan. The operation of teaching and learning is articulated via the programme and module descriptors. The review team also saw evidence of the module review process contributing to enhancement of the effectiveness of the curriculum through changes to the Psychology modules.

2.20 The Study Group-level Centre Review Report made recommendations concerning the high dependency on variable-hours staff and the need to develop a staff development policy. The number of full-time contract staff at SUISC had been increased in response to this, and a staff development plan had been drawn up.

2.21 There is an annual staff appraisal system including observation of teaching by the Head of Centre or Head of English. While it is not compulsory, staff are expected to engage with the peer observation of teaching with pro forma documentation available to support the process. Staff engage in peer observation and, while the outcomes are confidential to the reviewer and reviewee, they can be fed into the staff appraisal process to support a request for staff development assistance. Staff are eligible to attend staff development activities at the University and to register on award-bearing programmes with no cost being incurred by the staff member or SUISC. Staff also receive training in Safeguarding in relation to supporting students under the age of 18 years, and in an initiative unique to this centre, in supporting students with mental health issues. SUISC provides induction and support for new staff, as outlined in the Staff Handbook. New staff are supported by linking them to an established member of staff in the same subject area as a mentor/buddy. (See also the feature of good practice relating to staff development in section B4.)

2.22 Students have full and effective access to all of the University-provided learning resources including the VLE. Students said they regarded themselves as students of the University, and they appreciated the fact that the VLE used by SUISC was the same as that which the University used, making transition to the University easier. SUISC has negotiated additional space to address the Centre Review Report recommendations relating to social learning space and private meeting space. Students were aware of these additional facilities and valued them. The only concern relating to learning resources raised by students was that those who entered their programme in the second half of the year and had to study over the summer period were disadvantaged by the shorter opening hours of the library.

2.23 SUISC systematically reviews and enhances learning opportunities and teaching practices. 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**

2.24 SUISC emphasises the development of students as independent learners through three key mechanisms: a) allocation of an academic tutor to each student; b) student engagement with the VLE to access module information, and the submission of all assignments through Turnitin, with students able to submit drafts of assessments through Turnitin and gain formative feedback through Grademark; and c) running non-timetabled workshops to encourage engagement with independent learning, such as library and referencing skills.

2.25 The arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

2.26 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team scrutinised the induction programme, the role of the Academic Tutor, the VLE and the CAP. It met with senior, teaching and support staff and students.

2.27 Students are supported on arrival at SUISC by an induction programme lasting for one week. As part of this, students are tested for their Maths and English ability when they arrive, and those who do less well are interviewed by their academic tutor and may be directed towards additional support in the form of 'Plus classes' in Maths and/or English. Engineering UFP students may also benefit from Plus classes in Physics. Results from the diagnostic tests are entered on the student's 'RAG status', and this begins a process of regular reporting on each student's progress with the ability to identify students at risk. The Welfare Officer also creates a RAG status that reflects student requirement for pastoral support, so that counselling advice and additional support can be channelled towards them. This enhances the assessment-result-informed progression RAG status to add a further level of individuated information. This information relating to student performance is held on the staff shared drive so that all tutors are able to monitor student performance, whilst Personal Tutors are able to intervene to support students. The students are thereby involved in their own support to progress. This deliberately enables students to be engaged in managing their own progress.

2.28 The role of Academic Tutor is central to supporting student development and achievement. There is a role descriptor, and academic tutors hold regular one-to-one meetings with students allocated to them, and play a pivotal role in monitoring student progression using the 'RAG system' and providing advice and additional support for students encountering progression issues. The self-evaluation document says SUISC recognises some students do not avail themselves of the support provided through the academic tutorial system, and it was considering introducing changes from 2016-17. In relation to students under 18 years old on entry to SUISC, staff have been trained in safeguarding, with two members of staff appointed as Designated Safeguarding Leads. Staff have also been trained to support students with special needs, for example to identify and support students with mental health issues. As members of the University of Strathclyde Students' Association (USSA), students at SUISC are able to access the full range of University counselling and support services.

2.29 Students are informed of the arrangements and resources which are in place to support their academic studies, and to support them in the transition to university, through the SUISC Student Handbook, and through information provided on the VLE, together with

University information relating to relevant University support services. The Student Handbook contains a Learning Agreement which informs students of their rights and responsibilities as learners at SUISC. The curricula of all programmes contain modules related to the development of English language and study skills. The programme specifications refer to ESUS modules, but these have now been replaced by Academic English Skills (AES) modules. SUISC is also working with Study Group's 'CareerAhead' initiative by embedding employability skills into the curriculum of its programmes, as well as developing a new Personal Awareness Communication and Employability Skills (PACES) module for delivery to all students from January 2017. SUISC also has in place a range of measures, working in conjunction with the University through faculty links and activities, and designed to assist students in making the transition from SUISC to the University.

2.30 Students have supportive information before they arrive at SUISC including information on the progression requirements which they would need to achieve to gain a place on their chosen programme at the University. They also confirmed they had experienced an induction programme which had been helpful. Students who had arrived late and missed the induction week said that staff had provided them with an equivalent induction, albeit without the social activities associated with the induction week. Students also confirmed they had extensive information available about their programme of study, and about the learning opportunities which supported it through their Student Handbook and the VLE (MyPlace). They particularly appreciated that SUISC used the same VLE as the University, since they felt this would aid their transition to the University. The Student Handbook provided an effective source of information to students relating to assessment and assessment regulations, attendance requirements and the progression requirements for entry to University degree programmes.

2.31 SUISC undertook a review of the Academic Tutorial system at the end of 2015-16, since there was concern that not all students were making effective use of the support facilities available to them. All students now have a timetabled slot when they must see their academic tutor, and attendance is compulsory and monitored. Students have three booked individual tutorials with their academic tutor each month, with the fourth week taken up by a group Student Assembly run by senior support staff, and which acts as an information-sharing activity, whilst students are also able to see staff at the end of the session with any individual support requirements. Staff who undertake the role of academic tutor are currently all on full-time contracts and they confirmed that, as well as having the statement of responsibilities relating to the role, they had also received training from the Head of Centre. Students with whom the review team met confirmed the arrangements in place for academic tutorial support, said they found them very helpful, but also pointed out that the 'open-door' policy meant they could seek support from any member of academic or support staff.

2.32 SUISC has also given prominence to supporting students with special needs, and to upskilling staff so they are able to provide effective support. Recognising the specific needs of students less than 18 years old, all staff have received Level 1 safeguarding training with key staff having received higher-level safeguarding training as well. A number of staff have also received specialist training in supporting students with mental health issues. The Head of Centre is building on the experience and expertise which has been developed at SUISC in supporting students with special needs, by chairing a Study Group working group looking at ways to enhance the support for students with special needs across the ISC network. The review team regarded the focused staff development initiatives which provide staff with the skills to support students with particular needs as **good practice**.

2.33 The monitoring of student progress and the identification of students at risk of non-progression are managed effectively through the RAG system. Regular student reports are produced through each term. This enables academic tutors to identify students at risk, and to

counsel them and recommend additional support. The reports also enable students themselves to monitor their own progress, and to identify where additional effort and support is needed.

2.34 Arrangements to support the transition of students from SUISC to the University are comprehensive and effective. Students have full access to the University's learning resources including library and information services, and SUISC uses the same MyPlace VLE as the University, so that students transfer to the University with a comprehensive awareness of the University's learning environment. The link tutors are University staff from the different academic departments which receive students from SUISC, and they are able to engage in a variety of activities which are supportive of transition to the University. A good example is the 'immersion sessions' arranged at the University for students. Students, who completed their studies with SUISC last year and have transferred to the University, commented that they were contacted towards the end of their studies by University tutors on the programmes to which they were transferring, and this had helped to make the transition to the University seamless. The review team concluded that the comprehensive and systematic arrangements in place meant the effectiveness of the academic and pastoral student support arrangements that enable students to develop their potential are **good practice**.

2.35 In relation to students recruited by SUISC, numbers have increased over the last three years from 78 in 2013-14 and 104 in 2014-15 to 131 in 2015-16. At the same time, the proportion of students progressing to the University, as a percentage of the students initially recruited, has also increased over the last three years from 69 per cent in 2013-14 and 88 per cent in 2014-15 to 89 per cent in 2015-16.

2.36 SUISC has in place arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their personal and professional potential. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement**

**Findings**

2.37 SUIISC's approach to student engagement is the collection of information from students, acting on this information and communicating to students the outcomes from their feedback. Arrangements for the student voice to be heard are explained in the Student Handbook and articulated in the Centre Handbook.

2.38 There is student representation across most committees at SUIISC, both strategic and operational. There are student representatives on the Student Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC), and SSLC then nominates an individual to be the representative on both the QAEG and Academic Management Board (AMB).

2.39 SUIISC also operates a system of questionnaire surveys to collect general student opinion about induction and registration, end-of-module student evaluation, and overall programme satisfaction. It is part of the remit of the SSLC to review information arising from other student feedback mechanisms including the end-of-module evaluations. This feedback is also used, for example, in the annual module review process. As a result of changes to the academic tutorial system effective from 2016-17, periodic group Student Assemblies are now run by senior support staff, which act as an information-sharing activity. This has added a further dimension to hearing the student voice outside the formal arrangements for student feedback laid out in the Student and Centre Handbooks.

2.40 The arrangements to engage students individually and collectively allow the Expectation to be met.

2.41 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team examined documentation on student engagement and reviewed material held on the VLE. It met senior, teaching and support staff and students.

2.42 In relation to student representation on the strategic-level academic committees, QAEG and AMB, there was some variation in the terms of reference with which the review team was presented. In the case of QAEG, the terms of reference presented in the Centre Handbooks for 2015-16 and 2016-17 contain the statement 'student representatives have the opportunity to serve on QAEG', while the Student Handbook for 2016-17 contains the statement 'student representatives are encouraged to take up membership on the Centre's QAEG and the joint AMB'. The QAEG minutes for 2015-16 show a student representative at each meeting. For AMB, there is no mention of a student member in the terms of reference for 2015-16 but the terms of reference for 2016-17, as presented in the Centre Handbook, have provision for a student representative. Examination of the minutes of AMB during 2016-17 confirms that no students attended AMB meetings. While it is clear that SUIISC intends to include student representation on both its strategic-level academic committees from 2016-17 onwards, it would be desirable to clarify the language used in the terms of reference, particularly for QAEG, to make clear on what basis students are members and to clarify that it is a single student representative.

2.43 In relation to SSLC, its terms of reference state that its membership includes student representatives drawn from each pathway, and its purpose is to act as a formal channel for the views of students to be expressed and sought. Minutes presented for the SSLC meetings in 2015-16 show good levels of attendance by students, and a range of

pertinent issues being raised by student representatives and responded to. The Centre Handbook says that student representatives should be supported in their role by allowing them access to tutorial classes to make short presentations about issues to be discussed at SSLC and to consult on any other issues students wish to raise. They are also provided with a noticeboard and have a VLE Forum space to communicate with the students they represent. Students regarded the SSLC as an effective way of resolving any issues which might arise. Student representatives on SSLC are offered certificated training through the University, while the Centre Handbook states training of student representatives is the Head of Centre's responsibility with inputs from the University where possible. Information on being a student representative is available via the University portal. Students confirmed they had received training.

2.44 Students confirmed they completed module evaluation questionnaires after the completion of each module. They also said that, if they had concerns, they would arrange to meet with the Head of Centre to voice these. They were able to cite an example of where the delivery of the Business Law module had been unsatisfactory, and they had given feedback on this and a change was effected. Student feedback is discussed at staff meetings and, where appropriate, responses to student feedback could be routed through SSLC. Staff also said that, exceptionally, student views may also be canvassed by running focus groups. The process of making changes to the ESUS modules was cited as an example of this.

2.45 The review team concludes that SUISC takes strategic steps to engage students as partners in their educational experiences. 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**

2.46 SUIISC has assessment regulations, policies and processes which are based on expectations of Study Group. They are aligned to its partner University regulations to ease students' progression to University study. SUIISC is responsible for designing, conducting and marking the assessments with associated record keeping.

2.47 Link tutors and external examiners are able to review assessment tasks before they are given to students which ensures assessment is valid and reliable. Examinations and marking schemes are also sent to external examiners and link tutors for comment and approval.

2.48 SUIISC undertakes Module Assessment Boards (MABs) and Programme Assessment Boards (PABs) in which to validate student achievement and review assessment processes. Link tutors are also members of MABs and PABs and the University Vice Dean (Academic) chairs each of the PABs.

2.49 Students receive the Assessment Regulations in their student handbook. Students also have access to past assessments and exemplars via the VLE.

2.50 Feedback on assessment is provided to students within a maximum of two weeks after the assessment took place. SUIISC use Turnitin and are beginning to use GradeMark to facilitate feedback to students.

2.51 Academic misconduct is dealt with through the SUIISC Academic Impropriety Board and outcomes reported at MABs. Students with mitigating circumstances can submit a Personal Circumstances Form which is considered by the Personal Circumstances Board prior to the Exam Boards.

2.52 While students receive no formal credit or qualification for undertaking their programme, they are guaranteed progression onto their chosen University course if they obtain the results required as laid out in the Contract. This includes minimum grades for English and results for each module.

2.53 The arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

2.54 To test this Expectation to review team scrutinised evidence of SUIISC's assessment practices including policies and procedures, Terms of Reference and Minutes of Assessment Committees, and met with staff and students at the Centre.

2.55 Overall the review team found that SUIISC was making good use of its committee structure to manage assessment effectively. MABs and PABs use data from Progresso to make judgements about the achievement of students on the programmes, and discussions about assessment strategies take place at MABs, Curriculum committees, staff meetings and QAEG.

2.56 Study Group delivered a workshop on assessment to all of its centres, and SUISC took part in this training opportunity. External examiners have made comments on the way in which assessments are proofread before being passed over to the external examiner to approve. SUISC has now created a tracking document to ensure that it is appropriately overseen before going to the external examiner. Other comments from the external examiners made to the process for assessing students have been logged on the CAP and SUISC is taking appropriate steps to complete these.

2.57 Students' work is moderated internally by the teaching team, externally by the external examiner and sometimes by the University link tutors. New staff are guided through the marking and moderation process by a fellow member of the team.

2.58 Students are clear on what is expected of them in terms of assessment and understand regulations surrounding plagiarism, mitigation and referencing. All details are available in student handbooks and on the VLE. SUISC recently put together an assessment calendar for students to easily reference when work is due in. The external examiners are satisfied with the quality of feedback provided on the student work.

2.59 The review team found evidence of a well-managed assessment process by SUISC which is equitable, valid and reliable. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining**

**Findings**

2.60 External examiners are nominated by SUIISC, and appointed by the University. Appointments are discussed between the Head of Centre and the University Education Quality and Policy Manager. Appointments are logged with Study Group and noted at AQAEC. External examiners complete an Annual Report on the University template, attend Programme Assessment Boards, approve assessment tasks before delivery and are able to meet with students.

2.61 External examiner reports are received by the University and then provided to SUIISC and Study Group. Issues raised are reported at AMB and QAEG and responses are reported on and actioned at QAEG, Curriculum committees and through the CAP.

2.62 The arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

2.63 To test this Expectation the review team scrutinised external examiners' reports, minutes of committees, including assessment boards, the updated CAP and annual monitoring reports. It met with senior, teaching and support staff and students.

2.64 External examiners act as a formal external panel members of PABs and sample student work and approve assessments. Assessments are passed to external examiners for them to consider, prior to these formative assessments being put before students. SUIISC effectively uses external examiners' comments to assure standards and improve the student experience through annual monitoring and in committee discussion.

2.65 Students have access to external examiner reports on the VLE and on noticeboards, and have the opportunity to meet with the external examiners. However, SUIISC acknowledge that there is more to be done to encourage students to take up the opportunities that they are offered for connection with external examiners. Actions to further this are detailed on the CAP.

2.66 While it is policy for external examiners' reports to be on the University template, there are instances where a non-prescriptive Word document has been used to submit external examiner comments. A new Study Group policy has been put in place for 2016-17 which will ensure that SUIISC is using either the Study Group template or that used by the University.

2.67 Overall the review team concludes that SUIISC is scrupulously using external examiners. 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**

2.68 SUISC's approach to periodic review of its programmes uses Study Group's procedures which are identical to those used for initial programme approval. This would meet the Expectation as it relates to programme periodic review. However, the review team were unable to test this, since none of the programmes at SUISC have operated long enough to have required re-approval.

2.69 Annual programme monitoring is coordinated by the Head of Centre on behalf of QAEG. Annual monitoring for 2014-15 (the latest monitoring outcomes available to the review team at the time of their review visit) was conducted using the current approach and documentation. Annual monitoring of 2015-16 (scheduled for completion in December 2016) will use the revised Study Group templates for presentation of the outcomes of annual monitoring, including Annual Module Review Reports, Programme Review Reports and the Annual Monitoring Review Report (AMR). The AMR is completed during the autumn term, and goes forward for consideration by the AMB and RQAEG/AQAEC.

2.70 The arrangements for annual monitoring allow the Expectation to be met.

2.71 To test the whether the Expectation is met, the review team examined the effectiveness of annual monitoring in practice through consideration of the monitoring report for 2014-15, the minutes of QAEG, AMB, Curriculum Committee and the Module Assessment Boards, and through discussion with staff.

2.72 The AMR for the academic year 2014-15 is reasonably evaluative though the Head of Centre has indicated they would wish to include more narrative detail in future AMR reports. As an integral part of the process, module review folders are produced, with information on student results in the module, student feedback from the module evaluation questionnaires, external examiner comments where appropriate, and a report from the module tutor(s). These module reviews are considered at the Curriculum Committee. The review team's attention was drawn to the Psychology modules as an example of module development through module review. The two Psychology modules had been modified on advice from the external examiner and University link tutor, considered through the Curriculum Committee, and the changes approved through the provider-level PAVC. The terms of reference of QAEG indicate that it should agree the draft AMR prior to approval by AQAEC. However, in examining the minutes for the three QAEG meetings held during 2015-16, the review team was unable to find any record of QAEG having considered or agreed the AMR report for 2014-15.

2.73 Notwithstanding the omission of consideration of the AMR by QAEG for 2014-15, the review team is satisfied that the overall implementation of annual programme monitoring/review at SUISC meets the Expectation with low risk.

**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**

2.74 SUISC's Complaints and Appeals Process is outlined to students in the Student and Centre Handbooks. It conforms to the Group's process and provides a clear approach for the management of complaints and appeals. The process details an internal management of the complaint or appeal before referring the student to a Study Group-level process. Students are unable to appeal against academic judgement.

2.75 SUISC operates an informal complaints process before the student invokes the formal policy. Discussions of student feedback take place at Student Staff Liaison Meetings, Curriculum meetings and at QAEG.

2.76 The arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

2.77 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team scrutinised evidence of the policies guiding complaints and appeals, reviewed minutes of SUISC meetings and met with senior, teaching and support staff and students.

2.78 The process for complaints and appeals is made clear to students in the Student Handbook. This includes the grounds for which an appeal can be made and how SUISC ensures impartiality. Students are clear on how they are able to submit a complaint or appeal. To date there have been no formal complaints submitted to SUISC.

2.79 SUISC has procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints that are fair, accessible and timely. The review team concludes that 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

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

2.81 SUISC is managing the quality of student learning opportunities effectively. There are two instances of good practice relating to staff development and the academic and pastoral support for students.

2.82 The quality of student learning opportunities at SUISC **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 SUISC provides access to staff and students to its policies and procedures in the student and staff handbooks. Requirements for this information are set out in Study Group's Academic Quality Handbook. The Regional Director is responsible for ensuring key documents are in place at each ISC. The RQAEC receives a report confirming this. Study Group produces templates for handbooks, but content is also broadly aligned to the University documentation. This ensures continuity for students.

3.2 SUISC has a prospectus which is produced centrally by Study Group in conjunction with the Head of Centre and the University. This and the SUISC website provide prospective students with information about the programmes on offer, the entry requirements and how to apply.

3.3 Programme and module specification documents are produced by the programme teams and link tutors and are formally signed off by the Head of Centre before being reported at the RQAEC and AQAEC. Students have access to information about their programmes through these documents and access to the VLE. Developing a more blended learning environment is a key strategic priority for SUISC.

3.4 The arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

3.5 To test whether the Expectation is met, the review team scrutinised a range of documentation pertaining to published information and how it is managed. It met with senior and academic staff and students.

3.6 The SUISC website provides detailed information to prospective students on the programmes and how they link to University programmes. Details of the admissions criteria are clearly stated, as is information on how to apply. Once enrolled, students receive further information about the content and structure of the programme through module specifications and the VLE. SUISC has recently appointed a VLE Champion to develop academic staff engagement with the virtual platform to create a more blended learning environment for students.

3.7 Students are clear on what is expected of them, how the programme is delivered, and where to find information on policies, procedures and regulations. These are detailed in the Centre and Student Handbooks. They confirmed that information is accurate, timely and trustworthy at all stages of their student journey. Staff also received a handbook that details information pertaining to them.

3.8 The responsibilities for information are clearly understood by all staff. The RQAEC has final approval of information.

3.9 SUISC works with the University and Study Group to create and approve information which is fit for purpose, accurate and trustworthy. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

3.11 SUISC has systems in place to ensure that information is fit for purpose, accurate and trustworthy.

3.12 The quality of the information about learning opportunities at SUISC **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 The CAP is central to the identification and monitoring of enhancement activities. SUIISC is aware of the Study Centre-level initiative to produce an Enhancement Strategy, and anticipates aligning with this.

4.2 The self-evaluation document gives a number of specific examples of enhancement activities at SUIISC including focus on e-learning through the VLE, formative assessment and the use of software for checking academic misconduct, staff development activities, and student progress monitoring and support arrangements.

4.3 Staff regarded enhancement as a continuous process. The development of the SUIISC TLAS which had emerged through a peer process and discussion with the University was cited as a good example of this. Staff regard the Curriculum Committee as a key part of the deliberative structure supporting enhancement, and also the external inputs, for example from external examiners and the University.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 SUISC has developed a number of initiatives to enhance students' employability. There is a module which specifically focuses on students' transferable skills titled Personal Awareness Communication and Employability Skills (PACES). Students will learn about leadership, teamwork and self-reflection as well as skills for job application, Personal Development Planning and preparing personal statements. This is due to start in January 2017. This module will ensure that SUISC is adhering to Study Group's CareerAhead Initiative.

5.2 In addition to this specific module, SUISC has undertaken a curriculum review to ensure that transferable skills are explicit within all modules. Further to this, students on the IY1 programme have undertaken a Personal and Organisational Awareness (POA) course, which maps to the University's Leadership Development Programme and provides students with a head start before their transition to the University. Students are also able to access careers advice and guidance from the University Student Experience team.

## Glossary

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

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

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