



## Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd, June 2015

### Annex 11: University of Sussex International Study Centre

#### Section 1: Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the monitoring team concludes that the University of Sussex International Study Centre (USISC) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [previous monitoring visit](#) in June 2014.

#### Section 2: Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 There have been some significant changes at USISC since the previous monitoring visit. The University revalidated all USISC programmes in May 2015 and changes to the curriculum will be implemented from September 2015. This involved re-recognition of USISC and a restructuring of the academic year into teaching semesters that will afford all students, regardless of entry point, the same opportunity to resit final assessments. The planned move to a new building is also scheduled to take place in September 2015.

3 USISC has developed its governance structure to include the BES-required Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG) and a new Student Experience Group that reports to QAEG. Management structures have also been altered with a Centre Director appointed and the Head of Centre post renamed Deputy Centre Director while retaining responsibility for the operational academic management of USISC.

4 There were 648 students at USISC in 2014-15 including an intake of pre-master's students in March 2015.

#### Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

5 USISC has appropriately designed systems for monitoring, review and action planning which facilitate building on strengths and addressing opportunities for improvement. The Centre Action Plan is derived from multiple sources including BES initiatives, QAA monitoring reports, annual monitoring by the University, external examiners' comments, module reviews and student feedback. The Action Plan is overseen and monitored by QAEG on a quarterly basis. Responsibility for actions, deadlines for completion, and progress are incorporated in the Action Plan. Timely action has been taken on issues identified in the Action Plan since the last monitoring visit. USISC is planning for significant change during the coming academic year and implementation requirements have been incorporated in a revised Action Plan.

6 The new management and governance structures noted above are becoming embedded and staff development is being strengthened. USISC has introduced a new appraisal system and is now recording continuous professional development activity. Staff have a broad range of development opportunities, including access to the University's postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education teacher training qualification. USISC has formalised peer review and this now includes an element of cross-institutional review.

7 USISC places emphasis on supporting students to complete and progress successfully to the University. Progression rates are high. Academic Progression Advisors meet weekly with students and monitor progress. Mid-term progression reports have been introduced. Students at risk are identified and provided with additional support. USISC is working with the University to track performance of students once they have progressed to the University, to anticipate and resolve problems that USISC students may encounter on progression.

8 USISC is taking action to increase student engagement. There is a system of elected class representatives and USISC provides training in the first term of the academic year. This is being extended to ensure all student representatives, regardless of entry point, can access appropriate training. The revised governance structure includes a Student Experience Group which involves invited student and alumni members and reports to QAEG. Each programme has a Centre Board comprising student representatives and programme and teaching staff. Feedback is also collected through questionnaires. Students state that issues raised with programme staff are listened to and acted on; however they are unaware of what happens as a result of module feedback. Further action to strengthen the student voice is planned.

9 Students state that the teaching and support they receive, as well as the programme information and learning resources available to them, are satisfactory. While tutors are seen as helpful and approachable, students the review team met consider some teaching to be poor due to a perceived lack of structure and limited assessment feedback provided. Staff confirmed that issues with feedback on assessed work would be raised with individual members of staff and dealt with through line management processes, with training offered where required. Some students raised a concern about advice provided on the suitability of two and three-term programmes. Staff stated that this is dealt with centrally at the admissions stage, and that students did not always understand the impact their level of English proficiency might have on entry point to the programmes. Students on all programmes would appreciate more activities to prepare them for the transition to university.

10 Admissions are managed centrally by BES using entry criteria agreed at validation. BES has systems in place to check that applicants are suitably qualified, have appropriate levels of English language competence and a genuine intention to study. The Head of Centre may be consulted in marginal cases or in relation to special needs.

11 USISC manages assessment using policies and procedures which are aligned with the University's assessment regulations; these are in turn aligned with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code). Standards are assured through formal processes of internal moderation and the use of external examiners appointed by the University. Assessment strategies have recently been reviewed at revalidation in order to check their appropriateness and alignment with intended learning outcomes. Students are briefed on the principles of good academic practice. Staff and students have access to plagiarism-detection software which is used effectively to support good academic conduct.

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

12 USISC makes good use of external reference points. The recent revalidation involved USISC staff in significant curriculum development activity that took account of external reference points such as *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, Subject Benchmark Statements and the Quality Code. The Centre Action Plan is mapped against relevant parts of Quality Code. Staff engage with the wider higher education sector through Centre networking and interaction with the University. Staff the team met confirmed that they are supported to achieve a higher education Postgraduate Certificate in Education at the University and become members of the Higher Education Academy, and this was commended by the recent BES Centre Review.

## Section 5: Background to the monitoring visit

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

14 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mrs Freda Richardson, QAA Officer, and Dr Carol Vielba, Reviewer, on 5 June 2015.

QAA1345d - R4537 - Sept 15

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786