



Educational Oversight for Embedded Colleges: report of the monitoring visit of Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd (Study Group), October 2018

Coventry University London International Study Centre

Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the monitoring team concludes that Coventry University London International Study Centre (the Centre) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [previous monitoring visit](#) in 2017.

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 The programmes offered by the Centre remain unchanged since the last monitoring visit in October 2017. However, since the Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) (HER (EC)) in 2016, there has been a significant reduction in student numbers with an overall decline of 28 per cent between 2016-17 and 2017-18. The Centre had hoped this drop in recruitment was an anomaly but, although October enrolment for 2018-19 had not been completed at the time of the monitoring visit, the Centre confirmed that the lower level of recruitment had become a trend. Recruitment to the Pre-Masters Programme (PMP) is being kept under review to ensure there was no risk to the academic viability of the programme.

3 Since the last monitoring review in October 2017, the Centre has undergone significant staffing changes with the departure of the Programme Manager, the full-time Business Tutor, and sessional Academic English Skills (AES) and Business Tutors. The Centre Review (February 2018) undertaken by the Study Group recommended that the Centre should work with Study Group to ensure the Centre has an effective staffing structure. At the time of the monitoring visit, the Centre had recently appointed (in September 2018) a new Programme Manager and AES Co-ordinator, and was in the process of appointing two part-time Business Tutors to replace the full-time tutor. Also, in January 2018, the Centre appointed a Welfare Officer.

Findings from the monitoring visit

4 During the course of 2017-18, the Centre has introduced a number of changes with the potential to enhance the quality of the student experience, notably the revised personal tutoring arrangements and the support provided by the Welfare Officer (paragraph 9); enhancements of its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, including embedding individual support within the taught modules and greater recognition of differentiation in the needs of the study body (paragraph 8); and enhanced links with its University partner (paragraphs 7 and 11). By the commencement of 2018-19, it will also have restored its staffing

base (paragraph 3). Other developments are too new to evaluate, so that progress remains acceptable (see paragraph 1).

5 The HER (EC) report in October 2016 made one recommendation - that additional support should be available and accessible for students identified as being at risk. The monitoring report 2017 found that the Centre had done analysis of where additional support was needed and had introduced timetabled support classes. The current Centre Action Plan (CAP) has as one of its objectives to increase year-on-year progression to the University. It intends to continue and enhance student support with further support classes, diagnostic testing and formative assessments. The Centre said it was moving towards individualised support within classes (linked to its differentiation agenda), and a priority for 2018-19 was continuous improvement of the RPAG student progress reporting system (which rates each student as red, pink, amber or green) to support appropriate interventions where individual student needs were identified. Alumni students told the review team their personal tutor would raise any issues if their subject or AES Tutors had reported they were not doing well, and extra classes were available. The October 2016 HER (EC) report also had one affirmation which had been completed at the time of the monitoring visit in October 2017.

6 The CAP is the focus for progressing and monitoring actions for the management of quality in the Centre and is reviewed and updated at each Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG). Study Group also undertakes a periodic Centre Review with the most recent one taking place in February 2018. Recommendations from this review were added to the CAP.

7 The annual monitoring return 2018 refers to 2017-18 as a 'challenging year', particularly in relation to staffing (see paragraph 3 above). At the time of the last monitoring visit, the Centre had just moved to new premises. Although completed in a short time frame, the move was undertaken with care and students were broadly happy. Staff said that a year on, there had been no adverse effect of the move on students, and feedback from students on the location was largely positive. In the Student Survey for 2017-18, students were asked whether they would recommend the Centre to a friend or colleague. The vast majority were positive in their responses. At the monitoring visit in 2017, students were concerned about their inability to access the library facilities of the University partner. The Centre has responded to this by enhancing the range of electronic library and information resources available to students within the Centre, and Coventry University in London (CUL) also agreed during 2017-18 to allow students to use their library resources. Students have the same rights as students of the University, except that they cannot remotely access electronic learning resources. This is of significance as the university campus is some distance away. That said, students were very satisfied with the library and information resources which the Centre makes available. It will build an induction to the university library into the first visit students will make to the university campus in November 2018. One aspect of resourcing provision that students were dissatisfied with at the time of the monitoring visit in 2017, was the absence of social and group working space. The Centre has arranged for students to be able to use their classrooms for group and private studies when teaching is not taking place. However, students remain concerned about the lack of a dedicated social space and talked of needing to do group work in their residences or through electronic links. The Centre recognises this is a continuing issue for students. Staff have not yet discussed it as a group but recognised the need to think creatively about how to give students a dedicated area for study, and to listen to feedback from students.

8 In relation to student learning, the Centre Review recommended that the Centre's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy (TLAS) should be revisited to enhance its relevance. Initial work was done in collaboration with the other international study centres (ISCs)

in the London cluster, with customisation to meet Centre requirements. The revised TLAS is being introduced in 2018-19, and it has a focus on the use of formative assessment to facilitate learning, and differentiation in terms of tasks and support reflecting the diversity of students. The Centre Review also recommended greater engagement with the external examiners. All written assessments are now submitted through plagiarism detection software. This has allowed the Centre to move to fully share student work electronically with the external examiners who have full read-access to the Centre's virtual learning environment (VLE). The Centre Review also recommended greater student engagement with the external examiners. The Centre plans to introduce this in the 2018-19 academic year, ensuring that external examiner visits are timed at points when students are in Centre. At the time of the monitoring visit in 2017, the Centre had recently completed migration from its former university partner's VLE platform to the Study Group VLE. During 2017-18, it achieved basic competence in relation to use of the VLE. It intends to go forward to the next level in 2018-19, but this has been delayed by the need for VLE training for the significant number of new staff starting at the beginning of 2018-19. Students said the VLE was an essential study resource, but opinions varied as to how easy to use or effective the VLE was.

9 In relation to student learning support, the CAP identifies revisions to the personal tutor arrangements in order enhance effectiveness. It was agreed at QAEG that individual personal tutorials will no longer be conducted by tutors and would be replaced by twice-termly group tutorials. Individual student support will route through the new Welfare Officer. Tracking the outcomes of those students who arrive late and/or are exceptional admissions cases has been prompted by the increased number of exceptional-case entrants in 2017-18. Analysis of the October exceptional entrants showed a high degree of success (21 students were admitted as exceptional cases in October 2017, one student withdrew and the remaining 20 successfully progressed). Monitoring the outcomes of these students will continue on progression to the University.

10 A further recommendation in the Centre Review was to encourage a culture of academic governance that promotes greater staff and student engagement. All students have a number of opportunities to give feedback: the Pre-arrival/Induction Survey and Student Experience Survey towards the end of their studies (supplied and analysed at provider-level by Study Group), and Module Review Surveys generated at Centre-level. Student Representative elections take place during the first four weeks of the academic year, and elected representatives meet with the Head of Centre for a briefing and an introduction to the Student Representative Handbook. Student representative attendance at QAEG meetings is stressed to be a significant part of the role, but attendance has historically been low. The CAP has an action to engage students in quality assurance and proposes for 2018-19 that the well-attended Staff Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) should be scheduled immediately before QAEG to encourage students to stay on for this second meeting.

11 An objective of the CAP is to increase the proportion of eligible students who progress to CUL. This increased in 2016-17 (figures for 2017-18 were not available at the time of the monitoring visit) but the Centre believes the number of students progressing to other universities remains higher than is ideal. The fact the Centre is not co-located with the University means greater effort is required to engage the students with the University. Organised student visits to CUL are being increased to two per academic year in 2018-19, the Link Tutor delivered a session during the induction week, and other opportunities for engagement are being explored. A recommendation from the Study Group Centre Review to discuss the possibility the Centre students participating in the CUL applicant open days was not considered to be appropriate (though similar arrangements are in place in other ISCs in the London cluster). The Centre

Review also recommended the Centre to work with the University to develop subject-specific Link Tutors. However, the decision has been made with the University to continue with a single over-arching Link Tutor. The CAP has an action to enhance the tracking of students when they progress to the University. The proposal had been to discuss this with the Link Tutor and sign a data-sharing agreement with the University. However, recent changes in the Data Protection environment have made this more difficult and data on how students progress at university were described as still opaque. Academic Management Board will revisit this in 2018-19. Centre Review encouraged the Centre to explore synergies between the Study Group Career Ahead initiative and the University's own employability strategies. This is an item for development during 2018-19. The Centre is revising its Pre-Masters Programme (PMP) to better align it with higher education institution (HEI) expectations, and it has an action in its CAP to revisit the modules of PMP with the University.

12 Student recruitment and admission is centrally administered by Study Group. Entry requirements are maintained in a centralised database and set out in each Centre Specification, published on public-facing websites, and within marketing material and communications. Any borderline or exceptional cases outside the entry qualifications criteria are referred to the Head of Centre for a decision. All the students with whom the review team met had been recruited through an agent. Students said they had found the information they had received about the Centre and their programme of study had been accurate, and generally they felt the admissions process was supportive.

13 The Centre uses the annual monitoring report pro forma laid down by Study Group and which draws on module reviews as part of the process. For 2016-17, as well as the module reviews, the monitoring process made use of feedback given by students through student surveys, and external examiner reports.

14 The proportion of students enrolled at the Centre who were **eligible** to progress to the University improved from 79 per cent to 89 per cent between 2016-17 and 2017-18. Within this overall figure, there was some variance between programmes, but this had reduced significantly between 2016-17 and 2017-18.

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

15 Study Group is not a degree-awarding institution and its programmes are not credit-bearing, but it benchmarks its programmes against *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications* (FHEQ) for Levels 4-6, and against the Regulated Qualifications Framework for preparatory programmes set at Level 3. English language modules are set against the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The International Foundation Year, International Year One and Pre-Masters programmes at the Centre are approved by Study Group and endorsed by Coventry University. There are programme specifications which contain standardised information, including mapped learning outcomes and grade descriptors. The programme specifications identify external reference points including the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the QAA Subject Benchmark Statements. While most ISC programmes of study do not lead to HEI credit, programmes and modules are designed to fit with the principles of the partner university's academic framework in terms of credit-equivalence.

Background to the monitoring visit

16 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.

17 The monitoring visit was carried out by Ms Sarah James, QAA Officer, and Emeritus Professor Brian Anderton, QAA Reviewer, on 9 October 2018

QAA2303a - R10362 - Jan 19

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