



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

Istituto Marangoni 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 Istituto Marangoni 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 Centre continues to offer one International Foundation Year (IFY) programme in Fashion with students able to choose specialist routes within the programme. Student recruitment continues to show steady growth year-on-year, although recruitment for 2018 (actual and projected) appears to have stabilised. Istituto Marangoni (IM) continues to require students to have a specified International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score.

3 There have been significant staffing changes since the last monitoring visit. A full-time English Tutor was appointed in January 2018 to teach the majority of the Academic English Skills (AES) unit and lead on IELTS preparation for students, and to be the Centre E-Champ facilitating development of the virtual learning environment (VLE) within the Centre. A new full-time Professional Services Manager was appointed in January 2018 with oversight of Centre administration and the post-holder also acts as Welfare Tutor. This role is supported by the newly created post of full-time Student Services Co-ordinator. The previous Head of English has been appointed to the newly created position of Head of Curriculum and Progression, with responsibilities that include oversight of curriculum delivery, the maintenance of academic standards, and quality assurance processes, in conjunction with the Head of Centre. The Head of Curriculum and Progression line-manages all academic tutors in the Centre. Overall, there has been an increase in administrative staffing since the monitoring visit in 2017. Academic staffing remains broadly the same, but its structure has changed with more permanent staffing and fewer sessional lecturer inputs.

4 The IFY Fashion programme was originally approved for one year, and approval was extended for a further year by the Study Group's Academic Quality and Enhancement Committee (AQAEC) to cover delivery in 2017-18. The programme was reviewed in March 2018, using Study Group's programme reapproval process, and reapproved for delivery from September 2018 for a period of five years, subject to the Centre meeting the conditions set by the reapproval panel. However, contract negotiations with the IM resulted in further significant programme changes being proposed. To ensure an approved programme was in place for 2018-19 and to allow time for further programme development, the March 2018 programme

reapproval was set aside by AQAEC at its July 2018 meeting, and the original programme approved for delivery with minor amendments for a further one-year period. A reapproval event is now scheduled for March 2019. The current contract between IM and Study Group runs to August 2019, but negotiations are already underway to renew the contract.

Findings from the monitoring visit

5 The monitoring team made use of the annual return submitted by the Centre together with its evidence base. This was supplemented by meetings with staff and students, though the latter meeting was of limited value as the students had only been at the Centre for a very short period and no alumni students were available. The centre received an acceptable progress judgement in its Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) (HER (EC)) in 2016, and this was repeated as the outcome of the monitoring visit in 2017. It has taken the Centre some time to resolve the issue relating to discrepancies in public-facing information between its and the IM websites. However, this recommendation has now been effectively addressed, and policies and procedures put in place which should prevent the issue recurring (paragraph 6). The affirmation relating to minute-taking has been addressed and the additional administrative staff resource now available should avoid any recurrence of the problem (paragraph 7). The other affirmation concerning support for students with special educational needs is challenging for the Centre as it has not been able to look to the support facilities of its partner. The development of a Study Group policy on support for students with special needs may finally resolve this affirmation (paragraph 7). The staffing policy implemented during 2018 is a positive development. The Centre has continued to make progress in several areas which will contribute to the quality of provision, for example, the development of its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and Continuing Professional Development framework; the implementation of the Welfare Officer role; and bringing the VLE up to Level 1 competence (paragraphs 8 and 10). The relationship with IM has also developed and become closer, and the new contract due in August 2019 has the potential to enhance this (paragraph 9). However, progress has been relatively slow. Other developments are too new to evaluate, so that progress remains acceptable (paragraph 1).

6 The HER (EC) of the Centre in 2016 made one recommendation - to ensure sufficient information about course content was available to prospective students across both recruitment routes. Due to the dual-recruitment system (paragraph 11), there are two websites with information about the IFY course: an Istituto Marangoni (IM) website administered by IM Milan and a centre website administered by Study Group. In 2016, the review team found the websites displayed differing public-facing information to potential students. The monitoring visit in 2017 found that the recommendation had been addressed by the Centre but further work needed to be done. Since then, the Centre has acted to correct any misalignment between the websites and to ensure the Centre and IM marketing teams work more closely together. The respective websites were internally audited in April 2018 and a summary report of the anomalies was raised and addressed. To ensure ongoing alignment, regular contact between the respective marketing departments is in place, and the Study Group central marketing team undertakes six-weekly checks of both websites. The Centre would prefer there to be a single website hosted by Study Group, with the IM site containing a hyperlink to this, and this will be discussed at the newly formed joint Academic Board.

7 One of the affirmations from the HER (EC) 2016 had been completed at the time of the monitoring visit in 2017. Fulfilment of the second affirmation (strengthening the quality and effectiveness of recording meetings to enhance the oversight of quality assurance) had been undermined by the loss of the member of administrative staff who had been trained to undertake this role. This has been addressed through the new appointments to the Professional Services

team (paragraph 3). Both the new Head of Professional Services and Administration Assistant have received training in taking meeting minutes from Study Group HR and have attended a Study Group training workshop on academic committees and meetings. The third affirmation related to implementation of a more systematic and effective process for the identification of students with specific learning disabilities, considering the outcomes of the Study Group Working Group. The position at the time of the current monitoring visit remains broadly as it was in 2017: students may be recommended to seek help or may self-refer themselves. The Centre provides students with details of external consultants able to diagnose such conditions as dyslexia and make recommendations for action. The Centre has enhanced 'signposting' to these external services, and the new post of Welfare Officer is helpful, but it remains the case that students must self-fund any external assistance they seek. The Study Group Working Group on Disability, Special Educational Needs and Mental Health has been relaunched and is expected to recommend a Study Group network-wide policy for approval by AQAEC during 2018-19.

8 The Centre uses its Centre Action Plan (CAP) to identify, progress and monitor actions related to its provision. It is also subject to periodic Centre Review by Study Group with the last review taking place in March 2018. The Centre Review report contained several recommendations around themes such as greater consistency with Study Group policies and procedures, and the relationship with the partner higher education institution, its staff and students. Thus, Centre Review recommended action relating to areas which were not consistent with Study Group policies and procedures: the composition of its governance bodies and assessment boards, especially the chairing of the Programme Assessment Board (PAB); developing and implementing a Centre Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy; responding to the Study Group Enhancement Strategy; and fully implementing the current Study Group Observation Policy. Students had identified variation between the high quality of assessment feedback in AES compared to academic modules, and it was recommended that the Centre should ensure the consistency of quality and timeliness of academic feedback on all modules. Finally, the Centre was recommended to collate and formalise existing staff development initiatives and activities within a Centre-level staff development plan. Some, but not all the Centre Review recommendations, have been incorporated into the CAP, and the review team were told that all the actions recommended in the Centre Review have now been addressed.

9 The current contract between IM and Study Group runs to August 2019, but negotiations are already underway to renew the contract. The Centre Review recommended the Centre should continue working with IM to promote stronger academic links between their respective programmes and to better support student transition to degree studies. It also recommended the Centre should further develop and formalise opportunities for students to work alongside undergraduate students. A new joint Academic Board has been set up with a remit to provide oversight of the academic aspects of the partnership, and a proposal is under discussion for a joint Steering Group to provide a forum for discussion of the management of the partnership at a strategic level. The Head of Centre meets fortnightly with the IM Link Tutor, and there is currently discussion designed to formalise the relationship based on the role description in the Centre Handbook. There are plans for Centre students to sit in on some degree teaching sessions at IM, and the Centre is in discussion with the Link Tutor about a plan to develop alumni student mentors to work with current Centre students. Students said they would welcome the opportunity for contact with students at IM. Overall, the Centre believes a closer working relationship has developed with IM.

10 In relation to learning resources and learner support, the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) at the Centre failed to meet acceptable Level 1 requirements when it was audited in late 2017. A second audit took place in summer 2018 and a successful outcome is anticipated from this, but sign-off was still outstanding at the time of the current monitoring visit. The Centre hopes to complete successfully the Level 2 requirements during 2018-19. Students indicated they were finding the VLE helpful and easy to navigate. At the monitoring visit in 2017, students indicated the value they attached to using IM's industry-standard facilities to support their technical classes and project work. However, student access to IM's specialist sewing room had now been withdrawn. The impact on students' work had been mitigated by buying domestic machines but the impact on students' perception of integration with Istituto Marangoni was more significant. Current students, though at a very early stage in their programme, did not seem concerned about this. Students identified the Welfare Officer as the person to whom they would go with any problems, but the accessibility and helpfulness of all staff was identified as a strength of the provision.

11 Since the last monitoring visit in 2017, the Centre has received considerable benefit from its membership of the London cluster of international study centres (ISCs). There have been joint staff development activities, and staff from the Centre have participated in the pilot cross-centre teaching observations. The development of policy frameworks such as the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy and staff Continuing Professional Development framework has benefitted from taking place as a joint activity. The cluster has allowed the Centre, with its activities rather different from other ISCs, to be more integrated with the rest of the Study Group network.

12 Admission of students continues to be a centralised Study Group activity. The UK and Europe Admissions Centre is split between the Singapore hub and Brighton with the latter picking up applications from the student-place-confirmation stage. The principles guiding the admissions function are in the Admissions Policy and Structure document (BES001), supported by documented working practices. Entry requirements are maintained by the Academic Office in a centralised database and set out in each centre specification, published on public-facing websites and in other marketing material. For the Centre, there are two recruitment routes: through Study Group and Istituto Marangoni (typically students who applied for degree studies but need to complete a foundation programme first). The Istituto Marangoni route accounted for six per cent of admissions in 2017-18. Students said they had used the internet to research their options before choosing the Centre. They found the information provided on the websites had been accurate and helpful, and the admission process had run smoothly. They had also found the induction process helpful and valued the industry-speaker inputs.

13 The annual monitoring report for 2016-17 was completed using the Study Group template and incorporated student outcomes data, external examiner reports and student feedback data. An action arising from the AMR was to review and evaluate the newly approved programme at the annual Curriculum Committee. This was undertaken at the Committee in June 2018 and had provided an opportunity to take a broad overview of the programme and to engage with IM in relation to the curriculum.

14 The proportion of students who successfully completed the IFY programme in 2017-18 was 94 per cent, significantly higher than for the previous year. 'Student flight' (students qualified to progress to IM who choose to go to another institution) tends to be a challenge in all the London-based ISCs because of the wide range of choice available to students. However, nearly 79 per cent of eligible students progressed to IM in 2017, a marked improvement on the

previous year. While complete data for 2018 was not available at the time of the monitoring visit, staff believed the progression rate would be even higher.

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 (as here with the IFY Fashion). English language modules are set against the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The IFY programme is approved by Study Group and endorsed by Istituto Marangoni. 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 Subject Benchmark Statements. While most programmes of study do not lead to higher education 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 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 11 October 2018.

QAA2303b - R10362 - Jan 19

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2019
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557050
Web www.qaa.ac.uk