



## Educational Oversight for embedded colleges: report of the monitoring visit of Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd (Study Group), October 2017

### Istituto Marangoni International Study Centre

#### 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 Istituto Marangoni International Study Centre (IMSC) is making acceptable progress with implementing the action plan following the October 2016 [Higher Education Review \(Embedded Colleges\)](#).

#### 2 Changes since the last QAA review

2 There have been several changes since the last review in October 2016. A new permanent Head of Centre was appointed in January 2017. The new Study Group-approved International Foundation Year (IFY) launched in 2016-17. It was approved for one year with a further review scheduled in 2017. IMISC reported that the new programme, with its 'long-thin' modular structure and better balance of theory and technical skills, had proved effective. Accordingly, IMISC had requested an extension of approval for a further year and the Study Group Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) had agreed this. The review would now be in May 2018. The AES module, introduced with the new programme in 2016-17, had been re-shaped in conjunction with Study Group and the Surrey and Leeds ISCs for delivery in 2017-18 in order to better prepare students for external International English Language Testing System (IELTS) testing required for progression. The partnership with IM was scheduled for contract renewal in December 2017, but IMISC could already identify a number of areas in which its working relationship with IM had been strengthened. Student numbers in 2016-17 dipped but recruitment to 2017-18, at the time of the visit and with projections for the January 2018 intake, was back to the level of two years ago. A new senior administrator had been recently appointed as a replacement post, and IMISC had approval to make two new appointments, an assistant administrator who would also fulfil the role of Welfare Officer, and a new full-time English teacher. Location of the provision was unchanged, but a major refurbishment by IM in consultation with IMISC had created a better learning environment for English and theory-based classes.

#### 3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The monitoring team made use of the Annual Return submitted together with its evidence base. This was supplemented by meetings with staff and students, current and alumni. Information that the team saw and heard satisfied it that acceptable progress had been made since the last review. The recommendation had been addressed (paragraph 4) but still needed further work to be fully completed. One of the affirmations was fully complete, but the other two were incomplete at the time of the visit though good progress had been made with them (paragraph 5).

4 The review in October 2016 made one recommendation and three affirmations. The recommendation was to ensure that sufficient information about course content is

available to prospective students across both admissions routes. Students continue to be recruited to IMISC directly and through the Istituto Marangoni. The review in 2016 had identified discrepancies in information available to prospective students. The Centre Action Plan (CAP) shows several completed actions, but a key outstanding action is to clarify responsibilities with IM in relation to the accuracy of public-facing information, and this will be part of the contract renewal scheduled for December 2017. The review team examined both websites, and found that the nature and level of information provided to prospective students continued to show some variance. Students told the team that they had not realised they would need to specialise from the outset of the IFY, and had believed they would be able to study across the different specialisms before electing which one to choose. Staff accepted that, while much progress had been made towards fulfilment of this recommendation, there was further work that needed to be done.

5 The first affirmation was of the steps being taken to strengthen the quality and effectiveness of recording meetings to enhance the oversight of quality assurance. IMISC had arranged for the college administrator to undertake training on effective minute taking to address this issue, but she had resigned during 2016-17. In the short term, IMISC had resorted to using temporary administrative staff, and the Head of Centre had overseen the quality of minutes taken. A replacement administrator had recently joined IMISC, and would be undertaking training on effective minute taking. The second affirmation related to adoption of Study Group's procedures and documentation for the conduct of annual programme review, with effect from the review of 2015-16. The Annual Monitoring Report for 2015-16 had been completed using Study Group procedures and documentation. The third affirmation was of the steps being taken to implement a more systematic and effective process for the identification and support of students with specific learning difficulties, taking account of the outcomes from the Study Group Working Group on this matter. The review team was told that, where students disclose a learning difficulty, IMISC is now able to refer the students to Student Services at IM. The CAP says that formalisation of this will be part of the contract renewal scheduled for December 2017. Staff are vigilant for undisclosed learning difficulties when marking work and giving tutorial support, but IMISC does not currently systematically screen students for undisclosed learning difficulties.

6 The Annual Return 2017 identifies other actions which have been progressed during 2016-17 as part of the CAP. The Annual Return notes the benefits students gain from the use of the specialist facilities of IM. An ongoing action is to negotiate the continuing availability of such facilities for delivery of the IFY in 2017-18. Students indicated the value they attached to being able to use industry-standard facilities for their technical classes and to support their project work. A previous problem was the appropriateness of teaching facilities for delivery of the AES and theory-based parts of the IFY programme, and student feedback on the use of open-plan spaces for delivery of these had been adverse. However, IM has undertaken a major refurbishment of the teaching accommodation during 2017, in consultation with IMISC, and this has created more spaces suitable for such activities. IMISC and IM also collaborate on timetabling to minimise clashes in the use of specialist facilities.

7 Peer observation of teaching is mandatory, and IMISC continued to implement peer observations during 2016-17, with the Head of Centre managing the process. IMISC is planning to relaunch peer observation from January 2018, using the standard Study Group documentation and procedures. Although pilot observations have taken place, plans for cross-centre observations between the four ISCs in the London Region have been put on hold. Staff appraisal for staff with a year or more of service continued during 2016-17, though not all staff were appraised. Appraisal identifies training and development needs, recorded in a 'Performance Review Objectives' pro forma. All staff had the opportunity to participate in the Study Group Learning and Teaching Conference in November 2016, and a range of Study Group workshops on teaching and learning. IMISC has created a

CPD calendar for 2017-18, so that staff have advanced warning of staff development activities and are encouraged to attend. Staff views have also been elicited in 2016-17 using a Study Group feedback questionnaire called 'the Review'. Using the feedback from this survey, an action plan has been developed.

8 Progresso, the Study Group data management system, was introduced at IMISC in October 2016 and is the main means for monitoring student attendance and academic attainment. IMISC evaluates this as a more rigorous mechanism for capturing and reporting on student attendance and progress. However, IMISC was dependent on a single administrator for its implementation and, when this individual resigned, it precipitated a problem. In the short term, this was rectified by the sharing of administrative support with other ISCs in the London region, and subsequently by the recruitment of a new academic administrator and the training of additional staff in the use of the system. The Head of Centre oversees the monitoring and support of students identified as 'at risk'.

9 The Centre e-Champ, who is also the Head of English, has fully implemented the VLE ready for 2017-18, and a full VLE audit took place in August 2017. The outcome of this is still awaited, but IMISC believes it now meets the level 1 requirement laid down by Study Group.

10 The IFY programme at IMISC is vocationally orientated, so aspects of the curriculum which link to industry-related activities and employability skills are important. Currently, the Head of Centre is covering the role of Events Co-ordinator and IMISC offers student trips including to other Marangoni campuses in Italy. IMISC has developed the existing link with local business, 'Bottle Top', into a live industry competition as part of the IFY programme, and this has reviewed favourably with students. It was considering developing the competition outcomes into a summative assessment, but has decided not to proceed with this. IMISC believes it has been particularly effective in implementing Study Group's employability enhancement theme, CareerAhead, for example through the 'Bottle Top' initiative and the Industry Knowledge unit.

11 Student progression improved in 2016-17 relative to 2015-16, and more students were gaining higher grades. At the same time, there had been a significant reduction in 'student flight', students eligible to proceed to IM but who choose to go to another higher education institution. Students are able to use the full range of learning resources and support facilities of IM, and it is clear that they regard themselves as part of IM.

12 Admission of students is a centralised activity based both in market (Singapore) and at Study Group's head office in Brighton. Policies and procedure are unchanged from the review in October 2016. However, for IMISC admissions, students are recruited by both IMISC and by Istituto Marangoni. This means some students are recruited through the standard Study Group process that covers all ISCs in the Study Group network, but others are recruited through Istituto Marangoni's own links with its agent network and its direct presence in the European market. There is now a single portal for student application and all students are admitted via Study Group's Admission Centre in Brighton, irrespective of their recruitment pathway. This ensures that students experience a consistent admissions process covered by clear and consistent terms and conditions. Students confirmed that the admissions process had run smoothly for them, with adequate and accurate information made available.

13 The process for annual programme monitoring for 2015-16 involved IMISC moving on to the standard Study Group process and documentation. It is continuing with this for annual monitoring of 2016-17, the outcomes of which are due in December 2017. The annual monitoring process begins with the collation of student feedback from module surveys. Module tutors use this in completing a module review form. Data from

modules is then collated to complete a programme review form. This meets Study Group's requirements and is subject to peer review by another head of centre before being submitted to the Regional Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (RQAEG) for discussion. RQAEG reports to Study Group's central Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC), escalating any issues or good practice of general interest.

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

14 Arrangements whereby IMISC utilises external reference points have not changed since the review in October 2016. Study Group references itself against *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and, for its level 3 programmes, the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) when it approves or re-approves programmes. English language modules are referenced against the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). IMISC also utilises specialist external reference points relevant to the fashion business. Qualifications descriptors in the FHEQ and RQF are used to ensure the drafting of learning outcomes at the appropriate level. Subject Benchmark Statements inform programme development, and the standard Study Group module template requires reference to be made to the Subject Benchmark Statement(s) utilised. Study Group programmes do not lead to the award of credit, but programmes and modules are designed to reflect the credit equivalence in the partner university.

#### **5 Background to the monitoring visit**

15 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.

16 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Philip Markey, QAA Officer, and Emeritus Professor Brian Anderton, QAA Reviewer, on 13 October 2017.

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