



## Educational Oversight for embedded colleges: report of the monitoring visit of Bellerby's Educational Services Ltd (Study Group UK), May 2018

### Lancaster University 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 Lancaster University International Study Centre (LUISC) is making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision following the [2016 Higher Education Review \(Embedded Colleges\)](#).

#### **2 Changes since the last QAA review**

2 At the time of the annual return, LUISC had 280 students, which represents a reduction in student numbers of around 24 per cent compared to numbers of 379 in 2016-17. There have been no significant changes at the Centre since 2016-17 in terms of programmes offered, staffing or premises.

#### **3 Findings from the monitoring visit**

3 The 2016 Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) (HER (EC)) made no recommendations and identified no affirmations. There were three features of good practice identified: the use of Ofqual descriptors to map programme learning outcomes to A-Level outcomes, which extends the range of students' degree options; the range of opportunities and high level of support for staff in the development of their professional practice; and the high level of support provided for students for their academic and personal development. From the documentary evidence and meetings with students and staff, the monitoring team found that LUISC has continued to enhance its provision in each of these areas.

4 The work on mapping of learning outcomes has been extended to enable students to draw equivalence of their academic results on the International Foundation Year (IFY) and apply for any degree available at Lancaster University (with the exception of those with additional criteria relating to funding and home/EU status). LUISC has completed work to simplify the processes for admissions and progression to the University, including clarifying the progression opportunities available. Students confirmed that they were clear about the progression arrangements and that there are regular opportunities to review their position.

5 The range of opportunities and support for staff development has been enhanced further. There is an effective staff development programme which is carefully planned, drawing on data from the annual IT skills audit, teaching observations, staff and student feedback and provider priorities. This has supported enhancements to feedback and innovation in relation to the effective use of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to meet the learning needs of

international students. All module information is preloaded, enabling students to be better prepared and able to engage in taught sessions, which include Flipped Learning, the development of web applications and use of mobile devices in the classroom. Staff are encouraged to engage in their own personal development, through research and scholarship, participation in appropriate development networks, conferences and workshops. Teaching observations have been further strengthened through staff development and the LUISC teaching observation policy that includes teaching triangles, management observations and an annual appraisal process. The monitoring team found that staff and students were enthusiastic and positive about the innovative approaches to learning and teaching that they were adopting.

6 Further progress has also been made with the high level of support for students for their academic and personal development. The introduction of a new structured Personal Tutorial process ensures termly one-to-one meetings as well as tutorial time in Project Research Skills. The recently concluded review and re-approval of the International Foundation Year has also enabled improvements designed to enhance the support available to students through the structure of the curriculum and to improve progression and retention. These include the introduction of Academic and Critical Thinking Skills (ACTS) within the Academic English Studies (AES) suite of English modules, specifically designed to challenge and stretch students with higher level English skills who join the Foundation programme. In response to student feedback, lecture time has been reduced and seminar time increased.

7 Admissions are managed centrally by the Study Group admissions teams in Brighton and Singapore. The principles are set out in the Admissions Policy and Structure document, and are supported by documented working practices. Study Group's admissions practices operate according to the principles of fair admissions. Entry requirements are maintained by Academic Registry in a centralised database and set out in each Centre Specification. The Registrar also manages any changes to admissions requirements, as appropriate. The Admissions team consult with the Centre concerning any exceptional or borderline cases, which are considered by the Head of Centre. Admissions staff are supported by the Visa and Accreditation Compliance team, which is led by a Director of Risk and Compliance. All students whom the monitoring team met had found the admissions process straightforward and confirmed that the information that they received was helpful and accurate.

8 The comprehensive procedures for annual monitoring require that LUISC submits annual monitoring reports for consideration and approval by both the Provider and the University. The process for annual monitoring, as set out by the Provider, makes reference to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and ensures thorough scrutiny of the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) by peers and senior management within the Study Group. It is submitted to the Provider through the Regional Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (RQAEG) for consideration prior to its submission and in summary form to Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (AQAE). The annual programme report includes analysis and critical reflection by the programme team on a range of data sources including student retention, student progression, module reviews, external examiner and student feedback. The robust quality assurance systems that engage staff and students in reviewing, monitoring and action planning, facilitate building on strengths and addressing opportunities for improvement. The Centre Action Plan (CAP) draws on a range of data sources, including QAA reviews, student feedback, Annual Monitoring and Provider data. It is overseen and monitored through the Quality Assurance and Enhancement group (QAEG). The University's requirements for annual monitoring and review are defined in the Contract with the University. Actions for enhancement arising from review are included in the CAP which is a live document recording continuous actions and review. It is monitored by LUISC QAEG. The CAP contains not just

locally-identified actions but also those that are Provider-driven and QAA-identified, aimed at enhancement and also highlighting areas of good practice. The action plans are also considered by the University's Head of Overseas Programmes for presentation of key issues at the joint steering group prior to submission to the University Collaborative Provision Oversight Committee. The 2016-17 annual monitoring process identified the need for action to improve the progression rates in one curriculum area, which contrasted with the high progression rates in other subjects. Accordingly a series of actions designed to improve progression have been identified in the CAP, including improving diagnostic testing, enhancing the curriculum and increasing student support.

9 LUISC has effective mechanisms to ensure student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement. The Student Handbook and LUISC Key Policies and Procedures document provide information about student feedback and representation, including the role of the Staff Student Committee and QAEG. Students elect and appoint a Student Representative from their teaching group, forming the Student Council. There is an excellent Student Representative handbook which ensures that student representatives fully understand their roles and responsibilities. The Student Council meets each term to discuss matters of interest and concern including feedback on teaching, learning and assessments. LUISC students also elect Group Representatives who represent the views of their classmates at termly staff-student meetings; Group Representatives from the previous year are invited to meet new students during induction week. The Student Representatives whom the team met, found that centre management staff were responsive at any time when they raised issues or concerns. Matters which require further action are referred to individuals or to relevant forums as appropriate. The Student Council elects a Lead Student Representative (LSR) who is a member of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG) and disseminates relevant information to the student body. Through QAEG membership, students are involved in the academic and quality related decision-making process. Individual and collective student feedback is used to inform monitoring processes and quality systems and to enhance the student experience. Module evaluation questionnaires, post arrival and end of programme questionnaires are used to collect student feedback on their experiences at LUISC. A summary of student feedback is provided in the Academic and Operational Reports for the Steering Committee and in the Annual Monitoring Report which is submitted to the University. Matters arising and action points are addressed through the CAP.

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

10 The Study Group uses QAA Subject Benchmark Statements when developing and reviewing programmes and modules. Academic Registry circulates links to revised Benchmark Statements to the network and QAA invitations to comment at the development or revision consultancy stages of specific benchmark statements are cascaded to Centres, enabling individual International Study Centre's to engage with subject benchmark statements. Reapproval processes facilitate the updating of programmes of study as appropriate. In addition, the templates for programme and module specifications include a requirement to specify the Subject Benchmark Statements that have been used for developing the module or programme, when applicable. Qualifications descriptors in *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)/Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF)* are utilised for the drafting of learning outcomes at the appropriate level or levels for both programmes and modules. LUISC programmes are Study Group approved courses and follow Study Group's procedures, which ensure external scrutiny and the appointment of an external panel member. Although Study Group programmes do not lead to

higher education credit, programmes are designed to fit with the partner University's academic framework in terms of credit-equivalence. The process for approval and endorsement by the University is set out in the Provider Academic Handbook and contract with the University. This ensures that content and learning outcomes are aligned with relevant national Frameworks.

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

11 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.

12 The monitoring visit was carried out by Ms Julia Baylie, QAA Officer, and Ms Gillian Butler, QAA Reviewer, on 15 May 2018.

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557050  
Web [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)