



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

Leeds 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 Leeds International Study Centre (LISC) 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 visit

2 At the time of the review visit there had been a 46 per cent growth in student numbers during 2016-17 relative to the previous year. This outcome resulted from deliberate action to expand student numbers at LISC, including an extensive marketing campaign by Study Group. For 2017-18, only a marginal growth in student numbers is anticipated.

3 During 2017, Study Group resourced a significant restructure at LISC which included the creation of two new senior roles reporting to the Head of Centre, the Head of Professional Services, and the Head of Curriculum and Progression, new academic Heads of Department roles, while the Head of English was refocussed to become the module co-ordinator for Academic English Skills (AES). At the same time an existing group of administrative staff was restructured into the Professional Services Team with revised roles and responsibilities.

The Study Group Centre Review in March 2017 affirmed LISC's intention to broaden its staff base, particularly around the use of sessional tutors, in order to increase capacity for effective progression tracking and to reduce the number of postponed classes. Alumni students with whom the monitoring team met said they had complained about the quality of some sessional teaching staff during 2016-17. LISC had responded by revising staffing arrangements.

4 The new semesterised curriculum had been delivered for the first time during 2016-17, as well as the AES module. LISC will review these changes as part of annual monitoring of 2016-17 due for completion in December 2017. A new IY1 (International Year 1) in International Relations had been developed in conjunction with the University of Leeds, with the first students recruited in 2017-18. From 2017-18, Leeds Beckett University has agreed to accept an AES grade in lieu of an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score, and to allow students to progress to the University without the need to apply through UCAS.

5 In relation to student support, LISC has fully implemented the Progresso student information management system to support the RPAG (Red, Pink, Amber, and Green) system for reporting student progress. It has also reviewed its personal tutoring system, and broadened the remit of personal tutors to include academic as well as personal support.

The LISC Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (LTAS) was approved by Study Group during 2016-17, and LISC has moved to roll out this strategy.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

6 The review in October 2016 made two recommendations, and two affirmations of actions LISC was already implementing. The recommendations have both been addressed (paragraphs 7-9). Good progress has been made but it will not be until the end of 2017-18 that a full evaluation of the effectiveness of the action taken by LISC can be completed. The two affirmations have also been progressed (paragraphs 11-12). That relating to information for external examiners has been completed, but that relating to LISC obtaining student progression data from its university partners is still incomplete.

7 The first recommendation was that LISC should expedite the Progression Improvement Plan designed to address low progression rates. LISC describes three 'main levers' to improve student outcomes which were set in place in 2015-16 but implemented during 2016-17. The levers are the introduction of a new semester-based curriculum; restructuring of academic teams to include a Head of Department; and refocusing of tutorial support to ensure that students were able to navigate the UCAS system effectively. IELTS remains a requirement for student wishing to progress to the University of Leeds, and LISC is providing additional English support for students planning to progress to Leeds. During 2016-17, LISC has developed and implemented a Student Outcomes Plan which identifies a number of actions designed to improve student progression, and which are embedded in the Centre Action Plan. These include preparation for study, with suggested pre-arrival reading, early diagnostic testing in core subjects and English to inform individual learning plans, and enhanced access to the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and training in its use to support independent learning. Students confirmed that they had been given diagnostic tests in English and Maths as part of their induction programme. LISC intends to implement continuous updating of course design and delivery, including better delivery of language skills development through AES, and review teaching materials to ensure that they remain current and align with learning outcomes. LISC intends to ensure that the design of assessment and feedback enhances student understanding and achievement, including implementing a culture of formative assessment, and maintaining the timeliness of feedback.

8 Student support, provided through the personal tutor system and now coordinated by the new professional services team, has been reviewed to ensure academic as well as pastoral support, and to provide guidance and support on progression including finding alternative routes where a student does not meet the progression requirements of the partner universities. For 2017-18, LISC is creating a 'Celebrating Student Success' plan including a graduation ceremony and student scholarships from LISC and its partner universities, so that students are encouraged to be successful. Progression has improved markedly, with 71 per cent of students starting the programme being eligible to progress in 2016-17, compared with 46 per cent in 2015-16. This will be fully evaluated at the next monitoring visit.

9 The second recommendation was to provide focused staff development to ensure consistency in internal marking. LISC has responded by making a number of procedural changes, including ensuring that clear marking criteria are in place and disseminated in handbooks and on the VLE; by ensuring that there are marking schemes appropriate to each marking task; requiring heads of subject to review the alignment between marking criteria and learning outcomes; and continuing to review feedback given to students on assessments. Regulations relating to marking and moderation are shared with staff and students through, respectively, the Centre and Student Handbooks. Staff development related to assessment has included LISC-provided training sessions on standardisation in

marking and in moderation, drawing on good practice from other ISCs, and Study Group-provided training sessions on assessment.

10 In addition, LISC has provided all tutors with a Feedback Handbook which gives written guidance on providing feedback to students. Feedback is provided using Turnitin's GradeMark facility and also forms designed by individual programme teams. Students have confirmed the value they attach to feedback on assessments, but noted the variability in the way in which the feedback is given. Heads of Subject were asked to consider creating a standard feedback sheet to further reinforce consistency in delivering feedback, and the monitoring team was told this will be implemented for 2017-18. Assessments and the giving of feedback are managed through the Assessment Calendar, which is part of the College Action Plan (CAP). This will be implemented from 2017-18, and will be communicated to students in a variety of ways so that they are able to manage their learning. The Calendar incorporates assessment dates and deadlines. LISC commits to returning marked assessments normally within two weeks, and students said this was generally the case. LISC concludes that it has taken deliberate steps and that progress has been made with this recommendation, and the impact will be fully reviewed in the Annual Monitoring Report (due December 2017).

11 The last review also made two affirmations. Firstly, affirmation of the steps being taken with the universities to ensure access to degree progression data. Both universities have committed in principle to making progression data available, but how this will be achieved remains to be resolved. LISC is considering obtaining a signed waiver from each of its students to facilitate the release of progression data by the universities.

12 The second affirmation was the actions LISC was taking to ensure that external examiners receive adequate and appropriate samples of students' work. In dialogue with its three external examiners, LISC has provided all scripts to the external examiners, and offered them in the media with which they are most comfortable. The external examiner reports for 2016-17 which have so far been received by LISC confirm that external examiners are happy that they receive adequate and appropriate assessment material to support their role.

13 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 November 2016. Historically, a feature of LISC was that students must apply to both universities through UCAS. This has resulted in a number of students eligible to progress to other universities, what LISC calls 'student flight'. From 2017-18, Leeds Beckett University will allow eligible students to progress to the University without going through UCAS. Information produced by Study Group and LISC and sent to students about the learning opportunities offered is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

14 The process for annual programme review is unchanged from the previous Review. At the time of the current monitoring visit, annual review was in progress towards completion at the beginning of December 2017. Progression, measured in terms of the number of students who entered programmes at LISC and who were eligible to progress, improved substantially in 2016-17, but the full effects of LISC's Student Outcomes Plan will not be felt until 2017-18.

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

15 Arrangements whereby LISC 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. The AES module is referenced against the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Qualifications descriptors in the FHEQ and RQF are used to ensure the drafting of learning outcomes at the appropriate level. QAA 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. LISC demonstrates highly effective engagement with relevant external reference points, including the Quality Code.

5 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 Mr Phillip Markey, QAA Officer, and Emeritus Professor Brian Anderton, QAA Reviewer, on 17 October 2017.

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