



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

Liverpool John Moores 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 Liverpool John Moores International Study Centre (LJMUISC) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [2017 Embedded College Educational Oversight Annual Monitoring Visit](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 At the time of the annual monitoring visit the Centre had 369 students, an increase of around 18 per cent compared to 314 students in 2016-17.

3 LJMUISC undertook a restructuring of staffing during 2017, creating new permanent roles including two Subject Leaders and permanent full-time tutor posts in English Language and Academic Skills; and Science and Engineering. Three further full-time teaching roles have been established, in response to growth in student numbers and a strategic decision to provide a higher ratio of full-time to sessional staff, and the Centre was in the process of recruiting to these posts at the time of the annual monitoring visit.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) (HER (EC)) of the Centre in 2016 identified two features of good practice: the sharing of good practice through peer-to-peer observations with another International Study Centre(s) and University faculty staff; and the integration of educational visits into the student learning experience. There were three recommendations: to ensure that definitive student progression data is clearly presented and analysed in annual programme monitoring reports; to work with the University to enable data on student progression at the University to be shared with the Centre; and to ensure that Centre Review recommendations are fully incorporated into the action plan. There was also an affirmation - the steps being taken to improve student achievement in English Skills for University Study.

5 The monitoring visit in May 2017 found that the good practice had been extended, and that the implementation of actions, in response to recommendations in the 2016 review, had resulted in improvements to the management of the Centre's Higher Education provision. The incorporation of recommendations into the action plan was fully met but work was still in progress relating to the first two recommendations. From the documentary evidence and

meetings with staff and students, the monitoring team found that LJMUI SC has made satisfactory progress in implementing the action plan, sustaining good practice and reviewing and continuing to improve its higher education provision.

6 The sharing of good practice through peer-to-peer observations, identified as good practice in the HER (EC), has continued with key Centre staff engaged in cross-network observations and a schedule of cross-faculty peer observations which are building the confidence of LJMUI SC staff. Both student feedback and observations made during the lesson observations have informed a review of the Centre's observation strategy which now includes 'walk-in observations' followed by management observations. The continuing peer review relationships with other centres are designed to support the dissemination of best practice. LJMUI SC has been audited by Keele University International Study Centre, as part of the Provider's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) review, whilst the shared experience of other centres has also helped to ensure the recent successful transition to a new VLE - Canvas.

7 The team was provided with evidence of the continuation of the good practice in the integration of educational visits into the student learning experience. Students whom the team met, valued the opportunity to visit a local cathedral and to participate in market research in the city. Although the students had experienced only a limited range of such activities, the annual calendar included further opportunities which had not yet taken place.

8 Further progress has also been made in relation to the affirmation regarding steps being taken to improve student achievement in English Skills for University Study (ESUS). The modules will be replaced in the academic year 2018-19 with Academic English Skills (AES) which include more formative assessments with the aim of encouraging a greater focus on learning, rather than multiple assessment preparation, across all four skills.

9 At the time of the 2017 annual monitoring visit, action to address the recommendation to ensure that definitive student progression data is clearly presented and analysed in annual programme monitoring reports, was in progress. Further work was necessary as the reports did not record progression rates to the partner university for individual courses, nor was there an in-depth analysis of the reasons behind poor performance. The 2017 monitoring team also noted that work was on-going in relation to the recommendation regarding the sharing of data from the University. Since then LJMUI SC has appointed a new Head of Professional Services to oversee data processing and has implemented a new management information system which enables more effective data sharing and checking with the University. Data accuracy and processes continue to be monitored during the academic year through the Centre's regular meetings with the University. The programme position paper informs a programme level curriculum action plan which feeds into the Centre Action Plan (CAP). The availability of data for individual courses showing progression rates to the partner university enabled LJMUI SC to identify that, whilst retention is excellent, progression is disappointing for some pathways. Actions, including the changes proposed to ESUS, are being taken to address the issues.

10 The annual monitoring process as set out in the Centre Handbook is a rigorous process, with Annual Monitoring Reports (AMR) for each programme completed on the University template. The LJMUI SC Head of Programmes and Head of Professional Services scrutinise the AMR data against the internal data spreadsheets produced from the Progresso system, and then commentary is added into the AMR. The process draws on findings from tutor module reviews, external examiner reports, link tutor reports and student feedback. The draft AMR are presented to the joint Board of Studies prior to consideration and approval by the University. The AMRs are considered by the Provider as part of the northern Regional Quality

Assurance and Enhancement Group (RQAEG) peer review process prior to being received by the Provider Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC). The link tutor and external examiner reports for International Foundation Year Business and Law raised a number of issues related to the challenges created by changes taking place in the partner University and in the staffing within LJMUISC. The responses to these difficulties were appropriate and demonstrate the effectiveness of the monitoring process. Issues identified and subsequent actions are incorporated into the Centre Action Plan (CAP). The University has piloted, and will be rolling out next academic year, a revised monitoring process which is less retrospective, more prospective and linked to enhancement.

11 Admissions are managed centrally by the Study Group's admissions teams in Brighton and Singapore. The principles on which the admissions function operates are captured in the Admissions Policy and Structure document, which is supported by documented working practices. Study Group's admissions practices operate in accordance with principles of fair admission. Admissions staff are supported by a dedicated Visa and Accreditation Compliance team, which is led by a Director of Risk and Compliance. Entry requirements are maintained by Academic Registry in a centralised database and set out in each Centre Specification; they are published on public-facing websites and within marketing-related material and communications. Academic Registry is also responsible for ensuring that approved amendments to entry requirements are implemented. The Head of Centre (or nominated representative) assesses all exceptional and borderline cases and the Centre monitors performance of exceptional or borderline cases. The admissions process may identify a need for additional support in particular cases and all students undertake diagnostic testing during the first weeks of Semester 1 to identify any support needs. All students whom the monitoring team met, found the process of application straightforward and confirmed that the information they received was helpful and accurate.

12 LJMUISC has formal structures in place which enable student engagement. Student Representative are elected by their peers and are members of the Staff Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) that reports to both QAEG and the Board of Studies. At the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG), LJMUISC staff and students are able to discuss a range of Centre business, including monitoring the Centre Action Plan. Whilst it is evident from minutes that student attendance at these meetings is variable, there is evidence that when they raise issues these are considered carefully and responded to appropriately. Student representatives are briefed about the role and support is provided within the Centre to help students develop their skills in gathering views, presenting collective feedback and providing updates on issues raised to the wider student body. The Lead Student Representative attends a network Student Council that enables the Provider to discuss directly with students the quality of their learning experience. Issues raised specifically at this forum relating to the Centre are raised in the SSLC and captured in the CAP. Examples of this process include feedback from students on the timing of timetabled classes which led to a review of timetabled sessions for Semester 2. LJMUISC uses a network survey to gather feedback from students on pre-arrival, arrival and induction activities. Areas identified for improvement include customer service training for all Centre staff involved with induction activities which is detailed in the CAP. The Centre uses module review surveys to gather curriculum-based feedback which is evaluated by the Head of Programmes, shared with the Programme Team and used to inform module review. The findings from both surveys are also considered at SSLC and QAEG.

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

13 The Study Group uses the QAA Subject Benchmark Statements when developing and reviewing programmes and modules, and the templates provided for the network require confirmation of this benchmarking. The Academic Registry circulates links to revised Statements to the study centre network and also circulates QAA consultations on proposed changes. In addition, the Provider templates for programme and module specifications require the recording of the Subject Benchmarks utilised for the purpose of developing the module or programme, when applicable. The programmes are benchmarked against *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) or the *Regulated Qualifications Framework* (RQF) as appropriate. The programmes are validated by the University and aligned to the University's academic framework, with the exception of the Extended International Foundation Programme (which is a Study Group approved programme set at level 3 of the RQF and endorsed by the University). English language modules are set against the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (CEFR). The programmes and modules are designed to fit with the University's academic framework in terms of credit equivalence, and the IY1 programme design is informed by the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement. External examiners confirm that the intended learning outcomes for the programmes are appropriate to the respective levels of award and the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement.

5 Background to the monitoring visit

14 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.

15 The monitoring visit was carried out by Ms Julia Baylie, QAA Officer, and Ms Gillian Butler, QAA Reviewer, on 17 May 2018.

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