



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

### University of Leicester International Study Centre

#### **Section 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 the University of Leicester International Study Centre (ULISC) is making commendable progress with implementing the action plan following the May 2016 [Higher Education Review \(Embedded Colleges\)](#).

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

2 There have been no significant changes since the last review visit. Student numbers have remained the same.

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

3 The Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) in May 2016 identified two features of good practice and made two recommendations, with action to be completed by April 2017. From the documentary evidence and meetings with staff and students, the monitoring team found that ULISC has made commendable progress in implementing the action plan following the review.

4 The review team identified 'the effective operation and use of the Link Student scheme to support and facilitate student transitions' as good practice. The Link Student role has been developed significantly. Additional opportunities for interaction between current students and Link Students have been established, including Link Students' greater involvement in Welcome Week; Link Student attendance at Student Council meetings; and a Question and Answer Forum, received very positively by students. These occasions provide the context for Link Students to talk about their course and the transition to the University, and to explore further ways to enhance the student experience. A new, engagingly presented Link Students' Directory, with photographs, brief profiles and contact details, has been developed. This is proving very effective in promoting the scheme to current students, who clearly value the opportunities it provides to maintain links with the University student body. Link Students and other alumni continue to participate in the University's mini-fairs for ULISC students, and Link Students contribute to the annual review of the alumni survey design.

5 Student support at ULISC, the second feature of good practice identified by the QAA review team ('the holistic and integrated approach to the support of students that empowers learners to develop their academic, personal and professional potential'), has been enhanced further. An employability workshop has been added to the induction programme; the tutorial

framework has been developed in line with the provider's Career Ahead initiative, with increased focus on employability, interpersonal and transferable skills; ULISC has facilitated the University Business School employability/careers input into a IY1 module; and employability features in a series of colourful, student-friendly 'storyboards' covering various aspects of the student experience at ULISC. The ULISC employability framework has been recognised as good practice within the network, a number of other ISCs having expressed an interest in adapting it for their centres. Academic and personal support for students has been extended to include extra Academic English Skills sessions for students deemed at risk, as well as for others seeking additional practice. A system of tutor 'office hours' has been established, to supplement existing open-door access to tutors. Students expressed high satisfaction with the support provided and spoke with confidence about the employability skills they had acquired during their studies at ULISC.

6 The May 2016 review report recommended that ULISC 'develop and implement a consistent and comprehensive approach to the reporting by external examiners on the approved programmes'. This recommendation has been fully implemented with the development and introduction of a new external examiner report template, which was approved by the University and the provider and commended by one of the external examiners. The template has been adopted for use on Study Group-approved International Foundation Year programmes at all ISCs, providing another example of good practice initiated and developed at ULISC, then shared to enhance provision across the network.

7 The review team further recommended that ULISC 'ensure internal consistency in the framework for dealing with academic appeals'. This recommendation has been fully implemented. A clear policy on appeals and complaints, approved by the University and the provider, has been introduced.

8 ULISC continues to effectively monitor and evaluate the impact of enhancements introduced since May 2016, principally through ongoing review in deliberative committees, the analysis of retention and performance data and student feedback, and external examiner reports.

9 ULISC implements effective mechanisms to ensure student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement. Class representatives actively participate in the Student Council, Staff Student Liaison Groups (SSLGs) and QAEG, feeding back to their peers in tutorial sessions. Student representatives also attend the University/ISC Student Experience Group. Opportunities for student engagement are generally very well publicised, and plans are in place to provide students with information about (relatively recently introduced) QAEG membership, which is not currently in student handbooks. Alumni students sit on the joint University/ULISC Academic Management Board (AMB). Student feedback is gathered via online module evaluation and post-induction surveys, supplemented by alumni surveys. QAEG receives reports from the Student Council and SSLG; relevant action points are followed through to the Centre Action Plan (CAP); annual Programme Self-Assessment and Action Documents (PSAADS) record and evaluate action in response to student feedback; and staff use tutorial sessions and the VLE news board to feed back to students on responses to the student voice.

10 Annual monitoring, culminating in the submission of the PSAAD for scrutiny and approval by the University and the provider, is a rigorous process informed by student retention, completion and progression data; module review; external examiner and student feedback; and relevant committee minutes. PSAADS, which are reviewed at AMB, provide comprehensive analysis, commentary and evaluation, with action planning. Action points inform the CAP,

which QAEG monitors on an ongoing basis. Detailed data analysis identifies areas for development. Recent reporting confirms that these areas are followed through appropriately, as is exemplified by the provision of additional English and other support with respect, in particular, to lower than average progression rates for certain nationalities identified in 2015-16. The most recent data on former ULISC students' degree performance at the University of Leicester, reviewed at AMB, shows that in some areas former ISC students outperformed the other cohorts, including Home/EU students, and that, overall, former ISC students' degree outcomes are comparable to those of other students graduating from the University.

11 Student admission processes, governed by documented policy and procedures and handled by the Study Group Admissions Centre, based in Singapore (application to offer-issuing) and Brighton (confirmation and CAS-issuing), operate fairly and effectively overall. Entry requirements, recorded in Centre Specifications, are maintained in a centralised database. Any amendments are approved by or notified to PAVC (approved/validated provision, respectively) and controlled by the Registry-based Academic Manager, who is a member of PAVC. Admissions practices must adhere to principles of fairness and inclusivity, with appropriate handling of student information. Decisions are based on documented evidence of academic qualifications, suitability for the course, genuine intention to study, and compliance with national regulations. Processes provide for identification of students with a disability or special needs. Under the documented process for considering exceptional or borderline applications, final decisions rest with the College Principal/Head of Centre. Students confirmed that application processes work smoothly and efficiently, with prompt and helpful assistance from admissions staff; that their qualifications are properly checked; and that their genuine intention to study is tested.

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

12 The ULISC International Year 1 (IY1) is a validated award of the University located at level 4 of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The International Foundation Year (IFY), a Study Group approved programme endorsed by the University, is set at level 3 of the Regulated Qualifications Framework. English language modules are set against the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (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. Staff comments to the monitoring team, together with the evidence of internal monitoring and review documentation, demonstrate the effective use of external reference points, including the UKQC, to inform quality assurance and the enhancement of student learning opportunities at ULISC.

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

13 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.

14 The monitoring visit was carried out by Phil Markey, QAA Officer, and Dr Sylvia Hargreaves, QAA Reviewer, on 26 May 2017.

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