Outcome of the monitoring visit

From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the monitoring team concludes that the University of Lincoln International Study Centre (ULISC) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision following the 2017 Embedded College Educational Oversight Monitoring Visit.

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

At the time of the annual monitoring return there were 137 enrolled students studying at the Centre. This represents a decline of around 31 per cent compared to the previous year (199). The Centre has recently introduced a new Social Science stream on the Foundation Business and Media programme.

There have been no significant changes in staff, programmes offered or premises since the previous monitoring visit.

Findings from the monitoring visit

The Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) (HER (EC)) of the Centre in 2016 made no recommendations or affirmations. One area of good practice was identified: the holistic and integrated approach to student support that enables learners to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The 2017 annual monitoring visit identified that there had been enhancements made in this area which have since been further consolidated at the Centre: establishing and training a smaller, more focused group of tutors, further developing individual learning plans and the introduction of supplementary interim risk tracking. From the documentary evidence and meetings with staff and students, the monitoring team concluded that ULISC continues to make satisfactory progress in reviewing, monitoring and enhancing its provision and has continued to build upon the feature of good practice identified in the HER (EC).

For 2017-18, ensuring that academic delivery is synchronised with student support systems to enhance the student experience has been identified as a central aim of the revised ULISC Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2017-18. The Centre also aims that, where possible, students have the same person as personal tutor and subject tutor to facilitate this process. There have also been enhancements to the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and to student support mechanisms (including study skills support, Career Ahead and pastoral...
There has been a recent restructuring of professional services staff in the Centre which has clarified roles and identified more specific roles and which aims to improve support to students and provide for coordinating roles in welfare and visa compliance.

6. A further target for 2017-18 is the development of transition planning to support students with progression and preparation for university study. The centre has established a joint team with a focus on transition and is working with link tutors to support the development of independent study skills post transition.

7. The Centre Action Plan (CAP) tracks enhancements to other areas referred to in the May 2017 QAA monitoring report, ensuring that actions are identified as required. The 2017 report noted that the data in the Centre Annual Monitoring Report, on progression to Year 1 and Year 2 of the University of Lincoln, was not disaggregated. This has subsequently been addressed so that issues in the progression rates to the University, from individual programmes, can be clearly identified and addressed. Work has also commenced to identify the degree outcomes of former ULISC students so that this can be used in the Centre’s data analysis. The anticipated availability of more data from the University will enable further analysis to identify degree outcomes of ULISC students by programme and pathway.

8. The disaggregated data also provides evidence of the positive impact of changes to the progression requirements made by the University in spring 2017, which have ameliorated the previous difficulties with progression attributed to earlier changes to those requirements, made by the University in 2015-16. Additionally in 2016-17, the replacement of English Skills for University Study (ESUS) with Academic English Skills (AES) has also led to significant improvements in results for both the Foundation Programme and International Year One.

9. Further work has been undertaken to address earlier concerns raised by external examiners and students about the quality and variability of assessment feedback to students. Staff development to enhance feedback is continuing and a research project focusing on student engagement through active participation in feedback, employing eLearning opportunities, is also in progress.

10. Admissions processes are carried out in accordance with the documented policies and procedures of the provider, as set out in the Admissions Policy and Structure document. Study Group’s admissions practices operate within the principles of fair admissions. Entry requirements are maintained by Academic Registry in a centralised database and set out in each Centre Specification. The Registry also manages any changes to admissions requirement as appropriate. Admissions staff are supported by a dedicated Visa and Accreditation Compliance team, which is led by a Director of Risk and Compliance. The Head of Centre, in liaison with Heads of Subject, reviews any exceptional cases presented for consideration. The performance of students who join as exceptional cases, is now compared to overall student performance to ensure that pass rates are at least similar. Concerns regarding the performance of Engineering students in 2015-16 resulted in particular scrutiny of mathematical skills and stricter tests for the 2016-17 entry. As a result, performance significantly improved and is now comparable or better than that of students entering through the standard procedure. All students whom the monitoring team met found the process of application straightforward and confirmed that the information they received was helpful and accurate.

11. ULISC operates effective annual monitoring processes informed by: external examiner reports; link tutor and student feedback; and retention, completion and progression data. In response to the comments made in the 2017 QAA monitoring visit, the annual monitoring report (AMR) for 2016-17 includes disaggregated data and analysis of the progression data by
programme and pathway, enabling a detailed picture of the performance and progression of students to emerge. It reports actions completed from the previous year and actions taken or planned in response to external examiner and student feedback for the current year. The Annual Monitoring Report is presented to the Centre Academic Management Board. It is also peer reviewed within Study Group via the Regional Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (RQAEG) and is then presented in summary form through the RQAEG Chair’s report to Study Group’s Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (AQAEC). This process ensures that there is an opportunity for students, tutors, external examiners and link tutors to offer meaningful feedback on programmes and modules. Issues raised are incorporated as appropriate into the Centre Action Plan (CAP) and monitoring and evaluation of these is ensured by the Centre Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG). External examiners’ reports confirm that standards are appropriate and are equivalent to those in their home institutions. The responses to these provide evidence that action is taken in relation to any issues that they raise.

12 ULISC operates effective mechanisms to engage students as partners in quality assurance and enhancement. Elected student representatives for each programme are members of, and actively participate in, the Staff Student Committee (SSC) and QAEG. The CAP is available to all students on the VLE (Blackboard) and the meetings provide the opportunity for representatives to consider the AMR and the CAP, including feedback from, and responses to, external examiners, and to raise any student concerns. Student representatives are provided with a role description which is included in both the Centre and Student Handbooks and a training session to enable them to fulfil the role. Student surveys and feedback from tutorial groups are used to gather feedback directly from students which is then discussed at SSC where actions are identified as needed. Student module feedback collected at the end of each term is reviewed at meetings between members of the management team and module tutors and the feedback discussed at QAEG meetings, in addition to staff feedback and module data. Feedback is reviewed by the Academic Management Board as part of annual monitoring and issues identified by students are also raised at the Steering Group, involving representatives from both the University and the provider. A small group of students is periodically invited to offer qualitative feedback on issues raised in student surveys to be included on the agenda for future Staff Student Committee meetings. A ULISC QAEG student representative also attends the network Student Council meeting. Issues from the Student Council are then discussed at the SSC and potential actions identified. Students whom the monitoring team met provided examples of actions that had been taken in response to issues that they had raised.

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

13 ULISC’s programmes are approved by Study Group and endorsed by the University. Study Group benchmarks (during initial programme and module development and at approval and re-approval) its programmes of study against The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ), for programmes set at levels 4-6, and against the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) for preparatory programmes set at level 3. English language modules are benchmarked against the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR). The provider templates for programme and module specifications require the recording of Subject Benchmark Statements utilised for the purpose of developing the module or programme. In considering amendments to the Business and Media Foundation programme the new Subject Benchmark Statements in social sciences were considered. Programmes and modules are
designed in line with the University of Lincoln's academic framework and in the case of the International Year One programme, mapped against the University's Year One programme in addition to the provider's framework and reflecting any relevant links to other external reference points.

5 Background to the monitoring visit

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.

The monitoring visit was carried out by Ms Julia Baylie, QAA Officer, and Ms Gillian Butler, QAA Reviewer, on 24 May 2018.

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