



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

### University of Sheffield International College

#### 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 University of Sheffield International College (USIC) is making commendable progress with implementing the action plan following the November 2016 [Higher Education Review \(Embedded Colleges\)](#).

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

2 There have been two significant changes since the last review visit. Firstly, a new Head of College/Deputy Director has been appointed, and a structural reorganisation has taken place with the creation of three senior posts reporting to the Head of College/Deputy Director. Student support has been organised into functional areas, and five new discipline-based academic heads roles have been created. USIC believes that its new structure gives greater consistency and accountability in its operations, and also aligns better with the university. The separation of responsibility for curriculum and for quality assurance avoids any possible conflicts of interest in these two areas of responsibility. The second change is that, from 2017-18, USIC has adopted the Study Group Academic English and Skills modules.

3 Student numbers fell by around 12 per cent between 2015-16 and 2016-17, which USIC believes largely reflected the volatility of the external recruitment environment. At the same time, progression improved, with 7 per cent more students entering programmes at USIC being eligible for progression.

#### 3 Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The recommendation has been fully addressed, the affirmation fully implemented, and all four areas of good practice have led to improvements and enhancements.

5 In responding to the recommendation related to student engagement (that USIC should ensure current students had the opportunity to attend deliberative committees as members), USIC has incorporated current students as representatives on the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG) and Academic Management Board, as well as programme boards. The new Group Representative and Student Forum structure, implemented from September 2016, has provided a pool of potential student committee members. USIC has also prioritised the development of its new termly Student Forum meetings through the involvement of the Head of College/Deputy Director and other QAEG members.

6 The affirmation from the last review related to the mapping of learning outcomes to assessment tasks. At the time of the last review, USIC was beginning this process. It was confirmed this has now been fully completed for all programmes at USIC.

7 There were four areas of good practice from the 2016 review. Firstly, the level of cooperation between USIC and the partner university, where there has been significant progress since the last review. There has been an increase in collaborative activity with the university during 2016-17, including university faculty-wide introductory sessions as part of induction; faculty fairs to assist students with their choice of progression to the university; and individual events including visits, open days and guest lectures. The more systematic two-way sharing of data between the university and USIC has also continued, with a formal agreement by the university to provide USIC with data on progression and completion of its alumni.

8 The second area of good practice was the effective support for student learning through the provision of critical reading modules and subject-specific vocabulary on the virtual learning environment. USIC has made further progress in this area. This includes increasing time devoted to academic skills development workshops; enhancing assessed learning outcomes to require students to provide more critical comments as part of the critical reading modules; and further development of online learning resources, including weekly subject-specific vocabulary activities.

9 USIC's effective support arrangements to enhance student progression was a third area of good practice. The RPAG (red, pink, amber, green) student monitoring system is a well-established and effective means of identifying students at risk of non-progression. Developments since the last review have focused on using the information generated through RPAG more effectively. Responsibility is shared between academic staff led by the Academic Progression Coordinator, and the Progression Support Team. More time has been created for students to receive advice and support in relation to their progress. This is focused on the role of the academic adviser. The Personal Development Programme module has been transformed into an Academic Success module, through which student support is tailored to the individual student's needs in conjunction with their academic adviser. The new module has been enhanced through the introduction of study skills within the learning objectives, and enhancements have been made to the student progression support schedule. USIC believes that the increased retention and better progression rate in 2016-17 resulted from these changes.

10 The fourth area of good practice identified was the interactive and effective communication tool for students provided by the Virtual Reception facility. USIC has sought to enhance the quality of this support, including the introduction of a Student E-Bulletin. Students new to USIC said how effective they found the information provided through the Virtual Reception in helping them to settle into the college and life in Sheffield.

11 USIC maintains a College Action Plan (CAP) incorporating the action from the review, which it updates regularly. Actions can be locally identified, can align with the provider's action plan, and can arise from external reviews. All actions incorporate responsibilities with a completion date, and actions are colour coded from green (action on track) to red (action has missed its completion date and requires urgent action). The QAEG provides the forum where the CAP is scrutinised. The CAP evidences a wide array of activities designed to monitor and enhance the quality of provision at USIC, and incorporates a statement of actions and an evaluation of their impact.

12 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 2016 review. Students who met the review team had learned of USIC through a variety of

sources, including family and friends, agents and sponsors. They reported that information received prior to leaving their home countries had been sufficient and accurate with respect to the performance required to allow progression to the university, and that on arrival they had a comprehensive induction programme. Late arrivals also received an induction. Information produced by Study Group and USIC about learning opportunities offered is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

13 The process for annual programme review is unchanged from the 2016 QAA review. Annual programme review was in progress at the time of the monitoring visit, scheduled to complete in early December 2017. The annual monitoring process begins with the collation of student feedback from module surveys. Module tutors use this in completing a module review form. Data from modules is then collated to complete a programme review form. This meets Study Group's requirements and is subject to peer review by another Head of Centre before being submitted to the Regional Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group for discussion. The Group reports to Study Group's central Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee, escalating any issues of good practice or general interest.

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

14 Arrangements whereby USIC utilises external reference points have not changed since the 2016 review. 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 reapproves programmes. English language modules are referenced against the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. 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 benchmarks 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. USIC demonstrates highly effective engagement with relevant external reference points, including the Quality Code.

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

15 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.

16 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Philip Markey, QAA Officer, and Emeritus Professor Brian Anderton, Reviewer, on 5 October 2017.

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