



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

### University of Strathclyde 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 University of Strathclyde International Study Centre (USISC) is making commendable progress with implementing the action plan following the October 2016 [Higher Education Review \(Embedded Colleges\)](#).

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

2 Student numbers at USISC in 2017-18 have remained stable compared to 2016-17. There have been no changes to staff numbers, and programmes offered previously have continued to run.

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

3 The previous review identified two instances of good practice. There were no recommendations or affirmations. Actions related to the good practice have been fully implemented, and the resulting improvements in USISC's management of its higher education provision are clearly evidenced. Actions are listed on the USISC Action Plan, which is regularly monitored by USISC's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG). The review team noted highly effective student engagement in line with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code).

4 The first point of good practice was 'the focused staff development initiatives which provide staff with the skills to support students with particular needs'. Since the review, further training involved the Head of Centre, the Head of English, the Academic Personal Tutor and professional services staff in a course focused on mental health first aid. This training is being extended to other personal tutors. As USISC continues to build its expertise in this area, it seeks to disseminate knowledge and skills to the wider network of International Study Centres: for example, the Head of Professional Services, together with two other team members, presented to the provider's network-wide Teaching and Learning Conference on the 'Strathclyde Approach to Student Welfare and Mental Health'. Additionally, USISC trains all new staff in safeguarding (a provider requirement).

5 A second point of good practice was 'the effectiveness of academic and pastoral support arrangements that enable students to develop their potential'. USISC monitors all students using the provider's RPAG (red, pink, amber, green) system, supported by software now in use across all the International Study Centres. USISC also use a 'welfare' RAG system, which identifies students with particular welfare issues, and is used in conjunction with the RPAG to identify students in need of targeted support. Academic Personal Tutors have access to both RPAG and the welfare RAG, and are responsible for determining whether extra support is needed for particular students.

Extra classes are offered in Maths, English, Physics and Psychology as necessary, which are mandatory for at-risk students. Students were aware of the extra help offered and appreciative of the availability of staff. USISC provided evidence of students who, with extra support, changed their rating from red to green. The success of this approach is evidenced by the high rates of completion and progression at USISC, with 95 per cent of those who completed the course progressing to the partner university.

6 Academic support for students is also being enhanced by engagement of International Study Centre staff with the university's STEP (Strathclyde's Teaching Excellence Programme). Additionally, further development of the material is available through the virtual learning environment (VLE), taking this beyond the provider's level 1 expectations. USISC staff have been involved in auditing VLE provision elsewhere in the network.

7 Admissions to Study Group's International Study Centres are carried out centrally by the provider, and are based in Brighton and Singapore. Borderline cases where potential students have narrowly missed the entry requirements or have exceptional circumstances are referred to the Head of Centre, who will make a decision in consultation with USISC and university staff as appropriate. In particular, students wishing to study architecture must present a portfolio of work to the university department prior to a decision being made. Such exceptional students can now be tracked to identify any issues, although this is in the early stages of development. Students who met the review team had learned about the International Study Centre from 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 partner university, and that on arrival they had a comprehensive induction programme. Late arrivals also received an induction.

8 An annual monitoring report is completed using the provider's template. This incorporates programme and module evaluation, external examiners' reports, and key quantitative data such as student attendance, retention and academic outcomes. The report is discussed by the QAEG prior to being assessed by a peer review process involving another Head of Centre. The report is then presented to the Regional Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group. Issues identified are incorporated into the USISC Action Plan, and the Regional Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group makes a report to the provider's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee, drawing attention to issues or good practice of general interest. The same report is presented to the university Quality Committee.

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

9 The embedded college demonstrates highly effective engagement with relevant external reference points, including the Quality Code. Programmes offered by USISC are validated by the provider and benchmarked against the Quality Code; Subject Benchmark Statements, where appropriate; the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*; and (for level 3) the Scottish Qualifications Framework. The provider's programme approval and reapproval processes check standards against these reference points, and will be used in the reapproval of programmes next year. Programme and module specifications refer to external reference points, listing appropriate benchmarks, and expressing aims and learning outcomes in terms of the appropriate level. External examiners are in place for all programmes and their reports confirm standards.

10 The reviewer noted that student engagement, in line with the Quality Code, was effective, with student representatives elected for all cohorts and offered training and support. Student representatives meet in the Staff Student Liaison Committee and are invited to the QAEG. Examples of changes resulting from the representative system were offered to the review team.

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

11 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.

12 The monitoring visit was carried out by Cameron Waitt, QAA Officer, and Professor Gaynor Taylor, Reviewer, on 25 October 2017.

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