



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

University of Sussex 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 the University of Sussex International Study Centre (USISC) is making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision following the [2016 Higher Education Review \(Embedded Colleges\)](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 Since the Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) (HER (EC)), student numbers increased very slightly (one per cent) from 817 in 2016-17 to a predicted total of 827 (including a May 2018 intake) in 2017-18.

3 Since the HER (EC), a new staffing structure has been implemented which included the appointment of Heads of Subject and Subject Leaders, the creation of a dedicated Progression Support Team and a new post of Director of Quality and Innovation.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The 2016 HER (EC) made no recommendations and identified no affirmations. There were four areas of good practice identified: the strong partnership, working at all levels, that supports the reapproval process to ensure standards are set and maintained; the multi-faceted and strategic approach to ensuring the quality of learning and teaching; the central role of Academic Progression Advisers in supporting the quality of student learning opportunities; and the effective use of systems to provide constructive and timely feedback on non-examination assessments. From documentary evidence and meetings with staff and students, the monitoring team concluded that USISC is continuing to build on all four features of good practice and has further enhanced the quality of student learning opportunities.

5 The impact and effectiveness of the strong partnership working at all levels that supports the reapproval process, was further demonstrated in two recent successful validation events where both validation panels highlighted areas of good practice - three of which related to the strong partnership and another related to the quality of pastoral support and expansion of the tutorial provision at the USISC. Staff also participate in the partner University's training and development programme, both as participants and presenters which encourages shared learning. This has enhanced the partnership with University staff in student transition activities and cross-institutional peer observation. The expertise of USISC staff in working with international students is recognised through their involvement in the University's International

Student Experience Task and Finish Group (ISEG), which aims to improve the international student experience and support higher rates of good degree outcomes.

6 Further progress has been made with the multi-faceted and strategic approach to ensuring the quality of learning and teaching, through the development of a staffing structure that supports enhancement and innovation in learning and teaching; enhancements to the curriculum through programme revalidation and the review of Centre's Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy. The revised staffing structure includes the appointment of an E-Champion and a Progression Support Team, discussed below. Staff are engaging with the strategy through appraisals, module evaluations and staff development. Priorities have included enhanced use of interactive features of the virtual learning environment (VLE) and the development of independent learning skills.

7 The central role of Academic Progression Advisers in supporting the quality of student learning opportunities has been taken forward by establishing a Progression Support Team. The role has been further developed and redesignated as a Lead Personal Tutor, in recognition of the holistic nature of the support that students need when they are struggling to engage. An updated Student Support Action Plan, for Personal Tutors to use with students in tutorials, has also been developed. Recent data indicates that interventions and support have improved the performance and the attendance of students at risk.

8 The effective use of systems to provide constructive and timely feedback on non-examination assessments has been given strategic direction through the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, with staff development focused on the enhancement of assessment and feedback approaches, including use of online marking. USISC has reviewed and published a set of assessment principles and feedback guidelines which have been shared with all staff. A recent project in one department on student partnership in assessment and feedback has resulted in enhancements to the module handbook template which now incorporates more accessible information on forms of feedback. The revalidation of courses this year provides an opportunity to embed best practice in assessment and feedback in the curriculum, for example, integration of formative feedback, assessment preparation and tutorials to encourage reflective learners are a key focus for the development of module specifications and module handbooks for September 2018.

9 All admissions to USISC are managed centrally by 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, and are supported by documented working practices. Study Group's admissions practices adhere to the principles of fair admissions. Entry requirements are maintained by Academic Registry in a centralised database and set out in the Centre Specification. The Admissions team consult with the Centre concerning any exceptional or borderline cases, which are considered by the Director of Curriculum or nominee. Admissions staff are supported by a dedicated Visa and Accreditation Compliance team, which is led by a Director of Risk and Compliance. The students whom the monitoring team met from the International Foundation Year programme confirmed that the information that they received prior to arrival was accessible, accurate and sufficient. While students on the Pre-Masters Programme and International Year One said that they had expected more integration with the University, the monitoring team found that information on the website of both the University and the Centre was very clear. In order to ensure clear expectations, USISC may wish to ensure that this level of clarity is also reflected in the offer letter.

10 The robust processes for annual monitoring are set out in the Academic Handbook. The Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) is completed using the University pro-forma and incorporates: issues from the Centre Action Plan (CAP), comprehensive data sets on enrolments, retention and progression data, analysis of student feedback from surveys and the Student Council, external examiner reports and responses to them and reflective course self-evaluations. The AMR is peer-reviewed both by USISC colleagues and by University of Sussex staff through the Partner Annual Monitoring Review Event (PAMRE). All actions identified through the annual monitoring review process are incorporated into the CAP and progress is monitored and evaluated by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG). The recent restructure, creation of subject leader roles and the appointment of a Director of Curriculum, has enabled further analysis and reflection on the curriculum. Module assessment boards scrutinise the module reports and feedback from students. Where the need for change is identified, this is discussed at QAEG and feeds into the CAP. A further enhancement introduced in 2017, is a departmental self-evaluation carried out each semester by the Heads of Subject and reported to QAEG.

11 USISC has systems in place to enable the effective representation of the student voice through groups in the governance structure: the Student Council, the Student Experience Group and the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group. The Student Council meets regularly and the minutes of meetings provide evidence of staff listening and responding to issues. Questionnaires are used by the Provider to run surveys across the network; a post induction survey and a student experience survey. Additionally USISC uses questionnaires to gain feedback on modules. A recent review of the system has led to questionnaires being completed with Personal Tutors during dedicated sessions which has improved response rates. Analysis of the end-of-module questionnaires takes place in the Module Assessment Boards (MABs) and any issues identified are noted in the Subject Leaders' post-MAB evaluation report and included in the AMR. Mid-semester questionnaires have been introduced to give teaching teams the opportunity to act on feedback during modules so that current students can see the impact of the response to their feedback. Students are involved in validation events and meet with the validation panel as part of the process. In the most recent validation event students raised some issues about mixed ability classes for English, which have been responded to by agreement to develop a fast-track English module for students with higher levels of English language.

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

12 Study Group benchmarks its programmes of study (during initial development and validation and subsequent revalidation) 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 templates provided for the network require confirmation of this benchmarking. The USISC programmes and modules are designed to fit within the University's academic framework and the process for revalidation is set out in the University's Academic Handbook. This ensures that there is external involvement in the process, that content and learning outcomes are aligned with the FHEQ and that Subject Benchmark Statements are used in the development of courses for validation or revalidation.

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 Ms Julia Baylie, QAA Officer, and Ms Gillian Butler, QAA Reviewer, on 22 May 2018.

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557050
Web www.qaa.ac.uk