



Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: desk-based analysis of ACCENT International Consortium for Academic Programs Abroad, November 2021

Outcome of the desk-based analysis

1 From the annual return and documentary evidence, the monitoring team concludes that ACCENT International Consortium for Academic Programs Abroad (ACCENT) is continuing to maintain academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities since the November 2020 [Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight Review](#).

Changes since the last QAA review

2 ACCENT has 38 students enrolled in the UK for the fall 2021 programme in the current academic year 2021-22, operating within ACCENT-approved COVID-19 protocols and national guidelines. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that there were no students studying in the UK in any of the three semesters in the previous academic year 2020-21. One online module was run specifically for 23 students at the University of Southern California in spring 2021. ACCENT has potential enrolments for its UK spring and summer 2022 programmes that are subject to future approval by the partner US universities in the light of prevailing travel, health and safety circumstances.

3 The staff profile comprises the London Centre Director, a part-time senior programme coordinator and three programme coordinators. The full-time senior programme coordinator, a fourth programme coordinator and an administrator are being recruited to bring the staff in post back to the pre-pandemic numbers.

4 There have been no material changes affecting the provision since the previous November 2020 review visit.

Findings from the desk-based analysis

5 The review team concluded that ACCENT is continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher educational provision for its US partner universities. The London Study Centre has recently welcomed the first small cohort since 2020, using its comprehensive operational COVID-19 protocols to continue to provide holistic student support. It has undertaken developmental activities to strengthen student support by updating its website information and its Course Management System to facilitate online learning. An online course was developed and provided for the first time to students in the US and received positive student evaluation. ACCENT is taking strategic planning initiatives to broaden the portfolio of courses available to students in the UK and also in collaboration with a European US-accredited provider. Programme teams are working proactively to offer courses in new subject areas to attract more potential students from US partners. These initiatives, taken together, make a significant contribution to the learning experience of students and enhancement of the provision offered to US partners.

6 The previous review team identified one feature of good practice in the continuing holistic support for students, including through a rapid response to the COVID-19 pandemic, that allows a flexibility of approach to delivery enabling students to enjoy a high-quality

learning experience. Subsequently, ACCENT has completed an upgrade to its Course Management System to enable flexible e-learning and support online instruction training workshops to further enhance the student experience. There were no recommendations for improvement as part of the action plan.

7 The impact of the pandemic has been managed effectively by the ACCENT leadership which is proceeding cautiously to reintroduce its programmes. Current students are studying in London following the first easing of international travel restrictions and consultations with US partners. In the absence of students last year, ACCENT concentrated its efforts on developments to further underpin the maintenance of academic standards and enhancements to the quality of learning opportunities.

8 ACCENT has undergone some changes in its staff profile, largely as a result of furlough. Faculty and administrative posts are being filled as student enrolments increase, with three programme coordinators appointed recently. Significant new developments are in progress through a partnership with the Paris College of Art, a US-accredited institution. This initiative has the potential to provide a broader portfolio for students in Art and Design courses that are highly rated in US-study abroad programmes.

9 The Director of Strategic Development has updated the ACCENT brand with a new logo and enhanced website during the time that travel to visit US partners was prohibited. Further programme developments to improve the portfolio are in progress in: product development; marketing; institutional relations; and management administration and operations. ACCENT is in early discussions with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, which already contributes to the comparative healthcare courses, to expand provision in public systems. Another initiative is to work with Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) on further hybrid or direct enrol modules built on the existing arrangement where University of Southern California (USC) students are directly enrolled at QMUL. ACCENT has responded to a request from a US partner to develop a topical course - Climate Change in London.

10 The online course, Engaging Media in the UK, was delivered to 23 students in spring 2021, receiving positive student feedback during and at the end of the course. Students commented on the interesting contributions of guest lecturers and on the wider benefits of skills they developed through interactive classes during the course. Current students in London attend courses either under the direction of US faculty and with UK faculty, or at various university campuses including Westminster, Queen Mary, the LSE and Edinburgh. ACCENT provides pastoral care, student support services, cultural visits and excursions to enhance the study abroad in London experience. ACCENT remains committed to implementing the intention to provide a student written submission for QAA reviews when student attendance returns to normal.

11 ACCENT is working on an institutional aim to have an Academic Advisory Board (AAB), although progress has been delayed due to the impact of the pandemic and there is currently no start date for the Board. Operating independently of the corporate board, consisting of academic and administrative staff drawn from its strategic partners. The remit of the AAB is intended to review policies and procedures for local faculty hiring, health and safety, student assessment and course evaluation, and new programme and partnership models. A new Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) policy is available in the Management Handbook, with a nominated DEI officer.

12 The London team meets weekly to review programmes, identify actions for improvement and consider future developments. The Centre Director also communicates regularly with the Executive Director and central team members. An integral feature of the UK partnerships is the role of the Centre Director in networking with the various universities

involved in the study abroad programme and with similar providers in the immediate locality to share experiences and support the student learning experience. Since March 2020, ACCENT has developed webinars to inform and support student expectations of life and culture in London and pre-departure information.

13 ACCENT has effectively developed its own action plan for the future and is intending to implement key forward-planning initiatives. In January 2022, the delayed programme on Business and Entrepreneurship for the University of California is scheduled over 10 weeks, with an option to extend to a full semester with an internship or intensive course in Social Impact Entrepreneurship. A delayed European project for Washington University is comprised of a two-week London course in 2022.

14 ACCENT has an established system for managing assessed credit-bearing internships, with placement coordinators working to ensure that students are employed in appropriate organisations and are well supported. Students from some current US universities are permitted to work while in the UK through ACCENT sponsorship for Student Visas (previously Tier 4). Staff attend training and receive regular updates for visa sponsors, and achieved 100% UKVI Basic Compliance Assessment in enrolment and course completion in November 2020.

15 The anonymous evaluation of all course modules using paper copies in the penultimate teaching week results in higher response rates than online surveys. From the academic year 2021-22, student feedback forms include comprehensive evaluation of the course and the instructor, with the new feature of student self-evaluation as a reflection on personal development. The London centre has ensured that student cohorts contribute to quality assurance and enhancement in an effective and well-established system of student ambassadors. Student ambassadors are valued for their roles as representatives and in communicating at regular working group meetings with staff.

16 ACCENT has continued to improve aspects of the provision including an integrated approach to extra-curricular activities for all US partners. Site visits and guest speakers are assessed to ensure relevant contributions to course aims. Comprehensive classroom observations continue to provide feedback to faculty. All contacts with participating faculty, guest speakers, site tours and visits are logged on the internal database for future programme development purposes. ACCENT continues to network with members of the AASAP (Association of American Study Abroad Providers in the UK) and Independent Higher Education (IHE).

Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education

17 ACCENT continues to engage with reference points of its US partner universities for monitoring and evaluation of the study abroad provision leading to credit awards. US partners approve the hire of UK faculty for semester programmes and course syllabi for their students. The close relationships with the University of Westminster and Queen Mary University of London ensure reference to the revised Quality Code for Higher Education for policies and procedures for student support, achievement and engagement.

18 Continued membership of AASAP and the IHE, the Forum for Higher Education, and NAFSA: Association of International Educators in the US, provides further external reference points to support ACCENT in managing and enhancing the quality of study abroad programmes.

Background to the desk-based analysis

19 The desk-based analysis serves as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review/annual monitoring. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring process or review.

20 The desk-based analysis was carried out by Dr Elizabeth Briggs, Reviewer, and Dr Julian Ellis, QAA Officer, in November 2021. No meetings were held with students or staff, and the conclusions presented in this report are based on the analysis of documentary evidence submitted by the provider.

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