Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Bader International Study Centre, June 2017

Section 1: Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review panel concludes that Bader International Study Centre (BISC) has made commendable progress with implementing the action plan from the June 2016 Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight.

Section 2: Changes since the last QAA review

2 BISC continues to deliver undergraduate programmes to students of Queen’s University (Canada). Since the 2016 review, the Chairman of BISC Board of Trustees is the newly appointed Provost of Queen’s. The other significant change is the appointment of the new BISC Executive Director, who has considerable experience in senior academic leadership roles at Queen’s. Student numbers for 2016-17 are slightly down on those recorded in 2015-16, with 367 students enrolled during the current academic year compared with 408 last year.

Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

3 BISC has made commendable progress in developing the four features of good practice and two desirable recommendations identified in the previous review. With regard to the use of quality assurance and feedback processes to respond quickly and effectively to issues raised, BISC has developed more systematic strategies to strengthen further these processes. Introduced since the review visit, weekly meetings of the Deputy Academic Director and the Student Academic Representative include reviewing comments from students that require immediate resolution, and discussing longer term matters, which lead to improvements in communications with students. Students confirmed that prompt feedback had been given by staff last year on their concerns about some course grades. Two newly designed student surveys have already prompted changes in academic workshops and will be used to inform the annual Student Government report. The role of the Student Academic Representative has been enhanced, largely as a result of being given additional responsibilities and also having student representatives reporting to that person from the three academic streams.

4 BISC has implemented guidelines and observation procedures to build on good practice in providing experiential learning (EL) opportunities for students. The EL Office and the EL Committee have developed and approved strategies for formal faculty observations to improve effective EL practice. Monitoring of EL activities results in an evaluative termly report on progress. Summer programme students spoke enthusiastically about their participation in a wide range of EL activities. They commented on how much they value, and benefit from, exploring curriculum-related topics in the ‘real world’, and being able to write a reflective report on what they have learnt.

5 Further enhancements have been introduced to promote the engagement of faculty in an extensive range of staff development activities. The staff development programme has
strengthened links between academic and support services. Other key developments include the implementation of the new faculty resources website, and innovative student-led faculty workshops. Discussions between the BISC Teaching and Learning Group and Queen's University Centre for Teaching and Learning to develop and implement a BISC faculty teaching certificate programme are in progress. New faculty attend a training day on institutional policies and procedures, with workshops and an introduction to the new virtual learning environment (VLE).

6 The identified good practice in the comprehensive information provided for students before registration, after arrival, and for transition onto further study at Queen's University continues to be developed. BISC course information has recently been migrated onto a single, integrated site. For prospective students, Student Services has introduced individually designed campus visits and a meeting with the Academic Director. BISC has also continued its commitment to providing academic advice, support and resources to its students, including study skills, developing English language skills, and supporting improved academic performance through 'Bounce Back' remedial help. Annual visits by the University Associate Deans (Studies) provide students with the opportunity to review their academic standing and discuss degree programme options to ease the transition back to the main campus.

7 The 2016 review resulted in two desirable recommendations that have been addressed and implemented. As well as those procedures outlined in paragraph 3, the Deputy Academic Director has actioned two additional improvements to address low response rates to the student evaluation system for courses, programmes and the BISC student experience: all surveys have been reviewed to eliminate duplicate questions and multiple surveys have been reduced in number; and efforts have been made, as a BISC priority, to promote student engagement with feedback questionnaires that are completed during scheduled class time.

8 BISC has implemented the desirable recommendation to address variable practice by faculty in adhering to academic regulations relating to extenuating circumstances, late submission and assessment deadlines. There is now a clear policy for late submission of coursework in all course syllabi and on the website. BISC has reminded faculty of the need for compliance, including procedures for granting extensions for medical reasons. Students confirmed their awareness of the policy, although one example cited suggests that it is not yet fully embedded practice in the current short summer programme. BISC has also implemented the Queen's University Appeals website procedures to ensure consistency of treatment with students at the main campus. The Deputy Academic Director has recently reminded faculty about the need to provide appropriate levels of feedback on written assessments. The Student Academic Representative confirmed that quality of feedback has improved significantly, and current students testified to the timely and helpful feedback on their assignments.

9 Queen's University is responsible for the recruitment, selection and admission of students to BISC programmes, and publishes typical entry grade requirements. BISC continues to provide comprehensive information and support to applicants (see paragraph 6). BISC's high completion rates correlate with those of students returning to studies at the main campus, thus demonstrating both an effective admissions procedure and students' genuine intentions to study. English language requirements are determined and published by the University, with additional helpful BISC guidance on compliance with Tier 4 General Student Visa conditions.

10 Annual quality monitoring procedures are largely the responsibility of the BISC Curriculum Committee, with a considerable focus on the quality of the teaching and learning experience. Course syllabi are reviewed at the start of term, and professional development
advice is provided to faculty. BISC operates a formal, systematic process of classroom observations with written and oral feedback to faculty. Quality monitoring strategies are underpinned by the comprehensive evaluation of student feedback and the monitoring of well-developed EL opportunities (see also paragraphs 3-4). Queen's University has ultimate responsibility for setting and maintaining academic standards, with annual reviews conducted by its External Educational Committee and visits by Associate Deans (Studies). BISC's use of global University data shows that its students frequently outperform students who study at the main campus.

11 BISC has well-developed systems of feedback to ensure the engagement of students in its quality assurance processes (see also paragraphs 3 and 7). The Board of Trustees receives an annual report by Student Government on the overall student experience at BISC. The 2016 report is a very reflective and comprehensive account of the BISC learning experience, with helpful suggestions for future improvement. The External Educational Quality Committee seeks student contributions on their experiences of BISC programmes at open meetings and student focus groups. Students have access to a comprehensive programme of extracurricular activities to promote general and subject-specific enhancements, for example on diversity and inclusion, health services, BISC Science Week, a Festival of Ideas, student clubs and workshops.

Section 4: Progress in working with the relevant external reference points relating to academic standards and quality for higher education

12 BISC programmes and courses respond to the academic standards and quality frameworks of Queen's University, which are subject to review cycles using the quality code of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. Reviews of academic departments include assessment of learning outcomes and course-specific activities. BISC accesses main campus resources, for example course outlines, assessments and final examinations. The Academic Director provides updates to the Queen's Dean of Education for the new programme in Concurrent Education relating to academic, legal and practical arrangements for the unique UK delivery of teaching practice.

13 New faculty appointments at BISC are scrutinised by University heads of department and undergraduate chairs to ensure that the quality of candidates meets departmental expectations. BISC faculty are familiar with and, where appropriate make use of, the Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the updated Subject Benchmark Statements.

Section 5: Background to the monitoring visit

14 The monitoring visit 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. 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 visit or review.

15 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Lee Smith, QAA Officer, and Dr Elizabeth Briggs, review panel member, on 13 June 2017.