



Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Foundation for International Education, February 2023

Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that the Foundation for International Education (FIE) is making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the April 2022 [monitoring report](#).

Changes since the last QAA review/monitoring visit

2 The Foundation for International Education (FIE) has operated since 1998. It is a private, independent, non-profit international educational organisation, offering educational programmes for academic credit to students enrolled at accredited universities in the United States. FIE is based in London and also has provision in Dublin and Amman. FIE has a clear mission and set of underpinning values which guide all areas of its work.

3 FIE works with over 50 partner and affiliated colleges and universities. Partnership arrangements are formalised through the development of a Memorandum of Understanding. FIE also has two Schools of Record (Drexel University and Marist College). Most of the partner universities offer their own academic credit for the courses studied at FIE, but where this is not the case, the credit is awarded by one of the Schools of Record.

4 Student numbers have increased following the COVID-19 pandemic but have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels. Staffing levels have been maintained and are sufficient for the student enrolment.

5 There have been no changes since the review of 2021.

Findings from the monitoring visit

6 The monitoring team scrutinised the Annual Monitoring Return and the action plan, together with the supporting evidence submitted by FIE. Online meetings were also held with a small group of students and a group of teaching and administration staff. The monitoring team considers that FIE is making commendable progress in respect of the actions arising from the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight (RSEO) report of 2021 and issues arising from its own quality assurance processes.

7 The development of online internships identified in the original action plan is now less of a priority as students return to classroom-based teaching (paragraph 9). A survey of the staff appraisal policy has been completed with no further action indicated (paragraph 9). Actions identified from the organisation's own quality system include a series of webinars on High Impact Teaching Strategies (paragraph 12) and the amendment of the attendance and engagement assessment process together with accompanying staff development (paragraph 14).

8 In the RSEO Review which concluded in 2021, the review team identified the innovative and flexible approach to the continued development and delivery of programmes, and the provision of excellent and effective support for students and staff, since the start of the pandemic, as being good practice. The review team made no recommendations. Through its action plan, FIE has continued to enhance its innovative and flexible approach to the continued development and delivery of programmes, and the provision of excellent and effective support for students and staff.

9 One of the actions raised in the action plan was to develop further the promotion of online internships. Since in-person programmes have resumed, interest in online programmes has reduced but the organisation continues to offer the online version and may further develop it for students from other markets. As part of the response to the identified good practice, the second action was to assess operational needs to facilitate flexible options for staff. In 2022, a survey of administrative staff was undertaken by an intern to evaluate the current appraisal scheme. Following the report, FIE leadership decided that no changes were required but that the annual appraisal process would be reviewed again in 2023.

10 FIE has rigorous quality assurance processes which enable it to evaluate its systems and identify and develop opportunities for enhancement. Sources of student feedback include the Programme Feedback survey, conducted at the end of each FIE programme and Course Feedback for each individual FIE taught course. FIE also runs a Student Leadership Forum and a student focus group, which engages students in conversation about the programme, as well as their experience both inside and outside of the classroom. Not all students were aware of the means by which they could give feedback to the provider.

11 Student feedback is used to inform the Team Action Plans (TAPs) which are reviewed by the Chief Academic and Programme Development Adviser in conjunction with the Executive Director who monitor the completion of actions and inform the Teaching and Learning Committee of outcomes where appropriate. TAPs are created for all aspects of the provision including academic matters and administration. Actions are gathered onto a spreadsheet with clear indications of responsibilities, target dates, whether completed and the results of the actions taken.

12 Examples of actions that have been taken in response to FIE's internal monitoring systems include a series of webinars led by the Academic Faculty Director, the Field of Study Convenors and teaching staff on High Impact Teaching Strategies, feedback from which was discussed at the fall 2022 Teaching and Learning Committee.

13 At the spring 2022 Student Leadership Forum, an issue with poor internet access in the accommodation was raised by students. This was added to the TAP and resulted in the bandwidth available to students being tripled. Some students met at the visit mentioned that they still had difficulty with access to the internet in their accommodation.

14 Following discussion regarding the use of attendance and participation grades, it was determined that these should be reframed as attendance and engagement, a new rubric was created, and a training video made to support teaching staff in consistent, accurate marking. This was introduced in the fall 2022 session and positive feedback on its implementation was discussed at the fall 2022 Teaching and Learning Committee meeting.

15 Student recruitment was adversely affected by travel restrictions during the pandemic. During the summer and fall of the 2020 calendar year students were recruited to online programmes only. Of those students 98.4% were retained and all those retained were successful (100%).

In 2021, only three students did not complete their programme - giving a retention rate of 99% - and all online students completed their programme. Again, all students who completed were successful in their studies.

16 The calendar year 2022 saw a return to normal recruitment patterns across all programmes. Only three of these students undertook their programme online. The fall cohort of 2022 also saw the first recruitment of students to a new first-year programme with students studying with FIE in London for a full academic year. Retention in 2022 was high with 99% of students completing or continuing their studies, with success rates above 99% on individual subjects.

17 FIE note that the high recruitment of 2022 may have been due to pent up demand following the pandemic, and that combined with an expected demographic downturn in numbers of the university age population may mean that future recruitment is more challenging, although this is not considered to be problematic.

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

18 FIE works highly effectively with external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education. FIE is not a credit or degree-granting institution but instead works in partnership with United States universities and colleges to develop and approve courses and programmes and to award appropriate credit. As a study abroad provider, courses are designed to support students with credit towards the qualifications they will receive from their home institutions.

19 The organisation refers to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) in developing, improving and monitoring its provision. The QAA approach is embedded in its processes and procedures, notably within the Faculty Handbook and the Programme and Course Design, Development, and Approval Process. Both documents make specific reference to the Quality Code with the programme design process including direct reference to the Advice and Guidance: Course Design and Development 2018.

20 FIE actively engages with the Forum on Education Abroad, a US-based organisation focused on academic standards, and submitted itself to a Quality Improvement Plan (QUIP) review in 2008, and again in 2016. In 2020, the Forum decided to discontinue QUIP and waive Interim Report requirements. FIE recognition is valid until 2025 but no equivalent programme is set to replace the QUIP process. FIE staff will attend a conference organised by the Forum on Education Abroad in the US later this year.

21 FIE also engages with a number of other organisations to assure and enhance quality. Professional bodies and organisations that serve as their external reference points include ASET - the work-based and placement learning association; The Association of American Study Abroad Programmes UK (AASAP-UK); UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA); and UK National Information Centre for the recognition and evaluation of international qualifications and skills (UK ENIC (previously UK NARIC)). FIE uses these resources for guiding best practice, networking opportunities, training and conferences to keep their processes and practices up-to-date and in maintaining academic standards.

22 Examples of recent engagement with these organisations include: attendance at UKCISA immigration training and annual conference; UK ENIC is used to check the accreditation of US university partners; NAFSA holds an annual conference (US-based) which staff often attend in order to support connection with university partners; and AASAP-UK regularly delivers networking meetings with training sessions.

Background to the monitoring visit

23 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.

24 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Peter Hymans, Reviewer, and Dr Margaret Johnson, QAA Officer, on 8 February 2023.

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