



## **Foundation for International Education**

Recognition Scheme for Educational  
Oversight Review by the Quality Assurance  
Agency for Higher Education

June 2016

## About this report

This is a report of a review under the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the Foundation for International Education. The review took place on 14 June 2016 and was conducted by a panel, as follows:

- Dr Terence Clifford-Amos
- Ms Barbara Howell.

The main purpose of the review was to:

- make judgements about the provider's delegated responsibilities for the management of quality and improvement of learning opportunities
- draw a conclusion about whether the provider's public information is reliable
- produce a commentary on how effectively the provider discharges its responsibilities for academic standards
- report on any features of good practice
- make recommendations for action.

A summary of the [key findings](#) can be found in the section starting on page 2. The [context](#) in which these findings should be interpreted is explained on page 3. [Explanations](#) of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>1</sup> More information about this the review method can be found in the [published handbook](#).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us)

<sup>2</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=202](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=202)

## Key findings

The QAA panel considered evidence relating to the educational provision at the Foundation for International Education, both information supplied in advance and evidence gathered during the review visit itself. The review has resulted in the key findings stated in this section.

## Judgements

The QAA panel formed the following judgement about the Foundation for International Education:

- **confidence** can be placed in the Foundation for International Education's management of its responsibilities for the quality of learning opportunities.

The QAA review panel also concluded that the Foundation for International Education **satisfactorily** manages its responsibilities for academic standards in accordance with the requirements of its awarding partners.

## Conclusion about public information

The QAA panel concludes that:

- **reliance can** be placed on the information that the Foundation for International Education produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

## Good practice

The QAA panel identified the following feature of **good practice** at the Foundation for International Education.

- There is a wide range of opportunities for teaching staff to develop, share and adopt new and innovative practice (paragraph 2.15).

## Recommendations

The QAA panel makes the following recommendations to the Foundation for International Education.

The panel considers that it is **desirable** for the Foundation for International Education to:

- formalise the monitoring by the Senior Management Team of recommendations made by the Academic Advisory Board (paragraph 1.2).

## Context

The Foundation for International Education (FIE) is a study abroad provider based in London. It was established in 1998 as a private, independent, non-profit educational exchange organisation which offers academic year, semester, or summer study abroad programmes for undergraduate students enrolled in accredited institutions of higher education in the USA and elsewhere. Students may study at FIE for one full academic year; however, in most cases the provision covers one semester, or one summer for a four-year degree programme. FIE has centres in Kensington, London and in Dublin, and a partner centre in Amman, Jordan, where students participate in a dual-city peace and conflict resolution programme FIE delivers customised partnership and individual student enrolment programmes as well as educational and co-curricular excursions within and outside of the UK. It also offers a range of extracurricular excursions organised by its Student Life Team.

FIE's mission is to provide high-quality educational experiences for the global community and to show a commitment to developing creative learning environments towards an appreciation of the privileges and responsibilities of international citizenship, which is fostered through empathy between nations and people of diverse cultures. FIE also participates in various initiatives such as the National Union of Students (NUS) Switch-off Scheme for which it has won awards and the Service Internship provision, which acknowledges the contribution of non-dominant groups to the curriculum in an understanding of the roles and responsibilities centred around the holding of power and privilege.

FIE offers a range of programme structures. The semester programme is a 15-week duration programme, comprising a key course with two or three elective courses, divided into two phases. Students on this programme may be accompanied by visiting teaching staff, who may teach during the semester. The quarter programmes are shorter, and options include study, study and internship, and dual city. There are six quarter programmes on offer, suitable for institutions who operate a trimester system. Quarter programmes are also available to students from institutions with semesters. Currently, key experiential education courses and elective courses number more than 60. Elective courses are available in the areas of arts, literature and theatre, contemporary Britain, global business, global studies, history and politics, humanities and social sciences, media and communications, peace, conflict and social justice. The summer programme includes an International Internship and the course British Life and Culture.

On offer also are numerous bespoke or 'closed' programmes for US colleges and universities, which are available only to students from a single institution. These closed programmes operate both in the semesters and in summer. There are currently 26 full-time staff and nine part-time members of staff based at FIE's London office, and 70 contracted teaching staff.

Agreements with partners are made through Memoranda of Understanding. All partner universities and colleges are verified by the UK National Academic Recognition Information Centre according to the 'recognised institutions' database ensuring that they are accredited in their home country.

The inspection visit and report by the British Accreditation Council (BAC) in 2014 resulted in positive outcomes in all areas considered, as did the previous QAA review in 2012. The outcome of the most recent monitoring visit by QAA in 2015 was that FIE was judged to be making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its provision.

## Detailed findings about the Foundation for International Education

### 1 Academic standards

#### How effectively does the Foundation for International Education fulfil its responsibilities for the management of academic standards?

1.1 The responsibility for oversight of academic standards rests with the Senior Management Team (SMT) comprising the Chairman of the Board, the Senior Vice-President for Operations, the Chief Academic Officer, the Vice-President for Housing and Facilities, and the Chief Finance Officer. The SMT retains responsibility for major institutional decisions and for decisions with funding implications, and is responsible also for enforcing and monitoring staffing requirements, quality assurance measures, programme development, as well as follow-through on implementation and response to student and partner feedback.

1.2 The Academic Advisory Board (AAB), reporting to the SMT, provides input on programme development, quality and management, and programme outcomes, and offers advice on outreach and enrolment activity. Although the AAB produces a comprehensive set of minutes and recommendations which may be considered by SMT or dealt with outside its meetings, no formal reporting takes place at SMT to monitor progress on the recommendations. It would be **desirable** for FIE to formalise the monitoring by the Senior Management Team of recommendations made by the Academic Advisory Board.

1.3 Effective communication and oversight is further managed through four main committees (Admission Committee, Teaching and Learning Committee, Joint Committee, and Diversity and Inclusivity Committee) chaired by the Chief Academic Officer, and also by the Human Resources Committee chaired by the Senior Vice-President, the Marol Academy Committee for fund-raising activity chaired by the Acting Assistant Director of Student Life and additionally by a number of working groups.

1.4 FIE works in partnership with 57 universities and colleges in the USA to develop and approve courses and programmes that lead to the award of credit. There are regular visits by partners for the review of all aspects of FIE's academic provision. Formal approval for programmes comes from the Chief Academic Officer and from the individual partners which are themselves verified by the National Academic Recognition Information Centre (UK NARIC). FIE also has two Schools of Record (Drexel University and Marist College) which approve new courses proposed by FIE's course teams. The panel considers that FIE has in place appropriate mechanisms for the effective management of academic standards.

#### How effectively are external reference points used in the management of academic standards?

1.5 FIE makes use of a variety of external reference points to assist it in managing its academic standards. It has mapped its provision against the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and staff have participated in internal and external QAA activities. These sessions have provided a greater understanding of FIE's responsibility in assuring quality standards across course teams.

1.6 FIE makes use of a variety of external reference points to support its provision. It has accreditation from the BAC and from the Forum on Education Abroad, the US professional and academic standards agency. Other external referencing includes: the Association of International Educators (NAFSA); Diversity Abroad; the Association of American Study Abroad Programmes - UK; the Association for the Advancement of

Sustainability in Higher Education; the Accreditation Network UK; the UK Council for International Student Affairs; Study UK; the Association on Higher Education and Disability; and ASET, the work-based and placement learning association.

1.7 FIE has been accredited by BAC since 2006, and received a positive interim inspection report in February 2014. In particular the report found the course programmes are very well organised, student welfare is thoroughly monitored, and the quality of the teaching and learning in lessons overall is good. The report of the re-accreditation in April 2016 has not yet been published.

1.8 The Forum on Education Abroad carried out a Quality Improvement Plan review of FIE in 2008 and FIE expects to undergo a further review in September 2016. As a result of being part of this review, FIE has noted an improvement in meeting the Forum's standards and its staff have also benefited from attending conferences and the sharing of good practice.

### **How effectively does the Foundation for International Education use external scrutiny of assessment processes to assure academic standards (where applicable)?**

1.9 Assessment processes are based on systems used in the USA. All FIE course syllabi and assessment plans are approved by the partner institutions which award credit for their courses. FIE courses have assignment level outcomes that provide the criteria for individual assessment with a clear grading rubric for guidance to both teaching staff and students of what is expected for a given grade.

The panel concludes that the Foundation for International Education **satisfactorily** manages its responsibilities for academic standards in accordance with the requirements of its awarding partners.

## **2 Quality of learning opportunities**

### **How effectively does the Foundation for International Education fulfil its responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities?**

2.1 FIE's SMT and its Development Team, based in the USA, work collaboratively in programme development, aligned with the capacities of its partner institutions. The process for approval of major and minor modifications to courses is well-developed, and involves a proposer, the Director of Academics, the Chief Academic Officer, consultation and external feedback via a range of internal and external stakeholders, the Teaching and Learning Committee, the Academic Advisory Board, FIE's Development Team and overseas partners, as required. The process is signed off by the Chief Academic Officer and the Director of Academics. FIE exercises effective oversight of the drafting and approval of learning outcomes which are subject to approval by each partner as well as by FIE itself.

2.2 FIE has reliable systems for the development and regular evaluation of its courses and programmes. Each programme is reviewed termly, and an annual summary based on student feedback is produced by the Senior Vice President and Chief Academic Officer. Course reviews are tutor based and result in statistically-based commentary reports which are used by the Director of Academics to identify any issues of concern. The reports are based on student feedback from each course through forms completed on the final day of a class. Following the submission of grades and the processing of feedback, teaching staff are given the reports so that they can take student comments into account for future teaching.

## **How effectively are external reference points used in monitoring and evaluation processes?**

2.3 FIE's monitoring processes do not explicitly engage with external reference points. Nevertheless, FIE is registered with 15 national and international professional organisations, some of which have been influential and provide illustrations relevant to the process of monitoring and evaluation related to the quality of learning opportunities. For instance, the interim inspection carried out by the BAC in 2014 noted that FIE had made progress in implementing its recommendation to develop its range of pedagogic techniques.

2.4 The interim report of the QIP review carried out by the FEA remarks on the development of Writing Support Tutors, a scheme proven to be highly successful and effective over the past few years and strongly promoted throughout the term by the academic team and teaching staff via posters, emails and in social media. The Writing Support Tutor service received very positive feedback in the survey report for autumn 2015. According to teaching staff, the service is well-used, especially among year-one students and non-USA students. The service's Handbook is a very comprehensive support document. In support of this initiative, a programme of workshop-orientated lunchtime drop-in sessions commenced in January 2014. Senior managers outlined their views of the specific and wider benefits of the FEA, including its conference provision, and the identification and sharing of good practice in relation to provision for international students. Being based in the USA, the FEA can guide on relevant aspects of US law, on meeting US academic standards and also on developments in Europe. The evidence of wide engagement with external bodies enables FIE to adopt best practice in support of its international students.

## **How effectively does the Foundation for International Education assure itself that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced?**

2.5 FIE's awareness of the quality of its provision is largely based on student feedback about its courses and on teaching observations. In developing teaching and learning and assessing future potential, the Chief Academic Officer, the Director of Academics and Director of Administration and Academic Services meet to review student course feedback, teaching observation and administrative records, as well as timeliness in providing student feedback, grading profiles and teamwork. Feedback reports are used to inform future course delivery.

2.6 The Academic Office, in consultation with teaching staff, is responsible for ensuring that there is a clear academic and assessment plan, objectives, outcomes, readings and coverage of the appropriate and approved material for each course. Students confirmed that all academic requirements are consistent and clear, including syllabus content, learning outcomes and arrangements for assessment.

2.7 Open sessions are held twice yearly with the academic team to enable full discussion on the teaching and learning process. FIE's Professional Development Portal enables dissemination and sharing of information on a range of professional matters, industry updates, staff achievements, good teaching practice, resources and upcoming opportunities. Teaching staff confirmed that the portal is particularly valuable during peak time, for example in the autumn term, and that it provides an effective means of spreading information particularly to part-time staff. For new teaching staff who are being observed in class, the course convenor may monitor the quality and consistency of course materials on the virtual learning environment (VLE).

2.8 Work-based learning takes the form of internships for which negotiations begin prior to the start of term. FIE's Experiential Education Team in London reviews students' curricula

vitae, coursework and experience with a view to identifying an appropriate match with the needs of partner organisations; the team is also responsible for conducting risk assessments of potential placement providers. The arrangements for internships involve students outlining their learning objectives and documenting progress towards achieving them at mid-term and final performance appraisals and evaluation. Appraisals of student progress and achievement carried out by site supervisors have the additional benefit of informing the College about the success or otherwise of placements and whether adjustments or changes need to be made. The management of internships is thorough and effective in enabling students to assess their progress in actual workplace settings.

2.9 FIE assists its teaching staff in understanding and delivering learning outcomes by defining course-level learning outcomes and assignment-level learning outcomes that support the criteria for each individual assignment. Support for teaching staff to assist students in their understanding of learning outcomes is available through its Faculty Enlightenment Matinees and through a training video on FIE London's video-sharing page.

2.10 Academic assessments normally include essays, assignments and a mid-term and final examination. Examination questions are usually determined by teaching staff and are based on field trips and readings from specified texts as well as on material taught in classes. In order to verify the outcomes of assessments, FIE cross-marks students' work, and provides a template form to record the process and its outcome. Cross-marking as a moderation exercise does not lead to changes in marks awarded, but rather enables the course convenor to offer advice on the assessment process. FIE has sound policies for students on good practice in assessment and on academic integrity.

### **How effectively does the Foundation for International Education assure itself that students are appropriately supported?**

2.11 Across several levels, students are supported comprehensively throughout their independent, experiential learning, and through curricular and extracurricular activities organised by the Student Life Team, for instance by enabling students to benefit from the teaching potential offered by the experience of living and working in London. The Student and Residence Life teams provide a wide range of pastoral support, which includes medical and mental health provision, where and when required. Writing Support Tutors provide advice and support in academic writing and meet students on request to review assignments: the panel heard from teaching staff that their services are well used by students, especially those in the first year of their studies in higher education. FIE mentors support first-year students: feedback on their experience of the mentorship programme is used to inform monitoring of the quality of FIE's provision.

2.12 FIE takes a number of steps to provide a supportive learning environment for its students. Residence Life Supervisors are present at all FIE student residences, and are on hand in an environment designed for learners. Guides to London, composed by students for students, help to support a diverse population of visiting learners. Students are encouraged to make themselves at home in various aspects of British culture, and are able to access a variety of sports and other activities, and may take temporary membership of the Imperial College Student and International Students House. FIE provides a subsidy towards participation in a HOST UK homestay and students are encouraged to share their holistic experiences with FIE staff, towards assisting FIE in being responsive towards students' needs.



**How effective are the Foundation for International Education's arrangements for staff development in relation to maintaining and/or enhancing the quality of learning opportunities?**

2.13 Outcomes of student feedback inform consideration of the support and developmental needs of teaching staff. Lecturers participate in peer observation once every two years and additionally all new courses and newly-appointed lecturers are subject to observation. The Teaching and Learning Committee receives peer observation feedback, and is thus a critical avenue for developmental work in teaching and the disseminating of good practice.

2.14 FIE provides funding for staff who wish to pursue training and professional development - teaching staff cited examples of the use of this funding, including support for studying towards professional qualifications in teaching.

2.15 The twice-yearly open sessions, known as Faculty Enlightenment Matinees, for academic staff to air concerns and discuss issues were reported by teaching staff as being highly developmental and informative. These sessions are used for discussion of a range of learning and teaching matters including new technology and upgrades to the VLE; they are also used for facilitating drop-in sessions. FIE supports research and conference attendance and an Outstanding Teaching Award, as well as other projects or training which are perceived as beneficial to teaching or to pedagogic or subject specialist knowledge. The wide range of opportunities for teaching staff to develop, share and adopt new and innovative practice is **good practice**.

2.16 FIE involves teaching staff in the development of institutional policy. Teaching staff expressed the view that FIE is exemplary in giving opportunities to both full and part-time staff to contribute to the development of policy. Course Convenors are members of the Teaching and Learning Committee, which provides an opportunity for teaching staff to contribute to discussion and debate on proposed academic developments, initiatives, policies and procedures.

**How effectively does the Foundation for International Education ensure that students have access to learning resources that are sufficient to enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes of their programmes?**

2.17 The learning resources made available in London offer comprehensive support for students to meet learning outcomes. Students have access to learning resources online through their home institution's library and at Birkbeck, University of London, as well as public libraries. A media server for relevant programmes and films, and BFI Screen Online, to which FIE subscribes, are also available. Students are able to access a digital library from FIE's premises or from any of the FIE's residence halls through FIE's subscription.

2.18 Media resources include a set of daily newspapers, periodicals in the student common room, the Metrogate Study Lab residence, and access to the BBC news channel throughout each day.

2.19 Secure internet access is available at all FIE sites and at the Metrogate Study Lab. Classrooms are provided with dynamic technological teaching and learning aids, including whiteboards or smartboards, projectors, computers and sound systems. Independent learning is encouraged and enabled through various online platforms including the Virtual Student Lounge on the VLE, the FIE Media Site, and the FIE video-sharing channel.

2.20 FIE engages students in the review and enhancement of information technology resources. This is of particular importance to residential life. Students expressed varying

levels of satisfaction with the effectiveness of wireless access and with the adequacy of classroom facilities. In the spring 2015 feedback summary, more than 78 per cent of students agreed that the environment in Foundation House was conducive for learning. However, some criticism was levelled at the perceived lack of comfort found in the desk and chair provision and at the layout of the teaching rooms.

2.21 Students are generally in agreement that Foundation House provides an environment conducive to learning and they have access to suitable learning resources. The College provides and manages a range of supportive learning resources which enable students to pursue their learning outcomes.

The panel has **confidence** that the Foundation for International Education is fulfilling its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of the learning opportunities it provides for students.

### 3 Public information

#### **How effective are the Foundation for International Education's arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of information it has responsibility for publishing?**

3.1 FIE communicates information about learning opportunities through its website, VLE, social media and printed materials. The content of all public-facing information is reviewed annually and is the responsibility of the Director of External Communication. The Senior Vice-President for Operations holds the ultimate responsibility for the sign-off of all published information.

3.2 Students confirmed that they received clear and useful information about their programmes prior to departure from the USA, and FIE provided clear and accurate information about lesson plans, learning outcomes, assessment arrangements and internships.

The panel concludes that **reliance can be placed** on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the provider is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

## 4 Action plan<sup>3</sup>

Foundation for International Education action plan relating to the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight in June 2016						
Good practice	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date(s)	Action by	Reported to	Evaluation (process or evidence)
The review panel identified the following areas of <b>good practice</b> that are worthy of wider dissemination within the Foundation for International Education:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>there is a wide range of opportunities for teaching staff (faculty) to develop, share and adopt new and innovative practice (paragraph 2.15).</li> </ul>	FIE intends to examine how it can further this element of good practice.	FIE will take under consideration the following steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>promote more actively the Faculty Development Fund</li> <li>use FIE faculty in communicating our capacity to partners and potential partners</li> <li>consider the appropriateness of engagement with the Higher Education</li> </ul>	Spring 2017	Chief Academic Officer and Director of Academics	Senior Management Team via Chief Academic Officer	Survey faculty on how successful the opportunities that FIE offers are and what more they need or desire

10

<sup>3</sup> The Foundation for International Education has been required to develop this action plan to follow up on good practice and address any recommendations arising from the review. QAA monitors progress against the action plan.

		<p>Academy, its training and fellows programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>more actively use 'star' faculty to inspire others.</li> </ul>				
<b>Desirable</b>	<b>Intended outcomes</b>	<b>Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes</b>	<b>Target date/s</b>	<b>Action by</b>	<b>Reported to</b>	<b>Evaluation (process or evidence)</b>
The panel considers that it would be <b>desirable</b> for the Foundation for International Education to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>formalise the monitoring by the Senior Management Team of the Academic Advisory Board's recommendations (paragraph 1.2).</li> </ul>	FIE to make clear and transparent the monitoring of the recommendations of the Academic Advisory Board.	<p>FIE to create a template for the Academic Advisory Board minutes and recommendations that documents more explicitly the attention to the items and the outcomes of Senior Management Team discussions.</p> <p>FIE to re-evaluate the use of the terminology of Board and entertain 'Council' or similar.</p>	Spring 2017	Chief Academic Officer	Senior Management Team	Academic Advisory Board and Senior Management Team to feed into a discussion on the success of the template in adding clarity to the proceedings and follow up.

## Glossary

This glossary explains terms used in this report. You can find a fuller glossary at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/glossary](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/glossary). More details and formal definitions of key terms can be found in the [handbook](#)<sup>4</sup> for this review method.

**Academic quality** A comprehensive term referring to how, and how well, higher education providers manage teaching and learning opportunities to help students progress and succeed.

**Academic standards** The standards set and maintained by degree-awarding bodies for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

**Credit(s)** A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as 'numbers of credits' at a specific level.

**Enhancement** The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in QAA's review processes.

**Good practice** A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's review processes.

**Learning opportunities** The provision made for students' learning, including planned study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, and resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios).

**Learning outcome** What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

**Programme (of study)** An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

**Public information** Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

**Widening participation** Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

### QAA1722 - R5002 - Sept 16

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<sup>4</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=202](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=202)