



Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: American Institute for Foreign Study (UK) Ltd, monitoring report, April 2023

Outcome of the desk-based analysis

1 From the annual return and documentary evidence, the monitoring team concludes that the American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS) is continuing to maintain academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities since the [April 2022 review](#).

Changes since the last QAA review

2 There have been no significant changes in the programme structure, accommodation or staffing at AIFS since the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight review of April 2022. For the spring 2023 semester there were 272 (full-time equivalent) students enrolled. Current staffing comprises 18 full-time and 15 part-time faculty academic staff, supplemented throughout the academic year by a range of visiting faculty from partner US universities. There have been no significant changes to the type of provision offered by AIFS. The Senior Vice-President left post in April 2022 and was effectively replaced by the two Vice-Presidents.

Findings from the desk-based analysis

3 AIFS has succeeded in maintaining its position, providing an international study opportunity for overseas students. The four recommendations from the April 2022 review have been translated into successful actions, overseen by the Director of Academic Affairs. Particular focus has been on developing Canvas, the virtual learning environment (VLE). This has been significantly improved since the 2022 review following the COVID-19 period and is now audited to ensure its effectiveness and consistency.

4 The two areas of good practice identified in the April 2022 review have been further enhanced. Experiential learning has been extended to feature travel writing, visits to film festivals, museums, the London Assembly, and invitations have been extended to national figures as guest speakers. Post-Covid pedagogies have emerged as further good practice developments, resulting in efficient transition from in-person to online teaching. Quality assurance contact areas in all pedagogically-related activities cover course development and the maintenance of standards, VLE resources, assessment, grading and teaching. There are effective evaluative controls in all these areas. In harnessing all academic work to the American Qualifications Framework, AIFS also illustrates its effective engagement with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). The engagement is full and detailed. AIFS is successful in engaging with external reference points, including through its work with Fairfield University as the School of Record, the Board of Advisers, Academic Advisory Council and the external examiner.

5 Actions following advisable recommendations from the 2022 review concerning formalising the process for the approval, setting, marking and moderation of assessments, include enhanced assessment guidance for new courses being developed. The Director of Academic Affairs now has effective oversight of all assignment marking and moderation prior to feedback being given to students. Grade monitoring now takes place mid-semester with

follow-up recommendations made to faculty academic staff. Proposed grades remain undisclosed to students until final approval by the Director of Academic Affairs. Moderation is also undertaken by academics from the School of Record and includes scrutiny of syllabi, assignments and assessed work. Assessment processes are also scrutinised by the external examiner.

6 Actions have also been taken following the recommendation to ensure there is clarity of responsibility for learning opportunities in information provided for students in relation to the hybrid-delivery model, where teaching is online and in-person. These developments include extensive support for faculty members accompanying overseas students, provided by the Academic Director of Customised Faculty Led Programmes. Information and guidance are provided prior to departure from the US. The appointee to this newly-introduced role works closely with students and prepares them for the hybrid study model. Shared understanding of this teaching model has been supported through a range of staff meetings in spring 2023. Hybrid-delivery students have access to the same handbook materials through Canvas. Review meetings between the Senior Vice-President and hybrid-delivery students have also been scheduled.

7 The desirable recommendations from the 2022 review towards ensuring greater consistency in the use of the VLE - Canvas - and the provision of further training for staff to support the enhancement of student learning opportunities, are clearly set out in AIFS action plan 2022. Responsibilities centre on the Global Education Center (GEC) academic office, which now has a new appointee of Coordinator, who also has responsibility for developing expertise in the use of Canvas.

8 The inequity in the use of Canvas noted in the 2022 QAA review has been addressed by the Director of Academic Affairs. Quality and consistency audits are now being undertaken with the objective of further embedding learning opportunities. This work includes the formal recording and review of action planning, especially important for instructors whose work has been identified as benefiting from improvement. New training materials have been provided in the VLE. The external examiner commended the work being undertaken by AIFS in improving the effective use of Canvas as a learning tool. Class observation feedback forms provide an additional resource to check students' engagement with Canvas.

9 Progress has been made in further developing and embedding the deliberative processes for the oversight of learning opportunities and ensuring the formal recording and review of actions. Actions include ensuring that proposed modifications and subsequent approvals of syllabi changes are logged on a spreadsheet and shared with the School of Record, Fairfield University. Mechanisms for checking and processes for approval, setting, marking and moderation of assessments have been established. The Director of Academic Affairs now observes the teaching on every course in the GEC and offers evaluative commentary.

10 Feedback on all courses through student representatives and course evaluations are collected and reviewed, and responses are disseminated to faculty who are required to take account of proposed and approved changes.

11 Actions to embed and enhance the two areas of good practice identified in the 2022 review have been extensive. The responsiveness of academic and pastoral support has been supplemented by a pre-departure telephone interview which allows students to identify any additional needs they consider crucial to their academic success. Online and in-person mentoring services have been expanded and new training ensures students are directed to counselling services when needed. Student advisers are now resident in student accommodation and there is a week of activities focused on supporting student wellbeing.

Academic writing support sessions have been expanded and more experience is evident in the handling of academic appeals.

12 New forms of experiential learning and immersive learning have been included which feature travel-writing visits to film festivals, museums and the London Assembly. External speakers assist students in making connections between London and the world of work have been effectively incorporated. Speakers have included national figures from the media, senior police authorities and balanced political discourse on current national issues, such as the migrant crisis. The new academic coordinator and forums on best practice in experiential learning are helping students and staff in their quests for effectiveness and progress.

13 Post-Covid pedagogies have emerged as good-practice developments. There were no taught courses in London during the official COVID-19 period during which time students returned to the US. Online classes were limited but many teachers continued to develop online facilities during the pandemic and developed ideas and methods which would become beneficial after the pandemic. These new initiatives further progressed the dedicated development of, and commitment to, Canvas, which is emerging as an essential pedagogic tool and for the creation of courses and resources. Writing support, mentoring and faculty training is often held online through a variety of electronic platforms.

14 The quality review flow chart illustrates the main procedures for pedagogically-related activities, including course creation and the maintenance of standards, Canvas resources, and assessment, grading and teaching. Course development now focuses on the maintenance of standards involving rigorous drafting, scrutiny, revision and amendment prior to proposals being submitted to the relevant academic committee. Fairfield University also observes the teaching of all new courses. Course instructors create up-to-date online resources, which are subject to monitoring and approval by the Director of Academic Affairs. As a formative process, students can provide feedback before completing a full assessment in their course evaluations.

15 Assessment practices are monitored by the Director of Academic Affairs and by the School of Record in relation to guidelines and standards. Assessments are monitored by the Director of Academic Affairs and the external examiner, and take account of student comments. Feedback from the quality enhancement process is important for instructors' future assessment planning and practice. Grades are monitored and reviewed for consistency and academic standards before being released to students. The School of Record and the external examiner are involved in the monitoring and developmental process. The cycle of teaching evaluation includes student feedback, classroom observation by representatives from the School of Record and the teaching on all courses is sampled by the Director of Academic Affairs.

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

16 External reference points for AIFS include the School of Record (Fairfield University), the Quality Code, AIFS Board of Advisers, Academic Advisory Council and the external examiner. AIFS has made considerable progress in responding to the revised Quality Code. Expectations for standards have been met through engagement with the American Qualifications Framework, undertaken by the School of Record. AIFS fosters a growth mindset which stimulates its students to achieve beyond threshold academic levels. The School of Record ensures that standards are fully maintained. This is achieved through the inspection and revision of documents, visits to London, observation of teaching and approval of academic faculty staff. The School of Record and external examiner provide continuous external guidance, which includes annual review of all Core practices.

17 Expectations for quality are met through a range of measures. Strong support given to students with learning differences with funding available to support inclusivity. Internal and external quality assurance procedures ensure that AIFS delivers high-quality courses. Recruitment of well-qualified staff is consistently achieved through the interviewing processes by the Director of Academic Affairs and CV scrutiny by the School of Record. Resources and facilities are well maintained and up-to-date. Mentoring, counselling and academic support are available to all students who are cared for individually. Policies for complaints and appeals are in place. Core practices are reviewed every semester and students are fully involved in the assessment of teaching and learning.

Background to the desk-based analysis

18 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.

19 The desk-based analysis was carried out by Dr Terence Clifford-Amos, Reviewer, and Simon Ives, QAA Officer, in April 2023. 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.

QAA2762 - R13482 - May 23

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