Section 1: Outcome of the monitoring visit

From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review panel concludes that ACCENT International Consortium for Academic Programs Abroad (ACCENT) has made commendable progress with implementing the action plan from the May 2016 Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight.

Changes since the last QAA review

The addition of a range of Michigan State University Summer programmes directed by US home university faculty took place in 2016-17. ACCENT’s responsibilities include student welfare, scheduling, study visits, providing guest speakers, and accommodation.

A range of new software has enhanced communication between staff and organisational management and this allows staff to plan and track each programme, and has improved internal communication across European centres. An internally developed Course Management System (CMS), integrated with the ACCENT website London At Your Fingertips (LAYF), enables students to access key information and services.

Findings from the monitoring visit

The actions identified following the 2016 report have been addressed and the good practice further developed and embedded. ACCENT has built on the two areas of good practice and continues to provide highly effective and holistic academic and personal support for students. The planned sequence of visits supporting both the academic curriculum and the development of students’ cross-cultural awareness have been further assimilated into the teaching programme.

Building further on good practice, the Director and a member of adjunct faculty visited several partner universities in the US during the last year to meet students prior to their departure for ACCENT, and to provide an orientation and introduction to what they might expect. This activity has engendered in students and staff a deeper understanding of what they can expect on arrival at ACCENT. An Intercultural Sensitivity Programme has been developed and shared with other ACCENT European campuses. This programme provides a space for reflection and the management of expectations while students are studying abroad, and the development of students’ cultural awareness. The programme is run through a series of informal participatory workshops raising questions for students to reflect on while in London. All administrative staff and some faculty have been participants in training for this project.

The London centre Director took on a company-wide role as Institution Academic Manager working with partner universities across ACCENT European Study Centres. A new role of Assistant Director in London was created, supported by a Senior Programs Coordinator. At the time of the visit, the Director had given notice that she would be relinquishing her role, with the imminent appointment of a replacement.
7 Student evaluations are positive in relation to the cultural sensitivity programmes, and also more generally about students' experience at ACCENT. A new programme evaluation form has been adopted by ACCENT for use throughout its European study centres. The form is specifically designed to encourage student reflection and allows for automatically tabulated results. This saves considerable managerial time and provides summary information for use in enhancing future development of programmes.

8 Details of required reading and schemes of work are made available online for students before departure from the US. This allows for preparatory reading and study and students confirmed the accuracy of this information. Students find the induction and orientation process in London effective, and are very positive about the experience provided. Students understand who they should speak to about both academic and pastoral issues. They appreciate the positive interaction between academic and support staff. ACCENT continues to use a system of student ambassadors to provide a place for student feedback. Depending on the size of the group, up to five volunteers are selected to represent the student body. Over a series of lunch meetings throughout the semester, students are asked about all aspects of their experience, both administrative and academic, and action is taken to address any concerns.

9 A planned sequence of visits supporting both the academic curriculum and the development of students' cross-cultural awareness continues to be assimilated into the teaching programme. This activity, which builds on previous good practice, comprises visits by students to relevant external venues and events and class discussions. Staff make great efforts to secure relevant and engaging guest speakers on a range of subjects, which not only enhances students' academic development, but also their cultural experience. These events in turn stimulate debate and have led to an informal arrangement with the Institute of Ideas, whereby further guest speakers are identified and invited to participate.

10 Through discussion of potential new courses with faculty academic staff at Queen Mary University of London, members of ACCENT staff have gained insights into student recruitment and admissions, curriculum and programme development, and other issues relevant to the UK higher education sector. These interactions have led to a deeper understanding by ACCENT staff of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) and its expectations.

11 An initiative for all ACCENT staff in 2016-17 has been more structured staff training and development. Adjunct faculty staff receive induction and training and have access to some professional development funds, and are encouraged to engage with discipline-specific staff development through their main employer. Adjunct staff consider that the recent more stable staffing base at ACCENT has led to greater interaction between themselves in campus-wide debates and discussions, and in engagement with support staff. These activities have, in turn, led to a greater feeling of collegiality. Development and review activities have been supported by new staff communication and management tools, which enable coordinators to have a greater overview of programmes and allows for inter-communication between staff. All members of staff now plan and track each programme using an online task management system.

12 Staff are encouraged to attend events organised by the Association of American Study Abroad Programmes (UK) and the independent higher education providers group, and provide a report of the activity at the weekly staff meeting. Activities have included staff development on mental health issues.

13 Class observations have been formalised using a standard template, with Programme Coordinators attending a session of each class in the early part of a semester, and compiling a brief report. Programme coordinators then meet the Director or Assistant
Director, with any potential concerns leading to a follow-up observation and discussion with the relevant staff member. Adjunct faculty consider the classroom observation process to be beneficial and developmental.

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

14 ACCENT continues to work with a wide range of partners and with relevant external reference points to which US home universities are subject, as well as the Quality Code. ACCENT programmes are either designed by US universities or developed to meet their specific requirements. The large pool of partner universities has been widened with the opening of the Michigan State University programmes. Successive reviews of ACCENT by its partner universities have been positive.

15 ACCENT has previously taken some account of the expectations of the Quality Code but is now working with Queen Mary University of London, with the intention to develop joint future programmes. This activity has enabled staff to have greater engagement with the Quality Code and in particular *Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval* and *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*. Additionally, ACCENT has explicitly developed its partnerships with reference to the expectations of the Quality Code, particularly *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others*. A number of adjunct staff also work at other UK higher education providers and are aware of the expectations of the Quality Code through these links.

5  **Background to the monitoring visit**

16 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.

17 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Simon Ives, QAA Officer, and Professor Christopher Gale, review panel member on 9 May 2017.