



Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of ACCENT International Consortium for Academic Programs Abroad, November 2022

Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the online monitoring visit, the review team concludes that ACCENT International Consortium for Academic Programs Abroad (ACCENT) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [November 2021 Recognition Scheme for Education Oversight monitoring visit](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 ACCENT has enrolled a total of 180 students on its fall programmes during the current 2022-23 academic year. Students are enrolled on a range of eight programmes lasting between 19 and 117 days and associated with six different sponsoring universities. ACCENT report that numbers have now returned to pre-pandemic levels.

3 Two new programmes were developed and launched recently and have now enrolled students. One with the University of California Education Abroad Program on Business and Entrepreneurship; the second developed with Washington University in St Louis on the Business of the Arts.

4 ACCENT has been successful in bidding for the 2023-25 contract with Michigan State University for their portfolio of summer courses in London.

5 Staffing levels have also returned to pre-pandemic levels. ACCENT staff now include four programme coordinators, two senior programme coordinators, a part-time administrator and the Centre Director. In addition, a range of visiting speakers and experts are integral to delivery of the programmes.

Findings from the monitoring visit

6 The outcome of this monitoring visit was reached after reading the Annual Monitoring Return and the accompanying evidence, and holding online meetings with the senior staff, including the Centre Director, and with a group of students drawn from different cohorts and study areas.

7 The monitoring visit in November 2021 noted that the College had continued to develop the good practice identified by the review team in 2020 by strengthening its holistic support to students. Subsequently, ACCENT has made further progress with both personal and academic support with the introduction of further webinars, grading criteria and the development of a Learning Hub.

8 Students confirmed that they were able to access information regarding their programmes and accommodation before leaving for the UK but suggested that some information could be more timely in advance of departure, including more detail on the facilities at the accommodation so that they could prepare more fully in advance. Orientation

events during the first few days of the programme were considered useful although students noted that more time during the first week to get familiar with their new surroundings would be helpful.

9 Specific academic support is provided for students directly by their tutors, who are available at well-publicised times and via email. Generally, feedback on assessments was considered useful, thorough and timely, although in the student meetings it was reported that some students reported a more mixed experience. Non-academic support is provided by ACCENT staff both at the centre and at the accommodation. Students indicated that ACCENT staff are helpful and provide face-to-face and online support for student wellbeing. However, the monitoring team heard that support at placements is less well developed as currently the placements are managed via a third-party organisation and students sometimes find this difficult to navigate. ACCENT is currently recruiting for an internship manager who will have overall responsibility for the placements in order to ensure a more consistent experience for all students.

10 Following advice from sponsoring universities, ACCENT staff now have access to a number of different plagiarism-detection applications for use if they have any concerns regarding authenticity of a student's written work. ACCENT has not instituted a policy of comprehensive checks as assessments are individualised, based on their placement work experience and, as yet, no instances of plagiarism have been identified.

11 ACCENT has a well-developed system for the monitoring of all aspects of their programmes and student involvement in the development and enhancement of the programmes is well established. Staff monitor all classes and visits, and observe lessons delivered by external speakers. These are recorded in their management information system and used to inform planning of future programmes. Students complete comprehensive qualitative and quantitative evaluation forms at the end of each course of their programme. These are analysed and discussed within the programme teams. Comments requiring attention are flagged up for further action. Sponsoring universities have access to these survey results and some undertake their own evaluations.

12 Student ambassadors are selected for each cohort and meet regularly with programme coordinators to raise and discuss any issues put forward by their student cohort. Students felt that this process would, in general, enhance the experience of the next cohorts to study in London. For example, staff were able to confirm that the process had improved the experience of at least one group whose timetable was adjusted to include a formal break during their three-hour session. Comments made by students, both at staff-ambassador meetings and informally, were actioned and feedback provided.

13 Following an internal review during the summer, ACCENT has amended their grading criteria. The new system helps with greater consistency between courses, feedback to students and to support the academic appeals process. The new criteria were explained to students during their orientation and are published in the London Academic Handbook and referred to in the programme handbooks. Students appreciated the detail within these handbooks and consult them regularly, including for assessment deadlines.

14 ACCENT maintains an active action plan, prominent in which is the development of an Academic Advisory Board. The development of the Board has progressed with a provisional charter currently under discussion with partners and waiting for formal approval. It is anticipated that this will be published at the industry conference in Seattle in spring 2023 where the inaugural meeting will take place. ACCENT anticipate the Board will provide externality to support the development of new policies and procedures.

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

15 ACCENT works closely with its sponsoring universities to ensure that their standards are consistent, especially for those programmes studied in the UK which are credited as part of the student's overall programme. The content of each programme and the appointed tutors are approved by the sponsoring university. When developing programmes, procedures and processes, ACCENT also refer to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) to ensure that it is also compliant with its expectations. Staff commented that there is considerable overlap between the requirements of the Quality Code and the sponsoring universities. ACCENT are sponsors for the visas of their students and received an excellent compliance result in their November 2021 UKVI Basic Compliance Assessment.

16 ACCENT has an active involvement with the Association of American Study Abroad Providers, with a senior staff member now taking up a position on the board. ACCENT are also members of the Forum on Education Abroad, the Institute of International Education, and Diversity Abroad in the US which enables them to compare their educational offer with similar providers and to benchmark their provision.

Background to the monitoring visit

17 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.

18 The monitoring visit was conducted by Sue Miller, Reviewer, and Julian Ellis, QAA Officer, on 22 November 2022.

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