



Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of American Institute for Foreign Study UK Ltd, April 2019

Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review panel concludes that the American Institute for Foreign Study UK Ltd has made acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the April 2018 [Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight](#) review.

Changes since the last QAA review

2 The American Institute for Foreign Study UK Ltd (AIFS) enrolled 433 students in the summer 2018 programme; 197 in the autumn 2018 programme; and 270 in the spring 2019 programme. The total enrolment of 900 students across the three 2018-19 programmes was a modest decrease from the student number last year. Changes since the 2018 Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight (RSEO) review include the appointment of a new Chair of AIFS. There have, however, been no changes in the management of the AIFS Customized Faculty-Led division. AIFS has purchased a building as the lease of the current building is due to end in 2020. AIFS plans to move into the new premises at the end of 2019.

Findings from the monitoring visit

3 AIFS has made acceptable progress in developing the two features of good practice and one desirable recommendation identified in the 2018 RSEO review. With regard to the good practice in the support provided to students and faculty, further information has been supplied to students and there has been some additional student feedback, although response rates are variable. In relation to the second area of good practice - training for staff to support an increasingly diversified range of students - this training has been designed and delivered to AIFS London management and support staff but not to adjunct and visiting faculty. With regard to the desirable recommendation to share good practice between adjunct and visiting faculty, while not all actions have resulted in communication between the two groups, the recent introduction of breakfast meetings has been well received by faculty. AIFS was the Top Rated Study Abroad Organizations of 2018, rated by Go Abroad award.

4 The good practice in supporting students and faculty, highlighted in the 2018 RSEO review, has been continued and is monitored. Following students' requests, all students are now escorted to their classroom in the first week and homestay students are provided with personalised directions to the study centre. Students are provided with a London Student Handbook and identity card, and all students attend an orientation session and study the British Life and Culture course (BLC). Following feedback from a UKVI review in February 2018, AIFS has reviewed certain internal processes and created clearer procedures and instructions for staff. There is an internship handbook that includes details of Tier 4 Student and Sponsor Responsibilities. This includes a table to ensure students provide the necessary information to AIFS to comply with UKVI requirements. AIFS provides guidelines to its internship sites and ensures that documentation and criteria have been checked before a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies is issued. Supervisors at companies offering an internship, sign to confirm that students are unpaid, that they do not replace an employee position and that they do not have a contract of employment. Students are required to sign

the code of conduct, to complete evaluations of internship and to record their internship hours.

5 Student representatives are appointed to solicit feedback from other students and the Programme Director holds a focus group with students from each programme. In addition to student representatives, AIFS has created ambassadors and managers told the review team that students who receive financial scholarships are allocated to this role. The review team was not able to meet any ambassadors, and faculty and students were unfamiliar with the role. The early bird questionnaire, previously targeted at homestay students, has been extended to all students. The response rate is low; senior staff report that only students with complaints respond and electronic collection lowers response rates. Each client University collects feedback from the courses in their programme and AIFS collects feedback on adjunct faculty classes. Internship opportunities are also evaluated, however, the response rate is low.

6 Co-curricular activities are focused on British and European culture and visits. There is a cultural calendar for each semester and a cultural workshop. The BLC course is co-curricular in nature and offers linked activities; students report that it provides a political, cultural and social context for their learning. There is an AIFS Risk Management and Incident Response Plan and all students receive details of the AIFS insurance cover. Students are provided with an emergency phone number and there is a duty officer available 24 hours a day to receive the calls. There is also an app for students to use in such a situation.

7 The AIFS action plan aims to support an increasingly diverse group of students by offering staff development on the topic of diversity and inclusion. AIFS has a new five-year 'Strategic Plan: Diversity Abroad Forward 2019-2023' that focuses on widening participation to overseas travel programmes. By improving support, AIFS aims to increase the recruitment of a wider range of students. This training has been delivered to AIFS London management and support staff to guide them in supporting students. The staff who have participated in this training have reviewed it post-delivery and at their annual appraisal. Adjunct and visiting faculty have been supplied with documentation on how to support diverse students but they have not been offered any training. One member of support staff has attended training sessions on students' mental health and started to offer a peer-to-peer support group for students, entitled Time Out Tuesday. Students report that this opportunity is valuable and the deliverer indicates that the early sessions are useful in helping students to settle in. Additional information is now provided to prospective students including advice regarding the safety of certain groups of students travelling to different countries.

8 In response to the desirable recommendation to formalise the approach to the sharing of good practice in teaching and learning between adjunct and visiting faculty, the action plan lists three actions: a mandatory orientation meeting; a faculty handbook of procedures and best practice; and mid and end of semester review meetings. A mandatory orientation meeting was introduced in January 2019 and visiting faculty attended this, however, it proved difficult for adjunct faculty to attend and they, instead, received summaries of the information. A Faculty Handbook is in place for visiting faculty for some time and, in spring 2019, a tailored handbook for adjunct faculty was produced and distributed. A monthly newsletter is circulated to all support staff and faculty. There are regular faculty meetings for each course and faculty who teach the course attend together with management and support staff. Considering most courses are taught by either visiting faculty or adjunct faculty, although these meetings provide an opportunity to discuss students' concerns and organisational matters, they are less effective in facilitating interactions between adjunct and visiting faculty.

9 Although not listed in the action plan, a series of monthly early morning meetings has been introduced. Following the decision to hold these discretionary meetings in an informal environment and provide breakfast, there has been good take-up. Visiting and adjunct faculty confirmed that this was a valuable opportunity to discuss the rapidly changing political situation, to which visiting students and staff are exposed, and share good practice. Adjunct and visiting faculty indicate that AIFS management and support staff provide them with a high level of support; breakfast meetings have made a promising start and the BLC course facilitates interaction between faculty.

10 Prior to initiation of the admissions process by the client University, AIFS provides information about its programmes. The client University checks the student's Grade Point Average, English language competency and study abroad intentions. AIFS inspects the applicant's passport, personal statement, confirmatory letter from the US and tests English language level, where necessary. Internships provide credit towards the client University's programme and the process for internship completion must comply with the requirements of the client University. There was a recent visit by a member of the internship team to a client University to interview students to assess them for internship.

11 The academic procedures and policies of the client University are applied with regard to student assessment. Where the syllabus and assessment from the client University is used, this is shared with adjunct faculty. In some cases, there is a partnership between the adjunct faculty and the client University to create the necessary syllabus and assessment. Students from a range of programmes reported that assessment methods reflect those on campus and include clear marking criteria and academic integrity guidelines. Feedback times on assessments vary; students found them satisfactory. Suspected academic malpractice is dealt with by the client University.

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

12 Partner US universities award credit to students during their visit abroad and AIFS regularly checks each client University's accreditation status against the Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs. Senior staff from the client University visit London to meet AIFS staff and students, observe classes and visit central London accommodation and homestay locations in the wider conurbation. AIFS has developed a set of standards using the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Forum of Education Abroad Standards and NAFSA: Association of International Educators guidelines. The latter are regularly monitored by the Director of Assessment in the US. These standards cover seven areas that include academic standards and student learning and development. There is an international AIFS Board of Advisors that meets annually to discuss standards.

Background to the monitoring visit

13 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.

14 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Yue Song, QAA Officer, and Dr Jenny Gilbert, review panel member on 16 April 2019.

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