



Bader International Study Centre

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

November 2020

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 Bader International Study Centre. The review took place on 1 June 2020 and was conducted by a review team, as follows:

- Dr Helen Corkill
- Professor Alan Jago.

The main purpose of the review was to:

- produce a commentary on how effectively the provider discharges its responsibilities for academic standards
- make judgements about the provider's delegated responsibilities for the management of quality and improvement of learning opportunities
- 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 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 3.

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

The impact of COVID-19

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the review of Bader International Study Centre was subject to an interim outcome in May 2020 and was concluded in November 2020. The review was conducted online and included meetings with senior management teams, teaching staff and students. The scope of the evidence considered, and the nature of the judgements and operational milestones have remained the same but with some adjustments due to the online format. A risk assessment was carried out prior to the review to identify and mitigate any potential risks. Annual monitoring will resume in 2021-22.

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us

² www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/guidance/rseo-handbook-for-providers.pdf

Key findings

The QAA team considered evidence relating to the educational provision at Bader International Study Centre, both information supplied in advance and evidence gathered during the visits of the review itself. The review has resulted in the key findings stated in this section.

Judgements

The QAA team formed the following judgement about Bader International Study Centre.

The team concluded that:

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

The QAA review team also concluded that the provider **satisfactorily** manages its responsibilities for academic standards, as set out in its contractual arrangements with its academic partners.

Good practice

The QAA team identified the following **features of good practice** at Bader International Study Centre.

- Staff development and pedagogic support for online learning provided over the summer, initiated by Queen's University and fully engaged with by BISC in preparation for delivery in September.
- Application of new practices, online pedagogies and technologies in the autumn term appropriate to support and enhance remote learning.
- Development of the Virtual Experiential Learning Opportunities (VELOs) to provide an engaging substitute for the experiential learning components of the residential programme.

Context

The Bader International Study Centre (BISC) is situated in Herstmonceux Castle in Hailsham, Sussex. It is one of a group of international study centres of Queen's University in Ontario, Canada. BISC offers residential study abroad opportunities for undergraduates of Queen's University, usually for one or two terms. Their studies at BISC form part of the undergraduate programmes they are studying at Queen's and carry credits towards achievement of Queen's awards. All programmes and assessment are designed by Queen's University and are part of their portfolio of programmes. They are identical to programmes offered at the main Ontario campus and other overseas centres but with some UK-centric elements and are subject to the same academic quality assurance. Queen's University is responsible for maintaining the academic standards of its awards. Queen's University and BISC operate within the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. The Vice-Provost of BISC is Chair of the External Education Quality Committee and reports directly to the Provost of Queen's.

Summer 2020 provision was cancelled due to COVID-19 travel restrictions with online provision offered thereafter. Similar restrictions are in place for the fall and winter terms.

Detailed findings about Bader International Study Centre

1 Academic standards

How effectively does the Centre fulfil its responsibilities for the management of academic standards?

1.1 The Bader International Study Centre (BISC) fulfils its responsibilities for the management of academic standards effectively. All courses deliver Queen's University credits towards degrees studied on the main campus. Students who come from partner universities transfer credits towards degrees at their home institutions under interuniversity agreements.

1.2 Academic regulations are well understood by staff, and are applied consistently through reference to Queen's policies and procedures. Adherence to academic regulations is monitored by the Deputy Academic Director.

1.3 The BISC follows the thorough curriculum development approach as required by the University. Detailed syllabus outlines and assignment guidelines are provided and intended learning outcomes of all courses are stated clearly. The BISC Curriculum Committee monitors academic matters systematically and considers feedback from curriculum initiatives. Some of the termly meetings focus on specific areas of curriculum, such as experiential learning and consider continuing reviews in each of these areas.

1.4 Teaching observations are undertaken regularly and extensive feedback is provided to instructors. For this academic year, BISC has adopted the new online Queen's Survey of Student Experience of Teaching (QSETT) as a replacement for the University Survey of Student Assessment of Teaching (USAT) forms used previously. Rather than being a formal assessment of an instructor's teaching ability, QSETT addresses students' direct experiences of the learning environment, including the online environment and the Experiential Learning Opportunities. Analysis of the BISC Student Satisfaction Survey indicates a general increase in student satisfaction across all areas except classroom provision.

1.5 After the initial lockdown and cancellation of the summer term due to COVID-19, BISC made the decision to maintain all provision online for the fall and winter terms. Changes to working practices brought about by COVID-19 have resulted in closer liaison between BISC and Queen's University. Working collaboratively with the main campus, BISC has taken care to ensure that the academic standards of courses delivered remotely continue to be managed effectively. This is monitored in faculty meetings and overseen by the Vice-Provost (Teaching and Learning).

1.6 Queen's University developed serious concerns with remote proctoring services and instructors were encouraged to assess learning outcomes using methods that did not rely on traditional examinations. Instead, courses administered by BISC have used a variety of assessment methods including open-book examinations, 24-hour extended essay questions, final projects or cumulative assignments. Random issue of questions is used and students submit work through text-matching software. Students met by the team remotely confirmed that, whatever the mode of assessment, assessment tasks were generally clear and that supporting information was provided online. Assessment feedback is provided for all assessments and is personalised.

1.7 In order to maintain and manage academic standards, staff engage with a wide range of continuous professional development opportunities. This became of paramount importance in the change to remote delivery and assessment. BISC engages regularly with

the pedagogic activities and materials of the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at the home campus, and provides follow-up support and monitoring from staff at BISC. As delivery for the summer term was cancelled, staff had the opportunity to engage fully with Queen's University's developmental activities in online pedagogies and associated technologies. The way in which BISC has adopted, embedded and monitored these is considered to be **good practice**.

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

1.8 BISC works effectively within the same external reference points as Queen's University, including the framework of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO). HEQCO is the primary focus of alignment for BISC's new courses. BISC adheres to the Queen's Learning Outcomes Framework, which is based on the HEQCO framework, and which aligns to the requirements of the Council of Ontario Universities Quality Council. Science classes subscribe to Pearson Education global online learning systems for both materials and assessment.

1.9 BISC references the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). It adopts the Core practices within the Expectations for standards and quality, as relevant to accepted practices within Ontario and Queen's University. BISC also recognises the similarities between the Quality Code and the quality enhancement structures advocated by the Centre for Teaching and Learning at Queen's University.

How effectively does the Centre use external scrutiny of assessment processes to assure academic standards (where applicable)?

1.10 In keeping with practices at Queen's University, assessment processes at BISC are not subject to external scrutiny beyond the University. BISC applies the grading systems as set out in the Faculty of Arts and Science Grading Policy. The grading process is made transparent to students through assignment guidelines, and grading rubrics are used for consistency. Each department establishes its own marking policy, and tutors calculate final course averages. There is no routine internal double marking or moderation for smaller-scale assessments. Where there is team teaching, larger assignments are double marked and there is internal moderation of marks. Moderation is undertaken by reviewing rubrics and grades on a termly basis, and main campus heads of department review these, comparing them with those of the main campus cohort.

1.11 Grades are also reviewed by the Curriculum Committee. The move to remote delivery and assessment has brought about greater scrutiny of assessment by the main campus. Grades are also reviewed by the Curriculum Committee. A formal appeals process for assessment grading is covered under the Queen's University regulations. Grades are reviewed by the Deputy Academic Director, and then by the Heads of Department on main campus who authorise their release to students. In the past, BISC used to send histograms of grade distributions to main campus departments, but that is now all done on their management system 'PeopleSoft'. The BISC Academic Secretary uploads grades to PeopleSoft after they have been verified in house, and then the Heads of Department check and release them.

1.12 The Queen's Provost's Office provides the highest level of oversight of provision and the Vice-Provost (Teaching and Learning) holds regular meetings with the Vice-Provost and Executive Director (BISC) and the Academic Director. The annual visit by Queen's University External Educational Quality Committee considers assessment within the scope of its external audit of academic quality.

The team has concluded that Bader International Study Centre **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 Centre fulfil its responsibilities for managing and improving the quality of learning opportunities?

2.1 Responsibility for managing and improving the quality of learning opportunities rests with BISC through the day-to-day running of its programmes. This is monitored by both BISC and Queen's University. The External Educational Quality Committee (EEQC) of Queen's University visit BISC annually and monitor and evaluate the quality of learning opportunities in a report to Queen's. BISC is required to respond to these reports, outlining any actions as a consequence of its findings and a detailed response document is provided.

2.2 BISC is responsible for the provision of teaching facilities and learning resources, accommodation, and academic and student support for programmes. All the courses, and any changes to courses, have to be approved through the Queen's Curriculum Committee process. This considers the relevance and appropriateness of the learning resources available for the teaching of the course.

2.3 The unusual circumstances of March 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulted in the return of all students to Canada and the cancellation of all classes in the summer term. It was decided by Queen's that all autumn term courses would be delivered online for BISC students. In order to prepare for this, all staff were given staff development and pedagogic support for online learning over the summer, initiated by Queen's University and fully engaged with by BISC in preparation for delivery in September. The review team considers this preparation and support **good practice**. The courses delivered in the autumn term have made full use of the technologies available and have received favourable feedback from students.

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

2.4 BISC uses the same external reference points as Queen's University. The framework for Queen's is that set by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. All courses offered at BISC are variants of main campus courses, with the exception of BISC 100 and BISC 101. All courses, including the two BISC courses, are fully integrated into the academic plans of the main campus departments.

How effectively does the Centre assure itself that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced?

2.5 The principal way that BISC uses to assure the quality of teaching and learning is by means of using well-qualified and experienced teaching staff. Teaching is monitored in a number of ways. This includes classroom observation, student evaluations and faculty meetings. BISC has been using the Queen's USAT system of student feedback which gives collective student feedback on each course. From the fall term, this is being replaced by the use of the fully online QSETT (Queen's Survey of Student Experience of Teaching) which aims to register the student's experience of the learning environment.

2.6 In addition there is an annual student satisfaction survey conducted in the winter term - this is divided into four sections, namely, academics, campus life, spaces and facilities, and catering. The results of the survey are considered by the BISC senior management team, and any actions and consequences reported to both academic and support staff with specific actions identified in the survey response document.

How effectively does the Centre assure itself that students are appropriately supported?

2.7 Academic and student support is provided throughout the programme of study, commencing with communications pre-arrival detailing what students can expect at BISC. Students are given comprehensive guidance on their courses. This includes guidance on the designing of Experiential Learning Opportunities (ELOs) which is described in the EL Curriculum Design Checklist with monitoring by the Experiential Learning Outcomes report, winter 2020. These provide information on the content, delivery, assessment, support and evaluation of online learning and virtual learning opportunities. The Virtual Experiential Learning Opportunities initiative enables BISC to offer a provision as close as possible to that which the students would experience if allowed to undertake residential study and provide a viable alternative which students met by the team, regard as superior to that offered to their peers studying at other institutions. The development of the Virtual Experiential Learning Opportunities (VELOs) to provide an engaging substitute for the well-regarded experiential learning components of the residential programme was also seen as **good practice**

2.8 For this academic year, all the academic and student support has been offered online. This has included the development and delivery of Virtual Experiential Learning Opportunities (VELOs). Students that the review team met at the online review commented favourably on the online programmes they had been receiving, especially noting the access to resources and the availability of staff support.

2.9 In order to facilitate and support the transition to online learning, BISC has developed teaching methods using technologies with which students are familiar and has provided staff development and support in the use of these technologies. This has led to a revision of pedagogies to support delivery of curriculum content and revised forms of assessment using less traditional methods such as written timed exams and more open essays and research findings. The application of new practices, online pedagogies and technologies in the fall term that are appropriate to support and enhance remote learning constitutes **good practice**.

How effective are the Centre's arrangements for staff development in relation to maintaining and/or improving the quality of learning opportunities?

2.10 BISC staff are encouraged to attend various workshops and conferences to support the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities. In order to prepare for the delivery of all the courses online in this academic year, all staff were given staff development and pedagogic support for online learning provided over the summer, initiated by Queen's University and fully engaged with by BISC staff in preparation for delivery in September. The review team considers this preparation and support as **good practice** (also see above paragraph 1.7).

How effectively does the Centre ensure that students have access to learning resources that are sufficient to enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes of their programmes?

2.11 BISC students have access to a wide range of study facilities and learning resources during their stay at the Centre. These include teaching rooms, a comprehensive library, study facilities and accommodation. Recently, a new Science and Innovation Centre housing state of the art teaching laboratories has been opened. This has meant that the integration of science on the BISC campus has become possible.

2.12 The student satisfaction survey provides feedback from the students on the facilities and learning resources available to them. The survey is comprehensive, including campus life, spaces and facilities, and catering, as well as academic provision. It provides the senior staff with detailed feedback on their provision. On the whole, students comment favourably about the learning resources available to them. Their principle criticisms are of the older classrooms and the catering.

2.13 Since March, students have been reliant on online resources. The summer programme at BISC was cancelled, with the students returning to Canada towards the end of the winter term to complete their courses online. All the courses have been delivered online this academic year. Students commented favourably on their provision, with varied teaching programmes, adequate access both to resources and to staff, and the variety in the teaching methods and learning materials. Their negative comments related to disappointed expectations as a result of not being able to visit and study at the centre, and the isolation of online learning, although they did say that the small nature of group sizes had been maintained. They also complemented the teaching and support staff on their accessibility and helpfulness. The provision of effective remote teaching and support for students providing a good experience in adverse circumstances, is something which the students recognise compares favourably with that of their peers in larger higher education institutions.

The team has **confidence** that the provider is fulfilling its responsibilities for managing and improving the quality of the learning opportunities it provides for students.

QAA2580 - R12009 - Feb 21

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