



CIEE Study Abroad London Ltd

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

February 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 CIEE Study Abroad London Ltd. The review took place on 27 February 2020 and was conducted by a review team, as follows:

- Barbara Howell
- Dr Jenny Gilbert.

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 3. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 4.

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

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us

² [www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/guidance/recognition-scheme-for-educational-oversight-\(rseo\)-handbook.pdf?sfvrsn=a792c881_18](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/guidance/recognition-scheme-for-educational-oversight-(rseo)-handbook.pdf?sfvrsn=a792c881_18)

Key findings

The QAA team considered evidence relating to the educational provision at CIEE Study Abroad London Ltd (CIEE London), 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 CIEE Study Abroad London Ltd.

- **Confidence can be placed** in CIEE Study Abroad London Ltd's management and improvement of the quality of learning opportunities.

The QAA review team also concluded that CIEE London **satisfactorily** manages its responsibilities for academic standards in accordance with the requirements of its awarding partners.

Recommendations

The QAA team makes the following advisable recommendation to CIEE Study Abroad London Ltd.

- To develop a formal agreement with the letting provider to ensure that the necessary resources are specified and in place for the practical elements of the STEM programmes.

Context

CIEE Inc is a non-profit, non-government organisation based in Portland, Maine, USA and was founded in 1947. CIEE offers study abroad courses to 362 US institutions of higher education as members of its Academic Consortium, comprising 60 study programmes, delivered in 42 countries worldwide.

CIEE Study Abroad London Ltd (CIEE London) was established in 2013, registered in 2014 and enrolled its first students in May 2015, and now offers 16 courses comprising 126 students. Since 2016, Tulane University awards credit to undergraduate college students on CIEE Study Abroad programs and language and culture summer abroad programs as the School of Record.

CIEE London offers four programme models: Open Campus; Global Internships semester or summer programme; direct enrolments to one of three UK university partners (Goldsmiths, University College London and the University of Westminster); and customised programmes. CIEE Academic Board approves the Open Campus courses with Tulane University as the School of Record. To provide the students with an option to study one, two or three of six blocks in one or more CIEE location, the courses are offered in three independent, six-week blocks.

The internship semester comprises the first six-week block alongside the Open Campus course, followed by an eight-week internship, or only the eight-week internships for the summer programme. Both programmes draw on the same syllabus areas as the semester program. CIEE London also continues to offer several short-term programs of between three days and eight weeks.

In 2019, a strategic decision was taken by CIEE London to introduce courses in Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Sustainability and Environmental Studies, Psychology and Computer Science. To support an increase in student numbers, CIEE London has hired an additional staff member for academic development and more staff for operations.

Detailed findings about CIEE Study Abroad London Ltd

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The main governing body of CIEE is the Academic Consortium Board (ACB), comprising representatives from the US higher education member institutions. The ACB, as an independent body, oversees all aspects of standards and academic quality of CIEE's work and is responsible for new programme development and approval.

1.2 ACB provides external academic input and reviews CIEE London twice a year, with ongoing oversight provided by the Regional Director of Operations (Northern Europe), based in Berlin. Day-to-day management of the London campus is carried out by its Resident Director, supported by three Heads of Department, the Booking Manager and a Customising Programmer.

1.3 The Regional Director of Operations and CIEE Study Abroad Programme Management Team conduct annual programme reviews which inform the compilation of a Critical Components Review (CCR) report. The CCR reflects on ACB evaluations reports, and information received from resident staff, student evaluations, past monitoring documents and any adviser site visit reports. The data is used to inform a comprehensive and evaluative report on the blocks of teachings (Block Report), comprising performance aspects and associated trends, key successes, key challenges, delivery of prior actioned items and new action items.

1.4 As part of the oversight process, CIEE London has a clearly documented course monitoring system. Oversight includes the use of student evaluations, classroom observations, weekly Student Representative Council meetings and or one-to-one student meetings.

1.5 In addition to annual monitoring, CIEE underwent an ACB periodic review in April 2019. The periodic review evaluations take place every 10 years for each individual centre. The report provides the members of the Academic Consortium with assurances that the programmes endorsed by consortium members are of the highest standard, any recommendations and an action plan.

1.6 Courses are developed around US terms of reference and recommended US credit, as these provide the framework that enables study abroad offices to ultimately grant credit to their participating students. Assessment principles are clearly set out in the Academic Manual For Faculty, with CIEE London following a standard rubric, and responsible for recommending grades and academic credit.

1.7 New courses are approved by the Regional Director of Operations. Subsequently, the new course content follows a CIEE syllabus template which must be submitted to and approved by the Vice-President for Academic Affairs of the ACB and assigned a course code by the Registration team that aligns with the level, subject, credits and contact hours. Once approved by ACB, approval is sought of the individual US universities and colleges.

1.8 Following the introduction of the new STEM programmes, CIEE London has formed a relationship with the Foundation Boys School to provide space and resources for laboratory-based classes, in particular for the new Biology and Chemistry courses. The team found the Letting Contract and application form with the Central Foundation Boys schools did not make clear the hired area, hours required, or resources needed. The team also

heard that sessions were organised on a day-to-day basis, and the support provided by the school may not be equivalent to those required. The team, therefore, **recommends it is advisable** to develop a formal agreement with the letting provider to ensure that the necessary resources are specified and in place for the practical elements of the STEM programmes.

1.9 The application process for students requires the students to complete an online application form, choose modules, submit a transcript to show they meet the minimum 2.75 GPA requirement, as well as formal support from the sending institution. Each student must also sign a participant contract. The students met were clear about the process and found pre-arrival information very useful and comprehensive, including live streams.

1.10 The appointment of teaching staff rests with the Academic Director, with selections based on their expertise in the subject being taught, with a minimum requirement of a master's qualification, and a PhD preferred. All lecturers are provided with training on the learning management systems (Canvas), ongoing support and a comprehensive academic manual for faculty and also for staff.

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

1.11 Programmes are designed and approved by the CIEE Academic Board with the Tulane University as the School of Record. The approval process is based on the US higher education framework, and evaluated by the programme learning goals, as demonstrated through the content of delivered syllabi, the intercultural learning component, and student safety and support features. In approving and reviewing programmes, the ACB is using the relevant US external reference points effectively.

1.12 CIEE received accreditation as a short course provider in November 2015 by the British Accreditation Council (BAC) with its most recent inspection taking place in May 2019. The report summarises several provider strengths to include comprehensive details and well-established policies and procedures, oversight of the provision and insightful evaluative commentary contained with the Director's term reports which facilitate continuous improvements.

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

1.13 CIEE London recommends grades and academic credit based on the student course completion and coursework assessment, and it is the US home institution's discretion to award grades and credit to participating students. The latest, most substantial assignment from each course must be sample second-marked by a faculty/academic from either outside of CIEE London or a suitable internal academic appointed by the Director or Academic Director. The second marker assesses the marking, feedback, consistency, quality and grading, and prepares a report with recommendations on sample grades.

1.14 Upon receipt of the report, the Director/Academic Director calls for a Course Quality Assurance Meeting, whereby the faculty is presented with the second-markers report, class observation report and student evaluations. Depending on the response to feedback, grades are either accepted as confirmed or subject to further review. The team noted some ambiguity between the terminology with those reports headed External Examiner Reports and the guidance on the same requirement in the academic handbooks referring to external or second examiners as 'second markers'. Although the terminology could be clearer, the team was satisfied the process acted as intended, and staff met were clear about their role and responsibilities as an independent external second marker.

The panel has concluded that CIEE London satisfactorily manages its responsibilities for academic standards in accordance with the requirements of its awarding partners.

2 Quality of learning opportunities

How effectively does CIEE London fulfil its responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities?

2.1 CIEE prescribes a standard procedure for evaluating courses, making judgements and taking action to improve the quality of learning opportunities for students. All CIEE centres follow this procedure so that students are assured an appropriate and comparable learning experience. At CIEE London most students study for a block of six weeks comprising two courses; at the end of each block, they complete online evaluations for each course and for their programme. The CIEE London Director adds to this data by completing a termly report presented in a block programme evaluation report that compares the 12 CIEE global centres. The most recent CIEE London report identified one significant problem that related to housing. The action to be taken includes providing students with more accurate information on accommodation prior to their departure from the US. Faculty indicate that feedback received from students includes emails, quizzes and feedback from Student Representation Committee meetings, in addition to the formal mid and end-block evaluations.

2.2 Within each course, there are opportunities for co-curricular visits, that allow students to access the resources available in London. Faculty is required to submit its proposals for co-curricular visits ahead of the teaching block to reduce the possibility of duplication. Co-curricular activities include case studies, field trips, site visits, guest speakers, multi-day regional excursions and embedded intercultural initiatives.

2.3 Internships are organised approximately five months ahead of the student's arrival in London. Each student must produce a CV and undertake an online interview. Students are able to register and gain credit for either the Open Campus Internship Seminar or the Global Internship. Students enrolling on the Internship Seminar complete internship hours alongside internship classes and their other six-week course. Students on the Global Internship follow the same model with an eight-week internship appended. Weekly seminars cover topics such as British work culture. Students complete a range of assessment types including an internship participation component, comprising 25% of the total mark, assigned by the work supervisor.

2.4 In response to requests from US university partners, in 2019 CIEE made a strategic decision to offer STEM courses at CIEE London. Numbers of students enrolling to date have been small, and some students find the courses demanding due to the laboratory hours and the need to align the course with the equivalent modules at US universities. Students are also offered the opportunity to study courses at three London universities.

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

2.5 The quality of all programmes is assured by twice-annual monitoring by ACB together with an ACB site visit at least once every 10 years. The last ACB visit was held in April 2019 and generated a number of recommendations. CIEE London received British Accreditation Council (BAC) approval as a short course provider in November 2015 and had a successful inspection in May 2019. The review team was able to meet students from seven different US universities. Students explained the approval mechanism of their home

university for the CIEE courses that they have chosen to study, and this ensures that the syllabus maps on to the requirements for their course.

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

2.6 CIEE London recruits appropriately qualified teaching faculty; following advertisement, the Academic Director interviews candidates qualified to at least master's-level in the relevant subject. A number of faculty are qualified to PhD level and most faculty work for another British higher education provider. A number of doctoral candidates apply for teaching posts, their ability to communicate effectively is judged as they explain their PhD thesis. Experienced teaching faculty are observed at least once per teaching block, new staff are observed more frequently. An observation grade of less than 7 out of 10 will lead to another observation. Following an observation session, teaching faculty receive a report within a week and often receive face-to-face feedback. If the observer identifies weaknesses, a faculty development report is produced, and the member of faculty is monitored. Two members of faculty were able to describe this situation, and confirm that the process had helped their development. Faculty are graded on several criteria during the observation, and this data is accumulated and contributes to the evaluation of courses across CIEE in the block report. As a result, a small number of faculty are not rehired.

2.7 In addition to formal student evaluation, issues arising during the course of teaching are dealt with through the Student Representation Committee (SRC) that meets weekly. The SRC is established for each teaching block and has a student representative from most subject areas; at least two members of the academics team are present at each meeting. Approximately 10% of the current student cohort are members of SRC. The role of the representative includes eliciting feedback from other students either at the Centre or in the student accommodation. Membership, constitution and the purpose of the SRC are documented and informal minutes are taken. Students report that academic staff have an open-door approach, and they feel able to seek advice or give feedback to a number of staff and faculty at CIEE London.

How effectively does CIEE London assure itself that students are appropriately supported?

2.8 Students are provided with pre-departure support from the CIEE Enrolment Department, they receive guidance on preparing for study and are enrolled on the learner management system to complete the online 'Know Before You Go' course. The review team spoke to students from a large number of universities, and they all confirmed that the advice from Study Abroad Advisors, the information provided and the briefing received before they departed the US, are helpful and appropriate. Students are able to apply for scholarships and must select their courses and obtain approval from their home university to ensure mapping of CIEE courses to home modules in order to permit credit transfer.

2.9 On arrival, students attend a two-day orientation process, receive an orientation handbook and the Academic Manual for Students. They are fully briefed on the action to take in emergencies and know who to contact. There are two 'student life' members of staff who advise students and two recent graduates who help with personal issues such as challenges around accommodation. The Academic Director and the Director offer ongoing support and personal advice sessions. Students spoke highly of the support received.

2.10 Student safety is assured by a standard process that operates across all CIEE centres, coordinated by a Health and Security team based in CIEE head office. CIEE London provides a health and security presentation during students' orientation briefing.

There is an emergency procedure for contacting students by phone and a 24-hour emergency phone line operated by CIEE London staff in rotation. Students are expected to record their personal trips so that CIEE can monitor them.

2.11 Attendance is a requirement and is closely monitored. Faculty keep electronic registers, and a student who is more than 15 minutes late is deemed absent. Students are permitted one absence of class without penalty. Following a further absence, without a doctor's note, they receive a deduction of marks and a third absence normally results in failure of the course. Students are clearly informed of the protocol in the student academic manual and in the course descriptions. Students also receive a mark for participation in the class. Faculty was able to describe the ways in which it allocates this mark to reflect the quantity and quality of contribution, and evidence of students' private study on course reading. In addition to note-taking, discussion, preparation for sessions and informal small group work, faculty set up social media sites and monitor student contributions.

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

2.12 Once hired, all faculty receive face-to-face orientation training and a tailored academic manual to offer guidance, to provide support and to outline policies. Manuals are standardised across CIEE with updates on policy circulated in writing, and all-faculty meetings addressing new policies. Where appropriate, faculty is provided with a mentor or undertakes informal mentoring; for example, how to use the learner management system.

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

2.13 Although there is only a small library available at London CIEE, students are advised of the necessary textbooks to purchase, and a large number of materials are provided on the learner management system. Students and faculty felt that they had adequate access to text-based resources and the learner management system at CIEE London was praised by both faculty and students.

2.14 As mentioned in paragraph 1.8, there are some issues with access to laboratories for the STEM programmes. For the recently-initiated STEM courses, an agreement has been reached with a local secondary school to use their laboratories in the early evening after school classes have finished. The laboratory is booked several months ahead, and the only problem experienced to date has been an after school event that led to the rescheduling of a session. The review team was informed by faculty that this arrangement provides satisfactory resources, and CIEE London purchases any piece of equipment not available. The school is some distance from CIEE London and some students were unhappy about the requirement to travel. A conditions of hire form has been signed by CIEE London, however, there is no contract specifying the precise facilities that are being hired.

2.15 It is recommended that a formal contract is completed to ensure that the necessary resources are specified and in place for the practical elements of the STEM programmes.

The panel has **confidence** that CIEE London is fulfilling its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of the learning opportunities.

QAA2542 - R12003 – May 20

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2020
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000
Email enquiries@qaa.ac.uk
Web www.qaa.ac.uk

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786