



Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of CIEE Study Abroad London Ltd, March 2023

Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that CIEE Study Abroad London Ltd (CIEE) is making acceptable progress since the [March 2022 Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight \(RSEO\) monitoring report](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 CIEE was founded in 1947 and is the UK's oldest and largest non-profit international exchange and study abroad organisation, annually attracting US and other international students. The organisation reports that student numbers were decimated by the Covid pandemic and had zero recruitment in February 2021. This has since recovered to almost pre-pandemic levels and currently there are 604 students on programmes awarded by Tulane University registered since May 2022. During the pandemic, CIEE delivered some courses online and by hybrid delivery but now they are all delivered by face-to-face teaching. These are on a range of courses including Theatre; International Business; Contemporary Challenges in Global Health; International Journalism; Media, Gender and Identity; and British Industrial Revolution.

3 Student numbers have been boosted by enrolments on CIEE partner courses at University College London (UCL), Goldsmiths and Westminster. In addition to Open Campus and Direct Enrol, CIEE has also continued to develop a portfolio of customised programmes for other US universities.

4 Staffing at CIEE has seen significant changes during the past year. As of early January 2023, there were 10 full-time staff, including two senior managers, and 14 part-time academic staff. Staff turnover has been significant, in part due to the pandemic. The Centre Director left in August 2022 and the Academic Director has stood in as Interim Centre Director, in addition to the roles of Academic Director and Faculty Programmes Manager, until a new Centre Director was appointed in January 2023. Two new Internship Coordinators have also recently been appointed. Temporary staff, including a Customised Programme Coordinator, were also appointed to fill other staffing gaps and these posts are now being filled with permanent appointments. The London Centre of CIEE has therefore had very significant staff changes in the last six months and has worked hard to deliver high-quality teaching, learning and support to an increased student number this year.

Findings from the monitoring visit

5 Student numbers have grown in 2022-23 and, following the Covid pandemic, there has been a move away from Covid-delivery formats - for example, online learning, hybrid teaching, co-curricular learning and internships - and a return to face-to-face delivery. Managing this process was identified by senior management as one of their key successes. The annual programme monitoring process has been reviewed and enhanced to include an increased focus on the online learning resources that students can now access. Partnerships with US universities have been strengthened and enhanced and there is

some evidence of progress in engaging with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). However, this could be formalised through clear documentation, formalised mapping and cross-referencing to an evidence-based enhancement focused action planning process.

6 Recruitment of staff has been a focus in the last 12 months including the appointment of the new Centre Director. Senior management state that full-time permanent staff recruitment and training has been a challenge, but it has now been successfully resolved. Senior management also state that there is a clear commitment from the parent CIEE management team to keep this situation under review as student numbers are expected to continue to increase.

7 Staff receive regular in-house training - for example, in equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) which is a key initiative that CIEE has prioritised. This is also included as part of staff induction. CIEE see it as a priority to integrate EDI into the wider student experience. Although adjunct faculty staff receive regular in-house training in CIEE policies and procedures, they are not generally supported by CIEE to attend conferences and other external training opportunities. This is because most academic staff are part-time and usually receive support to do this from their home universities.

8 CIEE senior management state that they have improved the study skills support given to students, particularly to address the disparate background of students when they arrive in London. A focus of this is ensuring that they have access to their home institution library as well as general and specialist libraries in London. Students like and appreciate the resources available to them online but they state there is a mismatch between home institution library access and the curriculum they study in London. If CIEE were to review this process it would enable students to get easier access to references recommended by CIEE academic staff. The senior management, however, do ensure copyright issues are not being breached via systematic checking of virtual learning environment (VLE)'s ahead of delivery.

9 Senior management articulate and evidence a clear and robust global and regional governance structure. This means CIEE must operate within the global management context so decision-making locally tends to be reactive to this. CIEE has still not produced a discrete action plan following the 2021 and 2022 RSEO review recommendations. On request, however, they did produce a progress report on these recommendations. If actions identified by CIEE senior management were added to this, it could become a centre action plan for improvement, owned and delivered by the centre.

10 Senior management state that they have an embedded student representative system. The Student Representative Committee (SRC) meets every six weeks and students are encouraged to offer themselves as representatives. There are no student elections to select representatives, as this is difficult to achieve in the six-week block format, or a document that describes and informs students how to represent the wider student body in this respect. Students feel that often the best way of dealing with issues is to speak to one of the London-based staff directly and they are not aware of the value that the SRC provides. If CIEE were to review the process for choosing student representatives and create, with engagement from students, a method of informing students of their duties and responsibilities as a representative, this would solve this deficiency.

11 The School of Record (SOR) for CIEE is provided by Tulane University in the USA, who act as the accredited US higher education institution. In this capacity they administer and record course grades, award credits for transfer to student home institution and provide detailed academic transcripts for students. In addition, the Tulane SOR site visits provide an opportunity for Tulane faculty and CIEE staff to engage in scholarly interactions including learning, teaching and assessment enhancement across the organisation. CIEE London and

CIEE's central Academic Consortium Board (ACB) work together to provide the core structures for the quality of study-abroad programmes and this is evident in high-quality course syllabuses and extensive details that are available to staff in the Academic Manual.

12 Senior management state that there is a need for a process for the home faculty in London to evaluate and provide a response to courses proposed by the ACB and they have made a proposal into the global governance process to do this. The review team affirm this action and support the senior management in their endeavours to achieve this.

13 There is an Academic Manual available to students which gives comprehensive details at programme and module level. Staff also have access to a detailed and comprehensive Academic Manual. Academic staff state that the content is of high quality and very informative but would be more usable if set out more clearly into core themes that they need.

14 Clear and comprehensive learning outcomes evident in course documentation underpin all teaching and learning. Whilst they do not strictly conform to UK expectations regarding this, they outline three global outcomes to reflect US and Study abroad objectives - to adapt interculturally, to build understanding and to communicate effectively. Senior management state that these have been designed by the central CIEE Academic Affairs unit. Alongside these, programme learning outcomes are developed by a range of subject specialists from across the wider organisation. Senior management report that assessment design and procedures have been influenced by relevant sections of the Quality Code rather than explicitly referenced to it.

15 Students state that they have excellent teaching from tutors drawn from renowned UK universities but would like more opportunity to engage with UK students advocating that some classes could be held jointly with classes held in UK universities. Students also state that they enjoy the modules they are taking and teaching staff are very helpful and supportive. This is confirmed in the responses in course evaluation.

16 During their orientation, students receive an academic orientation that introduces them to the US/UK university system and, critically, what they should expect from marking, grade boundaries and more independent study. Students did voice some concern about induction arrangements for late arrivals and orientation provision should a flight be delayed, and no airport pick up available. Another student spoke of the disparity in orientation programmes depending upon airport arrival suggesting that this was geared around London Heathrow and entry into other airports meant that students needed to secure their own provision.

17 Staff state that they are all engaged in the process of observation both in terms of virtual learning environment (VLE) audits and classroom observations by an academic manager. The recording form for observations clearly set out who conducts the observation and who is being observed with key pointers referenced in terms of: classroom management, pedagogy and practice, timings and delivery structures all being referenced. However, the form makes no allowance for staff to engage in a dialogue about the observations finding or how this process could be linked to ongoing development and CPD. Nor does the process allow for peer observation by a fellow subject practitioner.

18 Staff state that the local VLE (Canvass) is not linked to plagiarism detection software, though there is adequate staff training on this and peer to peer support. To ensure consistency in detection senior managers did acknowledge that this was an area they would like to see developed in their systems but that there was potentially a licencing issue.

19 Termly monitoring of CIEE Study Centre programmes is undertaken by ACB which has overall responsibility for safeguarding standards and quality. The ACB Executive

Committee provides an additional layer of review for cases requiring further scrutiny. ACB members also carry out periodic evaluations of study centre sites and programmes with special working groups established, where more in-depth and themed review is required. Students are given the opportunity to feedback via mid-course and end-of-course evaluations, the results of which are reviewed in programme and monitoring reports. There is recognition from senior management that closer integration between ACB and local operations in London could prove beneficial, and the review team affirms this view.

20 Senior managers and academic staff confirm that external examiners are not appointed to oversee the provision. Instead, a range of staff from their US headquarters have oversight of the provision and cross-organisational peer review is conducted - for example, academic staff in Barcelona or Berlin reviewing London and vice versa. While this seems to be working in practice with regards to standards and quality, independence is lacking.

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

21 Annual review by the British Accreditation Council (BAC) ceased in 2021. CIEE believes that the London Centre annual review by QAA, the internal scrutiny from UK universities and the wider organisation provides adequate insight into UK standards of higher education. This annual monitoring event as part of the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight continues to be one of CIEE key mechanisms to benchmark their work to and against external reference points.

22 External oversight of CIEE's academic standards and quality procedures remain under the direction of the CIEE ACB with accredited courses approved by Tulane University, the School of Record. CIEE is confident that global CIEE's close ties to its academic partners in the US, and elsewhere in the world, provides it with the necessary mechanisms to set, maintain and secure standards, and ensure that the quality of learning, teaching, assessment and the student experience is enhanced.

23 Attention to external reference points is further supported by faculty members from relevant backgrounds and universities in the UK, working with CIEE along with several other US providers who can import their knowledge and experience. Staff also attend meetings of the Association of American Study Abroad Programmes UK and Independent Higher Education.

24 The Annual Return does not refer to the Quality Code, but CIEE has produced a summary of how they engage with the intention of the Quality Code's Core practices. However, there is a clear expectation that course approvals, academic standards and credit for qualifications must, first and foremost, meet the requirements of US-accrediting institutions to allow students to be able to carry the credit from their London experience into their award back in the US.

Background to the monitoring visit

25 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.

26 The monitoring visit was carried out by Paul McDermott, Reviewer, and Kevin Kendall, QAA Officer, on 16 March 2023.

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