



Foundation for International Education

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

April 2021

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 the Foundation for International Education. The review took place on 9 February 2021 and was conducted by a review team, as follows:

- Dr Tommie Anderson-Jaquest
- Ms Brenda Eade.

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 4.

The impact of COVID-19

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the review of the Foundation for International Education in 2019-20, was subject to an interim outcome in July 2020 and was concluded in February 2021. The review was conducted online and included meetings with senior staff 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 again in 2021-22.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us) and its mission.¹ More information about this review method can be found in the [published handbook](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/guidance/rseo-handbook-for-providers.pdf).²

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 the Foundation for International Education (FIE), 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 the Foundation for International Education.

- **Confidence can be placed** in the Foundation for International Education's management of its responsibilities for the quality of learning opportunities.

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

Good practice

The QAA team identified the following **feature of good practice** at the Foundation for International Education.

- The innovative and flexible approach to the continued development and delivery of programmes, and the provision of excellent and effective support for students and staff, since the start of the pandemic

Recommendations

The QAA team makes no recommendations to the Foundation for International Education.

Context

The Foundation for International Education (FIE) has been in operation since 1998. FIE is a private, independent, non-profit international educational organisation, with a remit to offer educational programmes for academic credit to students enrolled at accredited universities in the United States. FIE is based in London and also has provision in Dublin and Amman. FIE has a clear mission and set of underpinning values which guide all areas of its work. Its values can be seen through the courses offered (for example, 'Food, Society and Culture,' with its focus upon ethical issues related to what we choose to produce and what we choose to eat).

FIE works with 61 partner and affiliated colleges and universities; and partnership arrangements are formalised through the development of a Memorandum of Understanding. FIE also has two Schools of Record (Drexel University and Marist College). All of the universities that FIE works with are UK NARIC verified. The majority of the partner universities offer their own academic credit for the courses studied at FIE; and where this is not the case, the credit is awarded by one of the Schools of Record.

Regular visits are made to FIE by university partners in order to review FIE's delivery of courses, the provision of services and the facilities available. In addition, regular liaison and communication takes place when staff visit, acting in a pastoral capacity to students, or in a

teaching capacity. Both formal and informal communications support FIE's review and development of practice.

FIE makes use of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education to guide the development and monitoring of its provision. In addition, FIE underwent a successful Quality Improvement Plan (QUIP) review in 2016, carried out by The Forum on Education Abroad. Until February 2020 FIE was successfully accredited by the British Accreditation Council (BAC). This accreditation no longer meets the needs of FIE at this current time; and FIE has therefore chosen not to seek reaccreditation.

There is also a wide range of external organisations which FIE uses, such as the American Association of Study Abroad Programmes, Association of International Educators and UK National Recognition Information Centre. Engagement with this range of organisations allows FIE to explore sector best practice guidance; and to take up networking opportunities and training for staff.

Detailed findings about the Foundation for International Education

1 Academic standards

How effectively does the Foundation for International Education fulfil its responsibilities for the management of academic standards?

1.1 The Foundation for International Education effectively fulfils its responsibilities for managing academic standards to ensure compliance with the requirements and standards set by each of its 61 partner and affiliated universities and the two Schools of Record. FIE does not award credits nor grant degrees, but the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), in consultation with FIE's major committees and working groups, works collaboratively with partners, affiliated colleges and Schools of Record to maintain academic standards in respect of course provision and delivery. Senior staff negotiate separate formal agreements with each university partner, using a standardised pro-forma to ensure consistency in approach. In cases where partners have not provided their own credits, FIE has formalised agreements in place for its two Schools of Record - Drexel University and Marist College - which have designated responsibilities for awarding credits, maintaining attainment records and issuing transcripts to students.

1.2 FIE maintains effective patterns of communication that ensure academic standards remain aligned to the standards set by US university partners and the two Schools of Record, and this continues to be the case in the current pandemic. The SLT representative participates actively in Academic Advisory Council (AAC) meetings, which include partner and Drexel representatives, and responds to recommendations made in sessions. An FIE team situated in the US regularly communicates with partners to ensure expectations are being met and provides feedback to the SLT. Staff members from universities in the US are encouraged to visit FIE offices and do so frequently. Similar patterns are demonstrated in FIE's management of relationships with the two Schools of Record. In both cases, FIE send FIE modules for review, and, in turn, staff members from the Schools of Record visit the premises on a periodic basis. Marist College, for example, reviews the CVs of academic staff every two years, and periodically reviews FIE quality practices; in the 2018 report, reviewers concluded that FIE worked very hard to maintain high standards and quality programmes.

1.3 FIE fulfils its responsibilities effectively for ensuring that all teaching staff employed to deliver modules, meet the standards set by partners and affiliates. The HR team has produced an operations manual setting detailed procedures for recruitment and selection and has developed pro-forma to inform applicants at various stages of the process. New teaching staff members are required to attend induction sessions and, in their first year of teaching, are mentored by experienced teaching staff who also receive mentoring guidance. The FIE Faculty Handbook provides detailed guidelines about the standards expected from teaching staff, as well as suggestions for effective delivery, which include FIE's principles of instructional excellence and teaching non-British students.

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

1.4 FIE effectively uses a wide range of external reference points to inform and to improve its approach to managing academic standards. First priority is accorded to university partners in the US, who are responsible for maintaining academic standards; consultations take place remotely and in situ, as demonstrated in the meeting agenda with the College of Charleston. The Academic Advisory Council, made up of representatives from partner institutions and other contributory institutions and organisations, provides advice to

FIE on academic quality and standards. The SLT has used information gained from the British Accreditation Council Report in 2018 and the QAA Annual Monitoring Report in 2019 to inform and ensure academic standards are maintained. FIE has responded positively to the recommendations provided by the Forum on Education Abroad in the QUIP review, and, as a result, meets the 'Standards of Good Practice.' The SLT has also used reference points from professional bodies, in particular: The Work Based and Placement Learning Association (ASET); the National Association of Disability Practitioners (NADP); the American Association of Study Abroad Programmes (AASAP); as well as American disabilities practitioners, to ensure standards align with national and professional bodies. FIE has also benefitted from guidance on managing academic standards provided in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and by the Quality Assurance Agency, Advance HE and the Office for Students. Experiences in managing academic standards in other UK higher education institutions shared by sessional teaching staff, have also proved helpful. In response to the pandemic, FIE commissioned reports and has used the recommendations made by Peninsula and Forum to shape its approach to meeting UK lockdown requirements and ensuring the academic standards are maintained in respect of delivery.

How effectively does the Foundation for International Education use external scrutiny of assessment processes to assure academic standards (where applicable)?

1.5 FIE makes effective use of assessment processes in maintaining academic standards. Externally, partners and affiliated universities review and approve course syllabi and assessment plans, thereby exercising ultimate oversight of assessment. In the 2019 Annual Monitoring Report, for example, QAA Reviewers found FIE assessment processes to be well executed and managed.

1.6 Internally, FIE teaching staff review assessments for each course to ensure learning outcomes are met, and clear grading rubrics are provided in advance to teaching staff and students. Cross-marking or moderation of first marking is carried out by experienced academics in-house, most commonly by the Peer Reviewer assigned to observe the particular marker's in-class delivery. FIE adopts a standardised approach to assessment focused upon the assignment level learning outcomes (ALLOs) expected for designated assignments across the programmes and upon the ethical requirements for assessment submission set out in the Academic Integrity Policy and the Complaints and Academic Appeals Policy.

The team has concluded that the Foundation for International Education 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 Foundation for International Education fulfil its responsibilities for managing and improving the quality of learning opportunities?

2.1 FIE effectively fulfils its responsibilities for managing and improving the quality of learning opportunities through its academic committee and management structures and its detailed policies and procedures which are set out in the Faculty Handbook. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) is responsible for oversight of quality assurance processes in London, including programme development, monitoring and review. Membership of SLT comprises: the Chairman of the Board, the Chief Academic and Operations Officer and the

Chief Finance Officer. The SLT responds to recommendations made by the Academic Advisory Board and to reports from external reviews. During the pandemic, meetings have taken place online on a less formal basis but have continued to address and effectively respond to issues relating to the quality of the student learning experience.

2.2 The Teaching and Learning Committee is the main vehicle for faculty engagement with new developments and innovation in learning and teaching. It receives the outcomes of peer review and is a platform for sharing good practice.

2.3 The Chief Academic Officer (recently renamed the Chief Academic and Operations Officer to reflect the additional responsibilities taken on during the pandemic) is responsible for managing and improving the quality of learning opportunities for the London-based operation. She is assisted by the Director of Teaching and Learning, the Director of Experiential Education and the Academic Faculty Director.

2.4 The FIE Teaching and Learning Strategy focuses on student-centred learning through an accessible, inclusive and adaptive teaching environment. During the pandemic FIE has effectively used this strategy to move its programmes online. Teaching staff and students confirmed that FIE has provided extensive and effective support and the necessary resources to develop and deliver the courses online.

2.5 FIE has a detailed process for course design, development and approval which may take place in response to partner initiatives, feedback from teaching staff or feedback from students. Levels of teaching and learning are clearly defined and relate to lower division (introductory) courses and upper division (more in depth courses). FIE has a set of programme learning outcomes which reflect the mission and values of FIE to 'provide high-quality educational experiences to the global community.' These are broken down into course learning outcomes which link directly to assessment outcomes.

2.6 A recent example of course design and approval which was developed in line with FIE's values, and which acknowledges LGBTQ issues and rights worldwide, is the Pride and Prejudice course.

2.7 The team concluded that the innovative and flexible approach to the continued development and delivery of programmes, and the provision of excellent and effective support for students and staff, since the start of the pandemic is **good practice**.

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

2.8 FIE effectively uses a range of external reference points for monitoring and evaluation of the quality of the student learning experience.

2.9 The key external reference points for FIE are its 61 partner institutions (sending organisations) and its two Schools of Record. Detailed agreements with partner universities set out the roles and responsibilities of FIE and the US institution. Faculty from the partner institutions visit FIE on a regular basis for monitoring and quality purposes. The reports from the visiting faculty are positive indicating excellent student support. Two members of faculty from Drexel University (one of the Schools of Record) visit FIE each year and undertake an informal assessment of programmes for quality and standards. Marist College, the other School of Record, carries out a review of FIE every other year. The most recent review report from Marist College (October 2018) concludes 'it is clear that as an organisation FIE works very hard to maintain high standards and quality programs.'

2.10 The Forum for Education Abroad reviewed FIE in 2017 and continues to recognise FIE as a provider which 'meets the field's Standards of Good Practice.' FIE has also used

the resources of the Forum for Education Abroad to develop and implement its COVID-19 policy.

2.11 The UKVI reviewed FIE for Basic Compliance in April 2020 and confirmed the continuation of its Tier 4 sponsorship licence.

2.12 FIE has had positive outcomes from the QAA Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight review in 2016 and the subsequent monitoring visits during 2017-19. FIE is familiar with the Expectations, practice, and advice and guidance of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, and effectively used the QAA toolkit for online learning in the development of its programmes.

2.13 Recommendations from the monitoring and review reports of the various external organisations are considered and responded to by the Senior Leadership Team and are recorded in the Team Action Plans.

How effectively does the Foundation for International Education assure itself that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced?

2.14 FIE effectively monitors and evaluates the quality of teaching through student feedback and peer review.

2.15 Student feedback is analysed by the Field of Study Convenors. The outcomes are positive, but the response rates are low (17% and 40%). Actions required as a result of student feedback are discussed by the Senior Leadership Team and the action taken is recorded in the Team Action Plans. Field of Study Convenors are responsible for monitoring of assessment (through cross marking) and for peer observation.

2.16 Peer review and teaching observations help to determine staff development needs. These were all completed prior to courses moving to online delivery in 2020. A less formal approach is being implemented during the pandemic which involves checking each other's pages on the virtual learning environment (VLE) to ensure teaching is consistent across courses.

2.17 FIE places a strong emphasis on experiential learning which is achieved through taught academic sessions, development of skills, field trips and work placements. FIE requires at least 15% of all courses to be in the form of experiential learning.

2.18 Work placements are effectively managed by the Experiential Education Team. There is an academic element to the internship through seminars. Students are required to submit timesheets to meet UKVI regulations. At the end of the placement they write a reflective report. Placements are supported by a member of the teaching staff and students are provided with a detailed course guide.

2.19 Employers complete a Placement Agreement Form. Work supervisors are provided with a handbook and checklist for the site visit. They complete appraisal performance reports for students mid-way through the internship and are invited to a networking meeting each year. All students have a dedicated site supervisor and those studying online have an Internship Mentor with whom they meet at least three times.

2.20 In response to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, FIE has developed an online internship programme. At the time of the review visit, 32 students were studying on this programme. The review team did not have the opportunity to meet with these students due to time zone differences. However, the team reviewed the extensive range of materials which support both students and employers. This includes an orientation programme, a set

of academic resources available on the student VLE, and guidance for employers and supervisors.

2.21 Students currently following academic courses which include a placement, confirmed that they had discussed their preferences for the placement with FIE and had completed the placement orientation programme. The placement feedback report for 2019 is positive.

How effectively does the Foundation for International Education assure itself that students are appropriately supported?

2.22 FIE provides extensive academic and pastoral support, including health and safety and residence support. Extra-curricular activities are advertised and promoted, and students can enjoy temporary membership of social and sports activities at Imperial College.

2.23 The admissions system supports equality and diversity and is operated in conjunction with the sending university. On arrival in London students undergo an orientation programme.

2.24 FIE has an extensive support system for new students which requires them to attend regular meetings with members of FIE teaching staff. The emphasis is on independent learning which is supported by various online platforms accessible through the VLE.

2.25 Students can develop their academic skills through Writing Support Tutors who provide group and one-to-one sessions.

2.26 During the online delivery of programmes, FIE has continued to provide extensive support for their students. Registers are taken and absences trigger a support meeting. Any student not doing well is provided with academic and pastoral support. A 'no detriment' policy is operating in one class where the student is working from Portugal in order to provide a safety net to mitigate any problems the distance may bring about.

2.27 Detailed feedback continues to be provided by tutors who comment on draft assessments and discuss how students are performing. Mid-term tests and final exams have been turned into 'seen papers' to support online learning. Immediate feedback from the professor, and the client, is provided following student presentations, enabling students to use the feedback to improve subsequent assessments.

2.28 Students confirmed that, throughout the pandemic, they are continuing to be effectively supported by teaching staff and know how to seek professional advice if they need to do so.

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

2.29 FIE has an effective system for teaching staff development which is directly related to maintaining and improving the quality of learning opportunities. Teaching staff development needs are based on a review of student feedback, teaching observation and their administrative record. Teaching observations include a review of teaching materials and moderation of assessment marking.

2.30 The recruitment and induction process is detailed and systematic. The expectations of teaching staff are clearly set out in the Faculty Handbook. New members of teaching staff are mentored for their first year.

2.31 Best practice and teaching staff achievements are celebrated in periodic newsletters and through the Annual Outstanding Teaching Award.

2.32 FIE supports teaching staff development through research, conference attendance and application for fellowship of the HEA. Two members of teaching staff have achieved fellowship of the HEA. Details of all staff development activities are recorded. One of the most recent staff development activities took place, prior to the pandemic, in January 2020, and related to understanding Generation Z - What we know so far.

2.33 During the pandemic, FIE has supported teaching staff with training on how to deliver through Microsoft Teams. Webinars are shared and this has included one about ethical leadership during a pandemic. Teaching staff meet virtually at least once a week to share ideas and best practice.

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

2.34 FIE provides an extensive range of online resources to support student learning. These are accessed through MyStudy@FIE. Resources include an on-demand media streaming service (BoB) which enables media students to access TV and radio programmes dating back to the 1990s.

2.35 Students continue to access the online materials available through their home university libraries. FIE supplies information on local resources, for example, places to study at specialist libraries and accessible libraries in London. Student feedback indicates overall satisfaction with the resources provided. Students are encouraged to contribute to the review and enhancement of the IT provision.

2.36 In response to the pandemic and the move to online learning, FIE has supported faculty with the provision of laptops and PCs in their homes to ensure the effective delivery of their courses.

2.37 Teaching staff and students confirmed that the resources available through FIE effectively support their learning and the delivery of courses online.

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.

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557000
Web www.qaa.ac.uk