



## Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: desk-based analysis of the Hansard Society Ltd, November 2021

### Outcome of the desk-based analysis

1 From the annual return and documentary evidence, the monitoring team concludes that the Hansard Society (the Society) is continuing to maintain academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities since the November 2020 [Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight Review](#).

### Changes since the last QAA review

2 Since the Society's last review and in the context of the pandemic, recruitment of students has been suspended. The continuing delay in reopening is the result of a number of factors. These include US state department advice that US citizens should not travel to the UK due to high levels of COVID-19 infection; uncertainty regarding when internships at the Westminster Parliament will be able to resume and, if so, in what form; possible changes to Home Office visa rules reducing the internship element of this and similar programmes from 50% to 33%, thus reducing the attraction of the programme for students; and the general unpredictability resulting from the pandemic. The Society intends to reopen the Hansard Society Scholars' (HSS) Programme for a spring 2023 intake but is likely to discontinue the summer semester programme.

3 During the last full year of the programme, there were 74 students in total, with each semester operating a cap of 35 students. In the light of the pandemic and the suspension of the programme, 25% of the Hansard Society staff, including the Programme Manager, Programme Director and two part-time staff, have been made redundant.

### Findings from the desk-based analysis

4 The Society's November 2020 Review, which related to students who were enrolled on the programme during the spring 2020 semester, identified no recommendations and listed four features of good practice that made a positive contribution to the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. However, as the HSS programme has been suspended due to the pandemic, the Society has not had an opportunity to build on the areas of good practice any further. It has made it clear though, that it will be mindful of them in the programme review that is being conducted with a view to restarting in spring 2023. The Society has also taken the opportunity realised by the suspension of activity to review its staffing structure and levels (see paragraphs 6 to 9).

5 The Society aims to promote knowledge and understanding of the British model of parliamentary democracy to overseas students. The 14-week HSS programme (spring and autumn) includes two taught modules, a three-day per week internship opportunity and a dissertation. Guest lectures and study visits to the Westminster Parliament and the devolved legislatures in Scotland and Wales also form an essential component. The programme is delivered in association with the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). Lectures are held on LSE premises and students have associate member status, providing them with access to various LSE facilities, including the library. Students are recruited from a small number of US universities, each of which grants academic credit for the programme.

Most of the universities award 15 US academic credits for the spring and autumn semesters although there is some variation for the internship.

6 An Academic Review of the Scholars' programme was conducted in 2019-20 by an external consultant, formerly an academic member of a US feeder university. The Review included meetings with teaching staff, the Programme Director, the Director of Studies who is a member of the House of Lords, and a Clerk in the House of Commons. Additionally, teaching observation was carried out for each taught module and there were feedback sessions with students. The guest lectures and visits to the devolved governments in Edinburgh and Cardiff were also evaluated. The Academic Review included four specific recommendations to adjust content and scheduling of teaching, to adapt assessment methods, to offer a dissertation with an alternative format, and to provide students with support to integrate their internship experience with academic assessment requirements. The programme will also be modified to accommodate some virtual learning.

7 Alongside the Academic Review, the Society has used the break in programming prompted by the pandemic to reflect on its broader educational mission and objectives for the future. The Society is exploring diversification options, particularly focusing on Commonwealth nations with Westminster-style parliamentary systems, and to help support the development of leadership in developing democracies.

8 As well as reconsidering its academic provision, the Society has reviewed its academic governance. In 2018, it had dispensed with the Academic Governance Board that oversaw academic standards with the Board of Trustees receiving reports direct from the Programme Director. It has now introduced an Academic Advisory Council (AAC) with the remit to review all academic policies and guidelines, as well as new and revised programmes. The membership will include an academic from a higher education institution in England or Wales and one from the US, and this will ensure familiarity with the standards and content of modules at appropriate levels across the two jurisdictions.

9 The revisions to the portfolio will also see the appointment of a new Programme Director, Programme Manager and Programme Administrator, together with the recruitment of new teaching staff. Student concerns, as well as wider issues pertaining to future management of COVID-19 - for example, isolation provision, cleaning and ventilation - have helped prompt a review of residential accommodation. The final stages of the action plan will require discussion with feeder institutions in the US and with the LSE, which will need to nominate an external examiner for the new programme. Although not in response to a formal recommendation, the Society has additionally decided to act upon discussion at the November 2020 review by planning to offer professional development to all teaching staff.

10 There have been no Scholars enrolled on the Society's programmes since spring 2020 and therefore the provider supplied a nil data return.

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

11 The HSS programme has been developed with reference to a number of external agencies including the Association of American Study Abroad Programmes, NAFSA: Association of International Educators, the UK Council for International Student Affairs, and the Forum on Education Abroad. As noted, external membership on AAC is intended to help promote effective alignment with relevant external reference points. The redesigned programme will take into account the [Subject Benchmarking Statement for Politics and International Relations](#) specifically at Level 6 of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications*. The module and programme documentation will continue to be reviewed by an external examiner approved by LSE.

## Background to the desk-based analysis

12 The desk-based analysis 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 process or review.

13 The desk-based analysis was carried out by Dr Jenny Gilbert, Reviewer, and Dr Neil Casey, QAA Officer, in November 2021. No meetings were held with students or staff, and the conclusions presented in this report are based on the analysis of documentary evidence submitted by the provider.

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