



IES Abroad London

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

June 2016

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 IES Abroad London. The review took place on 2 June 2016 and was conducted by a panel, as follows:

- Ms Brenda Eade
- Professor Duncan Lawson.

The main purpose of the review was to:

- make judgements about the provider's delegated responsibilities for the management of quality and improvement of learning opportunities
- draw a conclusion about whether the provider's public information is reliable
- produce a commentary on how effectively the provider discharges its responsibilities for academic standards
- 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/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=202

Key findings

The QAA review panel considered evidence relating to the educational provision at IES Abroad 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 review panel formed the following judgement about IES Abroad London:

- **confidence** can be placed in IES Abroad London's management of its responsibilities for the quality of the learning opportunities.

The QAA review panel also concluded that IES Abroad London satisfactorily manages its responsibilities for academic standards in accordance with the requirements of its awarding partners.

Conclusion about public information

The QAA review panel concluded that:

- **reliance can** be placed on the information that IES Abroad London produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

Good practice

The QAA review panel identified the following **features of good practice** at IES Abroad London:

- the comprehensive support for students, from the application process through to the completion of the programme (paragraph 2.11)
- the effective promotion of students' understanding of academic malpractice prior to arrival, during orientation and throughout the programmes (paragraph 2.13).

Recommendations

The QAA review panel makes the following recommendations to IES Abroad London.

The review panel considers it is **advisable** that IES Abroad London:

- ensure that internship supervisors are provided with appropriate support to fulfil their role, particularly in relation to assessment (paragraph 1.14).

The review panel considers that it would be **desirable** for IES Abroad London to:

- implement a formal process for assessment, which includes scrutiny of marks and a system of moderation (paragraph 1.12)
- continue to explore ways to increase the response rate for student surveys (paragraph 2.7)
- institute a more robust approach to staff appraisal and teaching observation (paragraph 2.10).

Context

IES Abroad London provides opportunities for students from American universities to undertake part of their degree programmes in the UK. It was established as a study abroad programme in 1972 and set up as a limited company in 1984. It is part of IES Abroad, one of the oldest and largest not-for-profit study abroad providers in the United States. IES Abroad was legally incorporated as the Institute for the International Education of Students in 1997 and has headquarters in Chicago. It works with over 200 US higher education institutions, who are either Members or Associate Members of the IES Abroad Consortium. All Members of the Consortium are required to meet the criteria set out in the Member Policy document, which include accreditation by state and regional accrediting associations. They are also recognised by the National Academic Recognition Information Centre for the UK.

IES Abroad London offers the following study abroad programmes:

- standard programmes on which students from the American institutions can enrol and receive credit for part of their learning - these are delivered and assessed by the IES Abroad London faculty
- customised programmes, also known as faculty-led programmes, designed for a specific American university, which takes responsibility for academic standards and the delivery of the programme within its regulatory framework - parts of customised programmes may be delivered by IES Abroad London staff
- direct enrolment programmes where an American student attends a UK university, and the home university formally recognises the credit awarded for the study programme
- hybrid programmes, which combine courses delivered and assessed by IES Abroad London with optional units delivered at British institutions
- internships and service learning courses where students complete a work placement and are supported by IES Abroad London through the internship coordinator and by attending classes delivered at the London Centre.

The University of Rochester (which is a Member of the Consortium) currently acts as the School of Record for the award of credit for sending institutions that are not Members of the IES Abroad Consortium. There is an Institutional Affiliation Agreement with the University of Rochester.

IES Abroad intends to have formal written agreements with its direct enrolment partner institutions, as the number of direct enrolment students is increasing. It currently has a memorandum of agreement with St Catherine's College, Oxford, which is being re-evaluated as the possible format for future agreements.

The IES Abroad London Centre has recently been the subject of a Periodic Review by IES Abroad (see paragraph 1.8).

Detailed findings about IES Abroad London

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 The Centre Director at IES Abroad London has delegated responsibility for the management of academic standards on London programmes. He is assisted by the Academic Programmes Manager and Assistant Director Student Affairs, who are responsible for managing academic standards at the operational level. The Centre Director reports directly to the Programme Dean at IES Abroad in Chicago, who oversees the maintenance of standards across all centres. The responsibilities of the Centre Director are clearly set out in the Centre Director Handbook. Annual meetings are held in Chicago to update directors on trends across IES centres globally, and to reinforce the organisation's expectation 'to meet the highest standards of academic quality'. New policies and procedures relating to standards and quality are conveyed to London staff through faculty meetings.

1.2 The Model Assessment Practice (MAP), which consists of a set of guidelines and expectations for planning and assessing academic quality, is the central reference point for all IES centres. The review panel found that, although the procedures for evaluating academic quality at IES Abroad London were consistent with the MAP, not all staff in the London Centre were fully aware of its content and purpose. The Management Team explained that the MAP, originally introduced in 1999 and updated at two-yearly intervals until 2011 (a feature of good practice in the RSEO of 2012), is in the process of being updated, and consequently less emphasis is currently placed on its use.

1.3 Direct enrolment programmes are managed through a set of guidelines included in the MAP and in the IES Academic Policy Guidelines. As well as setting out parameters for the partnership with the UK university, which include the application process, matriculation, and support for learning and development, these also specify that students enrolled on the programmes are subject to the academic guidelines and regulations of the UK institution. Adherence to these guidelines is monitored by the Academic Programmes Manager at IES Abroad London.

1.4 For customised (or faculty-led) programmes, the accrediting institution is responsible for setting and maintaining standards, including credit allocation, but students are bound by the IES Abroad London academic regulations relating to attendance, academic integrity and student conduct.

1.5 Admission to IES Abroad London programmes is managed by the enrolment management department at IES Chicago, and admission requirements are clearly set out on the website.

1.6 IES Abroad has an effective committee structure, which is responsible for the governance of all centres. The General Conference represents all Members of the Consortium and includes the IES President, deans and Centre Directors. It provides a forum for the exchange of information concerning the academic programmes of IES Abroad. The IES Board of Directors includes elected representatives from Consortium Members, the IES President and leading academics. The Academic Council, which meets twice a year and includes representatives from Member institutions and IES Abroad, sets educational policy and gives the final approval for new courses. The Curriculum Committee receives proposals for new programmes and revisions to the curriculum and also reviews policies and procedures. It reports directly to the Academic Council. In addition, the London Association

Board, which meets twice a year, exists to comply with UK regulatory requirements and provides further oversight of standards and quality for IES Abroad London programmes.

1.7 IES Abroad London is subject to extensive monitoring and review processes. A biannual report is prepared for the London Association Board, which reviews the activity on the London campus and highlights challenges and opportunities for the future. Annual reports are prepared by the Centre Director for IES Abroad in Chicago. Reports from all centres are compared to ensure consistency in standards and quality, and a summary of good practice and issues raised in the reports is produced and shared with Centre Directors. IES Abroad London produced its Strategic Plan in 2014 following extensive review and planning activities. This has been updated each year with a set of annual goal statements.

1.8 Periodic Review is normally undertaken for each centre by IES Abroad every five to seven years and aims to examine each programme's adherence to the IES Abroad MAP and Academic Policy Guidelines. IES Abroad London was reviewed in March 2016 after a period of nine years. The centre indicated that the longer period between reviews was the outcome of a risk analysis, which prioritised other IES Abroad centres. Notwithstanding the greater risk at other centres, the review panel was concerned that IES Abroad had gone beyond its stated upper limit for the gap between reviews at the London Centre. Although the Programme Review Report does not identify any issues in relation to the maintenance of academic standards, it does make a significant number of recommendations relating to the quality of the student learning experience and highlights variability in the quality of teaching. The Centre Director is required to update the Academic Council, within a year of publication of the review report, indicating that the recommendations from the review have been addressed.

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

1.9 The key external reference points for all IES Abroad programmes are the Consortium Member universities, which award credit based on the courses taken by their students during their period of study with IES Abroad. Consortium Members are involved in the development of programmes, and for customised programmes may also deliver part or all of the curriculum. All students have a signed agreement from their home university indicating that the learning undertaken with IES Abroad, including internships, will be accepted as part of their programme of study.

1.10 For direct enrolment programmes, the UK universities provide the external reference points that are recognised by the sending institution. Clear guidelines for direct enrolment programmes are included in the IES Abroad MAP, which requires that IES Abroad partners meet host country standards in terms of their accreditation status.

1.11 IES Abroad continues to use the Forum on Education Abroad as an external reference point for standards and quality, and was awarded the Forum's Quality Improvement Program for Education Abroad designation in 2010.

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

1.12 IES Abroad assessment information is included in the Academic Guidelines, the IES Essentials Academic Policies and the Faculty Handbook. The review panel learned that all assessment briefs are accompanied by grading criteria that clearly explain how grades are calculated. Marks are submitted online by teaching staff, and the Centre Director and Programme Director review overall student achievement before sending the grades to the Chicago office. However, IES Abroad does not have a policy for internal or external

moderation of assessment (neither of assignments nor of marking). Consequently, there are no opportunities for teaching staff to compare marking standards and review student performance across units. Teaching staff indicated that they would welcome the opportunity to discuss the award of marks, particularly as they sometimes felt under pressure from students to inflate grades. It would be **desirable** for IES Abroad London to implement a formal process for assessment, which includes scrutiny of marks and a system of moderation.

1.13 Internships have grown substantially in numbers since the last RSEO visit, when there were only 12 students at any one time. By 2015 the numbers had increased to 80.

1.14 Students who undertake an internship as part of their programme are monitored and assessed by their internship supervisors, who award grades that contribute to at least 40 per cent of the mark for the unit. Although a brief general handbook is available for internship supervisors, IES Abroad London does not provide support and training for the supervisors to ensure that they have the necessary skills to effectively assess students to a common standard. It is **advisable** for IES Abroad London to ensure that internship supervisors are provided with appropriate support to fulfil their role, particularly in relation to assessment.

1.15 IES Abroad London has effective management and committee structures and clear guidelines for the management of academic standards. It uses a range of external reference points, including the Consortium Members. Standards are continually monitored through the various review processes. However, assessment procedures in respect of internal and external moderation, and the role of internship supervisors in the assessment process, require further development.

The review panel concluded that IES Abroad 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 IES Abroad London fulfil its responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities?

2.1 The mission of IES Abroad includes offering 'students worldwide experiential learning opportunities that meet the highest standards of academic quality'. IES Abroad aims to achieve this through the provision of high quality documentation (such as the IES Abroad MAP and Faculty Handbook) and clear academic policies, which apply to all IES Abroad centres.

2.2 IES Abroad has a committee structure in which the Curriculum Committee reviews and approves all courses and reports to the Academic Council. The roles of individual members of staff, Centre Directors and the various committees appear to be well-embedded and understood.

2.3 IES Abroad operates a system of thorough on-site program reviews, which are scheduled to take place every five to seven years. The membership of the review committee includes representatives of the Academic Council, Board of Directors, academic staff from Member universities, and a member of academic staff from IES Abroad Chicago. In addition, two members of academic staff and two students from the centre being reviewed are part of the committee.

2.4 The latest program review for IES Abroad London took place in March 2016. The draft report became available just prior to the RSEO visit. This report is extremely thorough and makes a large array of recommendations to improve practice in a variety of aspects of the student experience.

2.5 IES Abroad makes extensive use of surveys to obtain feedback from students and parents. The Centre Director makes a response to IES Abroad Chicago concerning issues raised in these surveys.

2.6 The review panel saw evidence that this is an effective mechanism for enhancement. For example, student feedback had identified issues relating to the use of the virtual learning environment by academic staff. As a consequence, training has been made available by the Academic Programmes Manager for all academic staff, and students reported improvements.

2.7 On the instruction of IES Abroad Chicago, student feedback surveys are now delivered online rather than on paper as previously. This has led to a drop in the response rate. The Centre Director is working with colleagues from IES Abroad Chicago to explore ways of increasing the response rate. It would be **desirable** for IES Abroad to continue to explore ways to increase the response rate for student surveys.

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

2.8 See paragraphs 1.9 to 1.11.

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

2.9 The IES Abroad Faculty Handbook sets out the interactive approach to teaching that is the expectation of IES Abroad. The Centre Director reported that all new academic staff have to sign a form confirming that they are familiar with IES Abroad academic policies and guidelines. However, the recent programme review, which undertook extensive observation of teaching, reported that there was wide variability in teaching practice, with many sessions not going beyond the traditional lecture model.

2.10 The Centre Director is responsible for the quality of teaching, and although he and other full-time staff (such as the Academic Programmes Manager and the Customised Programmes Manager) do carry out teaching observations, these are neither frequent nor systematic. The Centre Director will speak to individual members of academic staff if he becomes aware of an issue, most likely through student evaluation; however, there is no systematic programme of appraisal or performance review for academic staff, in contrast to IES Abroad administrative staff. It would be **desirable** for IES Abroad London to institute a more robust approach to staff appraisal and teaching observation.

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

2.11 IES Abroad has a comprehensive process for supporting students from application through to the completion of the programme. Students spoke highly of the pre-arrival information (such as the IES Student Handbook and the IES Family Guide) and of the personal support available to them, covering both academic and non-academic matters. The comprehensive support for students, from the application process through to the completion of the programme, is **good practice**.

2.12 IES Abroad London runs a comprehensive orientation programme that covers a wide variety of issues relating to living in a different culture, and also a range of academic related issues. The latter included a thorough introduction to the Academic Integrity Code, which is a section of both the IES Student Handbook (made available to students before arrival) and the IES Abroad Faculty Handbook.

2.13 The focus on academic integrity is not confined to the orientation programme but is repeated through the programme of study; students outlined how they participated in interactive workshops, examining samples of work to enable them to develop an in-depth understanding of issues relating to academic integrity. Academic staff confirmed the importance given to academic integrity and their perception of the effectiveness of this focus as evidenced by the low number of academic misconduct cases. The effective promotion of students' understanding of academic malpractice prior to arrival, during orientation and throughout the programmes is **good practice**.

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

2.14 A range of staff development opportunities are provided for academic staff. Several recommendations in the Programme Review Report suggest the use of more accomplished academic staff as exemplars and trainers of their colleagues. However, since all academic staff are part-time, participation in staff development is patchy and this is something that merits further consideration.

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

2.15 In addition to increasing use of the virtual learning environment in response to student comments, IES Abroad London also provides access to a range of other online resources and to physical resources. In particular, students have access to the University of London's Senate House Library. It was confirmed at the meeting with students that extensive use is made of this provision. There is also a small library in the IES Abroad London building. Academic staff reported that resources they request for this library to support new courses are purchased quickly.

The review panel has **confidence** that IES Abroad London is fulfilling its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of the learning opportunities it provides for students.

3 Public information

How effective are IES Abroad London's arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of information it has responsibility for publishing?

3.1 IES Abroad provides an extensive range of information for potential students and their parents via the website. The catalogue provides the detail of programmes and courses available. It is regularly edited and updated. Academic guidelines, policies and procedures are also available on the website. Students confirmed that the information that they received before arrival and during orientation was helpful and informative, and they had found the application process through the website straightforward.

3.2 Students (and parents) give feedback on the accuracy of the information provided prior to enrolment and during orientation via surveys. Outcomes of the surveys indicate that the information provided is accurate and effective.

3.3 The IES Student Handbook and the IES Family Guide are given to all IES Abroad students prior to their arrival. The IES London Essentials Guide provides information on the London programmes after arrival.

3.4 Overall responsibility for the management of information lies with IES Abroad in Chicago. The London Centre has an input into the information available and can request changes. Website updates are carried out weekly.

The review panel concluded that **reliance can** be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that IES Abroad London produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

4 Action plan³

IES Abroad London action plan relating to the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight in June 2016						
Good practice	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date(s)	Action by	Reported to	Evaluation (process or evidence)
The review panel identified the following areas of good practice that are worthy of wider dissemination within IES Abroad London:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the comprehensive support for students, from the application process through to the completion of the programme (paragraph 2.11) the effective promotion of students' understanding of academic malpractice prior to arrival, during 	<p>IES aims to provide far-ranging information, resources and guidance to students prior to and throughout their experience abroad</p> <p>This involves setting clear boundaries and expectations for students, while also working to improve the service we currently provide</p>	<p>IES London staff will continue to work closely with staff in Chicago to ensure that students receive consistent, up-to-date information about the experience they can expect in London</p> <p>This includes updating details of our housing provision, adjusting orientation presentations to reflect changes in student needs, and also clearly communicating our academic and behavioural</p>	1 year (July 2017)	IES Team	Centre Director and Programme Dean in Chicago	Student evaluations completed at the close of every semester

³ IES Abroad London has been required to develop this action plan to follow up on good practice and address any recommendations arising from the review. QAA monitors progress against the action plan.

orientation and throughout the programmes (paragraph 2.13).		standards				
Advisable	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date(s)	Action by	Reported to	Evaluation (process or evidence)
The review panel considers that it is advisable for IES Abroad London to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that internship supervisors are provided with appropriate support to fulfil their role, particularly in relation to assessment (paragraph 1.14. 	<p>Internship supervisors feel the full support and help of the IES Abroad London organisation</p>	<p>1 Increased site visits to hosting institutions.</p> <p>2 Ensure that all hosts receive developed materials from IES, including grading rubrics, protocols for evaluating students, and so on</p> <p>3 General move towards greater communication/ work with hosting companies</p>	1 year (July 2017)	IES Abroad London Internship Coordinators	Centre Director and Academic Programmes Manager	We will meet after each semester to discuss, and will contact/query several hosting supervisors for confirmation and feedback

Desirable	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date/s	Action by	Reported to	Evaluation (process or evidence)
The review panel considers that it would be desirable for IES Abroad London to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> implement a formal process for assessment, which includes scrutiny of marks and a system of moderation (paragraph 1.12) 	Greater consistency of marking across all IES courses; with faculty having a stronger support structure to address any issues/questions they may have	1 Increased training on set grading scales and rubrics, especially for newer faculty 2 Creation of Faculty Committee to make recommendations on grading moderation, and to support fellow faculty 3 Increased observation of courses and dialogue with faculty 4 Plan to dramatically increase response rate for all student evaluations	1 year (July 2017)	Centre Director and Academic Programmes Manager	Programme Dean in Chicago	A query will be done of all faculty to ensure good progress has been made
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> continue to explore ways to increase the response rate for student surveys (paragraph 2.7) 	Obtain more representative feedback from students about courses	Work with faculty and students to communicate importance of evaluations, and will change protocol to require students to fill out course evaluations on the last day of class, in class	1 year (July 2017)	Centre Director and Academic Programmes Manager	Programme Dean in Chicago	We will run numbers each term to ensure response-rate trend continues to rise each term

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • institute a more robust approach to staff appraisal and teaching observation (paragraph 2.10). 	<p>Greater support and more feedback for staff and faculty</p>	<p>Staff appraisal, done once a year through Performance Reviews, will continue; with consistently scheduled meetings between staff and line manager to discuss work</p> <p>For faculty, a schedule will be developed for increased course observation and feedback sessions</p>	<p>1 year (July 2017)</p>	<p>All line managers on staff / Centre Director & Academic Programmes Manager</p>	<p>Centre Director & Programme Dean in Chicago</p>	<p>We will re-evaluate after one year based on feedback from staff and faculty regarding.</p>
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Glossary

This glossary explains terms used in this report. You can find a fuller glossary at: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/glossary. More details and formal definitions of key terms can be found in the [handbook](#)⁴ for this review method.

Academic quality A comprehensive term referring to how, and how well, higher education providers manage teaching and learning opportunities to help students progress and succeed.

Academic standards The standards set and maintained by degree-awarding bodies for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Credit(s) A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as 'numbers of credits' at a specific level.

Enhancement The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in QAA's review processes.

Good practice A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review panel, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's review processes.

Learning opportunities The provision made for students' learning, including planned study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, and resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios).

Learning outcome What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

Programme (of study) An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

Public information Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Widening participation Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

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⁴ www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=202