



IES Abroad London

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

December 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 IES Abroad London. The review took place in May 2020 and was conducted by a review team, as follows:

- Professor Alan Jago
- Barbara Howell.

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 the review method can be found in the [published handbook](#).²

The impact of COVID-19

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the review of IES Abroad London was subject to an interim outcome in **June 2020** and was concluded in December 2020. The review was conducted online and included meetings with the senior management team. However, due to the non-recruitment of students in the autumn term, the review team was unable to meet with 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 and availability of students. A risk assessment was carried out prior to the review to identify and mitigate any potential risks. Annual monitoring will resume in 2021-22.

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 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 team 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 team also concluded that the provider **satisfactorily** manages its responsibilities for academic standards, as set out in its contractual arrangements with its academic partners

Recommendations

The QAA team makes the following **advisable** recommendations to IES Abroad London.

- Ensure that all necessary planning and preparation for resuming the delivery of academic programmes is in place in advance of the 2021-22 academic year.
- Establish and deliver a programme of staff development in the design and application of blended learning technologies (including online) so that staff, if the circumstances require it, are prepared and able to continue teaching.
- Ensure that monitoring processes for academic year 2019-20 are fully reported, considered and acted upon and that all monitoring processes for 2020-21 are carried out.

Context

IES Abroad London is a non-profit, study abroad organisation, founded in 1950 as the Institute of European Studies. IES Abroad London is wholly dependent on and managed by IES Abroad headquarters in Chicago, USA.

IES Abroad London offers a range of courses and areas of study, including a variety of broad, 'liberal arts', curriculum-style courses, business studies, theatre studies, health studies, internship placements, customised programmes and direct enrolment to UK universities, for either a single course or full-time programme. The majority of students stay in the UK on an IES Abroad London programme for one semester (15 weeks), or, in the case of many customised programmes, anywhere from two to 15 weeks.

IES Abroad London, as a limited company, has a board comprised of local academics and business leaders, and the CEO from the Chicago office, who meet several times per year to review the activities, legislative compliance, review the audited accounts and consider the strategic direction of the organisation.

The University of Rochester is the School of Record contracted with IES Abroad London to award credit for IES Abroad London programmes to students who cannot accept IES Abroad London transcripts directly. This allows students to gain credits from a recognised US university while studying at IES Abroad London, with the University of Rochester monitoring students' assessment transcripts to ensure appropriate academic standards. In May to April 2019-20, the total number of students was 832 with a full-time equivalence (FTE) of 280.44, representing a 14.62% increase on the previous year which totalled 244.63 FTE's. However, due to the Covid pandemic, IES suspended all programmes in the summer term 2020 and now expects to enrol students again in September 2021.

IES Abroad London has 13 staff positions - three are part-time, representing 11.5 FTE's. In response to the pandemic, IES have suspended the contracts of academic staff on temporary contracts until further notice, and IES is currently operating with five part-time senior staff.

IES Abroad London is located in a five-storey building comprising, teaching and office space, library, student lounge and a meeting room in the Bloomsbury district of London. Classrooms are equipped with interactive whiteboards and have access to a good wi-fi connection.

The IES Programme Review in 2016 drew attention to the need for IES Abroad London to start to consider acquiring larger premises and, the current pandemic notwithstanding, it is still under consideration pending an assessment of potential student numbers in the near future.

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 IES Abroad London is not an awarding body and relies on the support from the US-based academic partners to ensure courses and programmes provide the rigour expected to award credit. Those partners include a coordinating consortium of professors from appropriate institutions who provide feedback and advice. For example, those members oversee IES Abroad programme openings and closings, review and revise policies, and provide governance of IES Abroad education programmes and policies. The Centre Director at IES Abroad London has delegated responsibility for managing academic standards and is tasked with setting the centre goals annually, aligned to the Chicago goals.

1.2 Evaluation processes at IES Abroad London are guided by the IES Abroad mission statement and by the guidelines laid out in the IES Abroad MAP (Model Assessment Practice). The IES Abroad MAP is an educational evaluation system, with set guidelines for the planning and assessing academic quality in programmes of international education to support programme review.

1.3 The IES Abroad Programme Review Committee is responsible for the approval and review of IES Abroad London's courses. Programme Review is a systematic review of every aspect of the centre's programmes, against the criteria set out in the IES MAP. The criteria includes assessment of the student learning environment, learning, assessment and intercultural development, resources for academic and student support, and programme administration and development. Current policy, as set out the IES MAP, requires that each standard/hybrid programme is reviewed approximately every five to seven years, or as needed. Clear protocols for the organisation of the event, to include the schedule and responsibilities, are set out in the Program Review Protocol guideline. IES undertook a full review in 2016 of IES Abroad London with recommendations followed up in the Centre Director's report to IES Academic Council and subsequently in the institution's Annual Goal Setting. The team noted that many of the goals have remained in progress year-on-year. During their first meeting with IES Abroad London, in June 2020, the team learned that although this appeared to be the case, an ongoing dialogue was taking place between London and Chicago, with a recognition that the review process could be improved. However, at the most recent meeting with IES, in December 2020, the current goals had been refocused and now includes reducing costs, maintaining a critical mass of staff, and planning for next year. In 2019, IES Abroad conducted, as part of its monitoring processes, a Curriculum Audit Taskforce (CAT) for the audit of curriculum worldwide, with a draft report now published. The team recommends as **advisable** for IES Abroad London, to ensure that monitoring processes for academic year 2019-20 are fully reported, considered and acted upon, and that all monitoring processes for 2020-21 are carried out and fully reported.

1.4 IES Abroad London conducts a number of different student evaluations of various aspects of the programme (also see section below on Quality of Learning Opportunity). The main programme evaluation form is sent by IES staff in Chicago, to all students on Standard and Direct Enrolment programmes after they return to the US. The evaluation forms' results are distributed to the Centre Director with questions that received a score below 3.5 out of 5 requiring a response. Each department head within IES Abroad London working with the course team, complete a Follow-Up Tracking Report, which is sent back to the Programme Dean in Chicago. Similarly customised programmes have adopted a similar process, with those evaluations held locally for future use if university programmes are repeated. IES Abroad London also conducts mid and end-of-term evaluations and an evaluation of the

internship programme. It has not been possible to further evaluate the effectiveness of this process due to the current suspension of programmes due to the pandemic.

1.5 The review process is supported by the Faculty Development Representative (FDR) who is responsible for implementing a more robust approach to teaching observation and staff mentoring and the establishment of the FDR committee which apportions interdepartmental responsibility for inducting new faculty as well as establishing some system for teaching observation for new faculty. It has not been possible to confirm the effectiveness of the FDR committee except for unminuted, weekly, virtual meetings as all other formal meetings have been suspended due to the provider's response to the Covid pandemic and the non-recruitment of students and reduction in staffing.

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

1.6 IES is supported by the US Academic Consortium of more than 235 member institutions as their main reference point. The Forum on Education Abroad, which publishes the Standards for International Education, closely aligns to the IES Abroad MAP. The Forum also has a review process for study abroad programmes called QUIP (Quality Improvement Process). IES Abroad London went through this process in 2010 and is expected to do so again, however, no date has been provided. No further clarification on the use of the external reference points could occur due to the suspension of the programmes.

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

1.7 IES Abroad London assessment information is included in the Faculty Handbook and IES Abroad MAP. During the first meeting with IES Abroad London, the review team learned that the individual professor designs the assignments and sets the academic standards. The approved learning outcomes and assessment patterns remain consistent with previous years, with Curriculum Committee responsible for external oversight and the approval of any changes. IES Abroad London is satisfied that the assessment meets the learning outcomes through week-by-week guidance to students, the professional judgement of the staff and oversight by the Curriculum Committee.

1.8 The team noted that there are limited opportunities for teaching staff to compare marking standards and review student performance across courses, although this has yet to be confirmed due to programme delivery suspension.

<p>The team has concluded that IES Abroad London satisfactorily manages its responsibilities for academic standards in accordance with the requirements of its awarding partners.</p>

2 Quality of learning opportunities

How effectively does IES Abroad London fulfil its responsibilities for managing and improving the quality of learning opportunities?

2.1 IES Abroad London fulfilled its responsibilities for managing and improving the quality of learning opportunities effectively when fully operational. Since April 2020, there have been no courses running and no students at the centre due to the Covid pandemic.

2.2 The responsibility for the student learning experience rests with IES Abroad London in the day-to-day operation of programmes. It operates a number of programmes including the Standard Programme with an option of a single 'outside course' at a British university, the provision of Direct Enrolment programmes at a number of British universities, the provision of full-time internships, and customised programmes for specific US universities. These were all subject to quality assurance by IES Abroad London itself and also its accountability to the sponsoring US universities and providers of programmes in the UK.

2.3 The IES Abroad Curriculum Committee is responsible for reviewing and approving all courses offered in regular IES Abroad programmes. It reports its decisions to the Academic Council which has the power to accept or disapprove the Committee's decisions. All course syllabi have to meet a standardised set of criteria including readings, assignments, examinations, course requirements, class attendance and credit calculation. In autumn 2019, IES Abroad announced that a taskforce would undertake a Curriculum Audit to ensure it was meeting the needs of students and consortium members. Due to the Covid pandemic this taskforce has not yet reported its findings.

2.4 Decisions about what kinds of courses to develop are based on a number of factors. These include student feedback, requests from consortium members, and the availability of local resources and expertise. Regular programme evaluations provide evidence of the suitability and efficacy of the Centre's programmes.

2.5 Internships are a feature of the provision, with additional learning opportunities available in lecture courses and seminars. Internship coordinators support employers in delivering the programme, in particular in relation to assessment.

2.6 IES Abroad London is responsible for the provision of teaching facilities and learning resources, accommodation, and academic and student support for programmes. The Centre has a core administrative staff, who are responsible for supporting teaching staff, internships, student affairs and centre resources. The number of these staff has reduced from 12 to five, due to the pandemic. When IES Abroad London was faced with the return of all its students to the US in March 2020, the courses they were involved in delivering were completed by online delivery. This was achieved through some centre-wide training. Once these programmes had been delivered, no further courses have been run by the Centre. The team recommends as **advisable** that IES Abroad London ensures that all necessary planning and preparation for resuming the delivery of academic programmes is in place in advance of the 2021-22 academic year

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

2.7 The principal way in which external reference points are used to monitor and evaluate processes is through the close relationship with its various partners including City University, Queen Mary College and RADA. Alignment with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, including those relating to teaching and learning, results from their close relationship with UK higher education providers. In addition, the Centre is required to set annual goals in the context of the strategic goals of the whole organisation emanating from its headquarters in Chicago.

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

2.8 The principal means that IES uses to assure the quality of teaching and learning is in hiring well-qualified and experienced teaching staff. New staff are given an induction programme, followed by a formal process of observation and discussion of teaching,

learning and assessment with a mentor. Teaching is monitored through classroom observations, faculty meetings and using student evaluations of their courses. IES programmes provide a variety of learning opportunities within courses, including seminars, study trips, site visits and guest lecturers to enhance the overall experience. There is an effective approach to the management of student internships to ensure that students and employers have a clear understanding of how the placement meets the intended learning outcomes based on feedback from students and employers. The internship team coordinate all placements. They work with the students on their application, interview skills and connections. Student evaluations indicate positive feedback on the process.

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

2.9 The IES study centre is located in Bloomsbury, central London and includes teaching, office and social space. Due to increased student numbers, IES was also hiring additional classroom space locally. There was a plan to acquire new premises in 2021-22, but this plan is currently on hold due to the pandemic. The Centre also provides housing for its students locally.

2.10 The Student Affairs department at the headquarters in Chicago has written protocols for managing a wide variety of student issues, and staff in London are trained by head office staff with regard to a number of issues including mental health, risk assessments, successful field trips, access to medical care, best practice in regard to establishing community, and wellbeing in student housing. Students complete an orientation programme on arrival and this is assessed in the programme evaluation at the end of the first term. There is a strong focus on student health and wellbeing through a Wellness Programme which students attend alongside their academic programmes. Student support is available from student services staff with a dedicated Head of Student Affairs and Wellness managing the provision. Social media facilities may also be used by students for communications with support staff.

2.11 As noted above, the management of the transition to online learning occurred in April 2020, after its completion the Centre has had no students and some of the student affairs staff are no longer employed.

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

2.12 Most IES teaching staff are experienced higher education teachers, they are employed part-time and sessionally. Student evaluations are used to assess their teaching and these are reviewed by the Centre Director. Teaching staff are invited to bid for staff development funds to attend conferences. All permanent staff go through an annual appraisal process, which involves the completion of a self-evaluation form and the setting of goals for the year ahead. Training is provided for administrative staff in relation to their area of responsibility. Currently, there are no teaching staff employed by the Centre, due to the pandemic. The team recommends as **advisable** that IES Abroad London establishes and delivers a programme of staff development in the design and application of blended learning technologies (including online) so that staff, if the circumstances require it, are prepared and able to continue teaching.

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

2.16 Students at the Centre have access to facilities of the Centre itself, including classrooms and a small library. In the development of programmes with partner institutions, provision of appropriate learning resources is a key criterium and is examined by the parent organisation before delivery at IES London. There are currently no programmes being run, and no students in attendance.

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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