



Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: desk-based analysis of IES Abroad London, December 2021

Outcome of the desk-based analysis

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and documentary evidence, the review team concludes that IES Abroad London (IES) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the December 2020 [Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight review](#).

Changes since the last QAA review

2 All programmes were cancelled for the period from May 2020 to April 2021. IES currently has 56 directly enrolled students, including students on customised programmes which IES hosts and which vary by university in terms of length. IES also facilitates direct enrolment at UK universities but these numbers are not included in IES statistics. Most students are studying with IES as student visitors with the remainder on student visas.

3 Due to Covid restrictions several administrative and teaching positions were furloughed under the Government scheme in 2020 and some support staff were made redundant in October 2020. The staff structure for the spring semester of 2021, when no courses were running, was five support staff in addition to the Centre Director. As all teaching staff are sessional, none were hired for the London-based programmes during this period. Remaining staff were engaged in updating health and safety policies and procedures and undertaking staff development in preparation for a return to normal operation.

4 Teaching staff were contracted for the return of the UK Today programme in July 2021 and the Study London and Health Practice and Policy programmes in September 2021. The organisation is expecting student recruitment to return to more normal numbers in January 2022 and is recruiting staff accordingly. At the time of review, IES has 26 teaching staff, nine administrative staff excluding the Director, and two temporary staff.

Findings from the desk-based analysis

5 The organisation is making satisfactory progress in respect of the actions arising from the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight (RSEO) report of December 2020. The organisation has made comprehensive plans for the resumption of teaching following the hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic (paragraph 7). A programme of staff development in the delivery of learning in a blended or totally online manner has been undertaken (paragraph 9). All monitoring processes from the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years have been completed using electronic communication when appropriate (paragraph 11). All actions have been monitored and evaluated for effectiveness by the organisation (paragraph 12).

6 There were three advisable recommendations arising from the full RSEO review report of December 2020. The actions taken in light of the recommendations have been completed and evaluation has been undertaken.

7 The first recommendation was to 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. Due to continuing COVID-19 restrictions during the academic year 2020-21, staffing levels were reduced and cost-cutting measures implemented to ensure a secure financial position could be maintained. Remaining management team members met regularly to ensure that the organisation would be in a position to ensure that the student experience would be maintained and to meet the requirements for health and safety occurring as a result of the threat of COVID-19 on reopening.

8 During the period when there were no students, the management team updated all relevant policies regarding health and safety in consultation with the Dean of Students in Chicago. Staff training included attending meetings hosted by the Association of American Study Abroad Programmes UK on how to run a Covid-secure programme. Internal staff training on coronavirus protocols is continuing.

9 The second advisable recommendation was to 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. The educational technology team in Chicago, as well as administrative staff in London, have delivered a range of sessions to help teaching staff prepare to teach online or in a blended way in case it should be required again in future.

10 Courses are offered via an online learning platform, which offers an option to teach classes virtually using a range of techniques. Academic staff were trained in online and blended teaching by the London-based staff during the first lockdown in March 2020. After the spring 2020 semester the organisation held several meetings to gather feedback from teaching staff regarding how effective these methods had been and whether there were areas of good practice that could be disseminated more widely. Staff gave detailed feedback on their experiences of online teaching and the organisation made a list of recommendations for future improvements. Student evaluations were also used to see if the move to online teaching impacted learning and the student experience in ways that could be mitigated in future. However, responses to the survey indicated that there was no major detriment to learning arising from the change to online learning.

11 The third recommendation from the 2020 review was to ensure that the 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. The organisation evaluated programmes run during the spring 2020 semester using its normal feedback procedures despite the disruption of the March lockdown and the fact that most students returned home early to finish their studies online. These evaluations did not show significant variation from the usual results of this process. Teaching staff were also surveyed to gather information about how the teaching had worked online and what their training needs were - this information was used to inform the design of various educational technology training sessions offered by both Chicago and London staff in the summer of 2020 and which have been ongoing since.

12 Course evaluations were sent out for the small summer programme which ran in June 2021 and results have been reflected upon by senior management and fed back to teaching staff where required. Evaluations for the current semester are being prepared in the normal way.

13 Due to the nature of the study abroad programmes on offer at the organisation and the high levels of commitment required by students, student data returns do not provide significant feedback on programme performance.

14 In the 2018-19 academic year, 520 students enrolled across all the programmes, all students completed their courses and all succeeded in the programme aim. Similarly in 2019-20, 713 students enrolled, all of whom completed and were successful on their courses. All courses were closed in the 2020-21 year due to COVID-19.

15 Students started to return to the organisation in May and June of 2021 with 32 students having enrolled on summer school and short programmes. All of these students have successfully completed their programmes.

16 In September 2021, 56 students enrolled across all programmes and a further 312 students are expected to enrol in January 2022.

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

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

18 The organisation consists of an academic consortium of more than 235 leading US colleges and universities which direct academic policy. IES Abroad has a structured academic governance system composed of elected and appointed faculty and staff representing the IES Abroad consortium. Representatives from member colleges and universities collaborate with IES Abroad staff to set academic policy, develop and approve curriculum, review academic quality, and recommend enhancements and innovations in academic programming. Only after an academic programme receives the full support of consortium members is it offered to students.

19 Through programme evaluation, the academic consortium schools work with IES Abroad to review academic programming so that it remains relevant to the needs of students.

20 Normally, an annual conference for IES Abroad members is held to discuss study abroad topics, including academic standards and assessment, faculty and programme development, and how to maximise the benefits of study abroad. However, this has not taken place since the start of the pandemic.

Background to the desk-based analysis

21 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 visit or review.

22 The desk-based analysis visit was carried out by Peter Hymans, Reviewer, and Tony Platt, QAA Officer, in November/December 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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