



Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of IES Abroad London, December 2022

Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that IES Abroad London (IES) is making acceptable progress with continuing to maintain, review and improve its higher education provision since the [December 2021 monitoring report](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 One major change has occurred since the monitoring report in December 2021. In 2022, IES Abroad London purchased new premises which are currently being renovated and updated. Teaching floors will be completed in January 2023 and will be in use from spring while the student lounge and staff offices will not be occupied until summer 2023. New student facilities will include more social space, breakout rooms, smaller meeting rooms and a kitchen area. Staff will also have upgraded work rooms. The current premises will continue to be used until building work is completed.

3 Face-to-face teaching recommenced in September 2022 but there have been no other significant changes since the previous monitoring report.

Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The review team conducted the annual monitoring by consideration of an annual return and supporting documentation submitted by IES. Online meetings were also held with a small group of students and teaching, support and administrative staff.

5 The review team considers that IES Abroad London continues to make satisfactory progress in respect of the actions arising from the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight (RSEO) review of December 2020 and issues arising from its own quality assurance processes.

6 Further training and development have been given to teaching staff (faculty) in the delivery of online learning (paragraphs 7 and 8). Normal course evaluations continue to be used as they were prior to the pandemic (paragraph 9). The wider IES Abroad organisation has created the Centre of Excellence for Teaching and Learning Abroad (CETLA) which will inform future development of the provision (paragraph 14). IES Abroad London has made significant changes in its assessment practices which align more closely with UK higher education (paragraph 21).

7 There were three advisable recommendations arising from the full RSEO review report of December 2020. It was noted at the 2021 monitoring visit that the actions taken in light of the recommendations had been completed and evaluation has been undertaken. Further development has also taken place in relation to the action on providing staff development in online and blended learning.

8 Following the initial delivery of staff training in online and blended learning methods, the organisation has been offering regular refresher and question and answer sessions. Online and blended teaching is now routine for London staff, with seamless change to online teaching in case of staff sickness or other disruption. The update to the 2020 review action plan notes increasing teaching staff confidence in technology use, with only a small number now requiring individual support.

9 Since the previous monitoring visit, IES has returned to normal operations and staffing levels have returned to pre-pandemic levels. Normal course evaluations, including end-of-term student surveys across all three teaching terms, as well as mid-term evaluations during the longer spring and autumn terms, have been undertaken.

10 Student feedback in the Orientation Feedback for the autumn (fall) cohort of 2022 indicated some dissatisfaction with the provision of information in advance of their arrival in the UK. Students who met the team confirmed that they were unsure if it was the US school, Chicago Office or the IES Abroad London Centre to contact about gaining assistance with obtaining their visas and other documentation. They were uncertain which part of the organisation was responsible for providing assistance to them. Response times to queries were also cited by students as being slow. IES Abroad London has recently appointed a Student Success Advocate who has the potential to resolve some of these issues in the future.

11 Oversight of academic standards falls under the remit of the Curriculum Committee for the wider study abroad consortium, but IES Abroad London is an active participant within the consortium and is leading on some initiatives, including the developments in assessment.

12 Although IES Abroad London is proactive in identifying opportunities for the enhancement of its provision and has made significant changes in relation to its policies and procedures for assessment, it has not developed a new summative action plan which records actions, responsibilities for effecting completion of them or target dates.

13 Staff meetings which deal with local programme management issues are held regularly by IES. Notes from the staff meeting of 3 October 2022 do not refer to actions arising out of previous meetings and do not clearly highlight actions and responsibilities for issues raised in the meeting. A teaching staff meeting held at the start of the autumn term was a minuted briefing session, but the actions are not assigned to a named individual with a timescale for completion. This was also noted in relation to faculty meetings.

14 IES Abroad has recently established the CETLA which provides dedicated guidance and support to centres and academic staff on a wide range of learning and teaching related topics. The London Centre has already benefited from an introductory meeting specifically for the London, Dublin and Amsterdam teaching teams in September 2022, and regular newsletters and workshops. CETLA are also advising the London centre in the choice of classroom technology for the new building move planned for early 2023.

15 Due to the short length of the study abroad programmes on offer at IES Abroad and the high-level of commitment required by students to attend a programme of study at an organisation in a different country, student data returns do not provide significant feedback on programme performance as all students are likely to successfully complete this discrete part of their overall course.

16 In the 2018-19 academic year, 520 students enrolled across all the programmes. All completed their programmes and all succeeded in the programme aim. Similarly, in 2019-20, 713 students enrolled, all of whom completed and were successful on their

programmes. All programmes were closed in the 2020-21 year due to COVID-19.

17 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 students have successfully completed their programmes. For the academic year 2021-22, a total of 260 students enrolled across the organisation including 171 students on the Study Abroad programme and 52 on customised programmes.

18 At the time of the monitoring visit, the students are the September 2022 cohort consisting of: 62 students on the Study Abroad programme; 11 students on Health Practice and Policy; 3 on full-time internships; 3 on a theatre studies programme; and 60 on customised programmes of study from three universities in the USA.

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

19 As a study abroad provider, IES Abroad London conforms with the academic framework of its validating consortium of US higher education institutions. IES Abroad London operates in the UK providing educational services to an American student body under the academic oversight of a Chicago-based Curriculum Committee made up of senior academic representatives from the 235 consortium universities. The IES Curriculum Committee validates and monitors programmes to ensure consistent standards and quality, as well as scrutinising organisation-wide academic policies. The Curriculum Committee provides procedural guidelines, standards and guidance for the introduction of new and review of existing programmes, courses and corresponding syllabi.

20 IES Abroad London has been involved in organisation-wide taskforces developing more inclusive curriculum and teaching approaches. As a result of these taskforces, IES Abroad London has started piloting improvements which include: the introduction of the role of the Student Success Advocate; a revised student orientation and induction which now includes a practical session on critical academic writing in the UK and a panel session focusing on diversity; and the roll-out of a faculty training and development programme, with two training sessions per semester. The autumn 2022 focus is on the concept of 'Inclusive Excellence'.

21 Despite the significant differences in academic policy environment and understanding of best practice between UK and US higher education, IES Abroad London has been developing its quality systems to align more closely with UK higher education practice. In particular, it has introduced three policies relating to assessment, including the introduction of anonymous marking, the introduction of second-marking and moderation, and the introduction of late submission and extenuating circumstances policies. None of these is standard practice in the US and their introduction at this stage is confined to IES Abroad London. IES Abroad has stated its intention to benchmark its systems against those of UK higher education institutions and the relevant Core and Common practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and, where appropriate, to adopt aspects of UK best practice.

22 By adopting best practice approaches from both academic cultures, IES Abroad aims to bridge the gap between teaching staff's own academic cultural backgrounds and the students' expectations.

Background to the monitoring visit

23 The monitoring visit 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.

24 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Peter Hymans, Reviewer, and Dr Margaret Johnson, QAA Officer, on 6 December 2022.

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