



Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Washington International Studies Council, June 2017

1 Section 1: Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review panel concludes that Washington International Studies Council (WISC) has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the May 2016 [Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA review

2 There have been no significant changes since the review visit of May 2016. Student numbers have remained broadly at the same level. The arrangements with the four colleges of the University of Oxford remain as previously, providing one-to-one tutorials and access to their facilities for students, while WISC itself provides non-academic services, including accommodation, social and cultural events, advice giving, administration and liaison.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 Many of the actions identified following the 2016 report have been addressed and the good practice further developed and embedded. Action has been taken to address the one advisable recommendation, to introduce a formal procedure to ensure that all contractual agreements with partner institutions are both current and subject to regular review. During the last year, WISC has reviewed the contracts it has with the 25 most significant providers of students. Contractual agreements with these partners have now been completed, and updated consortium agreements are in place with 17 institutions. These agreements clearly define the responsibilities of the respective parties. The remaining eight are yet to be approved by the relevant institution, and are expected to be ratified in the near future. Although the contractual process is not yet complete, WISC has found it beneficial and it has enabled a clearer relationship to be put in place with the providing institutions. WISC continues to recruit a minority of students from institutions where there is no formal contract between WISC and the provider. In these cases, the student has a formal agreement directly with WISC.

4 The 2016 review report identified one area of good practice, namely the close liaison with relevant colleges of the University of Oxford, which facilitates the institution's coherent and holistic response to student support and feedback. WISC has revised its contracts with student liaison officers in each of the four Oxford colleges. The aim of these arrangements is to enable WISC students to have the greatest possible opportunity to integrate into the life of their respective colleges. Feedback from the end-of-term evaluations indicates that students have made greater use of college facilities, although students at the monitoring visit indicated that there is variability between the colleges in the level of integration possible. Overall, students consider the experience to have been a very positive one.

5 WISC has continued to update and review its student orientation materials, including its pre-arrival information. Student feedback from the end-of-term evaluations

indicates that these amendments have been welcomed. However, students at the monitoring visit indicated that the induction programme could be improved and could provide a more dynamic introduction to their studies. In particular, some students would have welcomed more detailed information about their programme of study before arrival.

6 Assessment processes have been further clarified with the various US university partners, including the role of home faculties in reviewing students' assessments and agreeing the grades.

7 WISC's Academic Board meets annually to oversee the process of course design and approval for each student. The Board consists of the President, the Academic Director, the academic advisors and representatives from each of the four University of Oxford colleges with which WISC is partnered. Minutes of the Academic Board indicate the level of oversight and the detailed analysis, which ensures that the programme is working effectively. Minutes confirm that policies and procedures are reviewed through Academic Board and that monitoring and reporting responsibilities are effective. In addition to its annual meeting, members of the Board correspond throughout the year to discuss the effectiveness of the tutorial arrangements. This is done by taking into account tutor reports and student evaluation forms, as well as through maintaining regular contact with tutors. Formally defined teaching agreements between WISC and its tutors clearly identify the responsibilities of both parties.

8 Students have accommodation provided by WISC, and welcome both the personal and academic support they receive. Students at the monitoring visit commented favourably about the ways in which they are guided, the quality of the teaching, and the availability of learning support, although some students commented on the variability between their experience at the different Oxford colleges, and consequently the potential for a differing student experience.

4 Progress in working with the relevant external reference points relating to academic standards and quality for higher education

9 WISC continues to work with a wide range of partners and with the relevant external reference points, which are the requirements of the US home universities, as well as with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). Tutors teaching on the programme are members of the University of Oxford and are aware of the expectations of the Quality Code through their teaching roles.

10 In addition, the Centre has been taking account of how its provision maps against relevant chapters of the Quality Code, including *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*; *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*; and *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*. Senior staff see the Quality Code as a useful reference point. The Quality Code *Part C: Information about higher education provision* is used in ensuring that published information is accurate and fit for purpose. The University of Oxford has oversight of information published about its links with WISC and ensures that careful terminology is used concerning the status of students.

5 Background to the monitoring visit

11 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.

12 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Simon Ives, QAA Officer, and Professor Alan Jago, review panel member on 14 June 2017.

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