



Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Washington International Studies Council, June 2018

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 continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [previous monitoring visit](#) in June 2017.

2 Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 No significant changes have taken place since the previous monitoring visit. WISC continues to work with four Oxford University colleges, and the arrangements for one-to-one tutorials with the University faculty remain the same. There are plans to request a further 10 places at one of the Oxford colleges during the academic year 2018-19. Student numbers have increased slightly from 174 for the academic year 2016-17 to 180 for 2017-18. All students enrolled by WISC during 2016-17 successfully completed their programme of study. Since the last monitoring visit, WISC has engaged two additional part-time members of staff, one to provide academic advice and the other to support the administration of the programme.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 WISC continues to build on its action plan from the 2016 Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight (RSEO) review. It has now completed the actions required to address the advisable recommendation to introduce a formal procedure to ensure that contractual agreements with partner institutions are both current and subject to regular review. It has achieved this by updating its agreements with all 25 of its regular partners (sending institutions). The original one page Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) template has been replaced with a more detailed MOU which sets out the responsibilities of WISC and the home institution, and addresses the legal issues relating to students studying on the programmes. The new contract has been approved by the Academic Board and will require a review every three to five years. For legal reasons, some sending institutions prefer to use their own contract template, but the requirement for a review every three to five years has been included in these contracts. Staff met by the monitoring team indicated that the new format of the agreements enables them to provide consistent and detailed information to the sending institutions and to keep in contact with alumni. The first date for review of any of the agreements is 2019.

4 WISC continues to recruit a minority of students from institutions with which it has no formal agreement. In these cases, students sign agreements directly with WISC. Students with these customised agreements indicated to the team that their learning experience was consistent with those from other sending institutions.

5 Following comments made in the 2017 QAA monitoring report, WISC has undertaken to provide full-time students with information several weeks prior to their arrival about their tutors and the subjects arranged for them. This is intended to enable students to

communicate with their tutors regarding preparatory work for their course. However, the provision of this information is dependent upon the availability and the allocation of tutors by the Oxford colleges. Although students meet with their tutors upon arrival at WISC, relatively few of the students met by the team had received information in advance about their tutorials. Students indicated that they would like more information about their course and also their accommodation prior to arriving in the UK.

6 WISC's website is now the central point for pre-arrival information and includes material in respect of housing, academic matters, grievance procedures and the health and safety policy. It is also a resource for students when they commence their programme and helps them to settle into life in the UK. Students are also able to access information about the study abroad programmes from their home institution as well as through the websites of the individual Oxford colleges.

7 The revised contracts with Student Liaison Officers, which clearly set out the expectations of their role, have facilitated improved integration of WISC students into the academic aspects of undergraduate life and have supported their participation in social activities. This is reflected in positive feedback through the end-of-term evaluations and comments made by students to the team. These developments build further on the area of good practice highlighted at the 2016 RSEO review with regard to the close liaison between WISC and the Oxford colleges.

8 WISC has a rigorous admissions process which is aligned to Chapter B2 of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). Students are required to provide letters of recommendation, official transcripts, samples of their academic writing, and tutorial request forms. The majority of students are from American or Canadian Universities which ensures that their level of English Language meets the requirements of the Oxford colleges. Associate students are required to have a grade point average (GPA) of 3.2 and visiting students a GPA of 3.7. Students are able to contact WISC tutors during the application process. Concerns have been discussed at the Academic Board about the length of time the admissions process takes. However, as decisions about admissions rest with the Oxford colleges, WISC has little jurisdiction over the length of time the decision-making process takes, but does liaise regularly with college tutors.

9 The orientation programme has been extended and revised. It now includes sessions with the Oxford colleges and provides information on using the Bodleian library. Student surveys comment favourably on the revised orientation programme, and students who met the monitoring team indicated that it had effectively prepared them for their studies. They give informal feedback about the orientation process to their WISC tutors.

10 The Academic Board meets annually and is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the programme. It considers the outcomes of the various monitoring activities undertaken by WISC. These include student surveys which are held mid and end-of-term, feedback from the student committee, reports from academic tutors, and reports relating to student welfare. The Board also has oversight of the admissions process.

11 Student progress is monitored through reports from college tutors and by holding informal discussions with students. Tutor feedback is positive and students indicated that they are able to discuss all aspects of their programme with members of the WISC academic team. Student enrolment, progression and achievement data for academic year 2016-17 indicates 100 per cent completion and achievement rates for the programme.

12 The Student Committee, which includes students on either two-term or one-year programmes, enables WISC to receive regular feedback and make changes more quickly than by using only the outcomes of the end-of-term surveys. Changes made in response to

student feedback include the enhanced orientation programme with a tour of the College library.

13 Although WISC uses a range of methods to monitor its programmes, and is responsive to student feedback, a more structured approach to monitoring could provide a reference point for future enhancement. For example, the outcomes of the recent report following a visit by the British Accreditation Council (BAC) have not been formally considered by the Academic Board, although staff indicated that action had been taken in response to recommendations made in the report.

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

14 WISC works with its partner institutions for the design and development of the curriculum for each individual student. This provides the main external reference point. The one-to-one tutorial system of the Oxford colleges provides a further reference point for the delivery and assessment of the curriculum. BAC, through its accreditation process, provides an external reference point for confirming the quality of the student experience. Following the visit by BAC in July 2017, WISC has been reaccredited for a further four years and will be the subject of annual review.

15 WISC makes use of the Quality Code for its policies in relation to the quality of the learning experience, in particular Chapter B2 for its admissions policy and Chapter B4 for its handbook and Code of Practice.

5 Background to the monitoring visit

16 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.

17 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Lee Smith, QAA Officer, and Ms Brenda Eade, panel member, on 12 June 2018.

QAA2187 - R9915 - Jul 18

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2018
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557050
Web www.qaa.ac.uk