



Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: desk-based analysis of Washington International Studies Council, February 2022

Outcome of the desk-based analysis

1 From the annual return and documentary evidence, the monitoring team concludes that the Washington International Studies Council (WISC) is continuing to maintain academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities since the January 2021 [Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight Review](#).

Changes since the last QAA review

2 WISC's typical enrolments of around 140 full-term students per year, have declined since March 2020. The current student numbers stand at 41 full-time equivalent studying on an RQF Level 6 qualification being taught on a one-to-one basis by an average of 30 to 40 Oxford tutors per term. No changes have taken place to the awarding organisation, programmes offered, premises or staffing.

Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The desk-based review team considered the Annual Monitoring Return Form, supporting evidence and a wide range of requested supplementary evidence. WISC, as part of an internal quality process, has undertaken a systematic mapping exercise of all its activities against the Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), to identify a number of institutional recommendations and also to document how, following the RSEO, the three advisable recommendations could be met (paragraphs 5 and 9). The recommendations on student feedback and the introduction to formalised Academic Board remit are underway (paragraphs 6 and 7). The final recommendation – to provide the students with more detailed information before arrival at Oxford college - has been met (paragraph 8).

4 The WISC Action Plan 2021-22 clearly articulates progress made on the feature of good practice. In response, WISC intends to review the language contract with liaison representatives of the Oxford Colleges by July 2022, with an evaluation of the success of the process carried out through the end of term student survey feedback.

5 The action plan further documented the three advisable recommendations from the previous review. To take account of those recommendations, to continue to transition to the revised Quality Code and address the Common practices, WISC engaged an external consultant, to develop a QAA Quality Code manual and evidence mapping document.

6 The first of those recommendations required WISC to develop a more systematic approach to student feedback. Student feedback is currently collected during mid and end-of-term surveys, with the results from those surveys discussed at Academic Board. WISC plan to revise those evaluation forms by May 2022, to allow for a more qualitative analysis of library usage, social integration and student satisfaction levels in response to their tutorial programmes. Student-Staff Liaison Committee meetings further capture student views and, although the team found some discussion of those meetings at the Academic

Board, it did not appear to be a regular standing item. The team understands that to ensure a more coherent approach is taken, it is expected that from March 2022 new arrangements for those meetings will be implemented in line with the new Quality Code manual.

7 The second recommendation expected the institution to formalise the terms of reference for the Academic Board and ensure the records provide confirmation of actions planned and reviewed. The team was provided with information of how the Academic Board might operate but found the document to lack specific information on the frequency, constitution or membership. However, as part of the action plan commentary, the team was reassured that Academic Board would involve students in future meetings and the next meeting, in spring 2022, will approve the new arrangements, including revised terms of reference, membership and frequency of meetings.

8 The final recommendation required the institution to ensure the students are provided at the outset of their studies with comprehensive assessment information. The recommendation was completed in May 2021 with the introduction of three additional communication points and providing the students with an opportunity to communicate with their tutors in advance of their arrival in Oxford. The team was not able to fully confirm if this recommendation had been met as the evidence provided pre-dates the latest review.

9 The Quality Code Manual and mapping document of April 2021, sets out a number of recommendations, and although it is less clear how these recommendations will be monitored, several institutional changes have been implemented. These changes include a more informative acceptance letter and improved policies and procedures for attendance monitoring, a revised Student Liaison Officer Agreement, and the introduction of End-of-Term Evaluations. Again, although it is difficult to fully track the extent to which all student feedback has been systematically used and monitored, it was evident that changes had been made in response to some of their feedback, to include better access to medical services and an updated orientation schedule.

10 WISC employ only current or previously employed Oxford University faculty, who sign a teaching contract that details the precise equitable, valid and reliable assessment processes they will follow. WISC is a non-degree study abroad provider offering a highly individualised one-to-one tutorial system and is therefore not directly responsible for progression and achievement rates. It was, however, confirmed that WISC provides detailed academic records which are signed by the appropriate Oxford College official, at the end of every term.

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

11 An interim inspection to confirm the quality of the student experience, took place on November 2019, by the British Accreditation Council. The inspection was held over one day and included a tour of the premises, tutorial observation, document scrutiny and meetings with the management team, a selection of students and one tutor. The final British Accreditation Council report conferred continued accreditation on 20 February 2020. From February to April 2021, WISC engaged an external consultant to complete an intensive review of all provisions. The inspection included reviewing the programmes and meetings with staff and students, culminating in a Quality Code Handbook and comprehensive mapping document against the Core and Common practices of the QAA Quality Code (see also paragraph 9 above).

Background to the desk-based analysis

12 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/annual monitoring. 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 process or review.

13 The desk-based analysis was carried out by Barbara Howell, Reviewer, and Dr Demelza Curnow, QAA Officer, in February 2022. 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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