



Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: desk-based analysis of Washington International Studies Council, February 2024

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 February 2023 [monitoring visit](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 WISC is a short-term study abroad provider for students primarily studying in North America. There have been no significant changes since the previous annual monitoring visit in 2023. Student numbers vary slightly between terms but have remained at the same level in comparison with last year. The majority of students hosted by WISC's four partner colleges are undergraduate students. In the autumn term of this academic year (2023-24), enrolment was similar to the autumn term of the previous year. There were 49 students in residence (55 in the previous year) at the time of submission of the annual return. This included one postgraduate student. Likewise, current spring term enrolment is roughly the same as the previous spring. There are 56 students in residence, including two postgraduate students; 16 of these students are visiting students and 40 are associate members. In the autumn term, there were 41 associate members and eight visiting students. Visiting students are academically supervised and supported during their studies by the Oxford University college (Magdalen or New College), and admissions decisions for visiting students are made entirely by the Oxford college. Academic supervision for associate members is provided by WISC and they are supported by their Oxford college.

Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The review team considered the annual return and supporting documentation, as well as supplementary evidence requested by the team as part of a desk-based analysis. WISC continues to make acceptable progress in implementing the good practice identified in the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight report 2021 (paragraph 4) and meeting the three advisable recommendations from the report (paragraphs 5-8). There were no outstanding actions to be completed in the 2023 monitoring report; however, more time was needed for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the completed actions.

4 WISC continues to build upon the good practice identified in providing ongoing support for students. Tutorials can be revised with tutor and student agreement which means the syllabi can be adjusted based upon a student's progress throughout the term. This personalised approach provides students with ongoing weekly academic support. WISC is continuing to review contractual arrangements with college liaison representatives, with a view to providing a more proactive approach to facilitating students' integration, especially in the first two weeks of their arrival in Oxford. The Action Plan for 2023-24 indicates that these contract reviews will be completed in April 2024.

5 The first recommendation advised WISC to develop a more systematic approach to collecting, analysing and acting upon student feedback, particularly in respect of library resources, tutorial experiences and prospects for integration within the designated colleges. The recommendation had been met last year, and acceptable progress has been made over the past 12 months. WISC collects detailed feedback from mid-term evaluations, which are compulsory for each student, and end-of-term anonymous surveys. At the time of annual monitoring, WISC was reviewing the current evaluation forms to ensure that questions allow for more quantitative analysis of library usage, and student satisfaction with their tutorials. The Action Plan for 2023-24 confirms that these reviews will now be completed in May 2024. WISC continues to hold Student-Staff Liaison Committee meetings, and student representatives currently attend Academic Board for a timed item to provide more direct further feedback.

6 The second recommendation advised WISC to formalise the terms of reference for the Academic Board and to ensure that records provide sufficient confirmation of actions planned and reviewed. The recommendation relating to structuring the Board had been met last year. Following the mapping exercise to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), it is, however, proposed that further changes are made to the terms of reference, membership and frequency of meetings of Academic Board, including proposed greater student involvement. The Action Plan for 2023-24 indicates that these changes will be considered for formal approval by Academic Board in spring 2024.

7 The final recommendation advised WISC to ensure that students are provided with comprehensive assessment information from the outset of their studies. This recommendation had been met last year, and acceptable progress has been made in building upon the initiatives initially introduced in 2021, which focused on standardising systems for communicating with students prior to arrival in the UK. The institution has introduced a dedicated website that provides detailed information on the Oxford tutorial system, a list of recommended tutorials, and example courses. Upon arrival in Oxford, each student receives a revised orientation pack and a 10-day induction period, where students can ask staff members questions, meet with tutors, and clarify assessment requirements. Students are actively engaged in tutorial/course design and tutorial sessions are agreed between the student and tutor in the first tutorial. Students are informed of what is required to pass and achieve higher grades in their summative assessments.

8 In respect of policies and systems in place for monitoring student attendance and ensuring registered students meet their tutorial obligations, UK Visa and Immigration requirements for international students studying in the UK continue to be taken into account.

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

9 WISC does not award academic credit or determine student progression decisions. Instead, WISC ensures that the Oxford Study Abroad Programme meets the standards and quality requirements of home universities in the USA, which approve each course and award academic credit. WISC sends detailed academic transcripts, signed by the appropriate Oxford college official, to the home university at the end of every term. The home university registrar assesses the student's coursework by evaluating the transcript (which includes detailed tutorial reports) and awards academic credit accordingly.

10 Following a mapping of its policies and practices against the Quality Code, the Academic Board has approved a Quality Manual that acts as a reference point for the Oxford Study Abroad Programme staff and students regarding how the study abroad programme meets the Expectations and Core practices of the Quality Code. Prospects for reviewing and

updating the mapping exercise and supporting documentation relating to the Quality Code, initially produced by an external consultant in 2021, remain positive.

Background to the desk-based analysis

11 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.

12 The desk-based analysis was carried out by Graham Romp, Reviewer, and Monika Ruthe, QAA Officer, in February 2024. 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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