



# Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Washington International Study Council, February 2023

## Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Washington International Study Council (WISC) is making acceptable progress since the February 2022 [Desk-based review](#).

## Changes since the last monitoring report

2 Washington International Study Council is a short-term study abroad provider. Students studying at home universities in the USA attend for either one or two terms at one of the University of Oxford colleges with which it has an arrangement. These are Oriel, Trinity, Magdalene and New College. Credits gained in study at WISC can contribute to overall degree grades at the home university.

3 There have been no significant changes since the previous desk-based review in 2022. Student numbers vary each term and at the time of the annual return, there were 55 students engaged in one-to-one tutorials with University of Oxford tutors. This is an increase from 41 at the time of the 2022 review. All teaching is undertaken by University of Oxford staff. There are 9 administrative staff.

## Findings from the monitoring report

4 The review team considered the annual return, a wide range of documentary evidence, and information gained in meetings with the Senior Management Team, academic staff, support staff and students. Although more time is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the initiatives recently implemented, WISC continues to make acceptable progress in extending the good practice identified (paragraph 4) and meeting the three advisable recommendations (paragraphs 5-10) originally set out in the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight 2021 report, and monitoring review 2022.

5 WISC continues to build upon the good practice identified in providing ongoing support for students, particularly in respect of facilitating opportunities for student engagement in each designated University of Oxford college and maintaining effective relationships with Oxford College Liaison Representatives. The institution is currently reviewing contractual arrangements with each of the four colleges to provide additional prospects for student integration. The Action Plan for 2022-23 indicates that reviews will be completed in July 2023.

6 The first acceptable 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 has been met, and acceptable progress has been made over the past 12 months. The institution collects detailed feedback from mid-term evaluations, which are compulsory for each student, and end-of-term anonymous surveys. Plans are in place to review the current evaluation forms to ensure that questions are sufficiently

comprehensive, and the Action Plan for 2022-23 confirms that the reviews initially planned for May 2022 will now be completed in April 2023 following the appointment of a member of staff with specific responsibility for analysis of student evaluation. In 2022, to broaden options for direct feedback, senior managers decided to include student representatives in Academic Board meetings and inaugurate Student-Staff Liaison Committee sessions. To assist in developing a more systemised approach to data collection and usage, the external consultant originally hired to undertake the mapping exercise on the UK Quality Code in 2021 has now agreed to assist the Senior Team in embedding the recommendation.

7 The institution demonstrates a proactive approach in responding positively to student comments. For example, to address student complaints that the Bodleian Library was intimidating, WISC has introduced a separate orientation session on use of the library. To reduce concerns raised by some students about the roles and responsibilities of primary and secondary tutors, the contract for tutors has been revised to clarify responsibilities. In response to comments made by students wishing to have more interaction with students in their designated colleges and the University of Oxford in general, senior managers are currently exploring possibilities for students to live in-college, rather than in third-party accommodation.

8 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 has been fully met. The terms of reference, membership and frequency of meetings were agreed in December, during the Board's only meeting in 2022, which was attended by senior staff members, a representative from each of the four Oxford colleges and two student representatives. Minutes of the meeting provide a fair record of matters discussed, but precise details about the actions to be taken remain uncertain. Additional meetings in 2023 should provide further opportunities for implementing and embedding the Academic Board's key practices of review and action planning.

9 The final recommendation advised WISC to ensure that students are provided with comprehensive assessment information from the outset of their studies. This recommendation has been met, 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 aimed at students accepted into the Oxford Study Abroad Programme to address concerns they may have in advance of arrival in Oxford. In addition to valuable information about the programme and accommodation, the website provides detailed information on assessment requirements, the tutorial system and producing written work. Upon arrival in Oxford, each student receives a revised orientation pack that includes information on assessments. During the 10-day induction period, students have opportunities to ask staff members questions, to meet with tutors to clarify assessment requirements and to explore matters further with a Student Panel, comprised of student peers already familiar with the programme. Academic Advisors remain available to assist students with queries, to address and resolve academic issues arising, and to liaise with principal and secondary tutors and representatives from the four Oxford colleges, as required.

10 WISC's internal processes provide a robust system for managing the quality of its one-to-one study abroad provision. The institution's approach to course delivery provides students with a unique opportunity to study specialised topics on a one-to-one basis with highly qualified tutors who have taught at the University of Oxford. This is underpinned by a dedicated team of Academic Advisors. Systems are in place to ensure that Academic Advisors provide students with sufficient information prior to arrival in the UK and that tutors actively involve students in planning their own courses from the first tutorial session. A

compulsory attendance policy ensures that students meet regularly with their designated tutors and that results are recorded by academic team members. At designated points in the term, primary and secondary tutors are required to provide meaningful feedback on assigned work and, at the end of every term, to produce formal reports assessing each student's written and verbal performance.

11 Senior Managers and Academic Advisors review tutorial reports and resolve any anomalies arising. Final reports are signed off by the appropriate Oxford college official at the end of every term, and Academic Advisors send full reports to the student's home university, where final credit assessments are made. In exceptional cases, results are sent to Maryville University, the Institution's School of Record, where information is transferred onto American-styled university transcripts acceptable to the home university. WISC retains all records of past and present student performance in hardcopy and electronic version. In cases, where home universities raise queries about course content or credit assignment, regardless of when such issues are raised, WISC's Senior Managers and Academic Advisors liaise pro-actively with home university representatives to address queries or issues arising.

12 There has been a 14% increase in student numbers from 41 in 2022 to 55 in 2023. All students are studying undergraduate programmes at home universities, primarily in North America, and attend WISC for either one or two terms of study at University of Oxford colleges.

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

13 As a study abroad provider without the power to authorise progression or award qualifications, WISC's initial responsibility rests in ensuring that the Oxford Study Abroad Programme meets the standards and quality requirements of home universities in the USA, which must approve each course and determine the credits awarded. As confirmed in the meeting with academic and service staff, a proactive approach has been adopted in establishing and maintaining effective communication links with representatives from each of the home universities involved.

14 In respect of external reference points used to align WISC's study abroad provision with UK expectations, acceptable progress continues to be made. Officials in the designated colleges within the University of Oxford, approve and sign detailed academic records provided by WISC at the end of every term. In addition, each student in the programme must agree to abide by all the rules and regulations of the University of Oxford, including academic honesty. Prospects for reviewing and updating the mapping exercise and supporting documentation relating to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education initially produced by an external consultant in 2021 are positive. Senior managers attending the meeting have confirmed that the same consultant will serve as WISC's external quality advisor on future UK regulatory matters. 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 are also taken into account.

## **Background to the monitoring visit**

15 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.

16 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Tommie Anderson-Jaquest, Reviewer, and Millard Parkinson, QAA Officer, on 14 February 2023.

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