



Foundation for International Education

Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight

Review by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

May 2012

About this report

This is a report of a review under the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the Foundation for International Education. The review took place on 29 May 2012 and was conducted by a panel, as follows:

- Professor Peter Hodson
- Dr Colin Dawson
- Dr Emily Zhou.

The main purpose of the review was to:

- make judgements about the provider's delegated responsibilities for the management of academic standards and the quality and enhancement of learning opportunities
- draw a conclusion about whether the provider's public information is reliable
- report on any features of good practice
- make recommendations for action.

A summary of the key findings can be found in the section starting on page 3. The context in which these findings should be interpreted is explained on page 4. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.¹ More information about this review method can be found in the [published handbook](#)².

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx

² www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/eo-recognition-scheme.aspx

Key findings

The QAA panel considered evidence relating to the educational provision at the Foundation for International Education (FIE), both information supplied in advance and evidence gathered during the visits of the review itself. The review has resulted in the key findings stated in this section.

Judgements

The QAA panel formed the following judgements about the Foundation for International Education:

- **confidence** can be placed in the Foundation for International Education's management of its responsibilities for academic standards
- **confidence** can be placed in the Foundation for International Education's management of its responsibilities for the quality of the learning opportunities.

Conclusion about public information

The QAA panel concluded that:

- **reliance can** be placed on the public information that the Foundation for International Education supplies about itself.

Good practice

The QAA panel identified the following **features of good practice** at the Foundation for International Education:

- the clear support and guidance to academic staff in implementing the grading criteria (paragraph 1.11)
- the high quality of the student internship experience (paragraph 2.8)
- the support students receive in academic writing (paragraph 2.11)
- the comprehensive nature of the Faculty Handbook (paragraph 2.12)
- the strong provision for staff communication through the Faculty Lounge area on the virtual learning environment (paragraph 2.15).

Recommendations

The QAA panel makes the following **advisable** recommendations to the Foundation for International Education:

- implement the recently designed Course Convenor role, which should also embrace moderation of students' assessed work (paragraph 1.12)
- develop a more effective mechanism for the Academic Committee to receive and respond to student feedback (paragraph 2.6).

Context

The Foundation for International Education (FIE) is a private, independent, non-profit international education organisation founded in 1998, which offers educational programmes for academic credits to students from accredited American universities recognised by the National Recognition Information Centre of the UK (NARIC). It is based in London but also has provision in Dublin, Madrid and Amman. It provides Open Enrolment semester programmes, joint summer programmes and bespoke programmes (known as 'closed' programmes) for US colleges and universities.

FIE currently works with 46 partners. Partnership arrangements are in the form of memoranda of understanding and School of Record. FIE's students are mainly recruited via their home institutions, although it also receives applications directly from students. Courses and faculty are subject to review by the partner institutions. Programmes and courses are designed in line with the external reference points used by the partner institutions, and approved by the relevant academic committees of the partner institutions in the USA. Responsibility for the award of credit lies with the awarding institutions in the USA. Therefore, FIE operates within a US framework for academic standards.

FIE is accredited by the British Accreditation Council (BAC), and received a positive re-accreditation report in January 2012. Similarly, the Forum on Education Abroad undertook a Quality Improvement Plan (QUIP) review in 2008. Successful completion of the review confirmed that FIE meets the Forum's required standards of good practice. Additional external reference points include the Association of American Study Abroad Programmes/United Kingdom (AASAP/UK) and the NAFSA: Association of International Educators. In addition, many staff are members of professional bodies, which guide their working practices.

Detailed findings

1 Academic standards

How effectively does the provider fulfil its responsibilities for the management of academic standards?

1.1 The Foundation for International Education (FIE) provides study abroad programmes for accredited US institutions, which are recognised by NARIC. Responsibility for the award of credit lies with the awarding institutions in the USA. FIE is therefore operating within a US framework for academic standards.

1.2 Partnership arrangements, and the conditions of the partnership, are set out in memoranda of understanding. In addition, FIE has a partnership arrangement with Drexel University and St Norbert College known as a School of Record. Under this arrangement, FIE is able to deliver academic credit, through the School of Record, to students who apply directly to FIE on Open Enrolment programmes.

1.3 The arrangement of new partnerships is largely managed by FIE's development team in the USA. The terms of the partnership are negotiated between FIE's development team, the partner institution, and FIE's London Office. Formal approval follows the procedures of the new partner institution, and results in the signing of the memorandum of understanding.

1.4 The admission of students follows stringent recruitment procedures to ensure they are suitable for study abroad programmes. Typically, minimum grade point averages are set; and participation is limited to students who are not currently under academic or disciplinary sanctions by their home institution. This process is overseen by FIE staff in conjunction with the partner institution.

1.5 Procedures for course approval vary between institutions. Ideas for new programmes can come from FIE, or the partner institution and this is developed collaboratively with FIE's development team in the USA. Responsibility for course approval lies with the relevant department in the partner institution. Agreed syllabi are developed according to a standard template, which includes the content, recommended reading, learning outcomes, attendance policy, assessment tasks, and the grading rubric.

1.6 Courses and faculty are subject to review by the partner institutions; and processes and procedures tend to differ between institutions. This process is managed through the committee system of the partner institution. Drexel University intends to begin to review all of its accredited provision with FIE in 2012-13. The intention is that this will become a regular rolling programme of review, with six courses reviewed per academic year.

1.7 The review panel considers that FIE has in place a variety of mechanisms by which it is able to fulfil its responsibilities for the effective management of academic standards.

How effectively are external reference points used in the management of academic standards?

1.8 Programmes and courses are designed in line with the external reference points used by the partner institution, and approved by the relevant academic committees of the partner institution in the USA.

1.9 FIE is accredited by the British Accreditation Council (BAC), and received a positive re-accreditation report in January 2012. Similarly, the Forum on Education Abroad undertook

a Quality Improvement Plan (QUIP) review in 2008. Successful completion of the review confirmed that FIE meets the Forum's required standards of good practice.

1.10 Additional external reference points include the AASAP/UK and NAFSA: Association of International Educators (NAFSA). FIE provides a complete list of organisations that serve as external reference points on its Professional Development Portal. In addition, staff are often members of professional bodies, which guides their working practices.

How effectively does the provider use external scrutiny of assessment processes to assure academic standards?

1.11 Universities in the USA do not use external examiners and examination boards. Teaching faculty are given considerable autonomy and responsibility for standards. In practice, grading criteria are explicit, and the review panel considers the clear support and guidance to academic staff in implementing the grading criteria is a feature of good practice. There is no requirement to internally moderate students' work, but some does take place to ensure consistency.

1.12 The review panel learned that FIE is proposing to appoint three course convenors to undertake a range of quality assurance tasks. The review panel recommends that it is advisable that FIE implements the recently designed Course Convenor role, which should also embrace moderation of students' assessed work.

The panel has **confidence** in the provider's management of its responsibilities for the standards of the awards to be conferred by its awarding bodies.

2 Quality of learning opportunities

How effectively does the provider fulfil its responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities?

2.1 Responsibility for managing the quality of learning opportunities and delivery of academic courses lies with FIE's Management Team. The Management Team is collectively and individually responsible for staffing, quality assurance, programme development, and student satisfaction.

2.2 The Management Team is assisted in its responsibilities by a number of standing committees and working groups. The Academic Advisory Board contains members of partner institutions, and maintains a focus on academic quality and viability of programmes. The Academic Committee is responsible for day-to-day policies and procedures and delivery of programmes. In addition, an Admissions Committee exists to oversee admissions policies, procedures, and practices. In particular, it assesses applications from independent applicants. The review panel considered that FIE has in place robust systems and procedures for the management of learning opportunities.

How effectively are external reference points used in monitoring and evaluation processes?

2.3 FIE uses the external reference points described in paragraphs 1.10 to 1.12 to inform their evaluation of the learning opportunities provided.

How effectively does the provider assure itself that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced?

2.4 FIE has in place a variety of procedures in place to ensure that the quality of teaching is maintained and enhanced. Teaching faculty are observed at least once every two years, sometimes more frequently for less experienced faculty.

2.5 In addition to faculty monitoring, each syllabus is reviewed prior to delivery. Through this review, senior managers assure that course content, aims and objectives, learning outcomes, assessment regimes, and reading lists are at the appropriate level.

2.6 Student evaluations are held at the end of each course and focus on the quality of teaching and learning. While there was evidence that student evaluations are reviewed among faculty, it was not clear to the review panel that student evaluation reports were consistently received in deliberative committees. Therefore, the review panel considers it advisable that FIE develops a more effective mechanism for the Academic Committee to receive and respond to student feedback.

2.7 FIE has a strong commitment to experiential learning, and this is evident in the internship programmes offered. Internships are supported by a comprehensive Training Manual. Every internship site is visited before internship starts with that organisation, and there is continual dialogue with sites throughout the internship. At the end of the internship, students are asked to complete a feedback form in order to assess the quality of their experience. In addition, internship sites are asked to complete an Internship Performance Appraisal Form for each student. A series of academic seminars supports the work placement experience.

2.8 The students that the review panel spoke to confirmed that they were very satisfied with their internship experience. They felt that they were involved in mainstream work, and not simply undertaking mundane tasks. It was felt that the experience would be a useful addition to their personal résumé. The team considers that the high quality of the student internship experience is a feature of good practice.

How effectively does the provider assure itself that students are appropriately supported?

2.9 Student support takes a variety of forms. Key information is provided at pre-departure orientation meetings, which are held at the partner institution in the USA. A FIE representative attends where possible. Based on the meeting with students, the review panel felt that the quality of the information provided to the students tended to vary.

2.10 On arrival in the UK, students are provided with an orientation programme. Students that the review panel met felt that the information provided was mainly useful and relevant to their studies. A range of student services is in place, including housing, counselling, pastoral care, disability support, and access to FIE's Psychotherapist. A range of extra-curricular activities are provided, including host family stays, sporting events, and concerts. Students can become members of Imperial College Student Union.

2.11 In terms of academic support, FIE operates an open-door policy, and this appears to be working effectively. Wireless access and IT support are available. Students have access to the Writing Support Tutor system, which helps improve their academic writing, and are supported by a comprehensive handbook. The review panel considered the support students receive in academic writing to be a feature of good practice.

How effective are the provider's arrangements for staff development in relation to maintaining and/or enhancing the quality of learning opportunities?

2.12 Staff recruitment and induction processes were found to be robust. The Faculty Selection Process is also robust. All faculty appointments are subject to the approval of the partner institution. Staff are provided with an Employee Handbook, detailing FIE's human resources policies and procedures. Teaching faculty are provided with a Faculty Handbook. The review panel considers that the comprehensive nature of the Faculty Handbook is a feature of good practice.

2.13 Staff are appraised after a probationary period to assess their strengths and weaknesses. Annual appraisals and mid-year objectives meetings are also in place. Senior managers use student feedback and peer observation data to review the development needs of each faculty.

2.14 Staff development is supported by a Professional Development Portal. IT support is available to ensure that faculty have the technical expertise to support their academic delivery and student learning. In addition, faculty can apply for small grant funding to support research, conference attendance, or knowledge updating. A Mentoring Scheme has recently been introduced, whereby junior staff are supported by more experienced members, in areas of personal, professional, and educational development. FIE has also recently introduced an annual Outstanding Teaching Award scheme.

2.15 A number of formal and informal channels of communication are available to teaching faculty, including virtual learning environment, email, cell phone, and text. The review panel learned that a virtual Faculty Lounge has been created on virtual learning environment to enable the sharing of documents. The review panel considered the strong provision for staff communication through the Faculty Lounge area on the virtual learning environment to be a feature of good practice.

2.16 The review panel concludes that FIE has effective arrangements for staff development in place, which serve to maintain and/or enhance the quality of learning opportunities.

How effectively does the provider ensure that students have access to learning resources that are sufficient to enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes of their programmes?

2.17 Requirements in terms of learning resources are negotiated and included in the memoranda of understanding and other contracts between FIE and its partner institutions.

2.18 FIE's London study centre is centrally located, and contains classrooms, offices, and a student common room. FIE does not have its own library, but students are able to access online resources from their home institution. In addition, students are able to access the library at Birkbeck College, University of London, as well as public libraries.

2.19 A range of media and IT is available to support student learning. The virtual learning environment is used widely in teaching and learning. Other significant applications include Media Server, Screen Online, and access to JSTOR for academic journals.

The panel has **confidence** that the provider is fulfilling its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of the learning opportunities it provides for students.

3 Public information

How effective are the provider's arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of information it has responsibility for publishing?

3.1 FIE has a robust approach to the accuracy and completeness of published information. FIE's Manager for External Communication and Programme Development is responsible for the website and publications; and this is overseen by the Senior Academic Director in the USA. However, all staff members are responsible for reporting any changes needed to published information. All printed materials are reviewed every two years.

The panel concludes that **reliance can be placed** on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the provider is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

4 Action plan

Foundation for International Education action plan relating to the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight May 2012						
Good practice	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The panel identified the following areas of good practice that are worthy of wider dissemination within the provider:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the clear support and guidance to academic staff in implementing the grading criteria (paragraph 1.11) 	Review of student work to gauge continued effectiveness	December 2012	Associate Academic Officer and course convenors	Are the marks received commensurate with the grading criteria set forth/are assignments clear, in line with objectives and at the appropriate levels	Chief Academic Officer and Teaching and Learning Committee	Framework being initiated in relation to success indicators to judge these areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the high quality of the student internship experience (paragraph 2.8) 	To engage in continuous quality improvement via a review of the associated academic curriculum; discussions set to take place with the Academic Advisory Board	December 2012	International Internship Course faculty, course convenors and Teaching and Learning Committee	Is the curriculum sufficiently relevant to students and in line with what the Foundation and partner institutions want students to achieve	Chief Academic Officer	Review of alternative models against current curriculum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the support students receive 	Advertise this service more widely/using	December 2012	Academic Coordinator and writing	Increased uptake	Associate Academic Officer and Chief	A review of the student feedback should show less

in academic writing (paragraph 2.11)	different media to increase student uptake		support tutors		Academic Officer	instances of students claiming to have not heard of the service
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the comprehensive nature of the Faculty Handbook (paragraph 2.12) 	Update handbook annually	September of each year	Associate Academic Officer and Academic Coordinator in consultation with faculty and the Administration Team	Are we finding that faculty need information that is not referenced in the handbook?	Associate Academic Officer	A review of enquiries and concerns from faculty over the academic year will serve to highlight any omissions in the handbook
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the strong provision for staff communication through the Faculty Lounge area on the virtual learning environment (paragraph 2.15). 	Build up the amount of information available both teaching resources and administrative information; first step is set readings for key courses to be updated and highlighted on the Virtual Faculty Lounge	December 2012	Senior Faculty and Academic Consultant and Academic Coordinator	Are faculty accessing the Virtual Faculty Lounge and for what purposes?	Associate Academic Officer and Chief Academic Officer	Virtual learning environment reports will allow this evaluation
Advisable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The panel considers that it is advisable for the provider to:						

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> implement the recently designed Course Convenor role, which should also embrace moderation of students' assessed work (paragraph 1.12) 	<p>Recruit course conveners</p> <p>Outline plans of work for autumn 2012</p> <p>Moderation of student work as task</p>	<p>This is now completed</p> <p>Partially completed; confirmation of work plans by 1 September</p> <p>To be discussed in 14 August meeting</p>	<p>Associate Academic Officer and Chief Academic Officer</p> <p>Associate Academic Officer and Chief Academic Officer</p> <p>Associate Academic Officer and Chief Academic Officer</p>	<p>Not applicable</p> <p>Judged against aims of role</p> <p>Judged against the framework to be established for moderation of work</p>	<p>Chief Academic Officer and rest of Senior Management Team</p>	<p>Review Course Convenor role and associated work in December 2012 and in April 2013 in Teaching and Learning Committee (see next recommendation)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop a more effective mechanism for the Academic Committee to receive and respond to student feedback (paragraph 2.6). 	<p>Academic Coordinator to present on electronic options so that faculty can access the results more easily and they can be summarised effectively</p> <p>The Academic Committee</p>	<p>Meet on 23 July 2012</p> <p>Teaching and Learning</p>	<p>Academic Team</p>	<p>It is vital that the high response rate is maintained with any switch of format</p> <p>Efficiency of collection and dissemination of results</p>	<p>Chief Academic Officer</p>	<p>The Academic Team will review the response rate from students and seek from faculty whether they believe that easier access to their feedback is useful in reflecting on teaching practice</p>

	<p>membership extended to course convenors and renamed Teaching and Learning Committee</p> <p>This will be the venue for reviews of student course feedback and determination of courses of action</p>	<p>Committee to have inaugural meeting on 14 August</p> <p>December and April reviews</p>				
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Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to key terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. For more details see the [handbook](#)³ for this review method.

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality:

www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx.

academic standards The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Code of practice *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for higher education institutions.

credit(s) A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as 'numbers of credits' at a specific level.

feature of good practice A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

learning opportunities The provision made for students' learning, including planned **programmes of study**, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios) and staff development.

learning outcome What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

programme (of study) An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

public information Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

widening participation Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

³ www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/eo-recognition-scheme.aspx

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