



The Hansard Society

Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight

Review by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

March 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 Hansard Society. The review took place on 31 March 2012 and was conducted by a panel, as follows:

- Brenda Hodgkinson
- David Gale
- 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 Hansard Society (the Society), 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 Hansard Society:

- **confidence** that the Hansard Society effectively discharges its responsibilities for the management of academic standards
- **confidence** that the Hansard Society effectively discharges its responsibilities for the management and enhancement of the quality of the learning opportunities it offers.

Conclusion about public information

The QAA panel concluded that:

- **reliance can** be placed on the public information that the Hansard Society supplies about itself.

Good practice

The QAA panel identified the following **features of good practice** at the Hansard Society:

- the opportunities internships provide for student learning (paragraph 2.6)
- the learning resources available to students, including access to parliamentary facilities (paragraph 2.15).

Recommendations

The QAA panel makes the following recommendations to the Hansard Society:

The panel considers that it is **advisable** for the provider to:

- assign responsibility within its management structure for the overall governance of the Hansard Scholars Programme (paragraph 1.1)
- institute a formal programme committee to provide oversight and management of academic matters relating to the programmes (paragraph 2.1)
- establish a formal process of programme monitoring and review to take account of changes made to the programmes (paragraph 2.2)
- ensure marking criteria clearly reference threshold attainment and distinguish between undergraduate and postgraduate levels (paragraph 2.11)
- develop formal procedures for dealing with student complaints, appeals and regulations to deal with plagiarism (paragraph 2.12).

The panel considers that it would be **desirable** for the provider to:

- use the external examiner to verify all assessment instruments and to report on overall academic attainment (paragraph 1.5).

Context

The Hansard Society is an independent, non-partisan political research and education charity. It has almost 70 years of engagement with the centre of the British political establishment, having the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Lord Speaker as Co-Presidents and the Prime Minister and main party leaders as Vice Presidents. The Society states that its overall aim is to 'inform decision makers and engage the public in politics'.

As part of its work, the Society delivers the programmes that are the subject of this review, known as the Hansard Scholars Programme. It has been delivering these programmes for 25 years and has developed a network of contacts in politics, the civil service, academia and the media, through which it is able to provide internships that are highly specialised.

The Society aims to recruit undergraduate students from English-speaking countries, but will occasionally have students from Europe. Its postgraduate programme is aimed at students from the emerging democracies. Historically, sponsorship for the postgraduate course has been funded through government sources. This funding has recently been cut back, but there remain six Open Society Foundation Scholarships for future leaders from emerging democracies.

The Society has a close relationship with the London School of Economics (LSE) where students are associate students and accordingly have access to LSE facilities. Teaching takes place on the premises of LSE, although the students visit the Society's administration offices in the city on a regular basis.

Scholars completing the programme receive a Hansard transcript. The award of credit and the grading of coursework are calculated by the student's home institution. The Society provides UK grades. These arrangements for credit and assessment by the home institution are generally set out in the affiliation agreements between the feeder institution and the Society.

Detailed findings

1 Academic standards

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

1.1 Legal responsibility for the management and stewardship of the Society is vested in the Board of Trustees (the Executive Committee) of which the Programme's Director of Studies is a member. The Director of Studies' main role is to provide advice on academic matters. Day-to-day management is delegated to the Chief Executive and Senior Management Team. The Programme Director administers the Hansard Scholars Programme. Academic guidelines identifying the standards that must be achieved have been prepared, and experienced academics work to these standards. The Programme Director reported that reliance is placed on the academics in relation to the achievement of standards. While there are reporting lines to the Executive Committee and Senior Management Group, the review team found that there was no clear identification within the Society's structure as to where overall responsibility lay for the management of academic standards. The team therefore consider it advisable for the Society to assign responsibility within its management structure for the overall governance of the Hansard Scholars Programme.

1.2 Students on the undergraduate programme are generally from North American universities. The Society has arrangements with a number of US feeder institutions. These are all accredited by one of the six NARIC-recognised US bodies and they review the Scholars Programme and individually give credit to their own students who complete their studies. The postgraduate students come from various jurisdictions and different political backgrounds. They are not generally 'tied' to an institution. They are regarded as research scholars and are usually mid-career professionals. They attend the course to further their careers in their home country and take the qualification with them for accreditation as they might need.

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

1.3 The Programme Director is an active member of the Association of American Study Abroad Programmes UK, which is a source of information about best practice in study abroad and the operating of similar programmes for US students in the UK. The Society is also a member of the US NAFSA (Association of International Educators) and attendance at its conferences by the Programme Director provides another source for benchmarking of the programmes.

1.4 Staff are clear that the standard of the Research Scholars Programme is aligned to level 7 of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*. Students on the undergraduate programme generally come from their US institution in their junior year. Inevitably they will have different academic backgrounds and staff have identified that this can lead to some difficulties in teaching strategy but it has not overall been a problem. There is generally a consensus that they exit their UK programme at level 5 and through the discussion of individual students staff are confident that the appropriate equivalence to a second-year UK undergraduate is achieved. The production of an evaluative report by the external examiner would give further assurance on the level of attainment achieved by students (see paragraph 1.5).

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

1.5 The programmes have an experienced external examiner who double-marks all examination papers and research reports for the undergraduate students. Where there have been significant differences in marking a third examiner has been assigned. Course essays, which also contribute to the grade of the student, are not double marked. Examination papers are verified by the Director of Studies but are not seen by the external examiner prior to the students sitting the examinations. Although responsible for ensuring that students are treated equitably across cohorts, the external examiner does not give a report on the overall academic standards achieved across the programme. The review team considers that it is desirable for the Society to use the external examiner to verify all assessment instruments and to report on overall academic attainment.

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 A brief Quality Management Policy is in place, having been written by the current Programme Director who takes overall responsibility for the management of the programmes on a day-to-day basis. There is a Director of Studies, who sits on the Society's Board of Trustees and whose role in relation to the Scholars Programme is to provide advice on any major academic issues. A new Programme Manager has recently been appointed and her areas for development of the programmes are still being further defined. The review team considers that, although the programmes are currently being delivered effectively, there was not a mechanism for overall academic oversight at the programme level. The team concluded that it is advisable for the Society to institute a formal programme committee to provide oversight and management of academic matters relating to the programmes.

2.2 The Programme Director prepares a formal annual report, which is presented to the Society's Executive Committee. The report is narrative in form and is not evaluative. Teaching staff do not see the report, but they are consulted in relation to its content. Because of the size of the programme and the close relationship of the staff, the Programme Director reported that the programmes are constantly kept under review. Staff reported that they have regular meetings to discuss issues and at the end of each session there is a formal meeting to review that session. The review team considers that, although the programme is kept under review, it is more reactive than proactive, and that it is advisable for the Society to establish a formal process of programme monitoring and review in order to take account of changes made to the programmes.

2.3 There is limited formal external input to the monitoring and evaluation of processes. However, the Society has good relationships with its feeder institutions that send students year on year to the undergraduate programme. The American higher education institutions visit the Society and the Programme Director is able to network with the feeder institutions at annual Study Abroad conferences. Feedback is not systematic, but the Society is sure that if there were concerns the feeders would stop sending students and this has not occurred.

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

2.4 The recruitment of recognised academics to teach on the courses is the first point in assuring the quality of teaching and learning. All staff have doctorates and, although employed by the Society on a part-time basis only, they are established teachers at other UK higher education institutions and experts in their field.

2.5 Student evaluations and staff class observations play a key role in assessing teaching quality. Teaching observations in the past were carried out on a random basis, but these are now more regular and it is envisaged that they will take place at least once a year. At the end of each programme, the students are asked to submit evaluations and these include a section to reflect on individual module teaching. These evaluations are shared with academic staff and are reviewed by the Programme Director. Action is taken, if necessary, to ensure that a high level of teaching is maintained. In addition, formal annual reports are prepared by the Programme Director (see paragraph 2.2).

2.6 The internship is central to the student experience on these programmes. Approximately half of the student time is taken up by their placement. Students indicate preferences for the type of placement at the application stage. Because of the Society's 'unrivalled' network of contacts, students are provided with internships that generally match their preference. Students reported that they found the internship aspect of the programme very rewarding. Students complete a journal and are evaluated by their internship provider. They are formally graded and the mark recorded on the student's transcript. The scrutiny team considers that the availability of these internships and the opportunities they provide for student learning is good practice.

2.7 The Society has recently introduced a mid-term evaluation of the internship, which is submitted online, and there is also a final anonymous evaluation. Each internship provider is given an internship pack at the start of the placement and asked to submit a written evaluation of the student's performance at the end. It is sometimes problematic having these returned, as the providers are often busy Members of Parliament. However, the Programme Director has plans to meet with providers on a one-to-one basis so as to discuss with them the importance of this information to the Society. The students submit a journal reflecting on their placement. The Programme Director reads these journals and, although not the primary purpose of the journal, any issues that arise are identified.

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

2.8 Students reported that they were given helpful advice by the Society with all aspects of their application. Selection for the programmes is rigorous and only students who have already achieved a good academic standard at their home institution are accepted. Students are provided with an excellent pre-departure pack while still in their home country. They reported the orientation in their first week of attendance is excellent and they were very appreciative of the visits that were arranged at this time. Staff are available to students at all times.

2.9 The Society staff keep in touch with students on a daily basis through social media and email. There is also a weekly newsletter. Students are encouraged to attend lectures and events arranged both at Westminster and the LSE. A formal student meeting was arranged mid-term during the current session and the Programme Director reported that the feedback from this was extremely useful and that it is her intention to regularise these meetings.

2.10 Students are given academic guidelines on arrival together with a syllabus for each module. They are given further written guidance on how to write a dissertation, but considered that staff could have been more proactive in giving guidance for this element of assessment. They had been given timely feedback on assignments, which they found to be useful. Students are also provided with academic information and prepared before starting their internship as to what they can expect and how they should conduct themselves during the placement. The students reported that they were clear about how their work is assessed but found it hard to assimilate the UK grading system and how the grades would transfer to their home institution.

2.11 The review team could not see that any significant distinction was being made between the postgraduate and undergraduate criteria used in marking. It was not clear if the same pass mark was used for each level. Taking this together with the student difficulties with the grading of work, overall the scrutiny team considers that it is advisable for the Society to ensure marking criteria clearly reference threshold attainment and distinguish between undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

2.12 The Society does not have a system for dealing with complaints and appeals. The Programme Director reported that there had not been any complaints to date, although there had been one occasion when plagiarism was suspected. She informed the scrutiny team that if any complaint or appeal should arise they would develop a protocol to deal with the situation. However, the review team concluded that it was advisable for the Society to develop formal procedures for dealing with student complaints and appeals, as well as regulations to deal with plagiarism.

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

2.13 The Society does not have full-time academic staff and, apart from an introduction to the programmes being delivered and to the mission of the Society, it is not involved in staff development.

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?

2.14 The Society leases classroom space for teaching from the LSE. Students are enrolled as associate students of LSE, enabling them to have full use of all its facilities. In particular, the students appreciated the use of the library where they reported that they spent much of their time. In addition the Society has now developed its own virtual learning environment as a resource for students in relation to course information.

2.15 Students also testified to the excellence of the opportunities available to them through the Society's contacts at Westminster and through the Society's other activities, lectures, forums and seminars. They had visited, for example, the Parliamentary archive in their orientation week. The review team considers therefore that the learning resources available to students, including access to parliamentary facilities, is a feature of good practice.

The panel has **confidence** that the Hansard Society 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 Information on the programmes is contained in a professionally produced brochure that gives details of the contents of the programme and the process of application. In the past, this has been sent directly to US institutions for information. The administrative team at the Society's head office manages this centrally. Students reported that the information they received was informative and accurate.

3.2 The Society now recognises that the main source of information on the programmes is through its website. At the time of the review, the Society website was in the process of being redesigned. The section on the Scholars Programme is being rewritten with much more detail and with user-friendly links. The Programme Director is overseeing the accuracy of the section.

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

The Hansard Society, London: action plan relating to the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight, March 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 opportunities internships provide for student learning (paragraph 2.6) 	Further expansion of internship opportunities with particular emphasis on placements outside of the Houses of Parliament and new, but related, fields	Autumn 2012 - spring 2013	Programme Manager	Enhanced and more diversified placement offerings	Programme Director Academic Committee, Chief Executive and trustees US partner institutions	Scholar feedback via mid-term and end-of-programme evaluations and internship journals Internship provider feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the learning resources available to students, including access to parliamentary facilities (paragraph 2.15). 	Continual review and selective expansion of activities and opportunities provided for scholars	Summer 2012	Programme Manager and Programme Coordinator	Scholar attendance of and engagement with activities Feedback, where applicable, from facilitators of activities	Programme Director Chief Executive and trustees US partner institutions	Scholar feedback Programme staff review US partner institutions feedback
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"> assign responsibility within its management structure for the overall governance of the Hansard Scholars Programme (paragraph 1.1) 	More formalised powers to be vested in existing chain of command with the insertion of the newly constituted Academic Committee with oversight and governance responsibilities	Autumn 2012	Chief Executive	Enhanced, and more clearly defined, programme policies and procedures, particularly in relation to academic issues	Chief Executive and trustees	Review by Chief Executive and trustees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> institute a formal programme committee to provide oversight and management of academic matters relating to the programmes (paragraph 2.1) 	<p>Formal Academic Committee to be constituted and comprised of Director of Studies, Programme Director, Programme Manager, Senior Lecturer, one or two Academic Fellows and one academic drawn from the Society's Council to provide greater degree of academic oversight, scrutiny and management</p> <p>Committee to be chaired by the Director of Studies</p>	Autumn 2012	Programme Director and Director of Studies	<p>Improved academic policies and guidelines</p> <p>Enhanced faculty performance and scholar satisfaction</p>	<p>Chief Executive and trustees</p> <p>US partner institutions</p>	<p>Scholar feedback via mid-term and end-of-term evaluations</p> <p>Faculty feedback</p> <p>US partner feedback</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> establish a formal process of programme monitoring and review to take account of changes made to the programmes (paragraph 2.2) 	Development of an evidence-based process for programme evaluation and assessment	Autumn 2012	Director of Studies, Programme Director, Programme Manager and Programme Coordinator in consultation with main US partner institutions and using external UK/US reference points	<p>More evaluative and evidence-based documentation of outcomes</p> <p>Introduction/ monitoring of peer review to replace class assessment observation visits</p> <p>Enhanced teaching and scholar satisfaction</p> <p>Enhanced familiarity among trustees of programme issues, strengths, weaknesses</p>	<p>Course lecturers and (newly constituted) Academic Committee</p> <p>Chief Executive and trustees</p>	<p>Scholar feedback</p> <p>Analysis of academic peer review results</p> <p>Faculty feedback</p> <p>Review by Chief Executive and reported to trustees</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure marking criteria clearly reference threshold attainment and distinguish between undergraduate and postgraduate levels 	Review and overhaul of marking criteria with particular reference to threshold attainment and distinction between undergraduate and postgraduate levels	Autumn 2012	Director of Studies, course lecturers and external examiner	<p>More detailed and specific guidelines for scholars and US partner institutions</p> <p>Enhanced Scholar understanding,</p>	<p>(Newly constituted) Academic Committee</p> <p>Programme Director and Manager</p> <p>US partner institutions</p>	<p>Analysis of scholar evaluations</p> <p>External examiner's report</p> <p>Faculty feedback</p> <p>US partner institutions</p>

(paragraph 2.11)				satisfaction and performance		feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop formal procedures for dealing with student complaints, appeals and regulations to deal with plagiarism (paragraph 2.12). 	Define and develop official procedures and processes for dealing with complaints, plagiarism and related issues	Autumn 2012	Programme Director, Programme Manager, Director of Studies, senior course lecturer and external examiner	Improved and more detailed academic guidelines and student handbook	(Newly constituted) Academic Committee (for final approval) Chief Executive and trustees US partner institutions	Scholar feedback Faculty feedback US partner institutions feedback Satisfactory resolution of issues when need for implementation arises
Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The panel considers that it is desirable for the provider to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use the external examiner to verify all assessment instruments and to report on overall academic attainment (paragraph 1.5). 	<p>External examiner will verify all assessment instruments once they have been revised by Director of Studies and course lecturers</p> <p>External examiner will report on overall academic attainment of each cohort with immediate effect</p>	Autumn 2012 Summer 2012	External examiner	<p>Verification of assessment indicators to be documented in revised academic guidelines</p> <p>Report on academic attainment to be made available to relevant parties</p>	(Newly constituted) Academic Committee (for formal adoption) Programme Director and Programme Manager US partner institutions Chief Executive	<p>Comparison to external reference points/official UK assessment instruments</p> <p>Review by Programme Director, Programme Manager and (newly) constituted Academic Committee after</p>

					and trustees	each programme, for example three times each year
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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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