



Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of the American Institute for Foreign Study UK Ltd, April 2024

Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that the American Institute for Foreign Study UK Ltd (AIFS) is continuing to make acceptable progress since the April 2023 [Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight, monitoring report](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 Since the April 2023 monitoring report, there have been no significant changes to the programme offerings, delivery, buildings or student volumes. Student numbers fluctuate between terms, but this is considered as normal. In fall 2023, there were 51 students and in spring 2024, 188 (as at time of visit). AIFS continues to support Customized Faculty Led programmes (CFL) for a variety of institutions. AIFS also continues to offer direct enrolment on to a range of Global Education Center (GEC) programmes with Fairfield University as the designated School of Record. Additional GEC courses are being developed. A course titled International Internship has recently been added to the programme portfolio. Also, a History course titled 'Popular Music in Britain' is under development. In spring 2024, AIFS will run 25 different courses which will be taught by 20 faculty members. To reflect an overall increase in delivery across the institution over the past year, AIFS have created two separate Academic and Student Life teams based on the structural divide between CFL and GEC programmes. Staff numbers currently consist of 19 full-time and 1 part-time staff. Given the nature of the courses and their enrolment, temporary staff numbers fluctuate. Currently, 15 teaching faculty are on temporary payroll from February to the end of April 2024.

Findings from the monitoring visit

3 AIFS continues to make acceptable progress in monitoring, evaluating and enhancing its higher education provision. The review team considered the Annual Monitoring Form which contained actions developed since the 2023 annual monitoring report and originally developed in response to the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight review in April 2022. The review team also considered supporting evidence, supplementary evidence sent prior to the monitoring visit, and discussions held with students, management and academic staff. From the evidence provided, the conclusions are that AIFS continues to make progress in engaging with quality and standards and is effective in addressing actions set as a result of the RSEO review in April 2022.

4 AIFS is committed to developing the good practice that was identified in the 2022 review. Experiential learning has been extended in 2024 to include, for example, travel writing and visits to film festivals, museums and the London Assembly. Students who the

review team met were positive about the experiential learning, stressing its value to their academic success. AIFS remains committed to the importance of welfare as a core value and responsiveness of pastoral support provided to students. The student support network provided by AIFS remains strong and has recently included access to digital mental health services provided by an online provider. Students that the review team met confirmed that they were regularly reminded by email of the mental health services available to them. The students viewed AIFS as effective in providing them with a safe and enjoyable environment to experience academic study abroad, though they expressed some level of dissatisfaction with the reliability of utilities within their student accommodation, and of the London commute to class.

5 An advisable recommendation from the 2022 review was to formalise processes for the approval, setting, marking and moderation of assessments. Since 2022, AIFS has established and embedded a clear process of assessment design and marking that is overseen by internal and external sources. For GEC courses, the assessor creates assessment tasks in line with the AIFS rubric, which require approval by the Director of Academic Affairs. Assessment scores are checked by the Director of Academic Affairs prior to releasing them to students, with the internal monitoring of grades provided through the AIFS Education Oversight Committee. The external examiner will subsequently inspect graded assessments each semester and provide feedback with recommendations. Inspections from Fairfield University's School of Record Academic Committee (SORAC) involve a further review of grades and provide an additional layer of external monitoring of assessment standards.

6 A second advisable recommendation from the 2022 review was to ensure that there is clarity of responsibility on learning opportunities for students who study both CFL and GEC programmes. Since 2022, the University of Wyoming has become the only institution that offers this teaching model, and, in 2023, a representative from the University conducted a site visit that included a check-in with students on the support that they received. AIFS also introduced an Academic Director of CFL Programmes who works with the relevant students to ensure clarity of understanding. The team met two University of Wyoming students who study both CFL and GEC programmes. While adapting to two different styles of delivery can be challenging, the students highlighted that they are clear about responsibility and differences in approach across CFL and GEC programmes.

7 A desirable recommendation from the 2022 review was to ensure greater consistency in the use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) - Canvas. Students noted that teachers do not all use the VLE consistently - a point acknowledged by management. Nevertheless, clear processes are established to evaluate and develop the use of the VLE. The Director of Academic Affairs conducts periodic consistency audits of Canvas and logs problems to be followed up by teachers. In addition, SORAC inspections include feedback on the use of the VLE. To consider the use of Canvas in detail, the review team was provided with access and can confirm that the resource is utilised effectively.

8 A second desirable recommendation from the 2022 review was to develop and embed deliberative processes and ensure the formal recording and review of actions. Significant progress has been made since 2022, with processes across the institution clarified and actions identified and tracked. AIFS are benefiting from recently embedded arrangements with Fairfield University's SORAC. SORAC reviews AIFS' actions, approves new GEC courses, and provides recommendations for course adjustments and alignments. For instance, SORAC is directing a review conducted by the Director of Academic Affairs to ensure curriculum alignment across GEC courses.

9 The review team considered student performance at AIFS. Generally, the students are high performers. From the evidence provided, based on performance since spring 2023,

approximately 80% of results generated were A or A-grades. Under 2% of the results generated were failing grades. Teaching staff view the students as strong performers, and the students who the review team met believed that their marks reflect the effort they put into assessment. Nevertheless, the SORAC inspection reported that scores were particularly high, and, in response, the Director of Academic Affairs is to write up related actions. AIFS may also wish to consider developing a systematic process of analysing student performance across courses to identify potential anomalies. A positive development has been the recent introduction of Turnitin, to safeguard academic integrity and support in the handling of academic appeals.

10 AIFS is developing systems to enhance academic support within an environment of inclusivity. AIFS has established a system of academic coaching which identifies and supports students' individual needs and interests. Students that the review team met confirmed that they each had a coach and that the coach was available to them if required. Developments also target inclusivity with the purpose of strengthening provision for students with specific needs. AIDE training sessions are provided to staff by the Director of Inclusion Initiatives, and students with additional needs receive a pre-departure phone call to discuss the needs in advance of arrival. AIFS is also introducing an Identity Questionnaire for students to complete upon application. This will provide demographic data on the student profile for the purpose of recognising and attracting a more diverse range of students. The demographic data will additionally be cross-referenced against student satisfaction and student attainment. The questionnaire remains a new innovation and its usefulness is to be considered in future reviews.

11 As an institution that employs most teachers on temporary contracts, the review team explored the established structures to safeguard and enhance the quality of delivery. The team concluded that AIFS is ensuring that delivery is of a sufficient standard and that senior managers value the recruitment of specialist teachers who return. On GEC courses, new teachers' CVs require approval from Fairfield University as the designated School of Record. Academic guidance is provided through a comprehensive GEC Academic Faculty Handbook and teaching staff are supported with training. Examples of recent training activities include artificial intelligence in education and the related use of Turnitin to protect academic integrity. Teachers receive classroom observations by both management and SORAC inspectors, with detailed and constructive feedback provided. Teachers interviewed by the review team felt supported, and students were generally very positive about the quality of delivery.

12 The review team explored the extent and value of the student voice in driving quality. The team concluded that AIFS is responsive to issues raised by students. Focus groups are conducted each semester to gather immediate qualitative feedback on academic and non-academic matters. Also, student representatives are in meetings to voice student matters. The GEC student representative that the review team met, meets regularly with the Director of Academic Affairs and provided an example of how AIFS had listened to concerns about a particular course. Other students at the review highlighted that their main channels of communication were informal, including meeting up with the academic coach, teacher or dropping into the Academic Office. At the time of the review, none of the students had been required to complete an end-of-semester survey and there was limited evidence in academic programme reviews that AIFS is systematically processing survey results through the formal review processes. While the review team recognises responsiveness to the student voice as matters arise, AIFS may consider formalising an analysis of student survey results to drive quality through the annual review process.

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

13 AIFS continues to engage effectively with a range of external reference points. These reference points are the School of Record (Fairfield University), AIFS Board of Advisors, Academic Advisory Council, the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the external examiner. The external examiner continues to inspect graded assignments each semester and generates a report to which AIFS responds. There is also active engagement with QAA resources, such as on academic integrity, when considering approaches to manage challenges brought about by artificial intelligence writing tools.

14 AIFS has been strengthening engagement with the Academic Advisory Council (AAC) and Fairfield University's School of Record. To raise the importance of external experts in shaping the institution, the AAC has a widened remit and increased frequency of meetings. A role of Vice-President of Partnership Development has been introduced to oversee the greater scope of the AAC. Furthermore, the agreement between Fairfield University and AIFS led to the SORAC inspection in October 2023. The inspection required an analysis of documentation and a site visit which included an inspection of the premises, teacher observations, and meetings with staff and students. The SORAC inspectors provided feedback and AIFS have responded with an Action Plan.

15 The range of measures discussed in this report ensure that expectations for quality are met. AIFS provides a high-quality learning opportunity for students that is both inclusive and experiential. Measures ensure that teaching staff are qualified and supported, with assessment processes established to safeguard standards in marking. Students receive both academic and non-academic support, and welfare services are available to students. AIFS is responsive to the student voice with practices reviewed each semester.

Background to the monitoring visit

16 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.

17 The monitoring visit was carried out by Richard Samuels, Reviewer, and Dr Andrew Thomas, QAA Officer, on 26 March 2024.

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