



Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of CIEE Study Abroad London Ltd, February 2017

1 Section 1: Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review panel concludes that CIEE Study Abroad London Ltd (CIEE London) has made **commendable progress** with implementing the action plan from the February 2016 [Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA review

2 CIEE London relocated to Russell Square London in August 2016 providing long-term leased accommodation containing administrative offices and classrooms. This offers greater flexibility, control, more classrooms and the opportunity to enhance the learning spaces still further. CIEE London now offers 24 courses per semester compared to 12 in each semester in 2016, with the numbers of students increasing from about 50 to 100 over the same period.

3 The (Interim) Director of CIEE London now reports to the Regional Director of Operations, based in Berlin who has oversight of the four Global Institutes in Berlin, London, Paris and Rome.

4 Following invitations of expressions of interest from a number of US higher education providers, CIEE Portland changed its School of Record in autumn 2016 from Spelman College to Tulane University, which more appropriately reflects the discipline mix of its centres. This has no operational implications for CIEE London.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

5 The Director of Student Life has developed the extensive pastoral and academic support given to students by teaching and support staff. This was identified as a feature of good practice in the 2016 review and has been further developed. This post, in part a response to the increasing diversity of the student population and the rise in student numbers, has oversight of all support for students outside the classroom, including extra-curricular activities (for example visits and planned social activities) as well as pastoral matters. The Director of Student Life, with other staff, works closely with faculty to become familiar with the non-classroom requirements of each course, and liaises with the accommodation authorities to seek resolution of issues that might arise in the student residences. Students enthusiastically reported the very high levels of support from all staff, and felt able to raise a variety of non-academic concerns, such as accommodation matters, visa concerns, and living in London. The review panel concludes that CIEE London was effectively building on this good practice.

6 In response to the advisable recommendation to develop guidance to staff and students on plagiarism, CIEE London has developed a clear plagiarism procedure for students which is accessible through the online Student Academic Manual, on the virtual learning environment (VLE), and is explained during the two-day student induction session.

Students confirmed their understanding of the procedures and appreciation of the scope of plagiarism. This advice, which is assisting CIEE Portland in developing greater consistency in its approach to plagiarism, is also available in the Academic Manual for Faculty with further support to staff available from the Academic Director.

7 Similarly, the Student Academic Manual describes CIEE London's Students' Complaints procedure and Appeals process. Students are aware of these, through induction and through the VLE, but felt that complaints would be effectively handled by raising matters with Centre staff and with the Students' Representative Committee (SRC) as necessary (paragraph 13). Staff reported that so far there had been no formal complaints and that they had advised one student on the appeals procedure. The panel concludes that the desirable recommendations to develop and communicate appeals and complaints arrangements have been fully met.

8 Staff explained that CIEE London used external examiners, drawn from staff at the other Global Institutes, rather than second markers, which is unusual for American institutions. The external examiners, who are appointed by CIEE London, review all programmes rather than acting as subject specialists. They are experienced and receive a sample of scripts from across the London programmes. They comment on the marking range, the quality of feedback to students and adherence to assessment requirements. The external examiner reports formally to CIEE London using a template on whether the standards of marking are met, whether the grading is appropriate or requires further consideration, and offers guidance for improvement. Second marking arrangements are in place to assist relatively inexperienced faculty members who also receive support on marking from the Academic Director. CIEE London has considered the introduction of a second marking scheme at some length, and will continue to reflect on how the current arrangements might be enhanced.

9 CIEE London now provides more formal opportunities for teaching staff interaction and communication to enable the sharing of good practice in teaching, learning and assessment. Staff meetings at the beginning of each bloc, led by the Academic Director, are used to do this. CIEE London also uses these meetings to brief staff on institute policies and procedures. The appointment of a Track-Co-ordinator (interim title), to work directly with faculty and support the Academic Director, has added a further source of lecturer support and is contributing to the development of a more formal programme of staff development. Online resources, particularly in relation to inter-cultural learning and the use of greater technology in teaching, are also used to support staff.

10 CIEE London has arranged with Portland to make available the detailed syllabi and reading lists for each course as soon as students express an interest in London programmes. These reflect the materials current at the time, with revised versions being available on the VLE two weeks before the students arrive. Students were extremely positive about the range and quality of pre-departure information in general and specifically the course information. They felt that all aspects of the London academic, cultural and living arrangements were comprehensively covered prior to departure. The desirable recommendation on providing detailed course information earlier was clearly met and CIEE London staff are continuing to reflect on how this could be further improved.

11 CIEE London staff reported that they had taken the QAA 2016 RSEO report very seriously and had addressed all the recommendations. The action plan was monitored by senior staff who discussed relevant elements with faculty and students. The review panel concurred with staff that the various recommendations had been addressed appropriately, and that those relating to the publication of information on plagiarism, complaints, appeals and of the enhanced provision of pre-departure information for students had been fully addressed. The review panel noted the commitment to enhancement displayed by CIEE

London, wishing, for example, to continue to develop the plagiarism guidance by exploring American legal implications of the adoption of plagiarism-detection software. Staff were also committed to increasing still further the content and quality of student pre-departure information and working with Portland in this regard.

12 CIEE London's role in admissions is largely limited to providing Portland with information on the programmes and the number of places available in London, with Portland selecting the students. However, CIEE London is asked to comment on applications which may either fall marginally below the required grade point average score required for admission to CIEE London's programmes balanced by other positive factors, or by applications which meet the formal criteria but which might reflect possible learner support issues for the Global Institute.

13 Annual quality monitoring consists of two main elements: the analysis of student course evaluations, and the review of the students' responses to the overall CIEE London experience at the end of the programme. The former invites responses to 22 questions through a five-point scale, with senior staff summarising responses in graph form. These are discussed with the individual lecturers as the basis for planning support and training. The programme evaluations consist of 31 questions on the total London experience. These, too, are summarised by staff, who contribute, together with a summary of the individual course scores, to a full submission sent to Portland from the four Global Institutes, showing scores for each of the four centres. The panel noted the 100 per cent response rate from London students. CIEE London additionally gains weekly feedback from students through meetings between the Director and the Student Representative Council (SRC), consisting of between four and six elected students. Discussions are wide ranging, and student representatives met by the panel found the meetings very positive; they sought agenda items from fellow students and regularly reported outcomes.

4 Progress in working with the relevant external reference points relating to academic standards and quality for higher education

14 The standards of CIEE London programmes are assured by the Academic Consortium Body (ACB) of CIEE Inc. at Portland, consisting of representatives of 350 leading public and private US colleges. ACB approves all new and fully revised programmes. CIEE Inc. has in place arrangements for the periodic review of each of its centres, with the first such review of CIEE London expected in 2018.

15 CIEE London underwent a successful British Accreditation Council (BAC) interim inspection in September 2016, following the relocation to Russell Square. The visit report confirmed that CIEE London met all the standards required and accreditation was confirmed.

16 CIEE London finds the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) useful in developing its provision and has adopted the level indicators of the FHEQ for its course designations, comparable to those formally adopted by the four UK universities offering units to CIEE students. Staff reported that the work they had undertaken on plagiarism (paragraph 6) was based in part on their reading of the Quality Code and that these arrangements had been adopted by the other three Global Institutes. While senior staff were confident in the approach adopted to the identification of appropriate external examiners (paragraph 8) they would consult Expectation B7 of the Quality Code in advance of future appointments.

5 Background to the monitoring visit

17 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.

18 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Philip Markey, QAA Officer, and Professor Peter Bush, review panel member on 7 February 2017.

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