



Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: monitoring report of ACCENT International Consortium for Academic Programs Abroad, November 2023

Outcome of the desk-based analysis

1 From the annual return and documentary evidence, the monitoring team concludes that ACCENT International Consortium for Academic Programs Abroad (ACCENT) is continuing to maintain academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities since the [November 2022 Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight monitoring visit](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 ACCENT student enrolment numbers (totalling 928) remained consistent with the 2022 total of 926. Students were all on short-term study abroad programmes for which they receive credit towards their US undergraduate degree. Students were enrolled in the usual semester-long programmes in spring and fall, and in summer programmes of typically two to three weeks in length, led by the faculty.

3 Two new members of staff have joined ACCENT:

- an internship manager was hired to develop the new internship programme and will be responsible for placing students into work placements, mentoring them through the process, and nurturing relationships with the business partners
- a new student intern who was a previous ACCENT student and student ambassador, and can provide a student perspective on operational and strategic developments.

4 Two new summer programmes have been developed:

- Comparative International Education for Texas Christian University
- Public Relations in the UK for Michigan State University.

5 There were also changes in the programme on the Business of the Arts for Washington University in St Louis, which is a customised programme that spends the first week in London and the second week in one of European Capitals of Culture for that.

6 There have been no material changes affecting the provision since the previous November 2022 monitoring visit.

Findings from the desk-based analyses

7 The review team concluded that ACCENT is continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher educational provision for its US partner universities. The review team identified areas of good practice, that ACCENT continue to follow, as well as areas of new initiatives and developments since the 2022 submission and online monitoring visit. The

review in 2020 highlighted as good practice: 'When developing programmes, procedures and processes, ACCENT also refer to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) to ensure that it is also compliant with its expectations'. It also noted that staff commented that there is considerable overlap between the requirements of the Quality Code and that of the sponsoring universities. ACCENT's action plan for 2023 includes a success indicator that states the ongoing use of the Core and Common practices in the Quality Code as a reference point to ensure courses and student experience are of high quality.

8 An area of good practice, identified by the review team in 2020 and noted in the monitoring visits in November 2021 and 2022, was continuing holistic support for students. More recently, further progress was achieved in both academic and pastoral support with the introduction of the Learning Hub, clear grading scales and series of pre-departure webinars, which help to set expectations and increase engagement with students. The Online Learning Hub is run by the Academic Coordinator from Rome Study Centre who reviews the University of California Education Abroad Program (UCEAP) course syllabi and academic policies to ensure consistency across courses within the programme, as well as across programmes at all the ACCENT study centres.

9 Another area of good practice identified at the 2020 review was around managing quality of learning opportunities. Key to maintaining focus on this area is the Academic Advisory Board (AAB), which is now operating, with meetings in July, September and November 2023. The AAB's role is to devise strategies to enable students to achieve academic excellence, incorporating technology with a focus on local expertise so that each student optimises their opportunity for intellectual, professional and personal development. Topics selected for the second meeting of the AAB are sustainability and mindfulness in education abroad with the goal to develop best practices, that will be piloted by the end of academic year 2023-24.

10 ACCENT continues to maintain the good practice identified in earlier review in student feedback (both during and after studies). This includes pre-departure sessions, arrival orientations and the use of student ambassadors. ACCENT also benchmarks its policies and procedures' approach with other higher education providers and makes use of the Quality Code to help shape student-centred policies. ACCENT understands that it is important to not just continue with current arrangements, but also learn and innovate from ideas of new staff, faculty, partners and networks.

11 The ACCENT team, in addition to using long-standing plagiarism-detection applications and policies, has been exploring issues around the use of artificial intelligence and ChatGPT. ACCENT reports that its Senior Programs Coordinator co-led the recent Association of American Study Abroad Providers in the UK (AASAP) UK webinar on the use of these tools within higher education and the risks posed for plagiarism balanced against their use as a learning tool.

12 ACCENT continues its work on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) to offer an open and welcoming learning environment that supports student welfare and academic success. To achieve this, they provide all staff training, faculty training, and develop additional DEI resources to address city specific issues.

13 Another important area of ACCENT's quality assurance arrangement is internal programme quality evaluation and monitoring. It continues to utilise its online Program Evaluation Form across all its study centres. To simplify the process and make it easier to complete, a change was introduced this academic year. The aim is to increase response rates to online evaluations. ACCENT plan to trial incentives to complete the feedback forms and consider asking students to take a few minutes before or after the penultimate class to fill it in while in the classroom. The results of the evaluation are considered by ACCENT

staff, who look for areas for improvement and note successful elements of the course, and, where necessary, make changes.

14 ACCENT continues to use student ambassadors as a way of engaging students in the quality assurance and programme enhancement process. The feedback from students is used to enhance the programmes on offer for existing and future students by giving staff a better insight into the student experience and identifying any issues.

15 In March 2023, the University of California Education Abroad Program (UCEAP) was subject to a programme review, undertaken by the University of California Senate Committee. The review assessed three UK programmes with ACCENT: Business and Entrepreneurship in London; Global Cities Urban Realities; and London's Calling. The main suggestion from the University of California review committee Chair was to increase the length of some UCEAP internship programmes. Previously, challenges for both students and employers in offering internships in the quarter-length programmes were discussed by UCEAP leadership and ACCENT and it was agreed to take on board the feedback and to offer only semester-length placements from the 2024-25 academic year.

16 Assessed internships form an integral part of several programmes offered by Washington University in St Louis, University of California, Washington and Lee, and Colgate University. The Internship Manager ensures that students are placed in appropriate workplaces based on their interests and abilities. These students are sponsored by ACCENT for their student visas, allowing them to undertake an internship. Staff attend training and follow updates in regulations and achieved 100% UKVI Basic Compliance Assessment in enrolment and course completion in January.

17 An important area for ACCENT has been building its relationships with several UK universities in London and other study abroad providers. Two of ACCENT's Program Coordinators, along with a member of staff from GEO in London, took the initiative to set up a networking group called the Future of Study Abroad (FSA). Being involved in the formation and organisation of this network has strengthened ACCENT's reputation in the sector and helped to disseminate best practice among junior staff.

18 ACCENT's staff meet weekly to review current and future programmes, academic development, social media, cyber security, health and safety, and any other business. The London Centre Director communicates regularly with the Executive Director and central team members.

19 ACCENT has continued to improve various aspects of provision including an integrated approach to extra-curricular activities for all US partner programmes. Staff assess and report on new site visits and guest speakers, completing a detailed programme development form. Following a guest speaker event, ACCENT staff will give feedback to the speaker. If there are any concerns, additional observation and discussion can take place.

20 ACCENT continues to network with members of AASAP (Association of American Study Abroad Providers in the UK), IHE (Independent Higher Education), Forum for International Education, Diversity Abroad and NAFSA (Association of International Educators). The ACCENT Senior Program Coordinator was appointed to the AASAP UK Board of Directors in late 2022.

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

21 ACCENT continues to engage with reference points used by its partner universities in the US for comparing and measuring its academic standards. These collaborations include

University of California system, Washington University of St. Louis, the University of South California and Michigan State University, among others. US partners approve faculty appointments and syllabi for semester courses. ACCENT has built close relationships with several local universities, including the University of Westminster and Queen Mary, University of London to help benchmark its practices in relation to managing academic quality and standards.

Background to the desk-based analysis

22 The desk-based analysis 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/annual monitoring. 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 process or review.

23 The desk-based analysis was carried out by Dr Inna Pomorina, Reviewer, and Dr Julian Ellis, QAA Officer, in November 2023. No meetings were held with students or staff, and the conclusions presented in this report are based on the analysis of documentary evidence submitted by the provider.

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