

BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM VISIT AND SUPPLEMENTARY INSPECTION CHANGE OF MANAGEMENT/STAFFING (College)

INSTITUTION: Azad University in Oxford

ADDRESS: Stroud Court
Oxford Road
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Witney
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HEAD OF INSTITUTION: Dr Mohammadreza Shahriari

Accreditation status: Accredited

Date of inspection: 27 April 2017

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: Continued accreditation 25 May 2017

PART A - INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the institution

Azad University in Oxford (AUO/the University) is the United Kingdom (UK) campus of a not-for-profit private university, called Islamic Azad University (IAU). IAU was established in Tehran, Iran in 1982 and is recognised by Iran's Ministry of Education. IAU has over 400 campuses and research centres in Iran and a number of branches in other countries for example Dubai, Germany and Russia.

AUO was established in 2003 to provide opportunities for graduate students from IAU to study abroad and for faculty members to take sabbaticals in a prestigious academic location. AUO has received Privy Council approval for its University title but does not intend to award degrees in the UK. It is overseen by a Vice-Chancellor, who, for administrative reasons, is listed as the sole shareholder at Companies House.

Between 2003 and 2008, AUO offered a university foundation course. Subsequently, it began its Study Abroad programme for visiting graduate students from Iranian campuses of IAU, and from the Indian sub-continent. Since 2012, due to difficulties for Iranian students to obtain visas to study in the UK, AUO has had to curtail its activities and decrease its range of courses. AUO is now optimistic that recent improvements in diplomatic relations between the UK and Iran will lead to visas being issued to students to begin study at AUO in autumn 2017.

The Oxford campus, where AUO is based, is located a few miles from the city centre and provides residential, teaching and administrative accommodation on a nine-acre site. The teaching capacity is approximately 150 students and on-site residential facilities, for about 30 students, have recently been set up. AUO was established in order to exercise a strategic role within the whole IAU university system, spearheading innovation and experimentation in teaching, and creating links with UK universities.

There have been significant changes in senior management at AUO since the last inspection.

The Oxford campus is also the location for two other related brands, each constituted as a limited company, but owned by the parent Iranian university, and operating as divisions of AUO. Oxford Language College (OLC) offers English language tuition to the visiting Iranian students, as well as courses for visiting groups from elsewhere. Oxford International Collaboration Centre (OICC) is intended to lead IAU's efforts to link with international universities and to provide training courses for faculty. Approximately 60 students completed PhDs on joint arrangements with British universities, arranged through OICC. It also offers consultancy services to other branches of IAU on a subscription basis.

2. Brief description of the current provision

AUO offers a Study Abroad programme of short modular courses. These are of six months' duration and are designed for cohorts of about 50 students, from within the network of IAU campuses in Iran. The courses will be available for undergraduate Master of Arts and PhD students, who have already completed the first year of their degree programme. Students will gain credits for these AUO courses, which will contribute towards their final IAU degree. Students will be drawn from a wide variety of disciplines, including business, law, architecture, accounting, technology and psychology.

Over 200 students have been screened to ensure that they are suitable to attend AUO courses and plans are in place for the first cohort to begin study in autumn 2017, subject to them obtaining visas. Of these, approximately 30 would be accommodated in campus residential accommodation and a further 20 to 30 in local homestay families or guest houses. No students under the age of 18 will be enrolled.

In addition, AUO runs professional development programmes for senior administrators from other IAU campuses as well as courses for visiting groups from countries other than Iran. AUO also hires out its facilities for conferences and training courses.

OLC will provide complementary English language support to students on the Study Abroad Programme. It is also providing short self-contained English language courses for groups of visiting students, arranged with agents or other institutions. A group of Chinese students was accommodated at the Oxford campus in February 2017, with teaching provided by accompanying teachers using AUO facilities. OICC will again offer short training courses for IAU faculty and senior executives from elsewhere in Iran, when study visas can be obtained. In the meantime, the consultancy services for IAU campuses continue.

3. Inspection process

The inspection was undertaken by one inspector over the course of one day. Interviews were held with the Education Manager and the lecturer who was formerly Deputy Vice-Chancellor, and now has a responsibility for quality assurance. Both of these are based at the AUO site. Interviews were also conducted with two senior staff with responsibility for human resources and finance and for development. These members of staff hold responsibilities in other branches of IAU in addition to carrying out their roles at AUO. The Vice-Chancellor had intended to be present during the inspection but was unwell and, therefore, unavailable. Documents relating to management, staffing and administration were scrutinised, and the inspector undertook a brief tour of the premises, paying particular attention to the new residential accommodation.

4. Inspection history

Stage 2 inspection: 15 October 2014

Stage 3 inspection: 19 August 2015

PART B – JUDGMENTS AND EVIDENCE

The following judgments and comments are based upon evidence seen by the inspector during the inspection and from documentation provided by the institution.

1. Significant changes since the last inspection

There have been significant changes in senior management since the last inspection. IAU has a policy of heads of campuses or branches holding posts for fixed periods only. The former Vice-Chancellor of AUO was therefore replaced by the current incumbent in April 2016. In addition, a scaling back of administrative capacity has been necessary until such time as Iranian IAU students can obtain visas and provide fee income for the Oxford operations.

As a result, the responsibilities of Vice-Chancellor in Oxford are undertaken by the Vice-Chancellor of the Dubai campus of IAU, on a part-time basis. Financial, human resources, quality assurance and marketing functions are also being undertaken by two senior IAU executives, who have other responsibilities within the IAU group. All three of these senior staff visit Oxford monthly and maintain contact by e-mail and online video conversations. The staff member, who was Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the time of the last inspection, who is Oxford-based, provides continuity and serves in a senior site-specific capacity. This is on a part-time basis, with a particular brief for quality assurance at AUO.

A new appointment of a full-time Educational Manager was made in August 2016. He has worked previously for IAU in other capacities, is based at the Oxford campus and oversees the campus and its development. He also assists the Vice-Chancellor in much of the operational administration.

It is expected that the administrative and management staff will be expanded when full-time students are recruited.

Since the last inspection AUO has established residential provision on-site. Accommodation for approximately 11 students is provided on the top floor of the central, main building. A separate, single-story building in the grounds, which was formerly used for offices, has been refurbished to provide a further nine to ten residential spaces. All the residential accommodation is in single, double or triple rooms, and is basic but comfortable and suitably furnished. It is expected that students will study in the library in the main building. There is a kitchen and common room area in the single storey building, although all meals will be provided in the dining area in the main building.

2. Response to actions points in last report

7.4 The new AUO policy to arrange a representative graduate student group should be progressed, documented and included in the handbooks.

A policy and guidelines document for a Graduate Student Representative Group has been formulated. This is a clear, comprehensive and appropriately detailed constitution and will be incorporated in handbooks, when these are finalised prior to the arrival of students. This action point is considered to have been appropriately addressed and the inclusion of the constitution in handbooks can be checked at the next inspection.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

AUO should complete the reviewing and editing of the three handbooks to ensure that common major parts originate from the same single source to ensure consistency. All three handbooks could be held

electronically for staff, tutors, and students to access the most up-to-date versions easily via passwords at appropriate security levels.

AUO intends to act on this recommendation when the handbooks are finalised prior to the future arrival of students.

Lateness should be quantitatively defined for students and tutors.

Appropriate regulations and procedures concerning lateness have been set out in the Student Handbook. However, the quantitative aspects of these do not accord exactly with practice at the students' home campuses in Iran, nor with actual practice at AUO. It is therefore recommended that regulations and procedures should be clarified, aligned with practice at other campuses and appropriately implemented.

There should be a clear policy statement that quality monitoring, its reporting, and its review are an integral part of AUO's provision.

A clear and appropriate quality policy statement has been developed.

It is recommended that tutors see the English and other placement tests, in order to help them prepare.

Students undertake an online English language assessment test prior to arrival and a placement test on arrival. It is intended that all results will be made available to tutors.

There should be more frequent monitoring of tutors' varying needs for equipment and space.

The small size of the operation means that there is good communication between tutors and management. However, some tutors will be engaged to teach only occasionally, and for a small number of hours. Therefore, monitoring could be enhanced by systematic and regular enquiries to tutors about their needs for equipment and space.

A dedicated mobile phone and number should be made available for emergency contact, rather than that of an AUO staff member's personal number.

A resident member of staff is now provided with a college mobile phone for emergency contact. The number is appropriately posted in the premises.

AUO should routinely review its documentation of local information, to ensure that it is up-to-date.

The Student Handbook has been updated and includes accurate, but limited, local information. International students would benefit from fuller local information.

There should be a clear hierarchy of levels of progression for queries, complaints and discipline.

A new document has been produced detailing escalating levels at which complaints and discipline will be addressed. This is included in relevant handbooks.

4. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements

4.1 Management, Staffing and Administration (full inspection)

The numbers below refer to the standards as presented in the college scheme document and main full inspection report

1.	The institution is effectively managed	
1.1	The management structure is clearly defined, documented and understood, including the role and extent of authority of any owners, trustees or governing body.	YES
1.2	The head of the institution and other senior managers are suitably qualified and experienced, understand their specific responsibilities and are effective in carrying them out.	YES
1.3	There are clear channels of communication between the management and staff.	YES

	Met	Partially met	Not met
This standard is	✓		
<p>Comments Arrangements are satisfactory for the current situation at the University. Senior staff have a clear idea of their respective roles and responsibilities. However, these are not set out in clear and up-to-date job descriptions.</p> <p>Regular meetings of management and staff take place and are appropriately recorded.</p>			

2.	The administration of the institution is effective	
2.1	Administrators are suitably qualified or experienced and understand their specific responsibilities and duties.	YES
2.2	The size of the administrative team is sufficient to ensure the effective day-to-day running of the institution.	YES
2.3	The administrative support available to the management is clearly defined, documented and understood.	YES
2.4	Policies, procedures and systems are well documented and effectively disseminated across the institution.	NO
2.5	Data collection and collation systems are effective.	YES

	Met	Partially met	Not met
This standard is		✓	
<p>Comments The management and administrative team is satisfactory for the current situation. However, additional support will be required when students arrive. This need is recognized by AUO.</p>			

2.4 Appropriate policies, procedures and systems are in place but are neither up-to-date nor effectively disseminated.

Data collection and collation systems are satisfactory for the current low numbers of students. However, IAU would benefit from use of the IAU-wide or a site-specific database, when Study Abroad students are attending.

3.	The institution employs appropriate managerial and administrative staff	
3.1	There are appropriate policies and effective procedures for the recruitment and continuing employment of suitably qualified and experienced staff.	YES
3.2	Experience and qualifications claimed are verified before employment.	YES
3.3	There is an effective system for regularly reviewing the performance of staff.	YES

	Met	Partially met	Not met
This standard is	✓		
Comments There are good policies for staff recruitment and clear arrangements for staff performance review.			

4.	Publicity material gives a comprehensive, up-to-date and accurate description of the institution and its curriculum	
4.1	Text and images provide an accurate depiction of the institution's location, premises, facilities and the range and nature of resources and services offered.	YES
4.2	Information on the courses available is comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date.	NO

	Met	Partially met	Not met
This standard is		✓	
Comments 4.2 The website contains a number of inoperable links and some updating and corrective work is needed. There is only limited information available on courses. However, as most prospective students are Iranian, additional information is available in Farsi. Enquirers are encouraged to contact AUO for further information. The principal target group of students for AUO is IAU students in Iran. For these, information can be directly provided. Therefore, they are not reliant on the website or publicity materials. For closed groups of visiting students, enquiries are also handled directly, or through agents. A printed prospectus is available and is of a high quality. Not all the information is up-to-date. However, it is only used occasionally and updates are included in accompanying information.			

5.	The institution takes reasonable care to recruit and enrol suitable students for its courses	
5.1	Entry requirements for each course are set at an appropriate level and clearly stated in the course descriptions seen by prospective students.	YES
5.2	A formal application process ensures that students meet the entry requirements and any claimed qualifications are verified.	YES
5.3	Students are properly briefed on the nature and requirements of the courses for which they apply, and all application enquiries responded to promptly and appropriately.	YES
5.4	Any overseas recruitment agents are properly selected, briefed, monitored and evaluated.	YES
5.5	Students receive a proper initial assessment, which includes language ability, to confirm their capability to complete the courses on which they are enrolling.	YES

	Met	Partially met	Not met
This standard is	✓		
<p>Comments</p> <p>Evidence was seen of the careful recruitment processing of students, who are enrolled on the Study Abroad programme and of appropriate procedures in relation to the cohort of students currently being processed.</p> <p>A standard online test is used to assess language proficiency prior to acceptance. The language placement test administered on arrival is carefully devised.</p> <p>There are plans to recruit agents to assist in the recruitment of students and the methods being used to recruit and screen agents are satisfactory.</p>			

6.	There is an appropriate policy on student attendance and effective procedures and systems to enforce it	
6.1	There is a clear and published policy on student attendance and punctuality, requiring that they attend at least 80% of their scheduled classes.	YES
6.2	Accurate and secure records of attendance and punctuality at each session are kept for all students, collated centrally and reviewed at least weekly.	YES
6.3	Student absences are followed up promptly and appropriate action taken.	YES

	Met	Partially met	Not met
This standard is	✓		
<p>Comments</p>			

Appropriate regulations and procedures concerning lateness are set out in the Student Handbook. However, these do not accord exactly with practice at the home campuses of students in Iran, nor with actual practice at AUO.

7.	The institution regularly obtains and records feedback from students and other stakeholders and takes appropriate action where necessary	
7.1	The institution has effective mechanisms for obtaining feedback from students and other stakeholders (such as staff, partner institutions and employers) on all aspects of the institution's provision, including formal student representation where appropriate.	YES
7.2	Feedback is obtained, recorded and analysed on a regular basis.	YES
7.3	The feedback is reviewed by management and action is taken where necessary.	YES
7.4	There is a mechanism for reporting on the institution's response to the feedback to the student body.	YES

	Met	Partially met	Not met
This standard is	✓		
Comments			
Feedback forms used for the recent visiting English language students are satisfactory and appropriate.			

8.	The institution has effective systems to review its own standards and assess its own performance with a view to continuing improvement	
8.1	There are effective systems for monitoring and periodically reviewing all aspects of the institution's performance.	YES
8.2	Reports are compiled at least annually which present the results of the institution's reviews and incorporate action plans. Reports include analysis of year-on-year results on student satisfaction, retention, achievement, examination results and completion rates.	YES
8.3	Action plans are implemented and regularly reviewed, with outcomes reported to the management.	YES

	Met	Partially met	Not met
This standard is	✓		
Comments			
AUO has undertaken recent work to improve quality assurance arrangements and shows a clear commitment to quality improvement. It has developed a good quality assurance statement and an IAU-wide quality assurance manual is in development.			
AUO's work on quality assurance could be strengthened by developing simple and robust procedures on quality assurance implementation and for reviewing quality on a continuing basis.			

4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

	Met	Partially met	Not met
The standards are judged to be	✓		
<p>Comments</p> <p>Graduate students on the Study Abroad programme will be drawn from a wide variety of academic disciplines and a detailed curriculum will be worked out when the specialisms of students are known.</p> <p>There are currently no common curriculum structure guidelines in place, which could be used in formulating a detailed curriculum in each area and to ensure consistency.</p>			

4.3 Student Welfare (spot check)

	Met	Partially met	Not met
The standards are judged to be	✓		
<p>Comments</p> <p>The provision of new residential accommodation is a significant improvement for students.</p>			

4.4 Premises and Facilities (spot check)

	Met	Partially met	Not met
The standards are judged to be	✓		
<p>Comments</p> <p>The central premises are clean, well-furnished and equipped and provide a good and appropriate environment for academic study.</p> <p>The newly fitted bathrooms and toilets have blinds, but do not all have opaque glass for privacy.</p>			

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

INSTITUTION'S STRENGTHS
AUO benefits and draws support from IAU and is managed by a small team of committed staff.
The attractive campus provides good academic and general facilities.
Teaching rooms are of a high quality, well equipped and of different sizes, suited to differing teaching arrangements.
Facilities include a good library, a study room, multiple Information Technology (IT) access points, generous office space and comfortable student common rooms.
On-site residential facilities provide clean and comfortable accommodation and a pleasant central dining room.
Proximity to Oxford enables AUO to draw on a large pool of well-qualified and experienced academic tutors.

ACTIONS REQUIRED	Priority H/M/L
2.4 Policies and procedures must be updated and clear dissemination ensured.	M
4.2 The website must be corrected and further information on courses provided.	H

RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT
Clear and up to date job descriptions should be developed when additional staff are appointed and students arrive.
AUO should complete the reviewing and editing of the three handbooks to ensure that common major parts originate from the same single source to ensure consistency. All three handbooks could be held electronically for staff, tutors and students to access the most up-to-date versions easily via passwords at appropriate security levels.
It is recommended that regulations and procedures on lateness should be reviewed, aligned with practice at other campuses and appropriately implemented.
It is recommended that enquiries to tutors about their needs for equipment and space are systematically and regularly made.
It is recommended that fuller local information is provided for international students.
Use of the IAU-wide or a site-specific database is recommended when larger numbers of Study Abroad students are attending courses.

It is recommended that AUO strengthens its work on quality assurance by developing simple and robust procedures on quality assurance implementation and for reviewing quality on a continuing basis.

It is recommended that common curriculum structure guidelines should be developed, to be used in formulating detailed curriculum in each area to ensure consistency.

It is recommended that the glass in bathrooms and toilets is obscured.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS	
Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.	YES
Further comments, if applicable	
None	