



## **BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT**

### **INTERIM INSPECTION (College)**

**INSTITUTION:** Washington International Studies Council

**ADDRESS:** 3rd Floor  
Chester House  
21 - 27 George Street  
Oxford  
OX1 2AY

**HEAD OF INSTITUTION:** Mr Robert Schuettinger, President

**Accreditation status:** Accredited

**Date of inspection:** 23 September 2015

**ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION ON ACCREDITATION:** 26 November 2015

## **PART A - INTRODUCTION**

### **1. Background to the institution**

Washington International Studies Council (WISC) was founded by the current President and has, since 1985, arranged study abroad programmes in Oxford for undergraduates from US universities. The company remains in the President's sole ownership and the Academic Director is also Vice-President and Company Secretary. A second, non-executive, Vice-President based in the USA, heads a US-based Advisory Board.

WISC also operates a wholly owned division, Oxford Study Abroad Programmes (OSAP), an alternative branding initially pitched at US state universities. The administration of WISC and OSAP is combined and there are few differences in academic programmes. In this report WISC is taken to refer to both WISC and OSAP.

WISC arranges admission of students either to colleges of the University of Oxford as visiting students, or to its own academic programme, very similar in structure, with teaching by tutors who regularly teach for the University of Oxford or its colleges. The latter students become associate members of a university college.

The organisation chooses to work with a number of colleges which are medieval foundations with older buildings. Currently it has agreements with New College (since 1989), Trinity College (since 1992), Magdalen College (since 1994), and Christ Church (since 2006).

Students are almost entirely housed in directly managed houses in central Oxford, where the WISC headquarters office is based. The student body is entirely adult – 18 years or older.

Since its foundation, WISC has offered programmes to students who have previously studied at over 450 universities in the USA and elsewhere.

### **2. Brief description of the current provision**

Study abroad students, mostly from the USA, but also from other countries, attend for periods of up to a year, most staying for one or two terms – each extended term of 12-13 weeks. Each term begins with an orientation period and incorporates the university full term of eight weeks, followed by a period for additional study and completion of tutorials. Around 70 students attend the Michaelmas/autumn and Hilary/winter terms, and a smaller cohort for the Trinity/summer term.

Teaching is by tutorials, mostly on a one-to-one basis, although with some students, and by request, in pairs. Teaching is arranged to individual student's requirements and interests, and to enable them to obtain credit for equivalent courses at their home university in the USA.

For visiting students, academic responsibility for the students' rests with the hosting Oxford college, which arranges all teaching. Acceptance as visiting students is by the relevant college, with WISC collating and forwarding documentation. Visiting students are registered as such with the University of Oxford, are entitled to attend all university lectures and to use library and other facilities on the same basis as regular undergraduates. Visiting students usually study two primary courses, with a total of 18 tutorials (nine in each course) during the extended term. Students have a university email account and receive a transcript from the university college.

The academic programme of students attending as associate members of university colleges is arranged and overseen by WISC, which accepts students itself, and engages tutors directly. Associate members usually follow one primary course (with a weekly tutorial and a total of nine tutorials in the extended term), and one secondary course, with five tutorials. The arrangement for students to become associate members of university colleges provides them with access to the college dining hall, library, clubs, sports and other facilities, and Junior

Common Room. Access to the Bodleian Library is additionally arranged, and students may, by arrangement, use university departmental libraries and attend university lectures. The transcript for associate members is provided by WISC which retains responsibility for the student's academic programme throughout.

WISC has an arrangement with the University of the Pacific, California, to provide a transcript from a US university, if required.

During the academic year all students are offered a programme of social receptions, excursions to places of cultural and historic interest and educational tours.

In addition to the academic year programme, WISC arranges a variety of academic summer courses for university students from the USA and elsewhere, combining lectures, tutorials, and excursions.

WISC also offers courses for visiting groups of students from US institutions, usually during university vacations, and arranged in cooperation with accompanying teaching faculty. WISC provides accommodation, arranges additional teaching (lectures and tutorials) and an excursion and social programme.

The WISC headquarters premises are on the third floor of an office building in central Oxford. They provide offices for the President, for the academic management team, coordinated by the Academic Director, and for a small team managing housing and general administration, led by the Office Manager. The headquarters also incorporate a lecture room, library, and rooms used for occasional teaching. A small satellite office of WISC in the USA receives and despatches key documents, and undertakes a limited administrative role.

In publicity materials WISC emphasises its ability to embed students into Oxford and British life, and states that it eschews the "island" model common in study abroad, where overseas students study only in their own group, and live only alongside their overseas peers. Where possible, in each residential house a student from the UK or elsewhere in Europe is placed alongside American students to provide cultural enrichment.

The Said Business School (SBS), in the University of Oxford, has recently approved a joint programme with WISC to allow qualified MBA students to study abroad in Oxford for one term, two terms, or the entire academic year. Students on this new programme will be academically supervised by the SBS and will receive an academic transcript issued by the SBS at the end of their studies in Oxford.

WISC received a review visit by QAA in 2012 and a monitoring visit in June 2013.

### **3. Inspection process**

The inspection was carried out by one inspector over one half-day at the WISC Oxford offices. The Inspector met and held discussions with the: Vice President; Office Manger; Academic Advisor. The President had sent his apologies. The administrative team is small, and each assists the team by sharing some tasks – appropriate for a small institution. The Library was made available for the inspector, and the staff members were each readily available, helpful, and most hospitable. Virtually all documentation was available and well indexed. A couple of small items were made available electronically shortly after the inspection.

### **4. Inspection history**

Full college inspection:	14 and 15 July 2009
Interim inspection:	29 October 2010
College reaccreditation	8 and 9 July 2013

## **PART B – JUDGEMENTS AND EVIDENCE**

**The following judgements and comments are based upon evidence seen by the inspector(s) during the inspection and from documentation provided by the institution**

### **1. Significant changes since the last inspection**

None

### **2. Response to actions points in last report**

*Qualifications of employed staff must be verified.*

All administrative staff qualifications have now been verified, and records of these were seen by the inspector. WISC have outsourced most human resource tasks to the contractor Citation Ltd, who are progressing a schedule and administration of routine annual appraisals. They have already implemented a scheme and documentation for annual leave. Tutors (academic staff) are contractually the respective responsibility of each of the four source Oxford Colleges.

*A clearly stated attendance policy must be provided.*

This has now been done, and it forms part of the letter to each student before arriving in the UK. The recording and reporting on student attendance is the contractual responsibility of each Oxford tutor. In cases of non compliance, WISC first consults the home university about appropriate action.

*Tutors for associate member students for which WISC retains academic responsibility, should be required to report failure to attend a scheduled tutorial without notification, and this must be included in the tutor's agreement.*

This has now been done, and forms part of the contractual agreement with each tutor.

*WISC must include reference to BAC's own complaints procedure in its documentation.*

This has now been done. A statement is included in the joining letter to each student, and this appears also on the WISC website.

### **The following recommendations were offered for future development:**

*Improve documentation of key procedures and roles and responsibilities*

Citation Ltd are currently progressing these tasks, which include concise job responsibilities as a supplement to the existing organogram.

*Further strengthen the performance review process recently introduced*

Some progress has been made in developing the analysis and reporting procedure following student feedback.

*Undertake a systematic review and streamlining of documentation and materials provided to students and institutions, enabling information to be more readily found and key points registered*

WISC is aware of this need, and will review opportunities with their President.

*Arrange face-to-face review meetings with each academic year associate member student during and towards the end of each term. This would strengthen academic monitoring of associate member students and elicit more comprehensive feedback*

This work has yet to be progressed, but its administration may form part of the tasks assigned to Citation Ltd.

*Establish opportunities for US stakeholder colleges to provide feedback on a more regular and formalised basis.*

Many home university tutors visit Oxford on a regular basis to sample every aspect of their students' experience. While there is no formal reporting, there are opportunities for free discussion about any aspect which may cause concern.

*Introduce a formalised annual internal review, taking into account feedback from all stakeholders, including the US provider institutions*

This work has yet to be progressed, but its administration may form part of the tasks assigned to Citation Ltd.

*Consider giving further guidance to tutors of the associate member students on the conduct of tutorials.*

This has now been done within the WISC-tutor contact.

*Consider seminar or other more interactive formats to complement or replace traditional format lectures*

Information about opportunities for students to attend and/or participate is now routinely provided in addition to those opportunities identified by tutors.

*Undertake a review of its own library provision, to consider the function of any library it provides, and how it can more effectively complement those for which access is already arranged*

The library stock has been updated and, additionally, is frequently supplemented by current relevant books left in Oxford by WISC students. Some students volunteer to organise sections of the specialist sections of stock from their recent studies.

*Make clear its commitment to accommodating religious observance by students*

This has been done within the student documentation.

*Give greater prominence to drug and alcohol use in information provided*

This has been done within the student documentation.

*Encourage students to arrange a fire evacuation practice in their residential accommodation*

This has been done as part of the Health & Safety documentation for students.

### **3. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements – spot check**

### 3.1 Management, Staffing and Administration

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
<b>Comments</b> Citation Ltd is now WISC's contractors for human resource matters. They have already enhanced some procedures and documentation, initiated others, and are actively making progress with the outstanding issues. Staff CVs are not all current or up to date, which new information could be used as part of annual appraisals.				

### 3.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
<b>Comments</b> There is no formal feedback from home universities on their students' progress and experience at Oxford.				

### 3.3 Student Welfare

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be		✓		
<b>Comments</b> The proportion of returned student questionnaires is low – about 20%. There is currently no feedback to students on progress made in response to any important issues that they have raised. The emergency contact phone number could be that for a mobile, with a schedule of alternating duty officers.				

### 3.4 Premises and Facilities

	Met	Partially met	Not met	NA
The standards are judged to be	✓			
<b>Comments</b> The ground-floor street-level main entrance and the call system for the WISC offices are untidy, dirty and poorly signed. It is appreciated that Oxford City planning regulation limits the extent of any signage.				

## PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

### Institution's strengths

WISC is overseen by a small senior team with considerable continuity of provision. WISC has a close working relationship with the home universities, Oxford University, its colleges, and several of its departments. These relationships have been developed over a number of years, and make good use of the President's connections and experience, and who also has reference to the US-based Advisory Board.

WISC arranges use of the Bodleian Library and university college libraries.

It draws on a pool of able and experienced tutors, who teach for the University of Oxford and/or its colleges. WISC is able to offer a very wide spectrum of specialist study subjects from Oxford's considerable resource.

WISC encourages students to make full use of opportunities in Oxford through the provision of extensive documentation, and a variety of educational tours.

WISC provides an orientation programme as introduction to the Oxford & English cultural environment.

The WISC office provides the resource to enable students to print-out their own documentation – most helpful. It appoints a student liaison officer in each of the colleges with which it works – a very good feature.

WISC has well located central premises which provide a good base and makes extensive use of locations in the University of Oxford, its colleges, and its libraries for teaching and study.

It provides a considerable amount of residential accommodation in centrally located premises.

Actions required	Priority H/M/L
Citation Ltd to progress and complete any outstanding human resource procedures, documentation, and resolve any issues.	M
The college must update all staff CVs, and discuss new information in appraisals.	L
The college must undertake a systematic review and streamlining of documentation and materials provided to students and institutions, enabling information to be more readily found and key points registered. Access common material from a single source to ensure continuing accuracy and consistency.	M
Home universities must be encouraged to provide formal feedback on their students' progress and experience at Oxford. This could also be included in each home university's annual review.	L
The college must have an emergency phone number for students, preferably a mobile number.	L
WISC must consult BAC for the statement, about their complaints procedure, to appear in WISC documentation and website.	L

### Recommendations

All students might positively be encouraged to use their recent Oxford learning experience to offer suggestions, additions, and changes to the WISC library.

The building owner's agent should be made aware that both the ground-floor street-level main entrance, and the call system, are unacceptably untidy, dirty and poorly signed.

Strongly encourage all students to return their anonymous feedback – perhaps at an earlier stage, so that they can be advised about consequential changes before they leave Oxford.

Any responsibility of the emergency number could be with a schedule of alternating duty officers.

## COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.	YES
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