



BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM VISIT (Short Course Provider)

PROVIDER: ISSOS International

ADDRESS: Second Floor
69 St Vincent Street
Glasgow
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HEAD OF PROVIDER: Ms Jennifer Munro

DATE OF VISIT: 26 July 2018

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: Continued accreditation 27 September 2018

PART A - INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the provider

ISSOS International Limited (ISSOS/the Provider) was established by the Managing Director (MD) in 2005. The MD is supported by an Operations Director, Admissions and Communications Director, International Recruitment Director and the Summer School Coordinator and Personal Assistant to the MD. ISSOS aims to provide international summer schools combining specialist academic courses with electives in a university setting to participants aged 13 to 18 years. The courses comprise three principal elements, which are morning academic courses, afternoon electives and an evening and weekend social and activities programme.

Courses were offered initially at the University of St Andrews and, from 2011, in Cambridge, in both cases using university teaching and residential accommodation. Growing interest from the United States of America (USA), along with increasing demand from previous participants looking for a course in a different location, led to courses being introduced at Yale University in the USA in 2016. BAC accreditation is for the summer schools which are offered at the University of St Andrews and Queens' College, Cambridge only.

ISSOS ensures international diversity among the participants attending. The Provider does this by capping numbers according to nationality and linguistic background, ensuring there is no over-representation of any single nationality or language spoken. ISSOS continues to offer a scholarship enabling a participant from a less financially privileged position to attend one of its courses each year.

2. Brief description of the current provision

Two three-week sessions are held at St Andrews and one three-week session is held in Cambridge, with approximately 150 participants attending each session. Participants select one academic and one elective programme for the three-week period. Participants at St Andrews have a choice of academic courses in English Language, Debate, Pre-International Baccalaureate, International Baccalaureate Extended Essay, Youth Leadership, and Creative Writing. At Cambridge, the available courses are English Language, Debating, Pre-International Baccalaureate, Journalism, and Business and Entrepreneurship. Electives at St Andrews are offered in golf, tennis, theatre, art and film, and at Cambridge in fencing, tennis, theatre, photography and outdoor leadership.

Evening and weekend social activities include various sports, yoga, song-writing, baking, guest speaker debates, movie nights, Scottish country dancing, and punting on the River Cam. Saturdays are set aside for cultural day trips to Edinburgh and Glasgow for the St Andrews students, and Oxford and Windsor for the Cambridge students.

A small minority of participants are from the United Kingdom (UK), with just over half from the rest of Europe. The remainder come from the rest of the world. There are approximately equal numbers of male and female participants. This participant profile has applied since programmes began in 2005. At the time of the inspection there were 308 participants enrolled at St Andrews and 162 participants enrolled at Cambridge.

Most enrolments take place between July and February prior to the July and August courses. In St Andrews, residential accommodation is provided in a hall of residence, where an office is also located during the length of the programme. Teaching and many activities take place in buildings on the main university campus, as well as in a recently built Arts Building near the main site. In Cambridge, teaching, administrative and residential accommodation is provided at Queens' College. In both cases, ISSOS participants are accommodated separately from other summer visitors.

3. Inspection visit process

The inspection was undertaken by one inspector, who visited Queens' College, Cambridge, for half a day. The inspector met the Operations Director from head office, along with the Programme Director, counsellors,

teachers and participants. The inspector also attended a small sample of academic and elective classes and conducted a brief tour of the teaching accommodation. Documents provided before and during the inspection were also reviewed. Staff cooperation was excellent.

4. Inspection history

Full accreditation: 12-13 & 23 July 2012

Interim: 29 July 2013

Re-accreditation: 14-15 & 21 July 2016

PART B – JUDGMENTS AND EVIDENCE

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

1. Significant changes since the last inspection

There have been no significant changes concerning ownership, senior personnel, premises and resources, or academic and elective programmes. There are currently no plans for any significant change in provision, although the Provider intends to extend the scholarship scheme at some point.

2. Response to action points in last report

3.2 Qualifications must be verified for all permanent staff and, on a discretionary basis, for seasonal staff. Originals of qualifications certificates must be seen, and copies taken and retained.

Qualifications have been reviewed and verified for all permanent head office staff, and copies of originals of qualifications certificates taken and retained. A secure online recruitment system has been fully implemented, and qualifications for new head office staff and all seasonal staff are now verified, copied and retained.

5.1 Minimum English language levels required for any academic or elective courses must be clearly stated, for instance as an IELTS score, in the information on that course.

A large majority of academic and elective courses are open to students of all ability levels, and do not have any minimum entry requirements. For those that do, entry criteria are clearly stated on the Provider's website and in the information provided for each of the courses.

For English language courses, the Provider uses Cambridge First Certificate in English (FCE) and Cambridge Advanced English (CAE) tests which include multiple choice, reading, writing and an oral test. Applicants for the pre-International Baccalaureate course should already be at an International Baccalaureate school and returning to start the International Baccalaureate diploma. Applicants and parents are now clear about any requirements and expected standards.

19.3 Reference to BAC's complaints procedures must be included in the Provider's complaints policy.

Reference to the BAC's complaints procedure is now included on the ISSOS website and has been incorporated into parents' terms and conditions and the handbook, which is given to all participants at the start of their course.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

Undertake a thorough review of all key documents to ensure consistency in detail and locate these where they are readily accessible to all concerned.

A thorough review of all key documentation, notably the detailed staff handbooks and policies and procedures, has been undertaken to ensure consistency in detail. Documents have been made more readily available online to full-time and seasonal staff, parents and participants. Documents are now reviewed on an annual basis, meaning fully up-to-date documentation is available to staff, participants and their parents at all times.

Strengthen policy and procedure documents by more concrete reference to the ISSOS context and detailing exactly where specific responsibilities lie.

Documents detailing policies and procedures have been updated to include more specific reference to the various programmes at the University of St Andrews and Queens' College, Cambridge. The documentation includes more detailed reference to key roles and responsibilities of all full-time and part-time staff.

Ensure senior seasonal staff are directed to or provided with key policy documents as well as more practical documents relating to implementation.

Senior seasonal staff are now directed to or provided with key policy documents, for example, on health and safety and safeguarding, as well as more practical documents relating to the organisation and delivery of the courses, primarily through the Provider's comprehensive staff handbooks.

References to child protection vetting, at all stages in recruitment, should be made more prominent, for example in advertisements and in all e-mail recruitment correspondence.

References to child protection vetting at all stages of recruitment have now been made more prominent. For example, in all advertisements and written job offers, specific mention is made of the Provider's commitment to safeguarding and child protection, and to the intention for enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) or equivalent checks to be conducted.

The provider should elicit specific assurances from referees that they know of no reason why prospective members of staff should not be engaged to work with children.

The Provider has implemented a policy of eliciting specific assurances in all cases from referees that they know of no reason why prospective members of staff should not be engaged to work with children.

Include more site-specific photographs in the brochures.

The Provider's online brochure has been amended to include photographs from St Andrews and Cambridge Universities, with online videos featuring academic and elective activities at both sites. There are further links to social media sites for videos and photographs of teaching and residential accommodation at each site.

Make clear that registration does not guarantee admission, for those academic and elective programmes to which it applies.

The registration process makes it clear that registration does not guarantee admission to specific academic and elective programmes. This is stated on the payments page. In addition, the application form states that participants will get their first choice of class depending on availability, and the number of spaces is updated as classes fill up.

Provide information in publicity materials on access to summer course facilities for those with physical disabilities.

Publicity materials have not been updated to provide more information on access to summer course facilities for participants with physical disabilities. The Provider notes that the nature of the premises, which would preclude or restrict access for some participants, is outside their control, but this could be made clearer in publicity materials.

Keep under review the arrangements for classroom observation, as the observation of a single short segment by two observers may not be the most efficient deployment of staff resources.

Arrangements for classroom observation have been amended and now include longer observations conducted by a single member of head office staff. However, lesson observations are used informally as a staff development tool. They are not conducted as part of formal staff appraisal and they are not used as a mechanism for sharing good practice between courses and the two venues.

Set out the sequence of sanctions for infringements of rules or anti-social behaviour, leading, eventually to expulsion from the course without refund.

The procedures for dealing with infringements of rules or general anti-social behaviour are set out in the rules and regulations, which form part of the information guide. The sequence of sanctions for infringements or anti-social behaviour is now more clearly set out in the staff and participant handbooks and includes withdrawal of participation from social activities or curfews. These are overseen by experienced counsellors who are allocated to participants at the start of each summer school to give effective pastoral care and support throughout the course.

Produce a single version of the rules, including specific details of curfew arrangements, to be used in all contexts.

Specific details of curfew arrangements, which are the same for all participants irrespective of age, are included in all handbooks, including participants' information packs, which form part of course induction and orientation.

Review and clarify the Provider's position on medical insurance of participants and ensure full consistency in documents.

Requirements in relation to medical insurance have been reviewed and clarified. Revised information is given in the section of the website which covers travel information for parents, and in the terms and conditions of contracts given to parents and guardians.

Provide more detailed information on medical arrangements.

Information provided to parents and participants on medical arrangements in the UK has been reviewed and more detailed information is now available in the terms and conditions of contracts for parents and guardians. For example, all participants need to purchase suitable travel insurance and those travelling from outside the European Union require additional medical cover.

The Provider is recommended to review its written terms and conditions to ensure that it is clear about when refunds will be made.

The terms and conditions have also been reviewed and revised to make it clearer when refunds will be made. For example, in the event that ISSOS is unable to offer the applicant a place, or in the event of a visa refusal.

It is recommended that the Provider undertakes more extensive checks of the health and safety arrangements in hired locations.

The Provider has implemented more extensive checks of the health and safety arrangements in each location, including a formalised process for risk assessments, a regular review of university policies and procedures, and the declaration of up-to-date information on emergency and non-emergency medical facilities to all key staff.

4. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements

4.1 Management, Staffing and Administration (spot check)

	Met	Partially met	Not met	
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments				
<p>The Provider continues to be effectively managed by a committed and enthusiastic team, with a clear sense of purpose and direction provided by senior managers. The comprehensive policies, procedures and staff handbooks have been developed further to address issues raised in the last inspection and these are now distributed to all seasonal staff, as well as to permanent full-time staff based at the head office.</p> <p>Courses continue to be well-designed and distinctively branded and all publicity materials are attractive and well-presented. Participants commented on the comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date information.</p>				

Regular feedback is obtained from participants, for example, during meetings with counsellors and through completion of end-of-course surveys. Comprehensive reports are produced by course teams at the end of each series of summer schools at each of the three locations.

4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

	Met	Partially met	Not met	
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments				
<p>Programme management continues to be effective. The allocation of classrooms and teachers is the same as at the previous inspection and programme directors continue to be closely involved in all aspects of academic management during summer school programmes.</p> <p>The academic backgrounds and particular needs of participants are well-catered for. Activities enable participants to develop their independent learning skills, self-confidence and interpersonal skills.</p> <p>Teachers for both academic and elective subjects are highly qualified and experienced. All teachers plan a wide range of imaginative and engaging activities which take account of different learning styles.</p>				

4.3 Participant Welfare (spot check)

	Met	Partially met	Not met	
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments				
<p>Participant welfare continues to be a high priority, and the level of pastoral support received is excellent. Welfare on each programme continues to be overseen by the Programme Director and two head counsellors, with each participant being assigned a counsellor for the duration of the course.</p> <p>Policies and procedures, including the sanctions imposed for infringing rules, are clearly set out.</p> <p>Participants are provided with detailed information before and on arrival. Counsellors are available throughout the course to provide information, assistance and advice. All participants are treated fairly.</p> <p>Safeguarding arrangements include suitable child protection and safeguarding policies agreed with the University of St Andrews and Queens' College, Cambridge. Arrangements are reviewed and updated on an annual basis. All staff are trained in child protection, safeguarding and the risks associated with radicalisation.</p> <p>Appropriate DBS checks are in place for all staff, including seasonal tutors and university staff who come into contact with participants during all programmes.</p> <p>The Provider has up-to-date radicalisation and extremism policies in place at both universities and has carried out regular risk assessments for academic, elective and social activities. Arrangements for the review of risk assessments have been formalised. All risk assessments are retained at head office and are accessible by all staff.</p>				

4.4 Premises and Facilities (spot check)

	Met	Partially met	Not met	
The standards are judged to be	✓			
Comments Facilities used at both locations for both academic classes and electives continue to provide a high-quality teaching and learning environment.				

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS
Effective management by a highly committed and enthusiastic team.
Excellent documentation, including comprehensive policies, procedures and handbooks.
A wide range of activities which enable participants to develop their independent learning skills, self-confidence and interpersonal skills.
Highly qualified and experienced teachers on both academic and elective courses.
A high priority on participant welfare, providing a safe, supportive and caring learning environment.
The good standard of university accommodation for all programmes.

ACTIONS REQUIRED	Priority H/M/L
None	

RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT
ISSOS should provide information in publicity materials on access to summer course facilities for those with physical disabilities
It is recommended that the Provider incorporates lesson observation into formal staff appraisal, and uses lesson observation as a means for identifying and sharing good practice

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS	
Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.	YES
Further comments, if applicable	