BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

College Candidacy / Stage 2 Inspection

NAME OF INSTITUTION: Azad University (IR) in Oxford

ADDRESS: Stroud Court
Oxford Road
Eynsham
Witney
OX29 4DA

HEAD OF INSTITUTION: Dr Mostafa Maleki

DATE OF INSPECTION: 17 December 2018

ACCREDITATION STATUS AT INSPECTION: Accredited

DECISION ON ACCREDITATION:

☒ Accreditation awarded for six months

☐ Decision on accreditation deferred

☐ Award of accreditation withdrawn

DATE: 28 March 2019

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the institution

Azad University in Oxford (AUO/the Institution) is the United Kingdom (UK) campus of Islamic Azad University (IAU), Iran, which is a not-for-profit private university. IAU was established in Tehran, Iran in 1982 and is recognised by Iran's Ministry of Education. It has over 400 campuses and research centres in Iran. Outside Iran, it also has branches in Afghanistan, Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates. BAC does not accredit any of the campuses, research centres or branches outside the UK.

AUO was established in 2003 to exercise a strategic role within the IAU university system, spearheading innovation and experimentation in teaching, and creating links with UK universities. AUO's main objective is to provide quality education and research to applicants from Iran, particularly to graduates of IAU undertaking postgraduate study. Additionally, AUO provides study abroad and training programmes to applicants from other countries as and when possible. It also provides opportunities for IAU faculty to undertake study and research abroad.

AUO has received Privy Council approval for its University title although it does not intend to award its own degrees in the UK. Its awards come from the parent university.

AUO is headed by a visiting Vice-Chancellor, who provides oversight and communication with the parent university. The Executive Director, who has day-to-day responsibility for AUO, works closely with the Vice-Chancellor and other colleagues in Iran, and is based at the AUO campus. There have been significant changes in senior management at AUO since the last inspection. The Vice-Chancellor was appointed in spring 2018 from within IAU, and the Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement at the time of the last inspection became Executive Director in autumn 2017, on the departure of the previous post holder.

The Oxford campus, where AUO is based, is located approximately five miles from Oxford city centre and provides residential, teaching and administrative accommodation on a nine-acre site. The teaching capacity is approximately 150 students and there are on-site residential facilities for about 30 students.

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. These operate as divisions of AUO and form part of the BAC-accredited activities. 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) leads IAU's efforts to link with international universities and to provide training courses for faculty. Approximately 60 students have completed doctorates on joint arrangements with British universities, arranged through OICC. OICC also offers consultancy services to other branches of IAU, although these are not subject to BAC accreditation.

2. Brief description of the current provision

AUO offers a variety of courses. The study abroad programme includes a range of short modular courses, taught in English. 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 are available for undergraduate, Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) students who have already completed the first year of their degree programme. Students will gain credits for these AUO courses, which will be based upon courses at the home university, and will contribute towards their final IAU degree. Students are 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. Of these students, approximately 30 would be accommodated in the Institution's 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 also offers short self-contained English language courses for groups of visiting students, arranged with agents or other institutions. Within the last academic year, to September 2018, courses for two groups of Chinese students have been accommodated in the Institution's residential accommodation, with teaching provided by accompanying teachers using AUO facilities.

3. Inspection process

The inspection was conducted by one inspector over one day. Interviews were held with the Executive Director, the Academic Manager, the Administrator and Student Welfare Officer, the Information Technology (IT) and Web Services Consultant, and the Maintenance Manager, who is also the Health and Safety Officer. Discussions were also held with the Vice-Chancellor for International Affairs of IAU, who was visiting the Institution at the time. The Vice-Chancellor of AUO was detained on urgent business in Iran and unable to be present during the inspection. Documents were scrutinised, residential accommodation was inspected and the inspector carried out a tour of the premises. The staff of AUO were very cooperative in arranging the inspection and during the inspection.

4. Inspection History

Inspection Type	Date
Stage 2	15 October 2014
Stage 3	19 August 2015
Combined Interim and Supplementary	27 April 2017

PART B - JUDGMENT 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 institution.

INSPECTION AREA - MANAGEMENT, STAFFING AND ADMINISTRATION

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	☐ No
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	☐ No
1.3	There are clear channels of communication between the management and staff.	☒ Yes	☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met ☐ Partially Met ☐ Not Met

Comments

The management structure is clearly set out in an organisation chart. The oversight of the Vice-Chancellor and the close communication between the Executive Director, the Vice-Chancellor and other senior staff of the parent university ensure effective coordination with the parent university.

All senior staff are well qualified and experienced. The Vice-Chancellor has extensive experience of higher education in Iran, most recently within IAU. The Executive Director and Academic Manager have senior level experience in universities in both Iran and the UK.

Responsibilities are concisely set out in job descriptions, and roles and responsibilities are well understood by staff. The Executive Director and Vice-Chancellor communicate frequently between the Vice Chancellor's visits. Regular, minuted meetings of staff are held and enable clear and effective communication.

2. **The administration of the institution is effective**

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

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met ☐ Partially Met ☐ Not Met

Comments

Most administration is undertaken by the Executive Director. Administrative support is currently provided by a well-qualified and able part-time administrator, working on a self-employed basis. This is sufficient for current needs and can be increased if required, when students are being taught. Communication between the administrative staff is effective.

There are clear, well developed policies principally set out in an Employee Handbook and Student Handbook. These are available online and determine and inform current practice. As a result, the management support is clearly defined and documented.

A well-designed and comprehensive form has been developed for feedback on courses. This combines both check boxes and questions eliciting open-ended responses. Feedback should provide useful information valuable for continuous improvement.

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	☐ No		
3.2	Experience and qualifications claimed are verified before employment.	☒ Yes	☐ No		
3.3	There is an effective system for regularly reviewing the performance of staff.	☒ Yes	☐ No		

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met

Comments

There is a good, recently revised recruitment policy. This will enable the Institution to recruit suitable employees when necessary.

Staff files are well kept, comprehensive and up to date. Evidence was seen of the verification of qualifications.

There is a well-designed staff appraisal form, focusing on objectives, professional development and training. With only two current employees this has not been used recently. However, it will ensure a positive and developmental approach to appraisal and evaluation. Currently, performance review is undertaken on an appropriate but informal basis.

4. Publicity material, both printed and electronic, 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	☐ No
4.2	Information on the courses available is comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date.	☒ Yes	☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met

Comments

The AUO website is clear, up to date and accurate and provides a good overview of the Institution.

Information on academic courses is principally aimed at visiting students from Iranian IAU campuses, for whom course structure and content relates closely to that of the home university. It is accurate and up to date. Some of the more extensive information is available in Farsi.

Copies of the previously used prospectus and other publicity materials were reviewed. These were of high quality and contained appropriate information. It is envisaged that such materials will be produced in the future, when regular student recruitment is possible.

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	☐ No
5.2	A formal application process ensures that students meet the entry requirements and any claimed qualifications are verified.	☒ Yes	☐ No
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	☐ No

5.4	Any overseas recruitment agents are properly selected, briefed, monitored and evaluated.	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ NA
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 ☐ No ☐ NA

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met
Comments

There is a comprehensive application form which requires a Curriculum Vitae (CV), evidence of academic background and English language level and elicits information on any work experience. It requires transcripts, certificates, academic testimonials and information on how study will be financed. A research proposal is required for some courses. Academic references are also required. This provides for effective screening of students before entry.

Recruitment of IAU students involves AUO working closely with students' home faculties. Such close liaison with Iranian colleagues will further enable effective screening of students for academic background and English language proficiency.

Staff show an evident concern for academic standards and for the welfare of students, indicating that care would be shown when the time comes to recruit students.

Overseas agents are used to recruit student groups for closed group courses operated by the agent on the AUO campus. Agents have visited the campus for briefings, and AUO works closely with them on arrangements for visiting groups.

6. There is an appropriate policy on student attendance and effective procedures and systems to enforce it

6.1	There is an appropriate, clear and published policy on student attendance and punctuality.	☒ Yes ☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met
Comments

The student attendance policy and procedures for its implementation are thoughtfully developed, practical and clearly set out. There are clear rules about punctuality and a distinction is made between authorised and unauthorised absences. As a result, students will be able to get a clear understanding of expectations and requirements.

With relatively small classes, manual systems of recording absence can be used effectively, with data subsequently entered on a central electronic record.

INSPECTION AREA – STUDENT WELFARE

18. Students receive pastoral support appropriate to their age, background and circumstances

18.1	There is at least one named staff member responsible for student welfare who is suitably trained, accessible to all students and available to provide advice and counselling.	☒ Yes ☐ No
18.2	Students receive appropriate advice before arrival.	☒ Yes ☐ No
18.3	Students receive an appropriate induction and relevant information upon arrival.	☒ Yes ☐ No
18.4	Students are issued with a contact number for out-of-hours and emergency support.	☒ Yes ☐ No
18.5	The institution has policies in place to avoid discrimination and a published procedure for dealing with any abusive behaviour.	☒ Yes ☐ No
18.6	Effective safeguarding arrangements are in place and are regularly reviewed to keep all students safe.	☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ NA
18.7	Effective arrangements are in place to protect students from the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.	☐ Yes ☒ No

This standard is judged to be: ☐ Met   ☒ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met

Comments

The Student Welfare Officer has knowledge of Iran and Britain, and evident concern for the welfare of prospective students. When student recruitment starts, new students will receive an appropriate induction. All study abroad students will be adults, and while the nominated welfare staff are competent to offer good welfare support, there is no one who has received specific adult welfare training. Appropriate, although limited, information is provided for students before arrival. This concerns visa issues, health and insurance, and clothing and bedding. It does not include information on the cultural differences students will encounter. The Student Handbook contains much concise, relevant and up-to-date information for students after they arrive. However, it has only limited information on opportunities for cultural activities and recreation in Oxford. The Student Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Policy is clear, succinct and sets out expectations of students. It also has a fair and appropriate set of procedures for dealing with disciplinary incidents. This should help to set a good tone for students, when they arrive. 18.7 No arrangements have been made to protect students from risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. There is no risk assessment, policy wording or staff training.

19. International students are provided with specific advice and assistance

19.1	International students receive appropriate advice before their arrival on travelling to and staying in the UK.	☒ Yes	☐ No
19.2	International students receive an appropriate induction upon arrival covering issues specific to the local area.	☒ Yes	☐ No
19.3	Information and advice specific to international students continues to be available throughout the course of study.	☒ Yes	☐ No
19.4	Provision of support takes into account cultural and religious considerations.	☒ Yes	☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met   ☐ NA

Comments

Appropriate information is available on practical matters such as travel, clothing and accommodation. The provision of more extensive information on life in the UK would be beneficial for students, enabling them more easily to adjust to life in a very different country. Outline plans for induction are appropriate. Information on the local area is provided in the Student Handbook, through leaflets available on the campus, and by staff. This includes information on opportunities for religious observance locally. The Student Handbook includes information specifically relevant to international students, such as information on registering with the police, working in the UK and banking.

20. The fair treatment of students is ensured

20.1	Students apply for and are enrolled on courses under fair and transparent contractual terms and conditions.	☒ Yes	☐ No
20.2	Students have access to a fair complaints procedure of which they are informed in	☒ Yes	☐ No

writing at the start of the course.

20.3	Students are advised of BAC's own complaints procedure.	☐ Yes ☒ No

This standard is judged to be: ☐ Met ☒ Partially Met ☐ Not Met

Comments

The contractual terms and conditions are fair and reasonable. Terms for the refund of fees are clear.

There is a fair and comprehensive complaints procedure, which refers to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, with which AUO was previously registered, and with which it would re-register when it enrolls students.

20.3 The complaints procedure does not refer to BAC.

21.	**Where residential accommodation is offered, it is fit for purpose, well maintained and appropriately supervised**	
21.1	Any residential accommodation is clean, safe and of a standard which is adequate to the needs of students.	☒ Yes ☐ No
21.2	Any residential accommodation is open to inspection by the appropriate authorities, including Ofsted where students under 18 are accommodated.	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ NA
21.3	Clear rules and fire, health and safety procedures are in place, with appropriate precautions taken for security of students and their property.	☒ Yes ☐ No
21.4	A level of supervision is provided appropriate to the needs of students.	☒ Yes ☐ No
21.5	Separate accommodation blocks are provided for students under 18.	☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ NA

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met ☐ Partially Met ☐ Not Met ☐ NA

Comments

Residential accommodation is provided within the main building and in a purpose-built annex in the grounds. It is clean and well decorated. Men and women are accommodated separately. Rooms, which are shared, are comfortable and adequately furnished. Shared bathrooms are provided nearby.

Rooms are set up for use by students on short English language courses. While the furniture configuration may be suitable for students on such short stay courses, it is likely that longer stay students will require or expect more individual storage space, a personal desk within their room and individual bedside lights.

Appropriate information on health and safety is included in the Student Handbook and there are clear fire notices displayed around the buildings.

22.	**Where home-stay accommodation is organised, the welfare of students is ensured and the institution's relationship with hosts is properly managed**	
22.1	Due care is taken in selecting home-stay accommodation which both provides a safe and comfortable living environment for students and is appropriately located for travel to the institution and back.	☒ Yes ☐ No
22.2	Any home-stay accommodation is inspected before students are placed and is subject to regular re-inspection by a responsible representative or agent of the institution.	☒ Yes ☐ No
22.3	The institution has appropriate contracts in place with any hosts, clearly setting out the rules, terms and conditions of the provision.	☒ Yes ☐ No
22.4	Appropriate advice and support is given to both hosts and students before and during the placement.	☒ Yes ☐ No

22.5	Clear monitoring procedures are in place with opportunities for student feedback and prompt action taken in the event of problems.	☒ Yes ☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met   ☐ NA

Comments

Appropriate documents and procedures are in place for recruiting homestay families.

There is a comprehensive and thorough checklist for use during visits to prospective homestay accommodation. Visits are undertaken by the Student Welfare Officer.

Homestay contracts will be issued when families are recruited. Expectations of families are made clear, and the information to students on the characteristics of homestay accommodation, compared with other available options, are clearly described in the Student Handbook.

Monitoring procedures have not yet been formalised in writing and this will be required when students are placed in homestay.

23.	**The institution provides an appropriate social programme for students and information on leisure activities in the area**	
23.1	Students are provided with appropriate information on opportunities for participation at events and other leisure activities which may be of interest.	☒ Yes ☐ No
23.2	The social programme is responsive to the needs and wishes of students.	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ NA
23.3	Any activities within the social programme have been chosen with consideration for their affordability by the majority of students.	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ NA
23.4	Any activities organised by the institution are supervised by a responsible representative with suitable qualifications and experience.	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ NA

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met   ☐ NA

Comments

A limited social programme is envisaged, with a few events or activities organised by the Institution. Instead, students will be encouraged to make use of the extensive opportunities for recreation and leisure in Oxford, to maximise their enjoyment of and benefit from the location.

INSPECTION AREA – PREMISES AND FACILITIES

24.	**The institution has secure possession of and access to its premises**	
24.1	The institution has secure tenure on its premises.	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ NA
24.2	Where required, the institution has access to suitable external premises for academic or non-academic purposes of a temporary or occasional nature.	☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ NA

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met

Comments

The premises are owned by IAU.

25. **The premises provide a safe, secure and clean environment for students and staff**

25.1	Access to the premises is appropriately restricted and secured.	☒ Yes ☐ No
25.2	The premises are maintained in an adequate state of repair, decoration and cleanliness.	☒ Yes ☐ No
25.3	There are specific safety rules in areas of particular hazard (e.g. science laboratories), made readily available to students, staff and visitors.	☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ NA
25.4	General guidance on health and safety is made available to students, staff and visitors.	☒ Yes ☐ No
25.5	There is adequate signage inside and outside of the premises and notice boards for the display of general information.	☒ Yes ☐ No
25.6	There is adequate circulation space for the number of students and staff accommodated, and a suitable area in which to receive visitors.	☒ Yes ☐ No
25.7	There are toilet facilities of an appropriate number and level of cleanliness.	☒ Yes ☐ No
25.8	There is adequate heating and ventilation in all rooms.	☒ Yes ☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met

Comments

The central building is a period former home, which has been modified for institutional use. There is a welcoming hall area, off which the reception and administrative offices lead.

There is good signage.

Administrative offices are well appointed and provide a good environment in which to receive visitors.

26. **Classrooms and other learning areas are appropriate for the courses offered**

26.1	Classrooms and other learning areas provide adequate accommodation in size and number for the classes allocated to them.	☐ Yes ☐ No
26.2	Classrooms and/or any specialised learning areas (e.g. laboratories, workshops, studios) are equipped to a level which allows for the effective delivery of each course.	☐ Yes ☐ No
26.3	There are facilities suitable for conducting the assessments required on each course.	☐ Yes ☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☐ Met   ☐ Partially Met   ☐ Not Met

Comments

This standard will be considered at the Stage 3 inspection when they are in use for teaching.

27. **There are appropriate additional facilities for students and staff**

27.1	Students have access to sufficient space and suitable facilities for private study, including library and IT resources.	☒ Yes ☐ No
27.2	Teaching staff have access to sufficient personal space for preparing lessons, marking work and relaxation.	☒ Yes ☐ No
27.3	Students and staff have access to space and facilities suitable for relaxation and the consumption of food and drink where appropriate.	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ NA
27.4	Students and staff have access to storage for personal possessions where appropriate.	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ NA

27.5	There are individual offices or rooms in which academic staff and senior management can hold private meetings and a room of sufficient size to hold staff meetings.	☒ Yes ☐ No
27.6	Administrative offices are adequate in size and resources for the effective administration of the institution.	☒ Yes ☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met ☐ Partially Met ☐ Not Met

Comments

There is a pleasant library which provides a central work space for students. There is wireless internet connection throughout the buildings and computer suites provide computer access for students without personal laptops.

Students who are residential on the campus have storage in their rooms. Limited facilities are available for storage for students living off campus.

Most teachers will prepare at home, although the library provides working space for those who wish to work on site.

There are small kitchens for student use within the main building. Meals are provided in a central refectory. This is light and airy, and attractively furnished. There is a lounge area near the entrance. Arrangements are in place for the provision of home-cooked meals. There is a cook, who is used to catering for varied dietary traditions and requirements.

Administrative offices are of good dimensions, and provide comfortable accommodation for work, and for receiving students and visitors.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated   ☒ Yes ☐ No

PART C - SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

MANAGEMENT, STAFFING AND ADMINISTRATION

Institution's Strengths

AUO has able and committed staff and management.
AUO benefits from being part of Iranian Azad University and AUO provides good complementary experiences to the home university.

Actions Required	Priority H/M/L
None	☐ High ☐ Medium ☐ Low

STUDENT WELFARE

Institution's Strengths

There is an evident concern displayed by AUO staff for student welfare and detailed knowledge of the needs of the expected visiting Iranian students.
Residential accommodation is clean and comfortable.
There is a pleasant central dining room on site.

Actions Required	Priority H/M/L
18.7 Effective arrangements must be put in place to protect students from the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism, to include a risk assessment, formulation of a policy and staff training.	☐ High ☒ Medium ☐ Low
20.3 Students must be advised of BAC's complaints policy.	☐ High ☒ Medium ☐ Low

PREMISES AND FACILITIES

Institution's Strengths

AUO occupies pleasant, well maintained premises in a pleasant site with good public transport links to Oxford.

Actions Required	Priority H/M/L
None	☐ High ☐ Medium ☐ Low

RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

To be reviewed at the next inspection

It is recommended that the Student Welfare Officer should receive training in welfare of adult students.

It is recommended that students should be provided with information on life and culture in the UK, particularly relating to areas of difference between the UK and Iran, and more extensive information on opportunities for recreation and culture in Oxford and elsewhere.

It is recommended that AUO considers providing longer stay students with more individual storage space, a personal desk and individual bedside lights within their rooms.

It is recommended to draft homestay contracts and monitoring arrangements in preparation for the arrival of students.

The Institution is recommended to consider arranging a social programme on campus for students.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS