



Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: CEA CAPA Education Abroad, monitoring report, June 2024

Outcome of the desk-based analysis

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that the CEA CAPA Education Abroad (CAPA) is making acceptable progress since the [June 2023 monitoring visit](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 In January 2023, CAPA formally merged with Cultural Experiences Abroad (CEA) and began working as one organisation under the name 'CEA CAPA Education Abroad', with programme branding revised to align with the new organisation. Within its June 2024 Educational Oversight monitoring report, CAPA highlights key changes that have resulted from the merger including the organisation's increased 'global reach' and programme portfolio. From the perspective of the London site, CAPA states that there has been no material impact on employment contracts of legacy staff and on the programmes offered. At the visit, staff confirmed that they have experienced no notable differences in their position since the merger, citing many benefits of working at CAPA including its collegiate and positive approach.

3 CAPA operates a fully face-to-face classroom teaching experience with the option of remote teaching on an exception basis (for example, to mitigate against transportation strikes). An option for remote internships also remains part of the CAPA offer should this be required. There are three sessions a year - each session attracting a new cohort of students who study with CAPA for the session (for periods ranging from one week to a full semester) and then return to their home university in the USA. In summer 2023, there were 161 students (68.5 full-time equivalent (FTE)); in fall/autumn 2023, 149 students (77.5 FTE); and in spring 2024, 181 students (82 FTE). Most students are at Level 5 or 6 of study but CAPA continues to offer a Level 4 (Year 1) opportunity for students from the University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass) and has developed another first-year experience with Skidmore College. There are currently 37 teaching staff and 26 non-teaching staff based at CAPA London.

Findings from the desk-based analysis

4 The review team studied the annual monitoring return, supporting evidence and supplementary documentation requested prior to the visit, and conducted meetings with management, and with academic and support staff at the CAPA site in London. Three Level 5 students from the University of Pittsburgh on a six-week study programme with CAPA - two of which were undertaking an internship course - also met with the review team. Consideration of the evidence confirmed that CAPA has maintained acceptable progress

since the last QAA review in June 2023 in its monitoring, reviewing and enhancing the quality of its higher education provision. Benefits already experienced by CAPA due to the merger are the sharing of best practices and expertise across the expanded number of locations, as well as the hiring of additional student support staff and those for new key management roles. In response to a statement within its June 2023 Educational Oversight monitoring report - that CAPA should evaluate the impact of increased resources for internship administration and development - management cited the recruitment of additional internship senior managers as having significant impact on enhancing staff wellbeing and performance as well as reducing CAPA's reliance on outsourcing. The merger has not adversely impacted the student experience as students confirmed that they are enjoying their studies at CAPA and feel well-supported. Recruitment statistics show increases in staff numbers since spring 2023, with an extra nine faculty (three leaving and 12 hired) being in post.

5 In autumn 2023, reworked Student Learning and Development Outcomes (SLDOs) were introduced throughout CAPA to better reflect and encompass the whole CAPA student learning experience. SLDOs are communicated to staff via new staff induction, the Faculty Handbook, and through roundtable staff development events which staff at the visit confirmed had taken place. Students are introduced to the SLDOs upon arrival, and the course evaluation survey explicitly refers to the SLDOs within its questions. Results of this survey for a sample of courses confirm that students are developing the understanding, knowledge and skills allied to the SLDOs. Staff at the visit evidenced that they are aware of the reworked SLDOs and that they are used as a reference point to focus and enhance course curricula and co-curricular activities. However, the potential for the reworked SLDOs to situate the activities students undertake while studying at CAPA is not yet fully realised as the students at the visit are unaware of them. The review team analysed several course descriptions and found evidence that the SLDOs are being reflected within course descriptions although SLDO number references are not always explicit.

6 Since the last monitoring visit, CAPA has undertaken work to articulate and enhance the support available for new students. The review team consider this support to be suitable and comprehensive, as it communicates key information about relevant academic and non-academic topics - pre-arrival as well as during induction sessions upon arrival. CAPA provides extra support to students attending at Level 4 (year 1) of their US degree programme, including a dedicated faculty lead and a course covering study skills and professional competency - the benefits of which are evident within the UMass Report for fall 2023. Students affirmed in their meeting with the review team that they feel well supported by both faculty and support staff.

7 New faculty undergo induction that is structured and comprehensive, and which includes a one-to-one meeting with the Faculty Chair and is supported by key documents. Staff also confirmed that CAPA offers several support opportunities including mentoring and peer review for new faculty, and continuing professional development (CPD) and staff development activities for all staff. Staff consider the peer review process to be thorough and helpful. Although there was no cadence mandated for peer reviews of existing faculty, staff confirmed that the triggers for this activity mean that existing faculty are peer reviewed at least annually.

8 CPD of staff is delivered principally through: termly roundtables which tackle global themes and are delivered to all CAPA locations; support materials such as the Faculty Handbook; virtual tutorials; dedicated shared folders; and staff meetings. Several strategic changes, including CAPA's reworked SLDOs and new engagement (class participation) policy, formed topics of CPD roundtables during 2023-24. Some staff attended conferences relevant to their respective role. Faculty continue to participate as authors or as editing

advisory board members in the occasional CAPA publication series of books, collections of essays and research papers. There is evidence that CAPA's staff development bursary fund is being used to good effect. At the visit, staff evidenced that they are aware of the avenues available at CAPA for staff development, that they value the community of practice that these opportunities enabled and that they consider the opportunities afforded to them to be fair across all staff groups. CAPA states a desire to 'introduce fresh ideas and new ways of teaching into the classroom', and all 12 of those recently hired possess master's-level or PhD-level qualifications, although only three possess teaching qualifications.

9 In January 2023, CAPA initiated work to reinforce the view of the internship experience as a career development and preparation activity, alongside work experience. The resultant internship pre-departure process is well-structured and comprehensive as it prescribes a logical pathway starting from enrolment and finishing with placement confirmation. Students must demonstrate professional standards during the process, and they are supported to do so by trained professional coaches - for example, in CV development. CAPA captures key student and internship information at several points during a student's internship, as well as offering professional performance feedback and internship support. At the visit, students stated that they value the internship experience, they feel well supported during their internship and they know who to contact if problems arise; an example of CAPA changing a placement for a student, because of its mismatch to the student's expectations, was shared with the review team. Students met by the review team find the demands of balancing internship and course requirements challenging and questioned the rationale for the internship class work and assessments.

10 CAPA continues to adopt face-to-face teaching and learning, supported by resources in its virtual learning environment (VLE), as its standard delivery model post-pandemic although the remote learning facilities have been useful to employ when exceptional circumstances make onsite learning difficult - for example, during transportation strikes. Remote internships can be incorporated within custom programmes and are a small part of CAPA's current offer. A range of suitable face-to-face teaching methods are employed within courses. CAPA's lecture-capture technology remains in place to facilitate asynchronous learning of students and staff. A new version of the VLE was implemented in spring 2024, providing additional facilities such as embedded Microsoft Teams and artificial intelligence driven detection of academic offences. There is no evidence of any adverse effects from the application of artificial intelligence detection to student work as students feel that the marks they receive are fair. All students at the visit were already familiar and confident with CAPA's VLE as the same software is used at their home university. They felt there was sufficient support available at CAPA to support students' use of the VLE should this be required. Staff VLE support is available through comprehensive VLE-hosted resources, video demonstration and available technical support. Both students and staff consider the VLE to offer important support for student learning.

11 In fall 2023, CAPA launched its engagement (class participation) policy which mandates that 20% of a student's overall course mark is for 'participation', together with a common marking rubric. The policy was accompanied by a well-structured staff training plan, which includes the training of local experts, and virtual support. The engagement policy is communicated to students through clear induction materials. At the visit, staff demonstrated awareness of CAPA's engagement policy. They echoed the positive overall view of the Global Faculty Advisory Council (GFAC) regarding the engagement policy, highlighting the high student engagement that they are experiencing within their classes. They recognise that there are challenges of marking participation fairly which was also found within the discussions of the GFAC. Students confirmed that they are aware of participation marking, that they consider the participation marks they have received to be fair, and that assessment feedback has been effective in explaining the marks obtained. However, the review team

remains unclear as to how CAPA's participation mark aligns with the achievement of assigned course learning outcomes, especially at threshold pass level where the common rubric states that little engagement with class preparation, materials and discussions is required.

12 In summer term 2023, CAPA London operationalised a system in response to the QAA Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight (RSEO) 2021 report's advisable recommendation - to develop a formal process for approving and recording minor modifications to modules. The criteria for categorising a change as minor or major are reasonable and clear, and embedded consistently within key CAPA documentation. The syllabus modifications tracker provides a useful termly log of what has been reviewed and where minor changes are approved. Changes made to the tracker in time for fall term 2023 enable it to effectively justify the type of course change in line with stated criteria. The auditing of minor curriculum changes could be further enhanced by including key dates on the tracker - for example, when approval was given by the Director of Academic Affairs. Including space to log both when a request for approval for a major change is made to the School of Record and when approval has been granted, would also strengthen the tracker's auditing of major curriculum change.

13 In response to the 2021 RSEO report's desirable recommendation to consider the creation and dissemination of a discrete annual professional-development report, CAPA shared a copy of the Director of Academic Affairs' Annual Report for 2023-24. The report includes a useful summary on several key activities within the staff development programme at CAPA London. At the visit, senior management explained that there is a separate professional development report.

14 CAPA London operates a tracker for local actions and a tracker specifically for managing student feedback, with clear links evident between trackers with respect to student feedback. In combination, these trackers offer CAPA London a suitable approach to monitor progress against action. However, while it is understood from the June 2023 monitoring report that CAPA undertakes action planning centrally, the review team remains unclear on the exact criteria used to determine when an action (for example, from a US College report such as the March 2023 UMass Report, or from a local examination board) gets placed on the action tracker.

15 The June 2023 monitoring report states that CAPA has addressed the commendations and recommendations as set out in the 2021 RSEO report. The review team considers that this remains the case overall.

16 CAPA's London programme is aligned with the standards of their School of Record (SOR) - the University of Minnesota - which reviews and accredits its courses as equivalent to those offered at the University. As stated in the June 2023 monitoring report, the London programme is periodically reviewed by a panel made up of experienced academic and administrative professionals from the University of Minnesota and CAPA's Academic Advisory Board. CAPA London underwent review in March 2023, resulting in judgements of 'exceeds expectations' for academic provision and student services, and 'meets expectations' for infrastructure. This provides confirmation that the provision continues to provide the quality and standards of programmes that are expected by its US partner institutions. Skidmore College representatives also visited CAPA in October 2023 to ascertain comparability of academic standards.

17 Student numbers stand at 491 - down by 2% compared to 502 in 2022-23. Institutional partnerships determine student enrolments in CEA CAPA London Programme courses, which offer full study loads based on the US credits system. The data set in the annual return reflects enrolment on these courses, including First Year Programmes with the

University of Massachusetts at Amherst and Skidmore College. The London Programme and First Year Programmes fall in line with typical semesterly models, with condensed summer terms meeting the contact hour and credit requirements of the US higher education system. Retention is very strong, with no withdrawals during any term and the majority of students are awarded grades A to C.

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

18 To meet UK expectations for higher education, CAPA continues to align internal policies and procedures with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education where relevant and applicable to US Study Abroad programmes. The provider also ensures that provision meets the standards set by higher education institutions in the US, in alignment with the US Higher Learning Commission. Other responsible bodies include the Academic Advisory Board which provides advice on programme development and academic affairs, other individual university partners, and the Forum on Education Abroad which is responsible for ensuring that organisations delivering American study programmes abroad meet the criteria set for Quality Improvement Standards. CAPA received Forum of Education Abroad QUIP recognition in 2012, which was reaffirmed in 2020.

19 CAPA London engaged an external examiner pre-pandemic, even though CAPA's School of Record does not require one, to act as a critical friend. The role was suspended during the pandemic and was not reintroduced for the 2023-24 academic year, as was expected at the time of the June 2023 monitoring visit. When asked about this at the June 2024 visit, management announced that CAPA London is to employ an 'external academic advisor' from the 2024-25 academic year, which the review team welcomes as a key UK quality external reference point.

Background to the desk-based analysis

20 The monitoring visit 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. 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 visit or review.

21 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Christine Fidler, Reviewer, and Mr Ian Welch, QAA Officer, on 20 June 2024.

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