



## Annual Monitoring: desk-based analysis of American Institute for Foreign Study UK Ltd, April 2020

1 From the annual return and documentary evidence, the monitoring team concludes that the American Institute for Foreign Study UK Ltd is continuing to maintain academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities since the April 2019 [annual monitoring visit](#).

### Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 The American Institute for Foreign Study UK Ltd (AIFS) enrolled 498 students in the summer 2019 programme; 91 in the autumn 2019 programme; and 266 in the spring 2020 programme. The total enrolment of 855 students across the three 2019-20 programmes represents a modest decrease from last year.

3 The existing AIFS site was leased from the University of London and was not going to be renewed; therefore, AIFS decided to purchase a building thus providing a permanent home and removing the uncertainty of another leasehold situation. A new building was purchased in 2019 with D1 Town and Country Planning Act 1987 use as a non-residential institution for the provision of education. The building perfectly meets their needs, comprising four classrooms, faculty office, student study/IT room, student services, academic and administrative offices, and staff/faculty lounge. The building has been refurbished to meet programme requirements, with programmes operational there since 1 January 2020.

### Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The outcome of the review was reached through consideration of the Annual Monitoring Return, supporting documentary evidence and responses to questions presented online. The team found good progress had been made on the desirable recommendation to share good practice (paragraph 5) and enhanced support and training for all staff (paragraph 6 and 7). AIFS has introduced a paid mandatory orientation meeting for adjunct faculty, a faculty handbook of procedures and best practice, and mid and end of semester reviews, meetings and informal faculty breakfasts for staff and faculty to share ideas.

5 AIFS was also found to be taking a proactive approach to the support of an increasingly diverse set of students (paragraph 7-11) and responding effectively to student needs through direct student feedback, student representative and student ambassador systems (paragraph 12-15).

6 The Academic Director and Head of Student Services also meet regularly with visiting faculty to check progress on the semester and discuss any issues or concerns.

7 Mandatory paid training has now been introduced for all adjunct members of staff. Training needs are highlighted as part of the annual appraisal process, and an extensive training programme for all staff was evident. For example, the 2019 programme included a session on mental health first aid, discussing race and differences with students, supporting transgender students, how to plan and lead enriching excursions and Moodle Rooms Site Administration Essentials. Faculty members also have the opportunity to request funding for professional development relating to teaching practice. The process has been reviewed, and

a more simplified process has been put in place. It was expected that a further two-day workshop for all staff and faculty - on Identity, Equity and Inclusion - would be held centrally in London in April 2020.

8 Some clarification was needed on the grading between the US and UK university systems as the two systems differ. The AIFS faculty had produced a grading rubric for US undergraduates. This rubric has been shared with all adjunct faculty and is expected to form the basis on all AIFS adjunct courses, ensuring students are assessed by the same means irrespective of which classes they take. Regarding assessment and good practice, AIFS has also implemented a new requirement for adjunct faculty to provide sample papers and evidence of summative feedback to the Academic Office. To ensure the integrity of the grading process, AIFS have introduced a grade dispute and academic appeals form.

9 AIFS has adopted a proactive approach to providing extensive support services, including a student services team which operates five days a week from a dedicated study centre to provide guidance and information. The staff also arrange cultural activities, such as walking tours, day trips and visits to the theatre, with their programme readily available online.

10 The AIFS aims to support an increasingly diverse group of students and will be producing its inaugural Plan of Action for Diversity and Inclusion in 2020. The plan is broken down into six priority areas - Communication, Policies, Processes, Programmes, Resources and Staff Training. To help with the development of this plan, all AIFS employees, the Board of Academic Advisors and Alumni Ambassadors, have been asked to complete a survey around those six areas. 75 out of a possible 88 responses were received to help inform the draft report, the publication of which has now been delayed from April to August, due to the COVID-19 situation.

11 As part of the commitment to broadening access, in October 2019, AIFS added new social identity handouts. These included questions for students to consider on accessibility, study abroad for adult students, first-generation students, LGBTQ+ students and student veterans, race and ethnicity, and study abroad as a woman. To assist students who need accommodation and have particular needs, there are a set of forms for: autism/autism spectrum; blind/low vision; systematic or chronic health conditions; deaf/hard of hearing; learning disability/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; or intellectual disability. Students, regardless of their course, can also now benefit from a writing workshop.

12 In the 2018 action plan, it was the intention to set up student working groups on diversity and inclusiveness. Although this was not achieved by the time of the QAA monitoring visit in 2019, two focus groups have now been held in October 2019. Those groups considered the non-discriminatory policy, student support, student representative programme and general feedback on volunteering. The students subsequently met with the Senior Vice-President and the Programme Director, and changes to the policy have been made as a direct result of those discussions.

13 Student views are solicited through self-nominating student representatives and the Programme Director, who hold focus groups with students from each programme. Feedback from these were generally positive, with students enjoying the cultural events and finding the staff welcoming, helpful and responsive. Students did raise some concerns about pre-departure information - the London office sends comprehensive pre-departure information, including information on visas, to students in advance of their coming to the UK and AIFS staff attended most pre-departure information sessions in the US. Issues were also raised about the size of the classrooms - now resolved with the acquisition of the new

building and full ownership of the teaching spaces. AIFS also has Student Ambassadors who have been selected to receive AIFS scholarships. These ambassadors have regular meetings with staff and chronicle their study abroad experiences (usually through a blog or vlog). Upon return to their US university, Student Ambassadors usually also help with the promotion of their university's next London programme and preparation of students for this study abroad experience.

14 Each programme is further evaluated through student feedback questionnaires, with a statistical summary, along with the original forms presented to the Programme Director and Senior Vice-President. The response rates were excellent and very positive feedback was received for the programmes and their respective courses, cultural excursions and Student Services - with only housing receiving some less favourable feedback. This was discussed with students and the main issue was the size of residential accommodation compared with that which they were used to in the US, due to the central London location. The Head of Student Services completes a cover sheet highlighting any strengths and concerns and, where appropriate, suggests areas for improvement. The summary for spring 2020 was not available, or the opportunity to present questions to the students, as the programmes were suspended partway through due to legislative requirements to close educational institutions in response to COVID-19.

15 To close the feedback loop on any issues raised, each semester, Student Advisors typically hold meetings every two weeks with student representatives. The Student Advisor is a pastoral role, and its primary function is to help both students and faculty (both US and adjunct faculty), to adjust to living in London and support them through their study period.

16 AIFS also offers an Internship Programme, which provides students with the opportunity to combine classroom learning with practical experience in the charitable and private sectors.

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

17 AIFS has not had any external accreditation reviews since the last QAA visit in April 2019. AIFS has had an external immigration compliance audit by their solicitors. The audit comprised a diagnostic assessment of AIFS's Tier 4 compliance of sponsored students from overseas who are taking a study abroad programme and internships. The audit rated record keeping, migrant tracking, monitoring and reporting, and general sponsor as good to excellent, with an overall rating of 4.6 out of 5 which means they have successfully passed this particular internal audit.

18 Partner US college or universities award all academic credit to students during their visit abroad and AIFS regularly checks their respective accreditation status against the Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs. Study Abroad Advisors and Deans from the US partner institutions have the opportunity to conduct site visits; the most recent report from one of those visits was very impressed with the entire AIFS team and their dedication to their students.

19 AIFS has its own set of standards, with the most recent iteration reviewed in March 2019 using the Forum on Education Abroad - 'Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad', 5th edition 2015 - as a reference point. The 6th edition of these Standards was due for release in April 2020. A full review of the AIFS Standards is expected after this release, and some adjustments may be needed. The AIFS Standards were also reviewed in conjunction with the Diversity Abroad five-year plan culminating in some revisions.

20 AIFS operates a process of peer review, engaging external academics to attend and evaluate the quality of teaching, materials presented, alignment to learning outcomes and the learning environment. The reviews follow a standard template and the final report is shared with the teaching faculty and partner university.

## **Background to the desk-based analysis**

21 The desk-based analysis 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/annual monitoring. 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 process or review.

22 The desk-based analysis was carried out by Barbara Howell, Reviewer, and Millard Parkinson, QAA Officer, on 22 April 2020. No meetings were held with students or staff, and the conclusions presented in this report are based on the analysis of documentary evidence submitted by the provider.

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