



This review method
is ESG compliant

Educational Oversight Review

American Institute for
Foreign Study UK LTD

March 2026

Contents

About this review	1
Executive summary	2
Conclusions	3
Financial sustainability, management and governance	4
Explanation of the findings – Sector-Agreed Principles	4
Principle 1: Taking a strategic approach to managing quality and standards	4
Principle 3: Resourcing delivery of a high-quality learning experience	6
Principle 4: Using data to inform and evaluate quality	8
Principle 5: Monitoring, evaluating and enhancing provision	8
Principle 7: Designing, developing, approving and modifying programmes	11
Principle 9: Recruiting, selecting and admitting students	12
Principle 10: Supporting students to achieve their potential	14
Principle 11: Teaching, learning and assessment	16
Principle 12: Operating concerns, complaints and appeals processes	18
Enhancement initiatives	19
Commentary on institutional approach to enhancement	19

About this review

This is a report of an Educational Oversight Review (EOR) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at American Institute for Foreign Study (UK) Ltd (AIFS/the Institute).

EOR consists of a number of components. The Core component is a review of a provider's arrangements for maintaining the academic standards and quality of the courses it offers against nine of the Sector-Agreed Principles contained within the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2024) (the UK Quality Code). This subset of Principles has been mapped to the core requirements that have been set out by the Home Office in relation to educational oversight. Further information about the Core component of EOR can be found in the [Educational Oversight Review Guidance for Providers](#).

The review took place on **19 March 2026** and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Matthew Leeke (Reviewer)
- Mrs Alison Jones (Reviewer)
- Ms Nina Cupric (Student reviewer)

The QAA Officer for this review was Dr Julian Ellis.

In Educational Oversight Review (Core component) the QAA review team:

- determines an outcome against a subset of the Sector-Agreed Principles outlined in the UK Quality Code
- identifies features of good practice
- makes recommendations
- sets conditions (where relevant)
- identifies areas of enhancement activity
- determines an overall judgement as to whether the provider meets the Home Office's quality assurance requirements for educational oversight.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission. A dedicated section explains the method for [Educational Oversight Review](#) and has links to other informative documents. QAA reviews are evidence-based processes. Review judgements result from the documents review teams see, and the meetings they hold, and draw upon their experience as peer reviewers and student reviewers.

The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) provide the framework for internal and external quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area. QAA's review methods are [compliant with these standards](#), as are the [reports we publish](#). More information is available on [our website](#).

This review was conducted in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

Executive summary

The American Institute for Foreign Study (UK) Limited (AIFS/the Institute) is an international educational and cultural exchange organisation founded in 1964 by Sir Cyril Taylor. Its core mission is to “bring the world together” by providing high-quality educational and cultural exchange programmes that enrich the lives of young people worldwide. Since its establishment, over 1.6 million participants have taken part in AIFS programmes, reflecting the organisation’s long-standing commitment to global engagement, access, and educational quality.

AIFS operates as a multi-division organisation which includes AIFS Abroad. In London, programme delivery is overseen by the London Director, supported by academic, student services and operational teams. AIFS Abroad delivers programmes through two principal models: Direct Enrolment and Customised Faculty Led (CFL) programmes. Direct enrolment students’ study at AIFS’s Global Education Centres (GECs), where courses are taught by locally based faculty and academic credit is awarded through AIFS’s School of Record, Fairfield University (USA). CFL programmes are developed in partnership with U.S. colleges and universities, with academic oversight and credit awarded by the sending institution, while AIFS provides comprehensive logistical, academic and pastoral support.

The London Global Education Centre, established in 2020, is a key campus location within the AIFS global network. The London centre offers small, student centred classes emphasising experiential, place-based learning, social justice, and global citizenship. Academic provision is integrated with cultural programming and wellbeing support.

Between Summer 2025 and Spring 2026, AIFS Abroad hosted about 930 students on London programmes across both direct enrolment and CFL formats. During this period, 56 temporary faculty were employed to teach GEC courses, and approximately 50 U.S. faculty accompanied CFL groups. London based staffing includes 14 permanent staff working directly with students and faculty and temporary student advisers during peak periods. Programmes which travel (not purely London based) may have a tour manager to offer logistical and pastoral support.

Recent major changes include the reorganisation of academic teams across GEC and CFL programmes to improve knowledge sharing, streamline workflows, and reduce duplication. New academic roles have been introduced, and programme offerings have expanded to include shorter, intensive courses, such as spring break programmes, in response to evolving student demand.

Key challenges facing AIFS include maintaining and growing enrolment in a competitive and financially constrained U.S. higher education environment, increasing demand for short-term and customised programmes, rising costs of study abroad, and heightened expectations around career readiness and measurable outcomes. AIFS is addressing these challenges through programme diversification, strategic partnerships with universities, enhanced experiential learning opportunities, and continued investment in scholarships and institutional support.

In reaching conclusions about the extent to which American Institute for Foreign Study (UK) Limited meets the Sector-Agreed Principles, the QAA review team followed the evidence-based review procedure as outlined in the guidance for Educational Oversight Review (July 2024). American Institute for Foreign Study (UK) Limited provided the review team with a self-evaluation and supporting evidence. During the review visit, which took place on Thursday 19 March 2026, the review team held a total of three meetings with the senior management team, academic staff, professional support staff, and students.

In summary, the team found one example of good practice and identified one recommendation.

Conclusions

The QAA review team reached the following conclusions about the higher education provision at American Institute for Foreign Study (UK) Limited.

The QAA review team determines that American Institute for Foreign Study (UK) Limited:

- **meets** the Home Office's Quality assurance requirements for educational oversight.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following feature(s) of good practice:

- The approach to deliberately embed experiential learning visits within programmes, aligned to programme outcomes, to enhance the quality of the students' learning experiences (**Sector-Agreed Principle 3, paragraph 13**).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following recommendation(s) for development and enhancement:

- Review the Student Handbooks and orientation materials to ensure that key policies and processes are communicated in clear, accessible and student-friendly language, to support the student experience in its entirety (**Sector-Agreed Principle 10, paragraph 44**).

These recommendations do not impact on the Sector-Agreed Principle being met.

Financial sustainability, management and governance

The financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG) check has been **satisfactorily** completed. The outcome of the FSMG check for the **institution** is that **no** material issues were identified.

Explanation of the findings – Sector-Agreed Principles

Principle 1: Taking a strategic approach to managing quality and standards

Providers demonstrate they have a strategic approach to securing academic standards and assuring and enhancing quality that is embedded across the organisation.

Findings

1 The review team found that AIFS has a defined and coherent strategic approach to securing academic standards and assuring and enhancing quality. This is demonstrated through the relationship between its internal governance arrangements and its external oversight framework. The Academic Office and Student Services Review of the Year and the Evaluation Review and Action Planning documentation show that the Institute reviews academic and operational themes together and identifies actions arising from that review, for example responding to feedback on assessment practices. This internal structure is reinforced by the Academic Oversight Committee (AOC) process, which provides a formal mechanism for reviewing academic delivery, assessment and student performance during the semester. Externally, the School of Record Procedures Manual and the School of Record approval documentation show that Fairfield University exercises a key role in course and instructor approval and in the wider oversight of academic standards. Taken together, these sources indicate that AIFS has established a framework through which standards and quality are intended to be managed strategically rather than in a reactive or unplanned way.

2 The review team also found that the strategic approach is reflected in operational practice rather than existing only at policy level. The AOC process shows that assessment materials and student work are reviewed during delivery, while the Evaluation Review and Action Planning material demonstrates that student and service feedback are used to identify areas for improvement. The Quality Improvement Action Plan also suggests that this review activity feeds into a structured cycle of enhancement. In its meeting with senior staff the review team heard how academic and student-life teams work closely together to identify early signs of disengagement, attendance records, academic and welfare indicators, to build



a fuller picture of student risk rather than relying on a single trigger alone. In the meeting with academic and professional staff this approach was reinforced as staff explained that attendance is often the first sign that a student may be disengaging, but that this is interpreted alongside wider concerns about attention in class, academic progress and personal circumstances, with the Academic Office becoming involved where extensions or further support are needed. The review team considered this indicates that AIFS is seeking not only to protect threshold standards, but also to use evidence systematically to support student success and improve the learning experience.

3 A further strength lies in the external reference points that support AIFS's strategic approach. The School of Record Procedures Manual makes clear that Fairfield University's role goes beyond nominal partnership and includes defined academic oversight responsibilities. This is complemented by the External Examiner report, which provides independent scrutiny of academic standards and academic practice. Senior staff further explained that Fairfield remains a regular checkpoint in the quality cycle and is represented within academic governance discussions. The review team considered that these external elements strengthen the Institute's framework by ensuring that key academic processes are subject to review beyond the immediate provider context.

4 The review team also found evidence that AIFS seeks to connect academic quality to wider aspects of the student experience. The Academic Office and Student Services Review of the Year, the student support monitoring records and the evidence relating to support for students with additional needs indicate that support issues, student concerns and wider aspects of the student journey are reviewed alongside academic matters. This was confirmed during the senior staff meeting, where staff explained that mental health, academic performance, attendance and placement or internship issues may all be considered together when deciding whether intervention is needed. The meeting with academic and professional staff reinforced this picture, with participants emphasising that student wellbeing sits at the heart of their work, that the links between the Academic Office and Student Services are strong, and that small class sizes and close communication enable quick intervention where concerns arise. In a study abroad context, the review team considered this integrated approach to be important, given the close relationship between student wellbeing, inclusion and academic success.

5 AIFS also presented itself as using complaints, student feedback and committee processes to drive strategic enhancement. The desk-based evidence for this can be seen in the Evaluation Review and Action Planning documentation and the Quality Improvement Action Plan. At the visit, senior staff described how academic concerns raised by students, including concerns about reflective journals, had led to wider internal discussion and the development of a journal rubric to provide greater clarity. The meeting with academic and support staff added further evidence that where a student challenges a grade, dialogue normally takes place first with the professor and can then be escalated to the AOC, with the Academic Office also providing support where extenuating circumstances are relevant. The review team considered that this was an example of how quality concerns can lead both to case-level handling and to wider quality enhancement.

6 Overall, the review team concluded that AIFS has a purposeful and increasingly well-articulated strategic approach to securing academic standards and assuring and enhancing quality, supported by internal governance, external academic oversight and the use of review and evaluation evidence to inform improvement. The Institute therefore **is aligned**

with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 3: Resourcing delivery of a high-quality learning experience

Providers plan, secure and maintain resources relating to learning, technology, facilities and staffing to enable the delivery and enhancement of an accessible, innovative and high-quality learning experience for students that aligns with the provider's strategy and the composition of the student body.

Findings

7 The review team found that AIFS has appropriate measures in place to plan, secure, and maintain resources to enable delivery and enhancement of an accessible, innovative and high-quality learning experience for students, aligned to its mission and values. The review team learnt that student's study with the provider for one trimester, with over 50% receiving scholarship and grant funding from the Institute to support study abroad and help with the impact of financial pressures due to the rising cost of living.

8 AIFS is responsible for the provision of Faculty and administrative staff, learning facilities and resources, training and staff support, and student support service. These are reviewed by Fairfield University, as its degree-awarding body, at monitoring and site visits undertaken by the School of Record Articulation Committee (SORAC). Students confirmed they were satisfied with access to the study and social spaces, and that classroom, IT and Library facilities were appropriate for their learning. All assigned reading was available through the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), and students had access to their home University electronic resources.

9 Oversight of resourcing decisions lay with the Senior Vice President, including programme planning and operations, staffing and development. Fairfield University approved new Faculty CVs and new/revised courses through the SORAC. The Faculty Handbook sets out AIFS's teaching philosophy, providing a consistent and accurate source of information to ensure shared understanding of academic requirements and internal/external regulations of courses, which was confirmed by academic staff who met the review team. The review team was also advised of the flexible approach to identifying staffing needs, as student enrolment numbers fluctuate over the academic year. The review team heard from senior staff how data was used to identify staff capacity needs and address resourcing issues, through hiring of more Faculty and administrative staff on temporary basis to cover peak periods, particularly over the summer. Academic staff confirmed to the review team that their extra resourcing needs were addressed and costs covered, either through a bidding system for external speakers, and reimbursement for purchase of extra equipment or request for more texts books/journals.

10 To support staff development, AIFS organised Faculty workshops to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and good practice on topics such as the use of AI, the VLE and grading standards, as well as attendance at conferences. AIFS maintains a training log to

record staff development activities and compliance training. Academic staff confirmed that in-house training sessions were beneficial and relevant to enhance their knowledge and skills, particularly in the use of the VLE. The team heard that classroom observations by the Director of Academic Affairs were used to identify development needs and academic staff confirmed that observations were constructive and gave opportunities to identify improvements. Staff from Fairfield University also undertook classroom observations during SORAC monitoring visits which was evidenced in the most recent report in October 2023 and the action taken by AIFS relating to late arrivals, note taking and integrating reading into class-room activities.

11 In meetings with the review team, AIFS highlighted its support for students to join societies and clubs as an extra resource and support for them become involved in communities and groups around London, including associate membership of Imperial College's Student Union. In response to student feedback, senior managers at AIFS told the review team that a campus tour had been established and meeting with a SU representative to encourage participation in clubs and societies. However, staff met by the review team acknowledged that take up was mixed, which was reflected in the meeting with students citing cost and commuting distances.

12 As part of the arrangement to study in London, AIFS organises housing for students prior to their arrival in London. At the meeting with senior staff, the team were advised on the Institute's planning approach to housing which had been subject to student complaints regarding commuting and public transport. They advised that Home Stay students and student residencies make up 99% of all students being housed by AIFS, working with housing providers to help manage student expectations. Students expressed mixed views regarding their housing, with some citing excellent facilities and others who were concerned about late notification, long commutes and location of their housing. The senior staff met by the review team acknowledged the importance of regularly keeping students informed pre-arrival on their housing allocation and was working with private property owners to manage student expectations. While changes to housing does occur depending on the number of students and the need to acquire more houses or hotels, students had the right to withdraw from the offer if they were dissatisfied with the housing arrangements.

13 The review team considered the experiential learning opportunities, embedded within the course syllabi a strength of the provision, enabling learning to take place outside the classroom by drawing upon the London location as a learning resource. Funded by AIFS these experiential learning opportunities complemented the classroom activities and varied each semester to take account of different cohort sizes, student priorities and events taking place in London. The evidence showed that the Institute had recently reviewed, updated and approved its offerings, taking account of feedback from student journal reflections and evaluations. The recently approved syllabus for Policing London included a schedule of visits over five days to the Central Criminal Court to view a trial in process, a tour of the Royal Courts of Justice, Sherlock Escape Rooms, and Bow Street Museum of Crime. Another example was a focus on immigration issues within the British Life and Culture class where students did a walking tour and visited black cultural archives in Brixton to gain an overview and heard from a speaker from the Windrush generation, before reflecting on their experiences in their journal. The review team learnt from Faculty how the experiential learning visits were embedded within the syllabi and linked to programme learning outcomes as stipulated in the Faculty Handbook. The team heard from students that they valued the experiential learning visits which were varied and gave them the opportunity to see places

beyond the city centre and reflect on what they had learnt in a formal way through the learning journals and direct links to the programme learning outcomes. The team therefore concluded that the approach to deliberately embed experiential learning visits within programmes, aligned to programme outcomes, to enhance the quality of the students' learning experiences is a feature of **good practice**.

14 Overall, the review team concluded that AIFS plans, secures and provides the facilities and resources to deliver high quality learning experiences, especially regarding the financial support through scholarships and grant funding, flexible and proactive approach to planning staffing resources during the year and the embedding of experiential learning visits within the courses. AIFS therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 4: Using data to inform and evaluate quality

Providers collect, analyse and utilise qualitative and quantitative data at provider, departmental, programme and module levels. These analyses inform decision-making with the aim of enhancing practices and processes relating to teaching, learning and the wider student experience.

Findings

15 The review team found that AIFS collects, analyses and uses qualitative and quantitative data at institutional and course levels to inform decision making, with the aim of enhancing practices and processes relating to teaching, learning and the wider student experience. AIFS has various policies and procedures to manage the collection, storage and use of personal data including the Data Security Policy to ensure it meets its obligations and compliance with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Staff confirmed that they received basic training in GDPR compliance at induction and the Faculty Handbook offers extra guidance to support data collection and analysis for reporting, quality assurance and enhancement purposes, including the use of third-party data. Multi-factor authentication is in place to enhance the protection of student data stored in the VLE.

16 The School of Records Procedure Manual describes how student grades are processed by AIFS and then shared with Fairfield University and the student's home institution. This system enables a digital transcript of the student's grades to be transferred securely between the different institutions. AIFS Study Abroad Privacy Policy outlines the types of personal information collected from students, together with the purpose and legal basis for doing so.

17 The review team found AIFS proactively track and watch student data to gain a better understanding of individual requirements by both Faculty and Student Services. Incoming student data is collected pre-departure through the Health, Safety and Culture Questionnaire, to identify any student who may require further guidance, intervention or reasonable adjustments to be made as appropriate. This data includes GPA, health and well-being and any specific learning requirements. Student data is shared by all staff through the monitoring spreadsheet as issues arise during the course to flag any health or attendance issues, missed deadlines or academic misconduct. A separate approach is also

used to track student performance data at the end of each semester to review grades, decide attainment gaps and identify students who may need more support. The Director of Academic Affairs also provides an evaluation report on student performance following completion of an academic session when grades are reported to Fairfield University for transcripts.

18 Student Services keeps a database of student feedback from evaluations, actions taken in response and monitoring outcome of actions to ensure systematic tracking and reporting. The Evaluation Review and Summary report provides an analysis of student experience, the most recent report noting that student views ranged from fair to excellent in Fall 2025. The students with whom the review team met had expressed issues relating to housing (see also, paragraph 12) which were also highlighted in the Evaluation Review and Summary Report relating to incorrect information and single room requirements. The report noted that complaints and related problems had significantly decreased compared with previous semesters, showing an overall improvement.

19 The review team found that the Institute has effective procedures in place to review its data and actions arising from feedback at an institutional level, reflected in the Academic Office and Student Services Review of the Year. Evidence provided showed that the 2024-25 Review of the Year report considered student evaluation outcomes, student well-being data and improvement in information sharing about students' additional learning needs. Enrolment trends and projections were also reviewed to highlight predicted high student numbers and the impact on staffing and the implications for future planning. In addition, evidence was provided as to how student and employer feedback is reviewed at course level to identify actions to be taken leading to course and institutional level enhancements. Academic staff confirmed that the Director of Academic Affairs provided the summary of evaluation outcomes and discussed with them any issues and changes for the next year, including updating syllabi and materials on the VLE. The academic staff also emphasized the importance of students completing the evaluation forms to provide feedback and find trends for future enhancements. Students who met the review team confirmed that they were given opportunity to feedback on their learning experiences and support services, highlighting the Institute's approach to enforcing the Attendance Policy and unexcused absences which were addressed by Faculty and senior staff in terms of promoting engagement and participation.

20 Overall, the review team concluded that AIFS takes a systematic, evidenced based approach in collecting and using student qualitative and quantitative data to identify and track enhancements to practices and processes relating to teaching, learning and the student experience. The Institute therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle

Principle 5: Monitoring, evaluating and enhancing provision

Providers regularly monitor and review their provision to secure academic standards and enhance quality. Deliberate steps are taken to engage and involve students, staff and external expertise in monitoring and evaluation activity. The outcomes and impact of these activities are considered at provider level to drive reflection and enhancement across the provider.

Findings

21 The review team considered that AIFS operates a robust set of procedures and processes for monitoring, reviewing and evaluating its study abroad provision on an on-going and periodic basis as outlined in the School of Record, Fairfield University, Procedures Manual. Self-monitoring reports are produced by the provider and shared with the SORAC unless an in-person monitoring visit or major course re-articulation takes place in that year. All courses offered by the provider undergo the same review and monitoring procedures.

22 The review team noted that the Institute adopts a cyclical approach to its monitoring and review activities starting from the creation of a course. These activities draw upon external experts where courses are scrutinized through SORAC and External Examiner annual visits, with the ensuing reports being shared with the academic team and responded to by the Director of Academic Affairs who then draws up action plans to take forward recommendations. SORAC also reviews grades annually together with updated student handbooks. The AOC receives recommendations from SORAC, and external examiner visit reports, reviews assignment guidelines, mid-term grades and academic appeals. At the end of each semester, the Academic Office and Student Services reflect on student performance and provide a report.

23 The cyclical approach to monitoring and evaluation is supplemented by classroom observations by both the Director of Student Affairs and the School of Record representatives during on-site inspections as noted in Principle 3. The VLE resources are monitored regularly and audits conducted to ensure improvements are implemented in an agreed timeframe. The review team also saw evidence that student feedback on their learning experiences is also used to improve and enhance courses and learning resources. In meetings with student representative's key issues are identified with actions agreed and taken recorded. During the meeting with students, the review team were told about the role of Student Academic Representatives (StARs) in eliciting systematic student feedback through formal meetings that reflect a specific purpose or theme.

24 Through its various activities, the AIFS takes deliberate steps to engage staff, students and external experts in its monitoring and enhancement processes. In the meeting with the review team, academic staff outlined improvements that had arisen through the audit and monitoring reviews including updates to the classroom observations through structured agenda, and integration of visits into the curriculum and reflection in student grades. The Academic Office and Student Services Review of the Year report provided evidence of the provider's reflection on feedback and impact upon the student experience at the end of the year. In particular, the Director of Academic Affairs plays a pivotal role through the

monitoring, review and evaluation cycle, by drawing together a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data arising from external sources, staff and student feedback, student outcomes. The review team found that there is clear responsibility for ensuring actions to address any recommendations are implemented and monitored and reported to SORAC as the awarding body.

25 Overall, the review team concluded that AIFS undertakes regular and systematic monitoring, review and enhancement of its courses, taking deliberate steps to engage and involve students, staff and external expertise in its activities at all levels. The cyclical approach evidenced that the provider continuously sought to identify and implement improvements to the student experience. The Institute therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 7: Designing, developing, approving and modifying programmes

Providers design, develop, approve and modify programmes and modules to ensure the quality of provision and the academic standards of awards are consistent with the relevant Qualifications Framework. Providers ensure their provision and level of qualifications are comparable to those offered across the UK and, where applicable, The Framework of Qualifications for The European Higher Education Area.

Findings

26 The review team found that AIFS has identifiable and documented arrangements for the design, approval and modification of its provision, and that these are supported by the School of Record relationship with Fairfield University. The School of Record Procedures Manual and the SORAC / School of Record approval documentation show that courses and instructors are subject to formal review, including consideration of learning outcomes, syllabus content, assessment methods and faculty credentials. The review team considered that this provides a clear and credible oversight of academic standards at the stage of programme and course approval.

27 The Institute has also shown that programme and module information is communicated to students through a structured documentation framework. The Student-facing programme and onboarding information and the Course catalogue / course information demonstrate that students are given access to course-level information, while the Syllabus archiving and version control documentation shows that AIFS retains a managed institutional record of syllabi and changes over time. Senior staff explained that website content is reviewed regularly by admissions staff and that where inaccurate information is identified, changes are cascaded through the admissions structure. The review team considered that this approach supports transparency, enables students to make informed choices and provides a basis for controlling programme modification in an orderly way.

28 The evidence also indicates that programme development and modification are

informed by a range of internal and external inputs. The Academic Advisory Council documentation suggests that advisory perspectives contribute to thinking about provision, while the External Examiner report and the External Examiner follow-up / response show that assessment- and curriculum-related issues can also feed into review and change. This approach to programme modification is reinforced by the Quality Improvement Action Plan, which indicates that AIFS is considering changes in response to student feedback, emerging sector issues and forthcoming review activity. Visit evidence added more examples of this. For example, senior staff explained how concerns about reflective journals had led to wider academic discussion and the development of a supporting rubric. Academic and professional staff also explained that student evaluations are reviewed centrally, that common issues can be identified across courses, and that faculty have scope to make adjustments in discussion with the Academic Office, including resubmitting syllabi at the beginning of each semester and making changes such as reordering teaching weeks where needed.

29 The review team also found that experiential learning and field-based elements are intended to be integrated into programme design in an academically purposeful way. Senior staff explained that such activities are expected to align with syllabus aims and learning outcomes and that they are discussed in curriculum development and approval conversations (see also, paragraph 13). The meeting with academic and professional staff added that experiential visits are integrated into teaching plans, identified in syllabi, supported by risk assessment, and accompanied by efforts to clarify for students what is coming and how visits connect to learning, for example through agendas, reflective activity and preparatory guidance on the VLE. This approach gave the review team confidence that programme design is intended to connect teaching activities, assessment and programme aims in a deliberate way.

30 Overall, the review team concluded that AIFS has structured and credible arrangements for the design, approval and modification of programmes and modules, supported by external oversight through the School of Record relationship, clear course documentation and processes for syllabus control and review. The Institute therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 9: Recruiting, selecting and admitting students

Providers operate recruitment, selection and admissions processes that are transparent, fair and inclusive. Providers maintain and publish accurate, relevant and accessible information about their provision, enabling students to make informed choices about their studies and future aspirations.

Findings

31 AIFS has limited responsibility for the admission process, as detailed in the Admissions and Pre-departure Overview document. They primarily admit students on two different pathways; students either attend as direct applicants or as part of faculty led courses (CFL) that the provider facilitates with the faculty member. For guidelines from an

external authority, AIFS looks to Forum's Standards of Good Practice which describes the importance of clear, accurate, and accessible marketing.

32 For all applicants, while they apply to AIFS directly the final decision on admission is made by the applicant's home institution. Marketing is managed centrally by AIFS and is delivered in collaboration with the sending school or faculty. All students, including those at the London site, apply through and have access to the admissions portal. The portal provides information and enables students to get advice from their Global Programme Advisor (based in the US). It also enables Staff in London to gain information about applicants and their choices.

33 For students who are direct entrance, all pre arrival information can be found on the website. The provided reviews programme content on the website as part of a twice-yearly formal process at the point of launching new programme sessions and pricing. The process is overseen by the Assistant Vice President, Strategic Academic Initiatives in the U.S. The London site staff provide updates and are required to check their pages for accuracy on a regular basis. Scholarships are also available and detailed on the website.

34 Any changes to the selection of courses offered for a semester or changes to the course itself, for example a new title or course code, are communicated through the Global Program Advisor allocated to that group. Any changes to CFL programmes are primarily overseen by their home institution. While AIFS manages the surrounding support and planning, the content of CFL courses ultimate responsibility lies with the home institution.

35 There is a pre-departure orientation where students are granted early access to the VLE, syllabus and course handbook. The AIFS portal provides students with all predeparture presentations, handbooks, insurance information and other details. Regular check-in emails are also sent to students. There is also an opportunity to communicate 1-2-1 with student services or the academic office. This is proactively offered to students with additional support needs. The review team confirmed this during the review visit but noted following the student meeting that improvements could be made to student understanding of accommodation and physical health provision, including GP access and insurance. (See also, paragraph 44). Notwithstanding this, the review team considered all necessary information was provided in the student handbooks and orientation slides confirming that key information was communicated with students at key points.

36 AIFS conducts a mandatory orientation session for students on the day after arrival for both direct entrants and faculty led programmes. These sessions cover student life, AIFS support services, health and safety and expectations about academic life. They also feature extra sessions designed for each programme which take place during the first week, including on internship and housing, if relevant. Students receive advice on how to get oriented, expectations/policies and support. While all relevant information is provided through the orientation and pre-orientation sessions, the review team noted that the language and method of delivery used, especially around the attendance expectations may be experienced by students as punitive, although in practice AIFS is more flexible than suggested, as confirmed by senior staff. The review team considered that AIFS may wish to explore a more student friendly way to provide and reiterate information on local healthcare access and health insurance (see also, paragraphs 44 and 50).

37 Overall, the review team concluded that despite some inconsistencies with student understanding on two aspects of their student experience, on balance the information

provided to students was accurate, relevant and accessible on different platforms. The admissions process was fair and transparent, with evidence of managed collaboration with key stakeholders. AIFS therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 10: Supporting students to achieve their potential

Providers facilitate a framework of support for students that enables them to have a high-quality learning experience and achieve their potential as they progress in their studies. The support structure scaffolds the academic, personal and professional learning journey, enabling students to recognise and articulate their progress and achievements.

Findings

38 The review team found that AIFS facilitated a structured and community-based support system for their students, which focused on developing them as global citizens, as well as on their academic development. The review team considered a strategic approach to student support was evident. For example, due to the rising number of both diagnosed and undiagnosed neurodiverse students applying to the Institute, extra training for faculty was put on as a response to rising number of neurodiverse students applying and attending.

39 AIFS uses a student engagement tracker to ensure they can track students who have declared any additional support needs, as well as any students who are experiences challenges with study or their experience outside of the classroom. The tracker information is also used to inform faculty if students have any accommodation needs. During the review visit, the benefit of this transparent approach was discussed by both professional staff and faculty, who praised the joined-up approach as being key to their ability to support students. This is a direct response to actions identified in previous external reviews, showing that the Institute effectively uses external feedback to enhance their provision. While students do not have access to the spreadsheet, they are able to request any information that is being kept on them.

40 Cultural and social programming (immersion) exists to support student integration into life in London. This programme runs alongside the Experiential Learning Trips, which are more educationally focused and include academic field trips and guest lectures, and these are mandatory and an integral part of the experiential learning while in London. All mandatory trips are closely related to learning outcomes of their associated programme (see also, paragraph 13). In contrast the social and cultural programme is optional with a mix of subsidised optional trips and events which students can choose to join depending on interest. The social and cultural programme will typically be made up of daytrips, theatre, sporting events, walking tours, meals, or neighbourhood walks. Students also have access to Imperial College Students Union through an associate membership. The Institute monitors the engagement of students with clubs and societies on a term-by-term basis but notes that despite encouragement, engagement is low

41 AIFS highlighted their specific work on career readiness and volunteering as a key strength of their learning experience offered to students. This includes an internship programme as well as opportunities for volunteering. The student meeting confirmed the

valuable experience of the internships, but students were less aware of the ability to engage with volunteering opportunities. Senior staff at AIFS told the review team that low engagement with volunteering opportunities was attributed to students' already busy schedule. The Institute indicated that more integrated volunteering opportunities may be developed in the future, following the example of another AIFS location, however, it would need to be developed and approved by SORAC for credit to be awarded.

42 All information regarding support mechanisms is accessible in the student handbooks Handbook, a student facing app and the VLE. Students have access to both a general GEC academic student handbook, as well as a London specific one. The handbooks include advice on money, academic life, medication, pre arrival information, communication, meals, and housing.

43 Students have access to a designated mental health platform, a specialist service offering expert-led counselling and mental health support that can be accessed digitally for flexibility and privacy. These services are promoted during orientation, through handbooks, and in ongoing communications. While students showed good awareness of the mental health platform available to them, there was lack of clarity regarding access to physical healthcare and health insurance.

44 Following on from this the review team found other areas where the style and content of information for students could be improved. This included communications about attendance expectations and while the review team recognised that attendance is both a visa requirement and a method of monitoring engagement, the way it is currently presented to students may be experienced as punitive and non-negotiable, although in practice AIFS is more flexible than suggested as confirmed by senior staff. This punitive language particularly applies to how it is presented in the Handbook for Travelling Programme Students. Another example is in the GEC Student Handbook, where information regarding learning accommodations, is found between incident reporting and academic appeals which may appear negative to students and function as a deterrent to requesting learning accommodations. The Institute may also wish to expand the section on medical insurance in the site-specific handbook to provide more detail about the steps involved and to help demystify the process. Consequently, the review team **recommends** that AIFS reviews the Student Handbooks and orientation materials to ensure that key policies and processes are communicated in clear, accessible, and student-friendly language, to support the student learning experience in its entirety.

45 Overall, the review team concluded that the provider maintains a strategic and holistic support framework that is frequently reviewed and tailored to their students. While the review team has formed a recommendation on the way that the support available is communicated to students, they were assured that the underlining framework was fit for purpose. AIFS therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 11: Teaching, learning and assessment

Providers facilitate a collaborative and inclusive approach that enables students to have a high-quality learning experience and to progress through their studies. All students are supported to develop and demonstrate academic and professional skills and competencies. Assessment employs a variety of methods, embodying the values of academic integrity, producing outcomes that are comparable across the UK and recognised globally.

Findings

46 The review team found that AIFS provides students with a structured and student-focused learning environment supported by clear information, varied assessment methods, and multiple layers of academic oversight. The GEC Student Handbook, the student-facing programme and onboarding information and sample syllabi such as Policing London show that students are given clear information about attendance, academic expectations, assessment, academic integrity, and available support. Students during the visit confirmed this overall picture, noting that assessment expectations are clear, submission requirements are consistent, and any misunderstandings that do occur are isolated rather than systemic. The meeting with academic and professional staff gave further reassurance that expectations are reinforced consistently through central induction, student handbooks, and routine staff discussion. The review team found that this supports transparency and helps students understand the academic requirements of their programmes.

47 The evidence also demonstrates that AIFS's approach to teaching and learning makes purposeful use of the study abroad setting. The sample syllabus for Policing London, together with the Experiential learning overview, the Selected Experiential Learning Trips evidence and the sustainability-related curriculum documentation, shows that London and the wider learning environment is used as an educational resource. Senior staff described experiential learning as something that should be explicitly aligned to learning outcomes and assessment, while students said that visits and excursions were beneficial and were linked to the learning objectives. The meeting with academic and professional staff added examples of how these visits are made more educationally purposeful through reflective posts, preparatory agendas, VLE guidance and discussion of what students should gain from the activity (see also, paragraph 13).

48 The review team found that assessment is supported by both internal and external scrutiny. The AOC process shows that the Institute reviews samples of student work, assessment guidance, and feedback during the semester before grades are released. This is complemented by the External Examiner report, the External Examiner follow-up / response, the later External Examiner report and the Institute's response to those recommendations. Senior staff added that anomalous grades are explored carefully and that concerns may relate either to an individual student situation or to the way grading and feedback have been applied. The meeting with academic staff gave extra practical detail, with staff explaining that consistency is supported through academic procedures, the AOC, rotating staff participation in review, sampling of student work and the use of blind marking. Taken together, these sources suggest that assessment is subject to a layered process of

internal moderation, independent external scrutiny, and follow-up action. The review team considered this a positive feature because it supports fairness, comparability, and timely intervention where issues are identified.

49 In their meeting with the review team students reported that assessment feedback is usually returned within two weeks and is often detailed, with explanation of strengths, areas for improvement and the reasons for the grade awarded. They also described clear routes for follow-up where they needed more guidance, usually by approaching the professor or named staff. The review team considered that this strengthens the overall positive picture around feedback and academic support.

50 At the same time, the review team heard from students that some professors provide more detailed assessment guidance than others, which is consistent with the concerns raised in the External Examiner reports about unevenness in the clarity and consistency of assessment briefs. Students also described the attendance policy as very clearly communicated but heavily enforced, with this emerging as the most prominent source of dissatisfaction in the student meeting. The later meeting with academic and professional staff confirmed the centrality of attendance within the teaching and support model, describing it as the first clue to disengagement and explaining the operation of excused and unexcused absence and the role of the Academic Office in applying penalties. The review team considered that this does not undermine the clarity of expectation, but it does suggest that the student experience of the policy can be experienced as punitive, although in practice AIFS is more flexible than suggested as confirmed by senior staff (see also paragraph 44).

51 The AIFS has also demonstrated awareness of current sector challenges in teaching, learning and assessment. The GEC Student Handbook, the Academic integrity / misconduct guidance and the Academic integrity / AI guidance show that AIFS provides students with information on academic conduct and the use of AI tools. Students confirmed that AI had been discussed at orientation and that the message they received was that it was not prohibited outright but needed to be acknowledged and cited appropriately. Senior staff similarly described moving towards clearer guidance on acceptable and unacceptable uses of AI. The meeting with academic and professional staff reinforced this by stating that students are told that AI use must be cited, that expectations may vary by subject area, and that consistency is reinforced through faculty meetings and reference to the Faculty Handbook and Student Handbook. The review team considered this helpful confirmation that the Institute is actively developing and communicating its approach in this area.

52 The evidence relating to support for students with additional needs and the Supporting Neurodivergent Students material suggests that AIFS is attentive to reasonable adjustments and inclusive support. Senior staff described the learning plan as the central document for coordinating adjustments and emphasised the importance of early dialogue with students. Academic and professional staff added that the Institute is often informed in advance where accommodations are needed, that many neurodiverse students are known individually, and that close coordination between academic and student support teams is central to this work. Students were aware that learning accommodations could be discussed with professors, although one student met by the EOR team reported not receiving the accommodations that had been requested.

53 Finally, the student meeting added some useful contextual evidence about the wider learning environment. Students spoke positively about study space, the flexibility shown

when a classroom proved too small, and the academic value of guest speakers and excursions. The later meeting with academic and professional staff added further evidence that staff regard classroom observation and faculty development as constructive, that observations generate written recommendations, and that staff have access to regular training including support for use of the VLE and discussion of AI-related risks. This supports the view that teaching quality is not only monitored but actively developed

54 Overall, the review team concluded that AIFS has a structured and student-focused approach to teaching, learning and assessment, characterised by clear student-facing information, varied and contextually appropriate assessment, and internal and external scrutiny of academic standards. The Institute therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 12: Operating concerns, complaints and appeals processes

Providers operate processes for complaints and appeals that are robust, fair, transparent and accessible, and clearly articulated to staff and students. Policies and processes for concerns, complaints and appeals are regularly reviewed and the outcomes are used to support the enhancement of provision and the student experience.

Findings

55 The review team found that the processes of operating concerns, complaints and appeals were clearly detailed in both staff and student handbooks. The processes detailed had information on both formal and informal stages of resolution, as well as repercussions. The code of conduct for students and staff is available online and is defined by the School of Record.

56 The number of formal grade appeals for 2024-2025 was twelve and for 2025-26 it was eight. The Institute confirmed that while none were upheld, grading criteria and rubrics were reviewed as a result. The review team considered that this showed that the Institute, even when the grade was upheld, used information gathered from the process to enable enhancement of their practice.

57 Through both the documentation provided and the review visit, AIFS was able to give examples of student feedback and informal complaints and detail their resolutions. This included case studies of students raising concerns though email, as well as one formal complaint regarding faculty conduct which was upheld. In this case the process described was fair and transparent for the student and followed the incident reporting noted in the handbooks. However, some students met by the review team showed less confidence in raising concerns, specifically in relation to the accommodation and the attendance policy. On balance, the review team felt that there was sufficient evidence to indicate that despite the lower confidence of students during the visit, there was sufficient evidence to indicate that the Institute conducted a complaints and appeals process that was accessible, fair and transparent.

58 The review team found that the Appeals and Complaints policy and procedures are reviewed internally at the start of the semester, as part of a wider reviewer of the student handbooks. Appeals and complaints are also reviewed by the School of Record as part of their monitoring exercises.

59 Overall, the review team concluded that the policies and procedures operated by the AIFS were accessible, robust and transparent, and fair to both staff and students. The evidence presented showed that the provider learnt from appeals and concerns raised. AIFS therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Enhancement initiatives

Commentary on institutional approach to enhancement

60 AIFS demonstrates a systematic and strategic approach to enhancement and continuous improvement, integrating academic quality, student experience, and operational practice within a coherent framework. Its strategy is grounded in strong internal governance—most notably through the Academic Oversight Committee and the Academic Office and Student Services Review of the Year—which together ensure that academic delivery, assessment, student performance and wellbeing are monitored holistically and acted upon within a structured cycle. Enhancement activity is also shaped by external oversight from Fairfield University as the School of Record and by routine engagement with external examiners, ensuring that curriculum design, assessment standards and teaching quality are subject to independent scrutiny and sector-aligned expectations.

61 This strategy is embedded in practice. AIFS uses student evaluations, complaints, casework trends and external examiner recommendations to identify and address areas for improvement. Recent enhancements—such as revising the reflective journal rubric, strengthening assessment clarity, improving VLE consistency, and expanding faculty development on AI and inclusive teaching—illustrate the Institute's responsiveness to feedback. Experiential learning is deliberately integrated into programme design, with syllabi regularly reviewed to ensure alignment between visits, learning outcomes and assessment.

62 AIFS also evaluates the impact of changes through semesterly data reviews, course-level learning reviews and annual institutional reports. This allows the Institute to track patterns in student performance, wellbeing, attendance, accommodation issues and engagement with support services, ensuring adjustments are evidence-based and monitored over time.

63 Overall, AIFS's enhancement approach is intentional, data-informed and outward-facing, supporting continuous improvement in both academic quality and the wider student learning experience.

QAA3077 - R14963 – June 2026

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2026
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel: 01452 557000 (voicemail only)

Web: www.qaa.ac.uk

