



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Richmond, The American International University in London, December 2018

1 Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Richmond, The American International University in London (the University) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the December 2017 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA review

2 The University has 842 students, 780 of which are on BA and BSc programmes and 62 on masters' programmes. Subjects are not limited to, but include Business Management, Communications, Economics, Finance, International Relations, Marketing, Psychology, Fashion Management, Film Studies, International Sports Management, Performance and Theatre Arts and Political Science. Students are taught at the Richmond campus and progress to the Kensington campus later in their studies. The University has 42 full-time academic staff, 92 part time academic staff and 77 administrative staff. The University was granted renewable Taught Degree Awarding Powers (TDAP) for a six-year term beginning on 17 May 2018. All of the programmes, except BA International Sports Management MBA, MA Advertising and Public Relations and MA Luxury Brand, were originally approved as The Open University (OU) validated degrees. The University successfully transitioned all students from The OU validation to its own degrees during the summer 2018. The partnership is in the last phase with its final reporting of OU annual monitoring in December 2018. A new President and Vice-Chancellor took up post in August 2018.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The review team considered a range of evidence, including strategic and programme documentation, information on the website and on the virtual learning environment (VLE). A meeting was held with senior, teaching and support staff to discuss progress made against the action plan. The review team met a cross-section of students, drawn from undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, different year groups, subject areas and countries of domicile. The University has systematically reviewed and built on its responses to the good practice identified in the HER (AP) report of December 2017 (paragraphs 4-6). It has also made good progress against the recommendations (paragraph 7-9) and the affirmation (paragraph 10). Following the HER (AP) 2017, the University developed an action plan to address the recommendations and the affirmation, and to progress further the points of good practice. It was intended that all actions relating to the recommendations and the affirmation were completed by June 2018. Two actions are ongoing and one is awaiting feedback from The Open University.

4 There is continuing progress in both of the identified areas of good practice. The University has developed further the good practice identified in relation to the personalised learning support provided to students. In keeping with the American system of

higher education, aside from compulsory modules, students have a wide choice of optional modules available to them. These modules may be taken in any order and at any level. An evaluation has been introduced half way through a student's programme to ensure that students are meeting academic targets and that progression from the Richmond to the Kensington campus is as smooth as possible.

5 The University has increased the support for peer tutors through training, revised procedures, and the use of dedicated academic spaces. The University has developed further its comprehensive scheme for the peer support of students. Peer tutors are recruited from students who have achieved high grades in particular subjects. They are appointed to support students in specific academic areas. Peer mentors are selected to help with transitions and general areas, acting as an intermediary between students and the professional support teams. Both peer tutors and peer mentors are paid for their roles, and are provided with recognition that they can use in their CVs. The comprehensive system of peer tutoring and mentoring is aided by an active system of student representation, including a student senate and a Student Government Forum on each campus.

6 The University continues to offer a wide and varied range of opportunities for students to develop skills and build experience, helping them to develop their employability. Activities include involving lower level students in more senior projects, such as in fashion design; increasing the range of careers-related events and introducing a professional skills module in autumn 2018. At this time, the Liberal Arts modules increased the emphasis placed on group work and digital skills. Also in autumn 2018, a three tier Richmond Leadership Academy (RLA) Employability Award was launched on the careers portal. The award allows students to progress from volunteering, through campus leadership, to internships and research. A digital badging system recognises achievement, and contributes to CV building.

7 The University had three recommendations in the HER (AP) 2017. All relevant university documentation, including for quality and governance, as well as for public information, has been revised subsequent to the awarding of Taught Degree Awarding Powers (TDAP). All references to the outgoing awarding body have been replaced. Alignment to the new Richmond University regulations is ongoing.

8 The University has completed its final annual monitoring process for The Open University. The process for annual monitoring has recently been revised to allow for the development of the University's own processes. The Open University Annual Programme Evaluations (APEs) have been monitored across schools to ensure consistency and parity of detail. Two dedicated officers were appointed to assist with this process. Students contribute to course evaluations, which feed into the annual monitoring process. However, while students feed back to the University, it is unclear how the University feeds back results of the course evaluations to students. Students had raised this as an issue through the Student Government Forum.

9 The Academic Complaints Policy and other related appeals and complaints policies have been revised to make appropriate reference to the University as the new awarding body and to the role of Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). This has been sent to the OIA for confirmation. Students are clear about where to find both appeals policies, and to the role of the OIA.

10 The University has completed its one affirmation in summer 2018 to ensure that relevant external examining activities are in place for courses offered on a stand-alone basis. The Academic Registrar obtained feedback from the schools to finalise a process going forward. This is now completed and integrated into the external examining and examination board processes. External examiners now cover the whole provision.

11 The University introduced a new Admissions Policy in September 2018, designed to align more closely with the higher education infrastructure in the UK. The Admissions and Recruitment Policy Committee has operational responsibility for monitoring the admissions cycle. The University Board and the Executive Committee has oversight of the admissions cycle, including sector comparisons. Students confirm that the admission process is very smooth and easy to navigate. They feel that the University takes good care of students during admission. The University recruits students using outreach and recruitment teams, recruitment agents, schools and embassies. Some students the review team met confirmed that they had visited local centres in Italy or the USA or had attended British Council events. They confirm that being able to discuss matters about admission in person is very helpful, particularly where a change of country and culture is being planned. Offer letters and additional information is sent to every successful applicant. Students confirm that information provided is accurate and helpful, but more detailed information on life in the UK, and the visa application process would be beneficial.

12 Agents are recruited selectively, references are taken up and contracts issued. Agents only have a referral role and they are monitored annually against the number and quality of applicants recruited. Visits are paid to agents during overseas trips and they are only employed to recruit international students. Admissions Officers work to written guidelines for offer thresholds, and work with Faculty and Registry in borderline academic and transfer credit cases. Entry criteria are clearly defined in the Admissions Policy. All applications include a personal statement and a reference. Students attend an interview, audition or open day. Where necessary, interviews are completed by telephone or by video call. Diagnostic placement tests are carried out on campus. Transfer credit, or Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), is used to admit students transferring from other institutions. The University does not have a process for the assessment of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) which might permit applicants or students to claim exemption against experiential or informal learning.

13 Intention to study is assessed through engagement with the admissions process, through the personal statement and examination of the reference. Admissions staff work closely with students during the application process. A 50 per cent upfront fee payment is required of non-national students. Standard United Kingdom Visas and Immigration (UKVI) checks are undertaken prior to the issuing of a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS). All students sign a student contract and are issued with the Student Charter. The University has a diverse and international student body and the students who met the team state that the admissions process was smooth and effective. The University works with the UKVI and Home Office English language examination requirements. It stipulates minimum English language requirements in terms of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), rising from 5.0 across all four areas for the Foundation Year, to 6.0 at master's level. As well as testing for English language competency prior to admission, the University also runs a programme for academic literacies. During orientation, most students sit a diagnostic placement test comprising an academic reading and writing assignment, and a test of mathematics. Depending on the outcome, students are then placed on either the Research and Writing programme or the English for Academic Purposes programme.

14 Students are provided with two handbooks, one of which contains assessment regulations. Students consider the handbooks to be helpful and professional. Detailed information and learning resources for assessment is provided on the virtual learning environment. Details of all assessments are posted at the start of the academic year. Assessment details remain on the VLE for the length of the students' time at the University. Students consider it helpful to be able to look back over assessment material for previous years of study. In some subject areas, such as Psychology, coursework assessments have been redesigned to have an initial assessment which then related to a second and larger

piece of assessment. Students are clear about the penalties imposed for late submission and non-submission of work, and about the process for the re-submission. They also understand the processes for the marking and moderation of work, and for academic complaint and appeal. External examiner reports note that the University has an internal moderation process, but has not yet implemented a system of anonymous marking for all assessments.

15 Formative feedback is provided on assessments and students find this very helpful. Feedback is provided online through the virtual learning environment and in person. Class feedback is used as well as one to one meetings. Summative feedback is provided within 10 working days. Students are aware of the external examiner system but had not met with examiners. Course representatives sometimes see external examiner reports. Reports are not made available to all students but can be requested through the Heads of Department.

16 The University is committed to addressing issues of deliberate academic misconduct, set out in its misconduct policies, and students are aware of the importance of submitting authentic work for assessment. The responsibilities of students are set out in the Student Charter, which is made available at the pre-admission stage. The approach to deterring academic dishonesty is reinforced at orientation and also through the instilling of good practice through the initial academic writing modules. Electronic submission of assignments has been introduced, which includes the use of text-matching software to detect plagiarism. Students are able to submit first and second drafts of work and sit written examinations twice per semester. These factors, coupled with a system based on small classes, help to minimise deliberate plagiarism and the use of contract assignments. The University has a range of sanctions for dealing with academic dishonesty. Registry Services monitor academic misconduct and produce an annual report for the University Exam Board.

17 For BA and BSc programmes which are four-year programmes, 215 students started in 2015-16 and 148 are still on the programme giving a retention rate of 68 per cent, 275 students started in 2016-17 and 233 are still on the programme giving a retention rate of 85 per cent, 188 started in 2017-18 and 176 are still on the programme giving a retention rate of 94 per cent so far. One hundred and eighty students have been enrolled on BA programmes so far in 2018-19. For MA and MBA programmes which are one year programmes, 35 students started in 2015-16 and 28 completed and passed giving an achievement rate of 80 per cent, 64 students started in 2016-17 and 54 completed and passed giving an achievement rate of 84 per cent, 49 students started in 2017-18 and 46 are still on the programme and are due to complete in December 2018 giving a retention rate of 94 per cent. Thirty nine students have been enrolled on MA and MBA programmes in 2018-19. The University is taking steps through personalised learning support and peer support (paragraphs 4-5) to maintain and improve these retention and achievement rates.

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

18 The University uses the Quality Code widely and all programmes are designed using the QAA Subject Benchmark Statements, which are listed on each programme specification. All policies and procedures are mapped against the Quality Code, and learning outcomes are written using the SEEC credit level descriptors. Several programmes are accredited by professional or regulatory bodies, and the University complies with the additional requirements for these. External examiners confirm that standards are appropriate for the awards, judged against relevant external benchmarks. The University is also required to demonstrate compliance with the Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE).

5 Background to the monitoring visit

19 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.

20 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Helen Corkill, Reviewer, and Mr Kevin Kendall, QAA Officer, on 6 December 2018.

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557050
Web www.qaa.ac.uk