# Richmond, The American International University in London

## Institutional Review
## by the Quality Assurance Agency
## for Higher Education

May 2013

# Contents

# About this review

This is a report of an Institutional Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Richmond, The American International University in London. The review took place on 28-31 May 2013 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Keith Bartlett
- Dr James Cunningham
- Mr Geoffrey Janes (student reviewer)
- Ms Hilary Placito (review secretary).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Richmond, The American International University in London and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. In this report the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - threshold academic standards[1]
  - the quality of learning opportunities
  - the information provided about learning opportunities
  - the enhancement of learning opportunities
- provides commentaries on the theme topic
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the institution is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the key findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

In reviewing Richmond, The American International University in London the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The themes for the academic year 2012-13 are the First Year Student Experience and Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and the institution is required to elect, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[2] Background information about Richmond, The American International University in London is given on page 4 of this report. A dedicated page of the website explains the method for Institutional Review of higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland[3] and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

---

[1] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx
[3] www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/IRENI/Pages/default.aspx.

# Key findings

## QAA's judgements about Richmond, The American International University in London

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Richmond, The American International University in London (the University).

- Academic standards delivered by the University on behalf of its awarding body **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at the University **meets UK expectations**.
- Information about learning opportunities produced by the University **meets UK expectations**.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University **meets UK expectations**.

## Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at Richmond, The American International University in London.

- The contribution of the credit mapping project to an understanding of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and the relationship between US and UK credit systems (paragraph 1.3).
- The contribution of the assessment norms project to the clarity of information for students about assessment requirements and processes (paragraph 1.8).
- The care and attention paid to academic and pastoral support for international students throughout their association with the University (paragraph 2.20).

## Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following recommendations to Richmond, The American International University in London.

By January 2014 the University should:

- introduce a policy specifying the timescales within which students will receive feedback on formative and summative assessment (paragraph 1.9)
- introduce, where appropriate, formal opportunities for employer input into programme development, approval and review (paragraph 1.12)
- align its terminology about complaints and appeals to reflect the relevant chapter of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (paragraph 2.14)
- publish advice and guidance for staff handling complaints and appeals (paragraph 2.14)
- work with the Student Government to jointly produce a single document that sets out the mutual expectations of all students and the University (paragraph 2.26)
- revise the published information on study abroad opportunities for all students on UK degrees to ensure clarity and accuracy (paragraph 3.4).

By the beginning of the academic year 2014-15 the University should:

- review and strengthen the training provided for staff in order to enhance their knowledge and develop their practice in the support of students with a disability (paragraph 2.19)
- develop robust arrangements for assuring the quality of information published about itself and by its partners regarding its academic provision (paragraph 3.4).

## Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms the following actions** that Richmond, The American International University in London is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The plan to subscribe to the Higher Education Academy (HEA) in order to enhance opportunities for continuing professional development, the sharing of good practice, and professional networking (paragraph 2.3).
- The implementation of the balanced scorecard dashboard and its use in strategic and operational planning and decision-making (paragraph 2.11).
- The plan to establish a Centre for Learning and Teaching to integrate academic enhancement initiatives (paragraph 4.3).

## Student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement

The University places high value on student engagement and uses a variety of methods to involve students at all levels in quality assurance and enhancement. The University provides students with a range of opportunities to feed back on their experiences and students generally felt informed about the actions taken in response to their input.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the operational description and handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining Institutional Review for England and Northern Ireland.[4]

---

[4] www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/IRENI/Pages/default.aspx.

# About Richmond, The American International University in London

Richmond, The American International University in London was established in 1972 and is an independent, not-for-profit institution, which additionally characterises itself as an international, liberal arts, and business studies University. The University became a voluntary subscriber to QAA in August 2009, and this is the first review of the institution by QAA.

The University currently employs 252 staff and has 1,063 students from almost 100 nationalities. The student body is comprised of 739 undergraduates, 27 postgraduates and 297 study abroad students. Study abroad students were not regarded as being in scope for this review as their short-term study in the UK accrues credits solely for their US degrees. The scope of this review only included students studying on UK degrees. At the time of the review visit, the University offered 11 dual-accredited BA degrees and two MA degrees, with the UK degrees being validated by The Open University. It has held institutional approval from The Open University since 1996. The University's US degrees have been accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) since 1981.

The University has two campuses in London, one at Richmond for undergraduates in their first two years of study, and the other at Kensington for postgraduate students and undergraduates in their final two years.

The Strategic Plan 2012-2017 sets out the University's vision and mission. Its vision is 'to be an international university offering high quality undergraduate and postgraduate education, research excellence and public engagement'. In order to deliver this vision, the University's mission is to pursue the following commitments:

- a commitment to internationalism, cosmopolitanism and diversity in all endeavours of the University
- a commitment to excellence in teaching and learning and the provision of a high quality student experience for an international student body
- a commitment to high quality interdisciplinary research and scholarship
- a commitment by faculty, staff and students to provide service to the community and to the development of globally active citizens
- a commitment to engage with local, national and international business and to develop graduates prepared for employability and leadership in the global economy.

The key challenges faced by the University include the continued embedding of the strategic changes that have taken place since 2010, most notably in the restructuring of the University executive and senior management. The University states in its Strategic Plan that it wishes to apply for and obtain taught degree-awarding powers within three years. It is also keen to change the culture of the University to emphasise its international identity over its American one, and to continue to develop its alignment with UK quality expectations.

# Explanation of the findings about Richmond, The American International University in London

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.[5]

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a [brief glossary](#) at the end of this report. A fuller [glossary of terms](#)[6] is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the [review method](#), also on the QAA website.[7]

## 1    Academic standards

### Outcome

The academic standards delivered by Richmond, The American International University in London on behalf of its awarding body **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

### Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1      The University is accredited to offer US degrees alongside the delegated responsibilities it has to deliver UK degrees in partnership with its awarding body, The Open University (OU). The University has actively embraced the full range of relevant OU quality procedures. These encompass the alignment of qualifications to the appropriate levels in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and ensuring that there is sufficient volume of study to demonstrate that learning outcomes can be achieved.

1.2      Normal practice at the University is for a new award to first be accredited by the US MSCHE, and then validation by the OU is normally scheduled for the academic year following the US accreditation. Revalidation at five-yearly intervals is designed to ensure that the University's UK degrees continue to meet OU and national expectations. The University's US degrees are stipulated by UK NARIC as being equivalent to UK degrees of the same name. The US degrees are outside the scope of Institutional Review.

1.3      The University actively promotes information about the FHEQ to both staff and students. Prospective and current students can see information about the FHEQ on the relevant course pages on the website and in the University Catalogue. The template for programme specifications, which has been in use since 1997, includes reference to relevant subject benchmark statements and was revised in September 2012 to include alignment with the appropriate level of the FHEQ. Information about learning outcomes and the volume of study required to achieve them is available in programme and course specifications and syllabi. Students whom the review team met confirmed their understanding of learning outcomes and their associated volume of study. As well as describing how the FHEQ is used in course development, approval and review, staff also confirmed that the Credit Mapping project, initiated in 2011-12, had been a key driver in raising awareness of the FHEQ and its use in ensuring clarity about the standards expected of UK qualifications. The particular benefits of the project as identified by the University included: defining the relevant FHEQ

---

[5] The full body of evidence used to compile the report is not published. However it is available on request for inspection. Please contact QAA Reviews Group.
[6] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx
[7] See note 4.

level for each programme; revisions to programme specifications; and clarification for students of the equivalences between US and UK credit. These and other benefits were confirmed in discussions with staff and students and therefore the review team considers the contribution of the credit mapping project to an understanding of the FHEQ and the relationship between US and UK credit systems to be a **feature of good practice**.

## Use of external examiners

1.4     The University makes scrupulous use of its external examiners. The role of the external examiner and the procedures for nomination and appointment are clearly defined according to the requirements set out by the OU. The University nominates external examiners, and their appointment is then subject to OU approval. The review team found evidence that the nomination and appointment procedures are clearly documented and established in the University's quality assurance system in order to meet the requirements of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code).

1.5     The University considers and responds to external examiners' reports in accordance with OU procedures. Reports are sent simultaneously to the University and to the OU. As part of the Annual Programme Review process, the review team found evidence of detailed and effective consideration of reports at both programme and institutional levels. Responses to reports are timely and comprehensive and effective engagement with the external examiner takes place to address any concerns or need for clarification. External examiners are also recognised by academic staff as valuable sources of expertise during the development of new courses and programmes.

1.6     Students were aware that external examiners' reports should be available for them to see. However, while some reports were found to be readily accessible via the portal (intranet), there was variation between Schools. The University might wish to consider introducing a more consistent approach to the sharing of reports with students. Students whom the review team met displayed a good awareness of the role of the external examiner in the assessment and quality assurance processes. In addition, student representatives are involved in the discussion of external examiners' reports as part of the programme annual monitoring and evaluation process.

## Assessment and standards

1.7     The design, approval, monitoring and review of assessment strategies is effective in ensuring students have the opportunity to demonstrate the learning outcomes of their awards. The University adheres to the assessment regulations specified by the OU. The University had responded effectively and methodically to two conditions arising from the 2012 OU Institutional Review relating to assessment and examination. This has led to the introduction of a working party on examination procedures, leading to the development of a range of guidelines, and a new University Examination Board.

1.8     The University provides clear and comprehensive information for students about assessment requirements and processes. Information for students, and staff, is widely available via the website, portal, and University Catalogue. A significant contribution to improving the level of understanding about assessment processes came about as a result of the assessment norms project carried out for all courses and implemented in September 2012. The purpose of this project was to ensure parity of staff and student expectations, and clarity in guidance to students, about the amount of assessment required for each course and at each level of the FHEQ. The norms are published for students and staff on the portal, and have been incorporated into the University's academic policies and the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The review team considers the contribution of the assessment

norms project to the clarity of information for students about assessment requirements and processes to be a **feature of good practice**.

1.9     The University lacks a coherent policy regarding feedback to students on assessments. The University states that students should receive feedback on any assignment within 10 working days of its submission. However, there is no formal policy and students reported that the timeliness and quality of feedback is variable and can be dependent on the individual tutor. The review team therefore **recommends** that, by January 2014, the University should introduce a policy specifying the timescales within which students will receive feedback on formative and summative assessment.

## Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.10     The design, approval, monitoring and review of programmes enable standards to be set and maintained and allow students to demonstrate the learning outcomes of the awards. The University adheres to the processes set out in its partnership agreement with the OU regarding the design, approval, monitoring and review of its UK degrees. Consideration of proposed programmes is informed by appropriate academic standards and the learning opportunities afforded to students, and the process takes due account of the conditions and recommendations set during the approval and review processes. The academic governance structure, which has undergone some recent and significant reconfigurations, allows final decisions regarding programme approval and revalidation to be taken at an appropriately senior level and independently from the academic department offering the programme.

1.11     Changes at course level are monitored across the institution to ensure that the accuracy of programme pathway information is maintained. In the normal cycle for programme review and revalidation, these changes are also captured in revisions which are made to curriculum maps. However, while this enables the documentation of changes, it does not act as a formal mechanism for the assessment or evaluation of the cumulative impact of course modifications to overall programme aims and content during the revalidation cycle. While this does not appear to present any significant risk to quality assurance, the University might wish to consider whether such a mechanism could be implemented as an enhancement to its quality assurance processes.

1.12     Overall, the University takes account of appropriate and effective external input into programme design and review, primarily through its external examiners and other external academic contacts. With the exception of some selected programmes, there were fewer examples of clear evidence for consideration of externality with regard to employer or professional practice. External consultation is a consideration specifically required within the programme approval documentation, and in this context the source of externality is identified as the external examiner. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the University introduce, where appropriate, formal opportunities for employer input into programme development, approval and review by January 2014.

## Subject benchmarks

1.13     Subject benchmark statements and qualification statements are used effectively in programme design, approval, delivery and review to inform the standards of awards. The University adheres to the processes set out in its partnership agreement with the OU regarding programme development, approval and review, including reference to subject benchmark statements. The University makes use of subject benchmark statements and other relevant external reference points in the development of programmes at all levels, and in the setting of learning outcomes. Appropriate reference is also made to subject

benchmark statements in programme validation and revalidation processes, and in the drawing up of programme specifications.

## Conclusion

1.14    In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified. All of the expectations for this judgement area were met and there were two features of good practice: the contribution of the credit mapping project to an understanding of the FHEQ and the US and UK credit systems; and the contribution of the assessment norms project in clarifying information available to students. In all sections under academic standards, the University is also required to adhere to the procedures of its awarding body. The team identified some areas for improvement and made recommendations in the following areas: introducing a policy specifying timescales for students to receive feedback on assessment; and introducing, where appropriate, formal opportunities for employer input into programme development, approval and review. Neither of these recommendations is judged to be based on significant risks to academic standards.

# 2    Quality of learning opportunities

## Outcome

The quality of learning opportunities at Richmond, The American International University in London **meets UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

## Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1    Professional standards for teaching and learning are upheld. A wide range of teaching, learning and assessment methods are applied by academic staff. The University has a strong ethos of research-informed teaching and the development of research skills among its students. Students whom the review team met spoke positively about the expertise of academic staff, the range of teaching, learning and assessment methods used, the embedding of research and professional practice in courses, and the opportunities to develop and apply their research-related skills and subject knowledge.

2.2    The University has an effective approach to mentoring new staff and providing professional development opportunities for existing staff at all stages of their careers. New members of staff are supported by an induction process and an assessment of staff development needs. For academic staff, this includes mentoring by more experienced colleagues through informal discussions and guidance. Useful feedback to academic staff is provided by peer observation of teaching sessions and student evaluation of new members of staff.

2.3    Although the qualifications of academic staff are assessed primarily for subject and professional expertise, senior management at the University acknowledge the value of pedagogic qualifications and continuing professional development (CPD). Opportunities for pedagogic professional development should be significantly enhanced by the establishment of the Centre for Teaching and Learning during the 2013-14 academic year, and by fulfilling the University's intention to subscribe to the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The review team **affirms** the University's plan to subscribe to the HEA in order to enhance opportunities for CPD, the sharing of good practice, and professional networking.

**Learning resources**

2.4     The University provides appropriate learning resources to enable students to achieve the learning outcomes of their programmes. The University operates on two campuses, one in Kensington and the other in Richmond. Programmes are delivered at both sites, with levels 3 and 4 studies conducted at Richmond and levels 5-7 on the FHEQ conducted at Kensington. For the purposes of Institutional review, level 3 programmes are out of scope. Each site has dedicated teaching and learning resources, including library and IT provision, that are appropriate for each level of study. Students reported satisfaction with all aspects of learning resource provision, with the split campus arrangement having no adverse effects on their learning experiences. A key resource is the virtual learning environment, delivered via the University Information System, PowerCAMPUS, which is the primary source of academic, student support and institutional information for staff and students. The review team heard that it works effectively in supporting the needs of staff and students both in academic and non-academic affairs. The review team welcomes the University's intention, through its Strategic Plan and the forthcoming E-learning Strategy, to further develop the digital learning environment.

2.5     The strategies for deployment and future development of teaching and learning resources are articulated clearly within the University's strategic documents. The priorities for learning and infrastructure resources to meet the overall teaching, learning and assessment strategy are clearly outlined in the University's strategic plan. The mechanisms for evaluating resource needs and the implementation of resource plans operate well and provide the basis for an effective provision of learning and infrastructure resources across the institution. Central to this process are the Operating Plans which are developed by academic and support departments and which benefit from good staff engagement for the identification of resource needs.

2.6     The University has an effective assessment system and subsequent provision for the staff development needs of both academic and support staff. The strategy for staff development and enhancement is described in the University's strategy documents and the mechanisms provided are detailed in the institution's Handbook for Employment. Non-academic professional, administrative and technical staff resources are appropriately deployed and work in close liaison with academic staff to support and enhance the teaching and learning experience of students.

2.7     The University has accessible and effective processes in place to support students in both academic and personal matters. For guidance on academic affairs, students are allocated an academic adviser from the point of induction and orientation through to graduation. For other types of support, including disability support and other institutional procedures, services and guidance are coordinated through the Department for Student Affairs which was praised by students for its effectiveness and accessibility.

**Student voice**

2.8     Students make an effective contribution to quality assurance. As well as providing feedback through course evaluations and different types of surveys, the institution holds open 'Majors Meetings' to allow students to provide feedback on their courses. This mechanism allows the gathering of students' views outside the formal representational system. Forums are attended on a regular basis by the President, Provost, and Vice-President for Student Affairs, and actions taken in response to suggestions made at these meetings are recorded in Annual Programme Evaluations. Students reported that staff are receptive to both formal and informal feedback, with matters often dealt with quickly. The review team also found evidence that the student voice feeds into planning at an

institutional level, with direct student input driving initiatives such as the inclusion of the enhancement of careers education provision in the Strategic Plan. From Spring 2014, the University will also participate in the National Student Survey (NSS).

2.9      The Student Government is the students' representative body and holds regular forums each semester at which all students are welcome to make their views known. The University ensures that students are represented on all key decision-making committees including Senior Management Team and the Learning and Teaching Policy Committee. The Student Affairs department provides training to members of the Student Government to enable them to perform their roles effectively. The University also provides opportunities for Student Leaders to meet with senior management both for training and for quality assurance purposes. The review team heard that the University is open to developing the Student Government further and regularly invites views from students on how their engagement in quality assurance can be developed.

## Management information is used to improve quality and standards

2.10     The University makes effective use of management information to safeguard quality and standards and to promote the enhancement of student learning opportunities. The University has robust systems in place to collect and utilise management information data and to track and monitor the progress of students. The key repository of management information is the 'Digest' which provides data on admissions, course results, progression, degree classifications, and course evaluation surveys. Data are also used in annual monitoring both at programme and institutional level, and in operational and strategic decision-making. The review team found evidence of the institution's use of management information in the development of its Strategic Plan, related sub-strategies, and school and departmental Operating Plans.

2.11     The University provided evidence of a range of other sources of management information, both quantitative and qualitative. This includes information on support for students with disabilities, the internship programme, careers advice, and employability data. Support staff confirmed that management information data had been used in the development of, for example, the library and ICT facilities. The review team saw evidence of the initial implementation of a 'balanced scorecard' dashboard as a set of key performance indicators for use by the executive, senior committees, and trustees. The review team therefore **affirms** the University's implementation of the 'balanced scorecard' dashboard and its use in strategic and operational planning and decision-making.

2.12     The University will be able to subscribe to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) from Autumn 2013 and this will allow it to participate in the NSS and the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey (DLHE) in 2014. In the meantime, the University is using its own exit interviews with students in place of the NSS, as well as a 'shadow' DLHE survey. The review team noted the value of these mechanisms in enabling the University to prepare for the requirements of HESA.

## Admission to the University

2.13     The University uses policies and procedures to admit students that are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied. The University has developed a new Admissions Policy that will be implemented in the academic year 2013-14 and is available on the University website. The policy outlines the different admissions routes and provides a clear statement for prospective students and applicants outlining key principles, roles and responsibilities. Students were involved in the development of the Admissions Policy. A range of clear and comprehensive information about admissions procedures is also provided via the University

Catalogue and the University Viewbook (prospectus). The University has clear procedures for the internal processing of enquiries and applications. Admissions Officers use written offer guidelines and consult as necessary with academic staff and Registry. Progress with recruitment and admissions is monitored by the executive with the aid of regular data reports. Students whom the review team met were positive about their experiences of pre-application information, the admissions process, and induction and orientation.

## Complaints and appeals

2.14    Overall, the University has effective complaints and appeals procedures. Students whom the review team met were clear about how to make a complaint or appeal, citing Student Affairs, and were complimentary about the level of support they get from this department in dealing with issues. There is also a mechanism in place to obtain support from the Student Government. For complaints about non-academic matters, the University uses the Student Code of Conduct. The review team also saw evidence that the University takes appropriate action in dealing with grievances. However, the review team also identified two areas in which the University could make changes to improve the way it processes complaints and appeals. Firstly, it became apparent to the review team that there is confusion among both staff and students as to what exactly is meant by the terms grievance, complaint and appeal. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that, by January 2014, the University aligns its terminology about complaints and appeals to reflect the relevant chapter of the Quality Code. Secondly, the review team heard that staff processing complaints and appeals do not routinely receive any formal training, or receive any written advice or guidance. Therefore, the team also **recommends** that, by January 2014, the University publishes advice and guidance for staff processing complaints and appeals.

## Career advice and guidance

2.15    The University has an approach to career education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) that is adequately quality assured. Students whom the review team met were complimentary about the CEIAG they have received, citing several sources of advice including academic advisers, careers professionals, and the Student Affairs department. Another important way in which students can be guided in their career choices is through their experience on the University's internship programme.

2.16    The growth of CEIAG is an important element in the University's Strategic Plan, most notably the development of a new Centre for Careers and Graduate Employability. The creation of this new centre was a direct result of feedback from students. The University has also developed an Employability Strategy that includes an action plan for students which has been partially implemented for first and second year students. The University will implement the action plan for the remaining students during the academic year 2013-14.

## Supporting disabled students

2.17    Overall, the University effectively manages the quality of learning opportunities to enable the entitlements of students with disabilities to be met. The physical environment is accessible and reasonable adjustments are made to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The University makes good use of management information to manage the experiences of students with disabilities, and is proactive in gathering the views of this group of students to help shape future provision. Assistive technologies are in place to assist students with disabilities to access IT and library resources.

2.18    The University takes a proactive approach to encourage applicants to declare a disability on their direct application forms. The one anomaly is for students who apply via the

common application process because US law forbids institutions from requesting information concerning disabilities at the application stage. In these instances, the University has adequate systems in place to gather information about a disability prior to enrolment. Students commented favourably on how proactive the University was in gathering and using this information. Any additional needs are discussed once the student has enrolled. The caring ethos of the University means that every effort is made to meet the needs of students with disabilities once those needs have been identified.

2.19      The University has recognised that further work is needed to bring it fully into line with UK expectations on equality, and so a Disability Working Party was set up in November 2012. In addition, the terms of reference of every board and committee include equality and diversity issues. However, it is not evident from minutes of meetings that these issues are being routinely discussed, including in the design of new programmes. Although both academic and support staff have requested training on how to better support students with disabilities, this has not taken place. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that, by the beginning of the academic year 2014-15, the University should review and strengthen the training provided for staff in order to enhance their knowledge and develop their practice in the support of students with a disability.

## Supporting international students

2.20      The quality of learning opportunities for the University's international students is appropriate. The University's 1,063 students come from almost 100 nationalities and it is therefore very experienced and capable in meeting the needs of international students. Students whom the review team met were complimentary about the information available to them at the application stage, and most were impressed with the level of contact with the University, particularly after their school results had been published. The University provides an induction and a welcome pack, both of which provide students with a wide range of useful information about practical and academic matters. Students spoke positively about the support they receive from the University, citing the Student Affairs department as the key place to obtain help and guidance. The Student Association also has a peer tutoring system that gives international students the opportunity to obtain guidance over and above that provided by their academic advisers. The review team therefore considers that the care and attention paid to academic and pastoral support for international students throughout their association with the University is a **feature of good practice**.

## Supporting postgraduate research students

2.21      The University has no provision at this level.

## Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.22      The University has effective procedures for approving, managing and reviewing collaborative programmes. In the context of this review, the University's only collaborative arrangements are its internship programme (see paragraph 2.25 for further details on how internship programmes are quality assured).

## Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.23      The University does not offer any flexible, distributed learning, or e-learning as defined in the Quality Code. As mentioned in other sections of the report, students use the portal (intranet) as a source of information about academic matters including assessment regulations and requirements.

**Work-based and placement learning**

2.24     The quality of learning opportunities delivered through work-based and placement learning is managed effectively by the University. The University offers internships, both in the UK and abroad, to all students. Internships are not compulsory for students on UK degrees but they are credit-bearing and therefore integral to the programmes of study and the achievement of learning outcomes for students who choose to undertake them. Students spoke positively about their internship experiences and the way in which the University is involved in evaluating them, particularly the regular contact between themselves, the employer and their institutional supervisors.

2.25     The University has adequate procedures in place to quality assure its internships. Clear information about internship programmes is available to students via the website, portal and academic advisers. This includes information about how internships are operated and assessed. The institution makes it clear to students that all assessment of internships is undertaken by academic supervisors. Employer input on student performance is also collected. Some students commented that the mechanism for assessment may not be adequate for all levels of study, and that the Internship Office may not have enough specialist knowledge about certain subject groups.

**Student charter**

2.26     The University does not have a document, written with the student body, such as a student charter or equivalent, which comprehensively outlines the mutual expectations of the institution and its students and therefore this expectation has not been met. Students whom the review team met pointed towards the Student Code of Conduct and student 'contracts' as being relevant sources of information about what the institution expects of them, while the student written submission pointed towards the University Strategic Plan 2012-2017 as being the most equivalent document. However, the review team noted that these alone do not meet the relevant expectation. The University regards its existing information and guidance as meeting students' needs but also recognises that much of this material was produced without the direct involvement of students. The University acknowledges that it lacks a single document which sets out what students can expect from the institution. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University works with the Student Government to jointly produce a single document that sets out the mutual expectations of all students and the University.

**Conclusion**

2.27     In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified. All but one of the expectations for this judgement area were met and there was one feature of good practice regarding the excellent academic and pastoral support for international students. The team identified some areas for improvement and made recommendations in the following areas: aligning terminology about complaints and appeals to the relevant chapter of the Quality Code; publishing advice and guidance for staff handling complaints and appeals; reviewing and strengthening training available to staff who support students with disabilities; and producing a single document setting out the mutual expectations of students and the University. None of these recommendations are judged to be based on significant risks to the area of learning opportunities. The University is already taking appropriate action in a number of areas where it was recognised further work would enhance practice and contribute positively to the student experience: for example, the plan to subscribe to the Higher Education Academy, and the use of the balanced scorecard dashboard for strategic and operational planning.

# 3 Information about learning opportunities

## Summary

The information about learning opportunities produced by the University **meets UK expectations**. The intended audience finds the information about the learning opportunities offered is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The team's reasons for this conclusion are given below.

3.1 Overall, the information provided by the University to its intended audiences is comprehensive. The University acknowledged that some areas are still under development and were able to assure the review team that potential weaknesses had been identified and were being acted upon. For example, the Key Information Set is incomplete but this is because the University is not yet a subscriber to HESA and so has not yet had the opportunity to engage in the NSS or DLHE (see paragraph 2.12). The University has operated a 'shadow DLHE' in the meantime until it subscribes to HESA in the academic year 2013-14.

3.2 Information for prospective and current students is comprehensive. The Viewbook (prospectus) provides a general introduction and complements the information available on the University's website. Course pages on the website, together with the University Catalogue, provide programme specifications and details about courses and credits. Information about admissions, pre-arrival and orientation (induction) is clear, comprehensive, and easy to navigate and this was confirmed by students whom the review team met (see also paragraph 2.13). The main sources of information for current students are the portal, website, the University Catalogue, degree handbooks, and planning documents found on course pages. Students spoke positively about the quality of information provided by the University and were clear about where they would go and/or whom they would approach in the event that the information being sought was not immediately available.

3.3 Information provided for staff with responsibilities for quality and standards is also comprehensive. In addition to material to support teaching and learning, the portal also includes information about strategies, policies, annual monitoring reports, data and statistics, and relevant external organisations. The University is methodically considering the ways in which its policies and procedures map to the relevant sections and chapters of the Quality Code. Staff at the review visit were clear about the use of the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements, and the purpose and benefits of the University's Credit Mapping project. They also clearly articulated the respective responsibilities of the University and the OU regarding programme approval, review and the role of external examiners.

3.4 While the information for current and prospective students is generally clear and comprehensive, the University accepts that the information published about itself and by its partners regarding study abroad opportunities is less clear. The opportunities provided by the University enable Richmond students to study abroad at a number of partner institutions in North America, Europe and the Middle East. In discussions with staff, it became evident that students taking advantage of these opportunities could only gain credits towards their US degree, not their UK degree. While recognising that the University has safeguards in place through its procedures for the transfer of credit, the review team felt that there is potential for confusion among students considering whether to apply for a UK degree about what is available in terms of study abroad and the availability of credits. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that, by January 2014, the University should revise the published information on study abroad opportunities for all students on UK degrees to ensure clarity and accuracy. The review team also **recommends** that, by the beginning of the academic

year 2014-15, the University should develop robust arrangements for assuring the quality of information published about itself and by its partners regarding its academic provision.

**Conclusion**

3.5    In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified. The team identified some areas for improvement and made recommendations in the following areas: revising published information on study abroad opportunities; and developing robust arrangements to ensure the quality of information published about the University and by its partners regarding its academic provision. Neither of these recommendations is judged to be based on significant risks to the management of this area.

# 4    Enhancement of learning opportunities

**Outcome**

The enhancement of learning opportunities at Richmond, The American International University in London **meets UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

4.1    Deliberate steps are being taken at institutional level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. The University has a strategic approach to enhance learning opportunities as articulated by the Strategic Plan, Teaching and Learning Strategy, and the Research and Professional Engagement Strategy. One feature articulated very clearly in the Research and Professional Engagement Strategy document is the University's emphasis on the complementarity of teaching and research activities and the value of this in stimulating research-informed teaching. Students also spoke positively about the benefits to them of this complementarity, as well as the innovations in teaching, learning and assessment methods employed by academic staff (see paragraph 2.1). The review team noted, however, that the terms of reference for the Research Policy Committee do not contain any specific reference to research-informed teaching. Another inconsistency in strategic approach is that the research-informed teaching highlighted by the Research and Professional Engagement Strategy does not feature in the current version of the Teaching and Learning Strategy.

4.2    Besides its overall strategic approach, the University has also put in place a number of significant enhancement initiatives in recent years. These include a restructuring of academic management, the committee structure and support services, and the development and implementation of the Credit Mapping and Assessment Norms projects, a refurbished Centre for New Media, and enhanced learning opportunities to be offered by the Centre for Modern Languages. Future initiatives include the establishment of a Centre for Learning and Teaching, planned for September 2013, which will support curriculum development.

4.3    While mechanisms for identifying good practice and enhancement opportunities exist at programme level, it is not always clear how locally identified opportunities are effectively followed up at an institutional level. The primary mechanism for the identification of good practice and enhancement opportunities is through the Annual Programme Evaluation process and its oversight by the Learning and Teaching Policy Committee. The central role of this committee will be strengthened by the forthcoming introduction of the Centre for Learning and Teaching. As part of its role, the Centre should provide a significant means for coordinating and leading academic enhancement initiatives across the institution. The review team therefore **affirms** the University's plan to establish a Centre for Learning and Teaching to integrate academic enhancement initiatives.

**Conclusion**

4.4     In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified. No significant issues were identified that threatened the management of this area. The University is already taking appropriate action in a number of areas where it was recognised that further work would enhance practice and contribute positively to the student experience. This includes the plan to establish a Centre for Learning and Teaching which will play a key role in the integration of academic enhancement initiatives. Therefore, there are no significant risks to the management of this area.

# 5     Thematic element: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

Each academic year a specific theme relating to higher education provision in England and Northern Ireland is chosen for special attention by QAA's Institutional Review teams. In 2012-13 there is a choice of two themes: First Year Student Experience or Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement.

The review team investigated Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement at Richmond, The American International University in London. The University places high value on student engagement and uses a variety of methods to involve students at all levels in quality assurance and enhancement. The University provides students with a range of opportunities to feed back on their experiences and students generally felt informed about the actions taken in response to their input.

**Innovations in student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement**

5.1     The size and ethos of the institution encourages student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement. The University has introduced a number of innovations to further improve student involvement, including the role of academic advisers.

**Staff experience of/participation in student involvement in quality**

5.2     There is evidence that students have been involved in the development of new policies, as well as in the development, monitoring and review of academic programmes. For example, the student submission was generally positive about admissions procedures, including student involvement in the development of the new Admissions Policy.

5.3     The University ensures that students are represented on all key decision-making bodies including the Senior Management Team and the Learning and Teaching Policy Committee. The Student Affairs department provides training to members of the Student Government to enable them to perform their roles. The institution provides opportunities for student leaders to meet with senior management both for training and quality assurance purposes.

5.4     The institution holds open 'Majors Meetings' to allow students to provide feedback on their courses. This mechanism allows the gathering of students' views outside of the formal representational system. Forums are attended on a regular basis by the President, Provost, and Vice-President for Student Affairs and actions taken in response to suggestions made at these meetings are recorded in Annual Programme Evaluations. Students reported that staff are receptive to both formal and informal feedback, with matters often dealt with quickly.

5.5      An institutional ethos that encourages and expects enhancement of student learning opportunities was exemplified by examples provided by staff and students of the diversity and innovation in teaching, learning and assessment methods and the use of research and scholarly activity to inform and develop student research skills. Academic staff also value the feedback provided through students' evaluation of new staff.

## Acting on student contributions and 'closing the feedback loop'

5.6      Students were aware that external examiners' reports should be available for them to see. However, while some reports were found by the team to be readily accessible via the portal, there was variation in practice between Schools. Student representatives are involved in discussion of external examiners' reports as part of the programme annual monitoring and evaluation process. Good awareness was shown by students of the role of the external examiner in the assessment and quality assurance processes.

# Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to key terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Most terms also have formal 'operational' definitions. For example, pages 18-19 of the handbook for this review method give formal definitions of: threshold academic standards; learning opportunities; enhancement; and public information.

The handbook can be found on the QAA website at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/ireni-handbook.aspx.

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality:
www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx.

**Academic Infrastructure** Guidance developed and agreed by the higher education community and published by QAA, which is used by institutions to ensure that their courses meet national expectations for academic standards and that students have access to a suitable environment for learning (academic quality). It consists of four groups of reference points: the **frameworks for higher education qualifications**, the **subject benchmark statements**, the **programme specifications** and the **Code of practice**. Work is underway (2011-12) to revise the Academic Infrastructure as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

**academic standards** The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

**Code of practice** *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for higher education institutions.

**credit(s)** A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as 'numbers of credits' at a specific level.

**enhancement** Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of **learning opportunities**. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

**feature of good practice** A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

**framework** A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

**framework for higher education qualifications** A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*.

**learning opportunities** The provision made for students' learning, including planned **programmes of study**, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios) and staff development.

**learning outcome** What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

**operational definition** A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in reports.

**programme (of study)** An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

**programme specifications** Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of **programmes of study**, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

**public information** Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

**Quality Code** Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is being developed from 2011 to replace the **Academic Infrastructure** and will incorporate all its key elements, along with additional topics and overarching themes.

**subject benchmark statement** A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

**threshold academic standard** The minimum standard that a student should reach in order to gain a particular qualification or award, as set out in the **subject benchmark statements** and national qualifications frameworks. Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that students need to achieve in order to gain any particular class of award, for example a first-class bachelor's degree. See also **academic standard**.

**widening participation** Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.