Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Richmond, The American International University in London, March 2016

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) has made commendable progress with continuing to monitor, evaluate and enhance its higher education provision since the [Institutional Review in May 2013](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 There have been no major changes since the last monitoring visit in February 2015. There are 932 students enrolled on 33 higher education programmes: 25 dual-accredited bachelor's degrees; one US-only undergraduate degree; three dual-accredited postgraduate degrees and four US-only postgraduate degrees. The UK degrees continue to be validated by The Open University and the US degrees continue to be accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. The corresponding figures for February 2015 are 917 students; 21 dual-accredited bachelor's degrees; two US-only undergraduate degree; three dual-accredited postgraduate degrees and three US-only postgraduate degrees.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 Commendable progress has been made in implementing the action plans from the May 2013 Institutional Review and subsequent annual monitoring visits. The University maintains appropriate management of quality assurance at both institutional and programme level (see paragraphs 4-6). The Academic Board continues to monitor and evaluate appropriately the effectiveness of actions designed to enhance good practice and to address recommendations arising from these plans (paragraph 4). The University continues to maintain and enhance the good practice identified during the May 2013 Institutional Review. All eight recommendations were reported as successfully completed in the report from the February 2015 monitoring visit. The admission process adheres to the entry requirements of the awarding partner. Diagnostic testing of students seeking admission without approved credit transfer is undertaken to ensure that students have sufficient English language skills and a genuine intention to study, and are suitably qualified (paragraph 5). The University operates an effective and coherent quality assurance and enhancement system, which ensures that the Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) and the awarding partner are met (paragraph 6). Comprehensive institutional and programme monitoring makes effective use of quantitative and qualitative data (paragraphs 6, 8 and 9). Appropriate use is made of external reference points and a number of programmes have gained professional body recognition (paragraph 11).

4 The University developed an action plan to ensure that the effectiveness of actions designed to enhance good practice and address recommendations arising from the May 2013 Institutional Review report was monitored and evaluated. Completion of all action steps in this action plan was noted at the annual monitoring visit in 2015 and led to a 'commendable progress' outcome at that time. The University continues to monitor, evaluate

and update this action plan, the latest update being published in December 2015. This demonstrates further ongoing activity to enhance and monitor practice. Academic Board monitors progress in taking actions to a successful conclusion and determines whether an action is complete, ongoing or under review.

5   The University continues to operate an admissions process that adheres to the entry requirements of the awarding partner. The process is aligned to the Expectation of the Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*. Applicants whose first language is not English are required to take a secure English language test as part of the visa application process. They are required to achieve an overall International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score of 5.5, with no element being less than 5.5. Diagnostic testing of students seeking admission without approved credit transfer is undertaken as part of the induction process, referred to as Orientation. This covers English language proficiency, reading comprehension and essay writing. Students confirmed that information on admission requirements is clearly and accurately presented on web pages and in promotional material.

6   The University submits a comprehensive annual institutional and programme evaluation to The Open University. This demonstrates that the University has developed and implemented an effective and coherent quality assurance and enhancement system, which ensures that the Expectations of the Quality Code, *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning* and *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review* are met. The annual institutional overview includes a comprehensive action planning process at both institutional and programme level, which clearly shows where identified action arose, the agreed action to be taken, the individual responsible, and the completion date and success criteria. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the action taken is included in the subsequent annual institutional overview. Each programme evaluation includes a programme-specific action plan and an evaluation of the effectiveness of the implementation of the previous action plan. Academic Board oversees the production of the annual institutional and programme evaluation and the implementation of the resulting action plans.

7   There is appropriate student engagement with the quality system through attendance at formal committee meetings and programme-based student representative meetings. The Student Experience Committee provides an effective forum to monitor the overall student experience and matters raised by students through surveys, focus groups, forums and other feedback mechanisms initiated through the Student Government. Appropriate training is provided for all student representatives at a central briefing covering their roles and responsibilities. Students commented favourably on the appropriateness of the training provided.

8   Each programme evaluation includes an appropriate and comprehensive commentary on statistical data relevant to the programme. This covers recruitment, entry qualifications, student profile, progression, retention and destination patterns, classifications, grades, appeals, complaints, disciplinary, ethnicity and disability data. Under each heading comment is provided on how the statistics compare with previous years, whether there are any discernible trends and, if relevant, any actions taken as a result. The evaluative commentary is based on cohort analysis data using the awarding partner's template. Average cumulative student retention across undergraduate programmes during the period 2012 to 2015 is 75 per cent, that is, of 761 enrolments in academic sessions 2012-13, 2013-14 and 2014-15, 191 students have discontinued their studies at some point between Year 1 and (for 2014-15) Year 4. Individual programmes' evaluations comment that student retention rates are affected by a number of reasons, such as students being granted a leave of absence. Most students who discontinue tend to leave the University within the initial two years, for predominately financial and personal reasons. The Student Experience Committee has taken an overview of this situation and has requested a report analysing student

withdrawals by nationality and course of study as a means of further improving undergraduate student retention. Average postgraduate retention during the period 2012 to 2015 is 98.83 per cent. Of the 102 students enrolled during this period, 83 (81.37 per cent) have graduated, 17 (16.66 per cent) are continuing their studies, and two (1.96 per cent) have left the University.

9   The care and attention paid to academic and pastoral support for international students has been extended to all students. A single, centrally located Student Hub has opened in the Richmond Library to provide direct access to student-facing services, for example finance, information technology and advisory services. Students welcomed the formation of the Student Hub and were unanimous in their praise for the academic and pastoral support provided.

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

10   The University has undertaken a comprehensive mapping of Quality Code Expectations to its procedures. This was reviewed and updated in September 2015. In addition to the Quality Code, the University's Quality Manual is cross-referenced appropriately to a number of other external reference points, including *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies* and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. Eleven programmes have Chartered Management Institution qualifications embedded in them and the BSc (Hons) Accounting and Finance with Combined Studies has received exemption accreditation from the Association of Certified Chartered Accountants.

11   At the time of the visit the University had completed the detailed scrutiny stage in applying for taught degree awarding powers. Academic Board has developed a transition plan to monitor actions required to complete the process.

5   Background to the monitoring visit

12   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.

13   The monitoring visit was carried out by Mark Langley, Reviewer, and Grant Horsburgh, Coordinator, on 23 March 2016.