

1. Provider context

Richmond American University London was established in 1972 by Sir Cyril Taylor. The institution developed quickly from its initial roots as a study abroad centre for American students, through to incorporation in 1978 as a not-for-profit educational institution in the State of Delaware and a recognized 501(c)(3) public educational charity under US law, a status which it holds to this day. In 2018, the University was granted Taught Degree Awarding Powers (TDAP) by Her Majesty's Privy Council and is registered with the Office for Students (OfS) as an 'Approved' provider. The University has a unique identity as both a US and a UK institution, combining the best practice of the US and the UK systems of higher education.

The University's students benefit from academic programmes and degrees which meet the expectations and requirements of both the Office for Students and the US Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) (*MSCHE Standards of Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation*

¹). The University operates and expresses itself in bilingual terms, and consistently aspires to the 'higher bar' when meeting the expectations of the US and UK regulators, which adds clear value for our students (Glossary²). The four-year undergraduate degree requires all students to study and pass a broad-based liberal arts curriculum while also specialising in "majors" which meet the requirements of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Subject Benchmark statements. In addition to meeting QAA and TDAP requirements, our US system expects high contact hours (typically 15 hours per week over two 15-week semesters), deferred subject specialisation, a wide range of elective choices (promoting student choice), and embedded support for credit transfer and mobility between institutions. We also offer a four-year degree, with the first year at RQF Level 3 fully integrated into the final degree award. Class sizes are typically much lower than the average in England and Wales allowing students greater opportunities to interact with their instructors and fellow students. We also actively support and encourage student inter-institutional transfer, in a key difference between the US and UK systems. To understand Richmond's bilingual terminology, it is important to note that we refer the components of the degree in US terms: modules (UK standard) are courses (US standard) and courses (UK standard) are programmes (US standard).

Our US heritage and our 'bilingualism' does mean that we do not always sit easily in standardised UK returns, offering multiple entry points (up to FHEQ Level 5), three admission windows a year and the ability to change major (degree specialisation) up to FHEQ Level 6. This difference is exacerbated by the fact we are small (currently with less than 1000 FTE) which can distort data. Furthermore, unlike many other independent providers we are not 'specialist' but avowedly and passionately 'generalist' in line with the expectations of the liberal arts. As such, all our undergraduate degrees are validated as UK bachelor's subject specialisms, with combined studies.

Our vision and mission

Richmond is a mission driven institution; our vision is "to be a leading liberal arts university" and our mission is "to educate and inform future generations by providing them with the knowledge and support to think critically, the freedom to challenge assumptions and the skills to work with others." To deliver this the University is committed to a set of shared values (*Strategic Plan 2021-2026*³) which directly inform our operations and are clearly embedded in the Strategic Plan.

Our operations

The University has faced significant financial challenges since 2019 but has kept our students as the core focus throughout. In May 2019, the University and Trustees approved a new Strategic Plan for 2019-2024 to ensure the delivery of the University's mission based on a charitable endowment provided by the late Sir Cyril Taylor. However, the passing of founder Sir Cyril Taylor had a profound impact on the University when previously agreed funding was denied by the Cyril Taylor Charitable Foundation (CTCF) in December 2019. Given the concerns about the University's future and in dialogue with the OfS, the Trustees took the precautionary decision to pause student enrolment for January 2020. The Trustees then considered the University's viability, including the possibilities of mergers and other forms of change of ownership and control. Students were kept informed of the situation with frequent town halls and opportunities for Q&As.

The University made the precautionary decision to run teach-out measures for its students' protection. For example, the University offered additional courses in the Spring 2020 and Summer 2020 semesters, at no cost to the students, to expedite graduation for eligible students for a full degree or relevant exit award. In addition, the University engaged with other providers in the UK and internationally to ensure there were progression and transfer pathways should operations cease. The University was in regular and productive communication with the OfS regarding a teach-out plan during this time, as required and expected under the "Conditions of Registration". This episode had a significant impact on student progression and retention as students were actively encouraged and supported to seek completion at other institutions, and this should be considered when reviewing the data.

In March 2020, the University established a strategic partnership with China Education Group HK (CEG) and adopted a service agreement with the organisation. CEG is a private higher and vocational education group operating educational institutes in Asia and Australia. A new Board of Trustees was also appointed at this time. The financial issues were successfully resolved, and the University has met OfS viability and sustainability requirements since this time. The new relationship provided investment into the University to move campus and to introduce new degree programmes.

Following extensive consultation with faculty, staff, and students, in December 2020 the Board of Trustees approved the Strategic Plan for 2021-2026 that reflected the University's new circumstances and strategic partnership. The Strategic Plan offered a clear route to financial sustainability and the delivery of the University's vision and mission. A major strategic project was the relocation of the London site to the new campus in Chiswick Park in 2022. The move to the new campus provided an opportunity to improve the student experience with modern flexible classroom space and learning resources with up-to-date facilities and technology. As of September 2022, Richmond has a campus in Chiswick Park and study centre in Leeds where the BA in International Sports Management is delivered.

The Strategic Plan is organised into two cognate areas with clear links and synergies: 'Our Students' and 'Our Operations.' These, in turn, are supported by a series of Delivery Plans and Major Projects designed to provide clear and measurable targets and goals. At the core of our strategy is

- the delivery of a robust Liberal Arts curriculum with a view to promote and foster awareness of contemporary issues and developing critical and creative thinking
- an international education and access to international learning and diversity

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As stated in our Learning and Teaching Plan, we are also committed to the continual development of financially sustainable ways of delivering and accessing high quality teaching and learning. We strive for an inclusive learning environment where students from all backgrounds and with all needs and requirements are valued, equal opportunity obligations are met, and students are supported to reach academic and personal goals.

Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning is at the heart of the Richmond experience. Its hallmarks are a liberal arts core, a diverse international curriculum, flexibility and student choice, small class sizes, and a highly professional and student-focused body of full time and adjunct academic staff (US: faculty) whose teaching is informed by research and professional engagement. Over 20 undergraduate degree subjects (majors) are currently offered, covering arts, sciences, humanities and social sciences, and business studies. In addition, students can choose a 'minor' in 24 different subjects alongside their degree. There are currently 11 taught postgraduate degree programmes. All degrees are delivered in person, except during the COVID-19 special arrangements detailed below.

As detailed below, standardised norms are in place covering assessment, grading, feedback, and workload to ensure students are treated consistently and fairly, and this is reinforced and supported by rigorous use of external examiners. In addition to annual monitoring, all degree programmes are subject to regular re-validation review, with external academics, specialists from business and industry, and students involved.

There are clear governance pathways across the University to ensure appropriate leadership and management of the delivery and maintenance of high-quality learning and teaching for all students. (University Committee Chart⁴). Academic Board (AB) is empowered by the University Board and the Board of Trustees to set academic policies and uphold academic standards in accordance with its terms of reference and the Academic Regulations. AB is chaired by the Provost (DVC Academic) and its remit includes quality assurance, programme approval and curriculum development, and its sub-committees include Research and Professional Engagement Committee, Academic Appeals Committee, Academic Progress Committee, Collaborative Provision Committee, and the University Exam Board. It comprises faculty, professional services staff, and students, and usually meets monthly, providing reports to both the University Board and the Board of Trustees. AB is responsible for student awards and for setting and applying admission standards.

The University had a student population of over 2000 in 2018-19 down to just over 600 in 2021-22 (*Student Entrants*⁵). It offers 22 bachelor's degrees, taught by close to 90 FTE faculty members, with an international student body with around 60 nationalities represented, and no single nationality representing more than 30% of the total degree-seeking student population. The University has several methods for evaluating and improving the quality and standards of its provision (⁶ Academic Board meeting minutes, December 2021).

2. Student experience

Academic Experience and Assessment

Richmond Curriculum: Liberal Arts

Richmond provides 4-year liberal arts degree programmes with several electives across a wide range of disciplines, and the Liberal Arts Core Curriculum (Core) running from RCF Level 3 to FHEQ Level 5. It is important to note that year one (RCF Level 3) is not a "foundation year" as typically understood in the English system but a fully integrated component of the liberal arts degree that

feeds through the curriculum to level five and counts toward the final degree classification. Its cornerstones are intellectual curiosity and critical thinking, an understanding of the interconnectedness of knowledge across a broad range of disciplines; clear written, oral, and visual communication and active, interculturally aware citizenship (*Liberal Arts Programme Specification*⁷). Students have flexibility in choosing their timetable and have optional courses from the first year. Students also have high contact hours (usually complete 5 courses per semester with 15h per week contact hours) and small class sizes (average class size in 18/19 pre-COVID was 17).

The importance we attach to student feedback in developing, improving, and enriching our teaching can be seen in a recent review of our core curriculum that involved faculty and staff, students, and a review of international best practice. During 2018-19, the School of Liberal Arts conducted in-depth reviews of the courses delivered on the Core since 2014, with particular attention to the courses that had below average GPAs and critical negative feedback from students in course evaluations. The gap between the GPA of all RCF Level 3 courses and the GPA of only the Core courses, had effectively doubled over the four years, indicating an increasingly lower level of achievement on the Core courses.

To address this in Spring 2019, the University undertook an extensive round of student focus groups without the faculty present. There was significant positive feedback, and the University took student concerns very seriously and made changes to reflect this. Much of the feedback was positive, and these areas have been enhanced; areas of negative feedback included:

- Students liked the faculty, but some felt the courses were not challenging enough or lacked content.
- A sub-set of students felt that they had already covered the skills at school.
- Some students could not see how the courses connected.
- Some students questioned the number of compulsory Core courses in the first year, feeling that their initial studies did not reflect the majors that they had signed up for.
- A group of students chose Richmond because it is in London, not because it is a Liberal Arts University, so are therefore not invested in doing the required elements of the Core.

In response the School of Liberal Arts ran a “Re-thinking the Core through a Design Thinking” workshop, following an established methodology used to structure organisational change. The workshop considered distinct categories of students (US, UK/Home, European, International, and visitors) and their varied educational backgrounds and pedagogic expectations. The workshop produced several Core ‘prototypes’ which a small team of representatives from the University’s Academic Board presented at the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ (AAC&U) Institute on General Education & Assessment in June 2019 (*AAC&U Institute on General Education & Assessment*⁸). The University of Vermont hosted the Institute and welcomed liberal arts institutions from across the US. The team gained valuable feedback from peers at liberal arts institutions, many of whom were also struggling with the delivery of the Core. This enabled the team to benchmark the prototypes against good practice across the US, and this demonstrates the University’s willingness and ability to look at good practice both inside and outside the UK system.

The key feedback from the AAC&U conference was:

- All liberal arts universities expressed difficulty with student engagement and getting faculty buy-in from different Schools / Departments.
- Most universities were moving from the traditional *Distribution* model to a more economical *Core* model.

- There has been a move by many liberal arts providers to re-structure their core around a selection of recognised 'High Impact Practices' (HIP) (AAC&U, 2008) such as:
 - Common Intellectual Experiences
 - Learning Communities
 - Writing-Intensive Courses
 - Collaborative Assignments and Projects
 - Service Learning, Community-Based Learning

The prototypes were further refined in response to the feedback and the US sector move to structure the Core around high impact practices. A final model was discussed with Peer Mentors, who are a small group of dedicated student leaders offering academic, extracurricular, and pastoral support for first- and second-year students entering the University. They provided additional feedback, particularly the new course titles. Academic Board then approved a pilot of the new RCF Level 3 courses in Fall 2019. The introductory course was remodelled:

Transitions I	Tools for Change (new course)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing on a range of skills. • Project based but without a clear topic or theoretical texts. • Individual presentations, no build up from group to individual. • Course was a prerequisite for Transitions II but did not link thematically with any of the other courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focussed on a range of personal study skills via theories of reflection and learning. • Set of key theoretical texts established on group work for students to analyse and critically reflect on their experience of a group presentation. • Group presentations introduced to develop skills toward individual presentations. • The focus on personal and social change in London through the experience of Service Learning, connected the course to others working around the same theme in the Core.

We looked at the students' GPA results at the end of the courses as well as well as the percentage of students that choose to withdraw from the courses or fail by attendance. The pilot revealed the following data:

- The average GPA of the piloted Core courses increased from 2.45 to 2.75 which was closer to the university average at RCF Level 3 of 3.00.
- The Course Withdrawal and FA (Failure to Attend) rate also improved, dropping from c.20% to 13% which again was lower than the university average at RCF Level 3.

A unifying theme of "social change" was proposed by the School of Liberal Arts as it directly responded to students' desire to engage with current issues and concerns such as climate change, Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and the rise of the extreme right. A Liberal Arts Core centred on social change offered a common intellectual experience that was identified by the student Peer Mentors as relevant and urgent. New courses offered learning communities and collaborative assignments and projects and specialist "Research and Writing" courses continued to successfully provide

opportunities for writing-intensive courses. The aim was then to develop Richmond's already established high impact practice of service learning. All of our undergraduates do some form of volunteer work (or 'service learning' when taken for credit) in a structured way as part of their degree programme. Our liberal arts approach helps students develop a strong sense of personal and social responsibility, enhancing self-understanding and preparing them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change. This in turn contributes to the University's public benefit and social responsibility strategies. The proposed shift from Core courses only existing at RCF Level 3 and FHEQ Level 4 to a new Core programme spanning all years of the degree proved to be an institutional strength when compared to competitor liberal arts institutions in the US. Devising a choice of FHEQ Level 5 service-learning courses also benefitted from engaging colleagues from other Schools/Departments and disciplines to enrich the Core. This breadth of choice is a crucial factor in building student engagement.

The revised **Liberal Arts Core** which has been fully in place since Fall 2022 is based on nine required core curriculum courses, with a mix of mandatory and optional courses. These courses are spread over the first three years of the four-year bachelor's degree (*Undergraduate Degree Programme Structure Policy*⁹):

- The Research and Writing courses in the Core at RQF Level 3, FHEQ Level 4 and FHEQ Level 5 (subject specific) equip students with key academic skills for success at university: written communication, critical thinking, effective research methods, and well-constructed, evidence-based research papers.
- The two interdisciplinary skills-based courses at RQF Level 3 and FHEQ Level 4 provide students with group working, presentation, report writing skills and digital literacy. These courses further enhance MSCHE's Standard III (see reference 10.) requirement of a curriculum designed to deliver oral and written communication, technological competencies as well as prepare students to make rational judgments.
- Students choose an option from courses in Environmental Studies at RQF Level 3 or FHEQ Level 4 to ensure the application of scientific thinking, data, and ethical analysis.
- Students choose an option from two RQF Level 3 courses enabling students to critically assess and analyse issues: one through the lenses of visual analyses and the other through the lenses of contemporary literature.
- For degrees without a quantitative course in their Major requirements, students complete a FHEQ Level 4 Data Analysis course. This course equips students with numeracy and quantitative reasoning skills as well as enhancing their technological competency and information literacy.
- Students choose an option from a range of FHEQ Level 5 service-learning courses which provide students with a range of advanced external learning opportunities supported by discipline faculty. These courses are designed to expand student's cultural and global awareness, promote both intellectual and civic engagement by linking classroom work to real work problems and needs.

The Core programme (*Liberal Arts Programme Specification*¹⁰) aims to deliver students a learning experience that meets MSCHE's *Standards of Accreditation* and US Graduation requirements in terms of core categories by providing students with engaging opportunities outside of their Major to gain skills and knowledge to prepare them for life during and after university. Since 2018 students

have had the benefit of some of the aspects of this value-added curriculum, but we believe the full benefit will be felt in the next generation of students that started in the 2022-23 academic year.

Richmond Curriculum: subject specialism

Faculty research and professional engagement in the relevant disciplines and professional practice also plays an important role in informing the student's academic experience. This has been commended by the panel members in our March 2022 re-validation of all undergraduate programmes. For example, the panel for the revalidation of BA Economics commended "the evidence for research informed teaching." and the External Examiner of BA Communications cited in his 2020-21 annual report, "always be[ing] impressed by the breadth of content on offer and the imagination shown by tutors in terms of making material relevant to students and to our changing times". (*Summary of Recommendations and Commendations*¹¹).

The teaching and learning strategy adopted within each degree is based on the understanding that all students will be treated as active rather than passive learners. The precise approach will vary from course to course, depending on the relevant learning outcomes.

The key components of our teaching and learning strategies include a variety of approaches. For example, the BSc Accounting and Finance degree includes:

- Regular use of formal lecture sessions in all courses.
- Occasional workshops and seminars in some courses.
- Regular use of individual and/or team-based projects in all courses.
- Regular use of self-directed and directed reading in all courses.
- Peer-tutoring led by advanced students in many courses.
- Use of audio-visual and library resources in some courses.
- Regular use of tutor- and student-led discussion groups via e-learning platforms such as or Blackboard in many courses.

The combination of teaching and learning approaches mentioned above develops our students' knowledge, thinking skills and practical skills.

Their knowledge is acquired through

- Structured lectures and supporting materials
- Directed reading and use of internet materials
- Independent research

Their cognitive skills are developed through

- Conducting research
- Making presentations and preparing other assessments
- Helping others to learn

Their practical skills are gained through

- Application of theory to practices encountered during internships
- Using information technology to retrieve and manipulate data
- Negotiating by means of team-based projects

Key skills are gained through

- Employing and using appropriate linguistic skills
- Independent learning

The External Examiners of this degree, as with other degrees, often praise assessments and course content. In the case of the Accounting and Finance degree, the External Examiner in the 2019-20 report commended the content “relat[ing] to issues that are current within accounting practice. They show a relationship between theory and the practical application of that theory to support and justify the student’s accounting and finance practice. Also, there is clear instruction to the student provided by the module leads.” (*External Examiner Report, Accounting and Finance 2019-20*¹²).

Richmond Curriculum: International Education

Recently some degrees have made considerable efforts to decolonise the curriculum. Concerted efforts were made to update reading lists to reflect a broader range of voices and non-western themes. These have been recognised and commended by the revalidation panel for both the BA Political Science and BA International Relations. (*Summary of Recommendations and Commendations*¹³).

All students have the option to take a leave of absence and travel away from the university under our well-established study abroad provision, and, subject to quality assurance checks, transfer credits earned elsewhere back to their Richmond degree. With 40 partnerships on five continents, students can select from a wide range of partners. All courses taken elsewhere must be preapproved by Registry Services to ensure appropriate progression and timely completion of studies.

The University recently won the Independent Higher Education (IHE) award for Advancing International Education (*Independent Higher Education Awards, 2022*¹⁴) This Award recognised the University’s work in assisting Ukrainian students to continue with their studies in the UK. The range of initiatives included:

- Full room and board, and tuition fee waivers for refugee students during summer 2022.
- Delivering online guest lectures with Ukrainian American Concordia University for students still in Ukraine.
- Awarding full year tuition scholarships for students to study at Richmond.
- Working with our student accommodation partners to provide free accommodation to scholarship recipients.

Assessment

All courses’ graded activities must meet the University’s Assessment Norms Policy (*Assessment Norms Policy*¹⁵). The Assessment Norms allow for innovative types of assignments, but within a framework that ensures University-wide parity and coherence. The Feedback Norms outline expectations as to the nature, extent, and timing of feedback from instructor to student – feedback sheets/rubrics are employed in each of the schools, breaking down the basis for the grade assigned into defined categories. The Feedback Norms help to ensure that students are fully aware of their standing in individual courses, but they also assist faculty, and the University, when assessing programme outcomes, because the student’s ability to meet a learning outcome found on the feedback sheet/rubric is measured.

Richmond’s many and varied methods of assessing student learning outcomes are at the heart of the student experience, and fundamental to the realisation of the University’s learning and teaching strategy. The processes in place have supported Richmond’s aim to improve student learning, and the University’s small size and agile committee structures enable a real responsiveness to

attainment-driven recommendations. The University makes extensive use of direct evidence to assess student learning and make curricular changes (see Educational Gains below).

The assessment strategies we use speak directly to how we anticipate progression with student learning to take place. In terms of following up with the assessment of student learning and consistent with US liberal arts traditions, our classes rely on the system of continuous assessment on a course-by-course basis and throughout any given semester. This approach often involves the use of term-papers, portfolios of work, quizzes, mid-semester exams, and final exams as well as student presentations and general class discussion. Not every component applies to every course, but most do relate to many of the classes that are offered. Many of courses involve a site visit or require attendance at a public lecture as well. Students find these events to be extremely valuable to their learning.

Our assessment practices have received strong endorsement from our External Examiners, both in their yearly reports and in the revalidation of our degrees. For example, the 2019 External Examiner report for BA Political Science cited the “diversity of forms of assessment, which complement the traditional essay/exam approaches while modules retain their rigour. The country briefs, short questions, reviews etc. challenge the students in helpful ways” (*External Examiner Report BA Political Science, 2019*¹⁶). In our recent revalidations of our undergraduate degrees, the revalidation panel for BA International Relations commended “the impressive work on the curriculum development, especially [...] the innovative variety of assessment.” The revalidation panel for BA Film Studies praised “the wide range of assessment and teaching and learning methods to engage students, reflecting an innovative and engaging response to current events” (*Summary of Recommendations and Commendations*¹⁷).

The University is dedicated to continual review and enhancement of learning and teaching. All programmes are currently undergoing an assessment mapping as a result of student feedback. The purpose is to ensure that students have a varied assessment experience to mitigate a pressurised final submission window of competing deadlines. The existing assignment types and submission dates have been compiled, and the timelines will be reviewed considering the student experience. Another aim is to inform students during course selection about the types of assessments within individual courses. Students do not follow a simple year-on-year progression; instead, students select courses based on prerequisites (and occasionally post-requisite degree requirements), and having the assessment information available allows students to plan their workload on a more individualised basis.

Resources, support, and student engagement

Resources

The University’s Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT) is an institutional mechanism designed to respond to assessment results across all schools, and specifically to encourage good practice in teaching, and to offer support for teaching and learning where assessment has identified deficiencies. The CLT is a highly productive and well-utilised centre with regular conferences and workshops held since its founding in Fall 2013. At times, CLT receives referrals from the different departments when additional support is needed for instructors and supports HEA applications by organising conferences and workshops and to disseminate good practice.

CLT was deeply involved with the design of the new classrooms at Chiswick Park from the outset. The University had faced increasing difficulty upgrading learning resources at the previous campuses due to the aging infrastructure. When a campus' move became inevitable, the University seized the opportunity to capitalise on the modern space. Design suggestions and decisions were based on current relevant research, faculty surveys, and student focus groups (*Campus Move Working Group notes*¹⁸). Moving to our new campus in Summer 2022 signified a marked improvement of every classroom's physical environment (furniture, lighting, air system, etc.), and a more up-to-date digital touch screen system which facilitates increased ease and efficiency of a wider range of delivery modes.

All classrooms are now equipped with the CleverTouch system which consists of an 86" screen augmented with laptop, speaker bar, and camera. Our decision to adopt the CleverTouch system in every classroom was based on student engagement and learning research which supports multi-faceted approaches, and feedback from faculty, staff, and students involved in the CleverTouch trial conducted in academic year 2021-2022 in which a range of faculty and students across most disciplines and across all undergraduate levels. Full training of the system has been provided for all faculty since AY 2020-21 with increased training since Fall 2022. Large scheduled group sessions with small group hands-on sessions regularly occur during each semester's Orientation Week and individual one-to-one sessions occur throughout the year. These ad hoc sessions are provided by the IT Department's AV specialist who is also an active member of the Centre for Learning and Teaching Committee.

Library Services is one of the most valuable resources supporting learning and teaching. The book collection is constantly updated in line with curriculum changes (such as new and updated courses) and to meet requests. Library staff work together with faculty to provide Information literacy teaching and research assistance. A range of Maths and Writing workshops have been established to support students with specific needs in these areas. Librarians are on hand to assist with library use, which includes instruction in web-based resources.

As part of the Student Satisfaction survey which is conducted at the end of each semester, students are asked how obtainable and accessible Library Resources are at the University. Every year for the last four years, the average result has remained above 90%, from an average response rate between 10 and 20% (*Student satisfaction survey questions and results*¹⁹).

Student Support

There is a range of student support and guidance, for both academic and general wellbeing, available to students. This is accomplished through a range of programmes and services which positively impact learning as well as the total student life experience. The University operates a well-staffed Student Affairs department that provides services intended to support and encourage student welfare, safety, and development. This department oversees medical registration of students and provides counselling services. It also organizes a range of extracurricular activities and travel designed to further enhance students' educational experiences. Disciplinary and social grievance procedures are also overseen by this department.

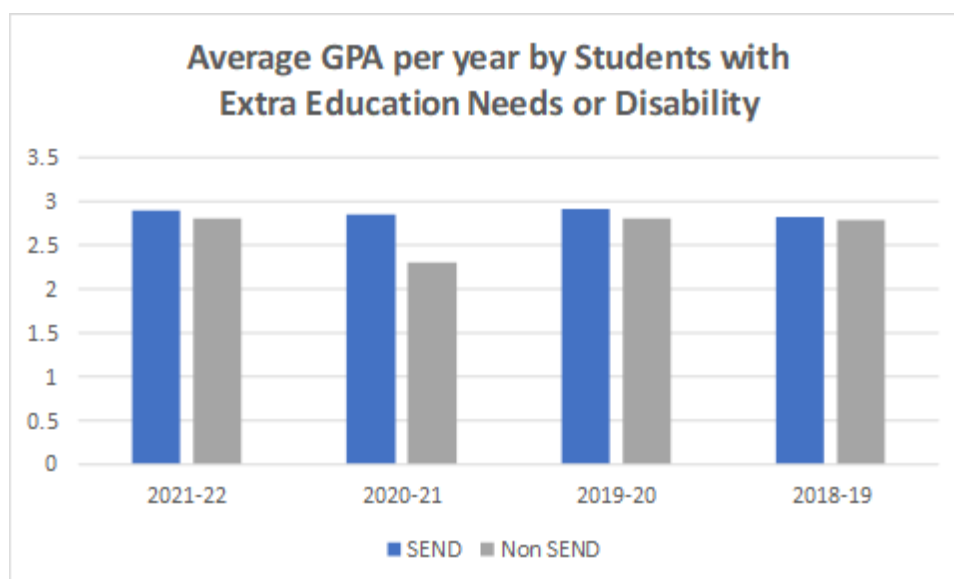
To navigate their progression at Richmond, students are offered significant practical assistance during the Admission and Orientation process by Student Affairs and Registry Services. An important source of academic support for students is Academic Advising. All students have an allocated full-time faculty member who acts as their academic adviser. Academic Advisers have on-going oversight of students' academic progress, meeting with each advisee at least once per semester. Advisers

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assist students with registration and course selection, enabling smooth progression through the degree. They also advise on postgraduate, career opportunities, and provide pastoral support in many cases. Students and their advisors have access to “Academic Plan,” which is an interactive degree planner, allowing students to track their progress against degree requirements as they complete courses (*Academic Plan Sample*²⁰).

According to the Student Satisfaction Survey, students find their academic advisor helpful (above 90% every year for the past 4 years) and easy to register for courses (above 80% every year for the past 4 years). (*Student Satisfaction Survey questions and results*²¹). The University is introducing a system for students to submit feedback year-round, which will be assigned to relevant staff with outcomes emailed to the student and posted on the Student Voice Webpage (*Student Voice webpage*²²). We hope this will improve student engagement and feedback.

The University endeavours to make all practical and reasonable adjustments to ensure students can fully participate in the University community. Students who declare a physical disability or a special educational need are supported to ensure the quality of their educational experience meets their individual requirements. Richmond complies with US and UK legislation regarding equality and disability and makes all reasonable efforts to accommodate and support its students and its employees. The University identifies students declaring a disability at application and students are contacted to discuss and agree upon reasonable adjustments; student may also report and present a disability or SEN at any point, post admission. The VP for Student Affairs also acts as the Disability Officer for the University, representing the needs of students with disabilities at University Board.



The Fitness to Study Policy was designed to recognise and support students who are not able to participate fully and successfully in their academic studies and life at the University by providing a consistent and coordinated approach to the management of their individual situation. The University is committed to supporting student wellbeing, takes a positive attitude to students' physical and mental health, and recognises that the wellbeing of students is critical to their learning, academic achievement, and their wider student experience. If a student is showing signs that their fitness to study may be impaired, they are assigned a Student Case Officer and together they discuss the options for progression using a Progress Plan.

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Support to students in their first and second year is also provided by their peers through the Peer Mentor scheme. These students assist with new student induction and lead groups of incoming and returning students in activities and social events. In the classroom, they are assigned to assist the instructors and students of Tools for Change (taken by students in their first semester) and Social Change in Practice classes (taken in the first or second year).

In addition to providing academic support in the classroom, the peer mentors' presence:

- establishes an immediate peer-to-peer support system that helps students who might have otherwise struggle with assessment requirements and deadlines;
- deploys a peer-oriented tool to encourage non-engaging students to connect with support systems, particularly helping those with early attendance issues to miss fewer classes; and,
- provides a forum for additional student feedback. In weekly/biweekly meetings, peer mentors' feedback student issues and enquiries, as well as offer means to directly engage students struggling with 1-1 peer support.

Recently, and in-line with our institutional motto of 'Unity in Diversity,' Student Affairs has created a university-wide framework to further develop and support student success. The framework brings together all key areas of the University in work that is cost-neutral and adapts existing practice/workload. Examples include work to create slide templates for academics to make their teaching accessible for dyslexic learners; Board-level endorsement of our upcoming Student Minds Mental Health Charter submission, and; work within Registry Services to develop enhanced reporting of student success and identify students with progression and/or fitness to study concerns.

Student Engagement

Student's input is crucial in curriculum development and continuous improvement of University's policies and procedures, all contributing to enhancement of student's outcomes. Examples of these are

- Student's voice in the development of the classrooms in the new campus (mentioned above) contributing to state-of-the-art learning experience.
- The development of the new Liberal Arts Core as a direct response to student's feedback and student's input in the development of the new Core.
- Student's input in the Annual Programme Monitoring described in the last section.

A key leadership programme has evolved from the peer mentoring programme whereby mentors serve as guides to sign post new students to opportunities on campus, in the community and around London. Our new students are involved in clubs and societies, sporting opportunities, take on voluntary roles in the community and represent their classmates on university committees and working groups.

The University was the runner-up for Outstanding Support for Student Learning by the IHE and shortlisted for Outstanding Contribution to Leadership Development by the Times Higher Ed in 2018 with this initiative which continues to be successful (*Times Higher Education THE Awards 2018*²³).

As part of the University's plan, Student Affairs have collaborated with the Centre for Learning and Teaching to convene a series of symposia for all academics and support staff. Following the first event ('Accessibility and Inclusion at Richmond'), the University produced inclusive language

guidance and a selection of more than 50 practical tips to support accessibility and inclusion in classroom-based teaching (*CLT Conferences*²⁴).

The team is now supported by a new Student Health and Wellbeing Officer with professional therapy training and substantial LGBTQIA+ training. In addition, the good practice developed from our first conference has subsequently also been shared with all student leaders as part of new training with an added emphasis on creating an inclusive and supportive campus community.

Our Student Government Association (SGA) as well as our teams of student mentors, tutors, residence life staff and student ambassadors comprise a wide range of students committed to helping us improve the student experience. These students represent diverse sectors of the University's population. Members of the SGA sit on all relevant committees, including Academic Board, Student Experience Committee, and the Operations Committee and through this directly help shape policies and procedures. The SGA President is also invited to attend meetings of the Board of Trustees. The SGA Executive team is comprised of elected student volunteers and is distinctly different to the standard Student Union Executive seen in UK universities which is comprised of sabbatical officers. The University provides support guidance and advice to members of the SGA, but Richmond's size and international student body mean that full time sabbatical officers are not a viable option. The SGA has considered membership of the NUS previously but has chosen not to join. Before 2022, the University operated from two London campuses a significant distance apart and the student voice was often divided consequently. One expected gain from consolidating to a single campus is to enable students to collaborate more effectively with each other and with the university management.

The University also has a strong history of student and faculty collaboration. The Richmond Business School launched an incubator initiative available to all Richmond's students, staff and alumni called 'Matrix.' The Matrix is available as a service to provide students with help and advice in establishing a start-up business. The Matrix team is a mix of instructors, students, and alumni. It has recently evolved into a research centre, marking its success at the University.

Another example of comes from our Psychology Department. In 2018 the department achieved Chartership with Psi Chi, the international honor society of psychology, and established the only UK Psi Chi Chapter. Psi Chi is a member of the Association of College Honor Societies and is an affiliate of the American Psychological Association (APA) and the Association for Psychological Science (APS). Psi Chi is well-represented, and respected among professional ranks of all behavioral sciences in the US and students and faculty who meet the criteria are encouraged to become members of Psi Chi. The membership has the following benefits for students:

- international recognition for academic excellence
- access to annual awards, grants, and scholarships
- access to the Psi Chi Career Center and networking opportunities
- opportunity to publish in peer-reviewed journal and other publications
- research opportunities with Psi Chi's Network for International Collaborative Exchange (NICE)
- recruit online participants for studies by submitting to Post a Study tool
- access to the Research Measures Database

The Psi Chi chapter is also conducting a student-led University-wide wellbeing project monitoring student and staff wellbeing and is now set to propose and implement interventions benefiting all members of the community. Our “University-Wide Culture of Wellbeing Project” has been selected as a recipient of a 2020-21 Psi Chi Chapter Activity Grant which recognizes the research efforts of the students and ensures that student and staff wellbeing needs will be at the top of the agenda for this academic year and beyond. The research on wellbeing stems from the ethical dilemmas and challenges peer mentors or residence halls assistants regularly face, especially relating to the mental health of their peers. They identified several issues arising from those relationships including confidentiality and lack of mental health first aid training and led action research into these issues. The funding provided by Psi Chi to implement the interventions now supports all Richmond students through the introduction of *NightLine* support services in our institution. Psychology students are measuring the impact the service has on wellbeing in the student population, especially student workers in support roles.

COVID-19 adaptations

Summer 2020 and the academic year 2020-21 enrolments and delivery were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The institution adopted a flexible delivery approach in Spring 2020 by adopting Emergency Regulations in response UK-government social distancing guidelines. In Fall 2020, courses were delivered in either 3-week or 6-week formats, either in online only or blended delivery. With this new format, the University was able to respond with relative flexibility to students or instructors in quarantine or other challenges, such as travel delays. It also offered pastoral and social support during this difficult period. The University also temporarily changed the assessment methods to allow alternative assessments that were more conducive to online/blended learning, drawing on the internal expertise of Digital Learning Technologists and the guidance from relevant UK and US professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). During Spring 2021, the institution reverted to a typical semester delivery mode over 15 weeks, with teaching and assessments offered only online.

3. Student Outcomes

The University’s continuation and completion rates appear to fall below the sector’s benchmarks. The retention rates are lowest in the first and second year of study. There are several factors that contribute to this. The University actively supports and promotes student transfer between institutions, as expected under the requirements of the University’s US accreditation. This is not simply allowing a semester or a year abroad, as happens in many UK providers. Student mobility is the norm in the US, where typically c.40% of students at private-not-for-profit institutions (like Richmond) graduate from a different institution to where they commenced their studies (*NSCRC Transfer, Mobility and Progress Data*²⁵). In this way Richmond is delivering an aspiration for inter-institutional mobility in UK higher education that has been discussed since the 1963 Robins Report. Simply put, we accept a far greater proportion of students into year two or year three than most British universities, and we transfer out more - we regard a student who starts at Richmond and completes their education elsewhere as a success, not a failure. Our American students often complete the first two years of the degree (equivalent to the US award of Associate of Arts (AA)) and then transfer these credits to a US institution to complete their bachelor studies. Reflecting on our data returns, we have not properly recorded and reported student transfer accurately in recent years which appears to have caused errors in our data and this issue is under active review.

There are several aspects that distinguish the University from others within the UK:

- We do not have an exam resit policy (which is in line with the US sector). Students must instead repeat the courses they fail which represents additional costs.
- The University also has a strict attendance policy (and associated appeals procedures) in place. Students can only miss six sessions of a 12 UK CAT credit course that meets twice a week. If they miss more than six, they receive an Attendance Failure and must retake the course, unless they have proven mitigating circumstances.
- The pass rate for our undergraduate degrees is 50% instead of 40%

Furthermore, from 2017 the recruitment patterns started to change, with a growing number of UK students and a shift in the regions from which international students studied and lived. Although the University still recruited from over 40 different countries, a higher percentage of new admits had a different profile: often having to balance a job along with their studies, sometimes with their own families also relocating to London, or staying with family members further away from the University. The growing number of commuter students had a particular impact on Year 4 of the time series regarding student Continuation. The University is always reviewing how it can best support their students outside their studies. Access to scholarships and hardship funds are examples of this.

Year 4 of Completion rate was also particularly low when compared to previous years. The cohort of students that started in 2016-17 had again a low continuation rate after their first year. What makes this cohort different than others is the low continuation rate in their penultimate and final year. We believe this was due to the financial difficulties the University was facing followed by COVID-19.

Internships and Careers

To prepare our students for their future careers, industry experts often inform the curriculum development of our programmes to embed employability skills into the learning experience. Revalidation panels often include industry experts, and Richmond Business School formally set up an Advisory Board composed of industry experts, alumni, and faculty (*RBS Advisory Board Terms of Reference and Membership*²⁶). From 2023 the Advisory Board will meet annually and inform on currency of curriculum, advise on programme development and support the enhancing of the student learning experience.

All students and recent graduates are offered a comprehensive Careers Services programme of events and resources that enable them to prepare for life beyond the University. Richmond's for-credit internship programme also offers valuable opportunities for students to gain concrete experience of employment related to their field of study. The internship can be completed locally, or globally, subject to the working visa requirements of the host country. Whether or not a student participates in the internship programme, with the Core's service-learning courses mentioned above, all students have will have the opportunity to engage in a professional environment and reflect on the skills they acquire with the support of their academic supervisor.

The University has close relations with organisations from a wide range of industries, and work individually with each student to place them in an internship that matches their interest and aspirations as closely as possible. Students gain valuable experience, with full supervision from faculty and regular feedback. Not only do students gain communication and presentation skills, develop critical thinking and creativity, but they also acquire first-hand industry knowledge and enhance their employability.

Between 6% and 9% of our undergraduate students have completed an internship for the last four years. Prior to Fall 2022, the undergraduate internship was equivalent to 20% of the FHEQ Level 6-degree requirements and necessitated a commitment equivalent to a full-time job for eight weeks. As such, many students opted to complete the internship in the summer months before or after their final year, which inevitably had financial consequences in terms of living costs outside of the regular semesters. As part of the revalidation of all undergraduate programmes in March 2022, the internship component has been redesigned to be equally weighted to all other Level 6 courses, which has enabled students to complete the internship in the standard Fall and Spring semesters, alongside their other courses. It is the belief of academic advisors and the SGA that this will lead to an increase in internship registration across all demographics of students.

Students complete a survey at the end of their internship (*Internship Programme Feedback Form*²⁷) to review their overall experience and the support they have received from the University. On a scale of one to five the average score has been consistently between four and five for the past four years (with a response rate of around 30%). In particular, the question “Extent to which the internship was helpful in defining the career goals” also receives scores between four and five. We are pleased to see that our network of employers regularly request repeat placement our students every year, and some students have successfully secured graduate employment with or connected to their placement employer.

Many of our alumni also continue their links to the University with between 20 and 30 former students coming to speak to the current students in the past couple of years. Most alumni come to talk with current students as part of our careers’ initiatives. These are students from all backgrounds and areas of study and many of whom provide internship opportunities to current students. We aim to improve the involvement of our alumni and our newest initiative is an industry-specific career mentoring for final year students.

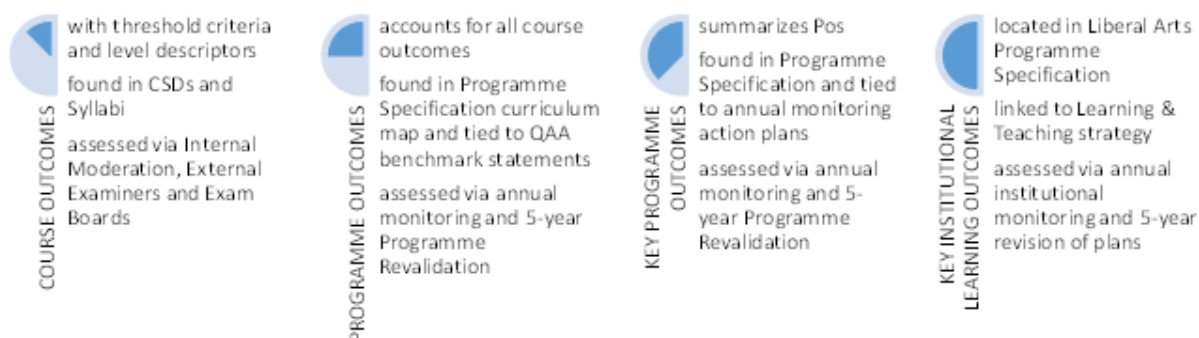
Educational Gains

The University has a comprehensive set of learning outcomes for each programme of study that were derived from multiple sources including QAA statements, SEEC descriptors and specialized teams of the University’s faculty. In addition to this, each programme has a set of Key Programme Outcomes (KPOs) that serve as “umbrella” outcomes, encompassing the main themes of the more numerous, more detailed programme outcomes. The programme teams assess each KPO within a 5-year cycle that aligns with the academic programmes’ revalidation cycle. The annual assessment of KPOs provides the University with direct evidence to assess the degree to which students are achieving the learning outcomes. By assessing the same outcome using courses at different FHEQ levels, we can obtain a measure of educational gain.

Programme teams collect quantitative data from direct evidence of student learning in a variety of ways but primarily through the following:

- Scored element(s) that relate directly to a KPO from an assignment (not overall grade);
- Capstone experiences such as senior projects and dissertations;
- Internship experience portfolio scored with a feedback sheet/rubric and/or workplace supervisor feedback via a scored feedback sheet/rubric;
- The setting of selected questions directly relating to KPOs on exams.

The University has also created Key Institutional Learning Outcomes (KILOs) that speak directly to the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The Key Programme Outcomes all link to the KILOs and each Programme Specification details an assessment map demonstrating the connectivity of the outcomes (*KILO KPO Outcome and Assessment Mapping, BA Accounting and Finance Programme Specification*²⁸). These are included in the 5-year cycle of assessment.



This review cycle contributes to a culture of assessment at the University that engages all stakeholders, as faculty discuss the specific elements with students. It not only gives assurance that the University is delivering the skills to our students but informs the way in which the University formally responds to assessment to enhance the curriculum and allows areas of academic policy to be adjusted because of the assessment of student learning. Examples of these are the feedback norms, the University late submission policy, and the strengthening of ethical guidelines for research.

The University, through a Liberal Arts curriculum, seeks to prepare students for a world that is evolving rapidly. The University promotes mobility and delivers international perspectives and opportunities. Throughout the last four turbulent years the University has been committed to deliver the best outcomes to our students through extensive evaluation and improvement mechanisms. With a state-of-the-art campus, teaching excellence, and new partnerships in place, the University is better placed to improve student outcomes and continue to reflect and develop its offer.

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