



## Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Leo Baeck College, December 2015

### Section 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 Leo Baeck College (the College) has made acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [previous monitoring visit](#) in October 2013.

### Section 2: Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 The College has 22 students on its level 6 and level 7 programmes, an increase of four since the 2013 monitoring visit. The past year has seen the University of Winchester end its partnership agreement with the College prematurely, citing a shift in strategic priorities. This unforeseen change was resolved when a new relationship was formed with Middlesex University. Institutional approval was granted following a visit in June 2015 and a suite of programmes was validated early in July 2015. The challenging nature of the timetable led the College to enrol students in anticipation of the timely completion of the partnership agreement and Memorandum of Cooperation for the Jewish Studies programmes. While the need to revise some regulations to meet the requirements of Middlesex University led to a delay in the signing of the documents, the review team confirms that both the partnership agreement and the Memorandum of Cooperation are now in place.

3 The broad range of provision remains the same, although revalidation has resulted in some curriculum revisions, including a new Study Abroad module in Jewish Studies and a proposed CertHE in Jewish Education. The College has suspended recruitment to its two Jewish Education programmes for one year to allow them to be submitted for validation in 2016, when a new one-year CertHE in Jewish Education will be introduced. It is continuing with longer term plans to introduce a certificated programme in Jewish Sacred Music.

4 The College can be said to have responded promptly and effectively to an unexpected validation change in that, over a period of less than a year, it achieved institutional approval from Middlesex University and a six-year validation of its four Jewish Studies programmes. It has managed the change to ensure continuity and progression for students and avoid any negative impact on their learning. The review team confirms that the College has very strong progression and completion rates, with some 90 per cent of students achieving their target award over the last three years, and students expressing high levels of confidence in the College's educational provision.

### Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

5 The College has continued to develop and enhance its quality assurance procedures, and all recent Annual Programme Evaluation reports, accompanied by clear action planning, have been formally approved by the University of Winchester. A notable feature of internal monitoring is the formal involvement of staff in a range of robust reflective activities focusing on module improvement, areas of good practice, and student feedback.

The reflections are shared and minuted at course team meetings, attended by student representatives.

6 Overall, the College has made good progress in addressing the action points arising from internal monitoring and reporting. The Jewish Studies programmes were revised in readiness for validation, enhancing the coherence of module design, refining learning outcomes, and introducing a more diverse range of assessment tools. Nevertheless, the demands associated with validation have been time-consuming for the small core staff team, hence some outcomes of internal monitoring have yet to be fully addressed and not all operational details of the new Study Abroad module on the Graduate Diploma in Hebrew and Jewish Studies Part 2 course are fully referenced to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). This is formally scheduled for completion in February 2016.

7 Work to improve and update marketing materials and the website is led by the Publicity, Marketing and Publications Committee and scheduled for completion by the end of the current academic year. All information is being explicitly mapped against the Quality Code. Published information is reviewed regularly for currency, accuracy and accessibility, although a specific inaccuracy in the online prospectus following the change of awarding body indicates that this is an area for continued attention. Students find the website, as a whole, to be fit for purpose, and value the improvements already made to it.

8 The generally robust arrangements for student recruitment, selection and admission are clearly defined in detailed policies and procedures, and reflect the relevant indicators in the Quality Code. They include language competency requirements for non-native English speakers, whose English skills are monitored after enrolment, with remedial plans put in place where required. The College always requests certificates and transcripts of academic achievement and, where appropriate, English language attainment. The review team did note, however, that documentation is normally requested as photocopies, which the College does not routinely verify. Transcripts are reviewed by the Admissions Board and the admissions teams, and procedures exist for testing the validity of unfamiliar awards.

9 The College makes constructive use of its extensive networks of religious, educational and community contacts to attract and identify potential students. All applicants are formally interviewed in a process that is rigorous but supportive; for example, a recruitment officer organises publicity, provides information, and is a continuing (and valued) personal link with applicants. Procedures for processing applications include awarding body scrutiny. The College is currently revising its procedures for the recognition of prior learning to ensure consistency of terminology and full alignment with the Quality Code. Candidates for the Rabbinic programme (which can lead to ordination) experience a lengthy and rigorous selection process, culminating, for shortlisted candidates, in an intensive three-day interview. At the end of the process, all Rabbinic interviewees receive written feedback and are offered individual follow-up meetings to discuss their application. Students confirm the thoroughness and transparency of these arrangements, highlighting the value of opportunities to meet staff and sample timetabled classes.

10 Appropriate assessment policies and procedures are in place, and the review team confirms, from extensive external evidence, that they are effectively implemented. Both University of Winchester monitoring reports and external examiner reports confirm that assessment meets awarding body requirements and all relevant sections of the Quality Code. Current extensive assessment regulations have been produced by the College, approved by Middlesex University, and are mapped against the Quality Code. Small student numbers allow all assignments and examinations to be second-marked internally and moderated by the external examiner. External examining procedures have been enhanced by external examiner attendance at the internal review of marks meetings held prior to recommended grades being submitted to the awarding body. External examiners have

described the written feedback provided on assessed work as detailed and highly supportive. The College recognises the need to build on this by promoting more consistency and structure in the feedback comments. Evidence from the sample of student work confirms that feedback could be more focused on module descriptors, assessment tasks and related learning outcomes. The College provides clear information, as well as practical sessions, on academic conventions and malpractice, including plagiarism. It does not use plagiarism-detection software, but most students have prior experience of academic writing and its associated conventions.

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

11 The College has given further attention to external reference points, particularly the Quality Code. The rolling programme of mapping provision against the Quality Code has reached a satisfactory point, although further attention to Part A, and Chapters B7 and B10 (which is significant for referencing the new Study Abroad module on the Graduate Diploma in Hebrew and Jewish Studies Part 2 course) would be desirable. While policies and procedures have been mapped against the Quality Code, they do not as yet incorporate explicit references to the relevant expectations and indicators.

12 The College continues to make regular and effective use of other external reference points, including working with external experts and Jewish community leaders in the development and delivery of the provision. Academic staff are regularly engaged in research and publication. Recent targeted staff development activities have included a session on assessment feedback for students, which was particularly valued by participants. The College does not engage with the Higher Education Academy or the UK Professional Standards Framework.

## **Section 5: Background to the monitoring visit**

13 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.

14 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr David Lewis, Coordinator, and Dr Helen Corkill, Reviewer, on 3 December 2015.

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