



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Leo Baeck College, November 2017

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 commendable progress with implementing the action plan from the November 2016 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

Section 2: Changes since the last QAA review

2 At the time of the monitoring visit there were 22 students enrolled on the College's level 6 and 7 diploma (12) and master's degree programmes (10) validated by Middlesex University. This compares with 25 students at the time of the 2016 review. There are seven full-time staff with academic and management responsibilities and 34 part-time academic staff. During the past year a new senior and a new part-time librarian have been appointed and there has been one replacement academic appointment. There have been no other changes since the 2016 review.

Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The College has made commendable progress since the 2016 review; actions in response to the two recommendations and the one affirmation arising from the 2016 review report have been fully implemented in line with the action plan resulting from the review. Examination papers are now sent to external examiners in advance of examinations, and the grading criteria relating to assessments on the Haifa University study abroad component have been aligned with those of the awarding body and the College. Demonstrable progress has been made with the affirmation to increase the synergy between the vocational and academic aspects of the College programmes. The College is proactive in its use of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) to inform its policies and procedures, and information provided by the College is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

4 The College has taken steps to ensure that drafts of all examination papers are now sent to the external examiners for comment in advance of end-of-semester examinations. This supplements the existing arrangements for sharing coursework assignment briefs with external examiners, which are made available at the beginning of each year through programme handbooks. To reinforce this addition to the assessment procedures, the College has updated its regulations on assessments to specify that draft examination papers are to be sent to external examiners for approval, and has set deadlines for the submission of draft papers by tutors.

5 As part of the 2016-17 annual monitoring process the College implemented a review of the Haifa University study abroad component of the Graduate Diploma in Hebrew and Jewish Studies programme. In addition to formally approving the alignment of the differing grading schemes between the College, Middlesex University and Haifa University, a comprehensive sample of module descriptors was shared with the external examiner to verify equivalencies in standards; confirmation of this was included in the examiner's report.

The College is not offering this component as an option for students in 2017-18 and is reviewing whether it will reinstate it in future years.

6 Clear progress has been made in respect of the affirmation to increase the synergy between the academic and vocational action elements of the programme through the process of an internal quinquennial review. The review, which commenced in spring 2017, is being led by a subgroup of the senior management team, the Quinquennial Review Team, membership of which includes external stakeholders and alumni in addition to College staff. A number of workshop sessions with staff and students have taken place intended to inform the development of alternative models for future rabbinic education. The Head of Vocational Studies reports regularly to the Academic Board on the progress of the Quinquennial Review Team, and it is intended that the recommendations from the review, once concluded in spring 2018, will form the basis of an action plan to be implemented in the 2018-19 academic year.

7 The annual monitoring arrangements for programmes at the College are specified by Middlesex University and set out in its quality handbook, which is available to collaborative partners online. The College currently prepares, with the support of the University Link Tutor, two programme-level annual monitoring reports: one for the MA in Jewish Educational Leadership and one for the five-year rabbinic training programme, comprising the Graduate and Postgraduate Diplomas in Hebrew and Jewish Studies and the MA in Applied Rabbinic Theology. Annual monitoring draws on progression and achievement data along with feedback from external examiners, students and programme staff. Reports are discussed internally at course team meetings and approved by the University at an annual monitoring and evaluation meeting, following which a report is provided to the College by the Link Tutor.

8 Students actively contribute to annual monitoring and enhancement in a variety of ways, including through representation on academic committees and the governing body. For all students, there are regular feedback surveys at the end of modules, and staff are encouraged to actively seek additional verbal feedback mid-semester. Students confirmed that the College was responsive to their suggestions, citing examples of changes to programme pace, assessment deadlines and the timing of feedback opportunities that had been implemented in the last year.

9 Regulations for the admission of students, including the recognition of prior learning, were revised following the validation of the College's awards by its new awarding body, Middlesex University, in July 2015. These regulations have been mapped against Expectation B2 of the Quality Code. Given the specialist nature of the College provision, many candidates establish a relationship with the College before submitting a formal application. Full information about admission requirements is provided on the College website and intending applicants are offered 'taster days' at the College. The admissions process for rabbinic applications is intensive and searching; it includes a 1,000-word academic paper and the testing of language skill in both English and Hebrew. Guidance is provided to the admissions team, there is provision for appeals against admissions decisions, and feedback is given to unsuccessful candidates. The minority of candidates who are not rabbinical applicants are subject to a comprehensive interview backed by academic references. Students confirmed that both the application process and the subsequent induction programme was rigorous and intensive, and that the information available to them prior to joining the College and when enrolled was accurate complete and helpful.

10 Both the diploma and master's programmes normally have 100 per cent retention and achievement rates, with only very few instances of discontinuation due to illness or

personal circumstances. There have been no instances of academic failure in the period covered by the College's data return (2014-17).

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

11 The successful outcome of the 2016 review confirmed that the College meets the expectations of the Quality Code. The College continues to demonstrate highly effective engagement through its mapping of policies and procedures against the Quality Code, recent examples being *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admissions to Higher Education*; *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*; and *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others* in respect to placements and study abroad. The College quinquennial review process is informed by significant external input and the College is in the process of applying for specific course designation for its awards.

Section 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 Mrs Francine Norris, Reviewer, and Professor Nicholas Goddard, Coordinator, on 15 November 2017.

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