



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, September 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 the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (the Centre) has made acceptable progress with continuing to 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 There have been no significant changes since the last monitoring visit in 2013. The Centre continues to offer an MPhil/PhD programme validated by Middlesex University and currently has 89 students enrolled at various stages of completion. The maximum registration period is seven years. All students receive support from the Centre for up to 12 weeks, comprising a five-week taught programme, and work closely with mentors to develop a proposal for registration with the University for the rest of the time. Currently, a further 39 students are engaged with this part of the provision. Students also receive mentoring, which supports their development from the point of acceptance onto the programme.

Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The Centre has continued to build on the good practice identified at the initial Review for Educational Oversight report, published by QAA in 2012 and during the 2013 annual monitoring visit. It continues to enhance the support for students through close monitoring of their progress. House tutors complement the external supervisory teams internally by providing pastoral and general academic support throughout the students' programme of study. Students value the regular opportunities to interact with staff and other students on site during residencies and through the comprehensive virtual learning environment, continuing to foster a strong academic community, which they feel part of. Policies and regular staff meetings that were newly established at the 2013 annual monitoring review continue to strengthen the quality management and staff appraisal systems.

4 The Centre has been responsive to concerns raised regarding the student-led seminars and has developed an approach which is tailored to the needs of students at different stages of the programme. Students confirmed that this has been successful in building confidence at the beginning of the programme and spoke positively about the increased focus on research competencies beyond the initial induction.

5 The committee structure, which is well established and forms the basis of the Centre's annual quality cycle, remains effective in engaging students with the development of the provision. Student input has recently informed the development of a new policy on bullying and harassment and a review of the online re-enrolment process. The twice-yearly Board of Studies, which all resident students and the

University link tutor attend, continues to respond effectively to student issues. Prior to each meeting there is a student forum, which is facilitated by an independent monitor who ensures that issues are brought forward to the Board of Studies.

6 The staff appraisal scheme, designed to promote a reflective approach to self-development in relation to the Centre's vision and goals, as well as to identify specific training needs of staff, has now been aligned to the academic year cycle. Reviews take place annually. The scheme has been extended to include administrative and senior management staff and this includes comprehensive feedback all round.

7 The Centre continues to offer its own supervisor training in addition to that offered to new supervisors by the University. Two training sessions have been held in the last year which were made through the Centre's remote link and are available on its virtual learning environment. The Centre is reviewing the timing of training to ensure that supervisors are aware of the commitments of the role prior to appointment.

8 The Centre's admissions process is rigorous and designed to take applicants through a structured process of research proposal development. Students are required to identify a research area at the point of application and are interviewed face-to-face or by video link. It is made clear to applicants that entry to the programme does not guarantee progression to the MPhil/PhD programme through the University. Students confirm that the high level of engagement with the Centre during the application process, and following acceptance prior to enrolment, is effective in enabling them to engage fully with the taught induction programme. Following successful registration with the University, the annual re-enrolment process allows for a close monitoring of student progress. At re-enrolments students are required to demonstrate a plan for the forthcoming year setting out a time plan for research activities and residencies at the Centre; this has contributed to a reduction in the average completion time in recent years.

9 The Centre's Assessment Board is responsible for the assessment of research degrees in accordance with the University's regulations. The University link tutor is a member of the Board, which considers progression between stages of the programme, annual re-enrolments and final assessment. The University's Research Degrees Committee externally verifies decisions of the Board. Additionally, the Centre offers a comprehensive series of review points for students, intended to support the development of their work. These include regular six-monthly reviews throughout the programme, a pre-registration review, stage plan reviews, a Dean's review and a mock viva. The Centre sets out clear expectations at each stage that enable students to structure their work towards completion. During the visit, students confirmed the effectiveness of the Centre's internal reviews in identifying areas for improvement and preparing them for external assessment.

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

10 The Centre has developed its own internal policies and procedures in accordance with Middlesex University's Research Degrees Regulations and Learning and Quality Enhancement Handbook. Specific mapping of the provision has been undertaken against the indicators of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), *Chapter B11: Research Degrees* and the Vitae Researcher Development Framework which has led to the development of a structured approach

to research skills' development, improved monitoring of reports and the introduction of annual progress reviews.

11 The Centre is still developing its explicit engagement with other areas of the Quality Code. While areas of activity, such as the approach to admissions, reflect the sound practice set out in *Chapter B2*, no deliberate mapping or alignment has been undertaken yet. Awareness of the Quality Code is not consistent across the staff team and the management recognises that there is development work to be done in this area.

12 The Centre's Ethics Committee continues to draw on both the British Educational Research Association and The Economics and Social Research Council guidelines.

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 Christopher Mabika (Coordinator) and Francine Norris (Reviewer) on 22 September 2015.

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