

# Review for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, October 2013

## 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 commendable progress with implementing the action plan from the October 2012 [Review for Educational Oversight](#).

## Section 2: Changes since the last QAA review

2 At the 2012 review visit, the Centre had 120 students, which by July 2013 had reduced to 73, attributed to a large number of PhD completions and the transition from the University of Wales to Middlesex University as the new validating body. It now has 106 students, following a new process of annual enrolments, a more stringent admissions process intended to increase completion rates, and improved reporting strategies to encourage progression and retention. The Centre is now on target to achieve its desired enrolments of between 100-120 students for the next five years. Only one student, who will complete the PhD in January 2014, is registered with the University of Wales. The Centre reported no other significant changes since the review visit.

## Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The Centre has continued to maintain and develop the good practice identified in the 2012 review report and has made commendable progress in addressing the recommendations. A staff appraisal policy and process, a sabbatical policy and a staff publications policy have all been introduced. Academic staff members find appraisals helpful for identifying a research focus. Staff meetings gather their views on improving quality, systems, and growth. Annual appraisals of administrative staff have led to workload adjustments to create more effective support systems. Trustees complete self-evaluations and participate in Board training that enhances their capacity to contribute to strategic goals and policies.

4 New research supervisors undertake induction training, which they are offered twice yearly to coincide with each new student intake. This training content draws on Middlesex University's supervisor training. The Centre invites supervisors to attend its weekly lecture series. Globally based supervisors can access training via the internet. The Centre maintains training records for supervisors. Existing supervisors submit annually revised CVs that list their yearly development and research, and the support they need. The house tutor provides a point of coordination for ensuring that the ensuing staff development activities impact favourably on student learning. At the different student PhD stages, the Centre issues supervisors with individual contracts that note their training, achievements and further training needs.

5 A twice-yearly Board of Studies responds effectively to student issues which sustains student motivation. The Link Tutor from Middlesex University suggested expanding the number of student Board members to encourage participation, and this has enabled the part-time students to contribute more effectively.

6 A Centre website committee, which the Director chairs, meets quarterly to update and check information for accuracy. Changes can be made as needed throughout the year. Students contribute to this process. A designated Centre staff member liaises with Middlesex University over updating the website. The Centre updated and expanded the use of its virtual learning environment (VLE) and introduced a new web conferencing system. These systems enable global participation in lectures

and seminars and increase students' access to the Centre's learning community. The Centre offers training on how to use the web conferencing and VLE systems, and monitors student and staff engagement.

7 Students find the research induction stage helpful for introducing them to expectations of their research, and for acquainting them with Oxford-based resources which include access to the University's Bodleian Library. A buddy system links new students with a student mentor. The Centre provides ongoing academic, moral and spiritual support through supervisors, house tutors, seminars, lectures, weekly chapel services, and web-based contact. Some students suggested that they need briefings on how to use the internet effectively.

8 The Centre provides two lectures on plagiarism as part of its research training, and uses plagiarism-detection software to check student submissions.

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

9 The Centre's Quality Assurance and enhancement policies, processes, and procedures comply with Middlesex University's Research Degrees Regulations and Learning and Quality Enhancement Handbook. The Centre continues to use the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), especially *Chapter B11: Research degrees* and the Vitae Researcher Development Framework as external reference points for enabling students to adopt national standards for research, and it has mapped its processes and procedures against the relevant Quality Code indicators. The Centre's Ethics Committee structure draws on both British Educational Research Association and The Economics and Social Research Council guidelines. The new staff appraisal policy and process are based on external reference points from educational institutions in North America and the UK.

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

10 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.

11 The monitoring visit was carried out by Patricia Higham (Coordinator) and Francine Norris (Reviewer) on 3 October 2013.