



Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of the Assemblies of God Incorporated trading as Mattersey Hall College, December 2018

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 Assemblies of God Incorporated trading as Mattersey Hall College (the College) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the December 2017 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA review visit

2 The College continues to offer full and part-time undergraduate awards in Biblical Studies and Theology, and in Theological Studies. It also provides MA awards in Biblical Studies and in Practical Theology, as well as the Master and Doctor of Philosophy and the Doctor of Ministry. The awarding body for all qualifications is the University of Chester (the University). The College currently has 87 undergraduate students compared with 97 for the previous year; a 10.3 per cent decrease. Postgraduate numbers have increased by 6.7 per cent over the same period, from 60 to 64 students. The College has the equivalent of 6.4 permanent academic staff which includes the continuation of the appointment of an Interim Principal. There have been no changes to the programmes offered by the awarding body or to the premises used for teaching and supporting students. The College's higher education provision was successfully re-validated in December 2016 by the University.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The team noted that good practice from the last Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER AP) has been further developed through the continued refinement of induction procedures and resources, and the supportive learning community is now underpinned by a detailed College-wide Enhancement Action Plan (paragraphs 4-6). Recommendations have been completed successfully, including the revision of the terms of reference for Lead Students (paragraph 5). The use of learning outcomes for assessment has been strengthened (paragraph 6) and changes have been made to procedures for agreeing curriculum development outcomes, as well as ensuring more consistency of practice with the planning and monitoring of all church placements (paragraph 6). One recommendation has been agreed but not yet implemented, concerning the involvement of an external observer for the College (paragraph 5). The College continues to apply consistent and appropriate procedures for student admissions, reinforced by clear policy (paragraphs 7 and 8). The management of assessment is supported by the College's updated Assessment Strategy, which includes staff training and the consistent use of criteria mapped to learning outcomes (paragraphs 9-11). The College monitors and reflects on retention and pass rates for all of its cohorts (paragraph 12 and 13) and it continues to work with national frameworks and benchmarks as appropriate external reference points (paragraphs 14).

4 Progress with the two areas of good practice noted in the HER (AP) includes revised policies and as strengthened resources for the induction of a wide range of students including those with specific learning needs. With reference to the HER (AP) good practice observation for the development of a supportive learning community, the College has developed an Enhancement Action Plan that guides development and review. Examples of developments over the last year include promoting a Research Centre, the delivery of study skills support, the creation of Leadership Formation Groups, the appointment of a Student Liaison Officer, and responding to student and external examiner feedback.

5 The College has succeeded in addressing all of the seven HER (AP) recommendations. The number of Lead Students has increased to nine, who engage in formal induction briefings with senior staff, using revised Lead Student terms of reference in order to highlight more specific signposting and referral functions for cases that require more specialist support from relevant professionals. An ongoing recommendation includes the agreement of an external peer reviewer for the College, who will monitor lectures and give feedback to staff, with observations of classes due to commence in March 2019.

6 Learning outcomes for supporting assessment design and feedback have been strengthened, with course reviews leading to the design of new sets of marking criteria reinforced by staff training. Arrangements have been formalised for safeguarding and supporting students engaging in placements through gathering questionnaire feedback and completing structured risk assessments for all church locations, including 'home placements' that were occasionally arranged informally by students themselves. Employability and graduate prospects have been enhanced through the Enhancement Action Plan, which also ensures that the Board of Studies monitors impact of multiple minor modifications on overall programme outcomes. Within this context, revised arrangements were introduced in March 2018 for signing off all new or substantially changed modules by the Board of Studies.

7 The recruitment and admissions processes are detailed and robust. The College has a clear Admissions Policy which was reviewed and updated in March 2018, detailing the overall admissions process, entry criteria, English Language requirements, and the appeals process in the event of unsuccessful application. Applicants with non-traditional entry qualifications are required to write a 2,000-word essay, which is subject related in order to establish their suitability to study. Students who had experienced this assessment stated that it was a fair process supported by clear criteria and instructions. Staff confirmed that the use of the admissions task has been in place for some years, but that the subject and title of the essay had been reviewed and updated.

8 Students felt that the recruitment and admissions process was clear and supportive, and that taster days organised by the College had been particularly helpful through the inclusion of effective support for those applicants with specific needs. The College makes clear the commitment to study required during the recruitment and application process. Students are made aware of teaching hours, costs, and study expectations through guidance in the College Handbook and the 'Our Commitment' document. The College currently receives informal feedback from students on its admissions and recruitment approach but has now developed a more structured feedback form to be implemented with the next student intake.

9 The College's approach to assessment is governed by the University. All programmes were revalidated in December 2016, with the College completing the update of their Academic Assessment Strategy in September 2018. The Strategy contains information on assessment principles, marking criteria, submissions, mitigating circumstances and appeals, and academic integrity.

10 The College has ensured that procedures are in place for clarifying to staff and students the underlying rationale for an Assessment Strategy, predicated on the use of transparent learning outcomes linked to the consistent use of appropriate assessment criteria. Staff development has been promoted actively for the understanding of assessment methods and criteria for marking student work, while providing relevant and constructive feedback to students that maps to the appropriate use of learning outcomes. Teaching staff and students confirmed that as a result of these College-wide actions they were clear on the marking and assessment requirement.

11 Students stated that approaches to assessment were effective and supportive. They were clear about coursework and examination expectations through clarity of learning outcomes, with staff succeeding in the continued re-iteration of these throughout the formative assessment process. The concept of academic malpractice was well understood due to the inclusion of detailed information within course handbooks and induction material, and reinforced throughout assessment processes. In addition, students felt that the College was very aware of challenges that can be caused to students with specific learning needs, and that staff are extremely responsive in giving extra support.

12 The College notes a decline in undergraduate student numbers alongside an increase in postgraduate student recruitment, which it attributes to changes in student funding arrangements. Overall retention rates for the last three full cohorts show a consistent increase from 74 per cent in 2015-16, 84 per cent in 2016-17 and 92 per cent for 2017-18. Pass rates for the last three cohorts enrolled on the Graduate Diploma in Theology have remained constant at 88 per cent, and stand at 87 per cent for students from the 2015-16 cohort enrolled on the three year full-time BA in Biblical Studies and Theology.

13 The team noted that the pass rate was 25 per cent for undergraduate students designated as distance learners, although overall numbers are small. The College has considered reasons for the higher proportion of drop-out from distance learning courses; staff recognise the possibilities of unrealistic expectations about workloads, the pressures of studying alone, and a reluctance to request assistance when there are difficulties and consider alternative study options. The College is taking steps to address student expectations at interview and through the revision of course information, alongside monitoring and enhancing parity between its distance learning and on-campus students. Students and staff also commented on access provided by evolving virtual learning platforms for supporting campus-based students as well as distance learners.

14 Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education. The College's main external reference is the UK Quality Code, which incorporates *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications* (FHEQ). Learning Outcomes of individual modules are in line with the Subject Benchmark Statement for Theology and Religious Studies (2000, 2007, 2014), and the FHEQ (2014). Teaching faculty are encouraged to apply for Fellowship of Advance HE (formerly the Higher Education Academy (HEA)), and to use available and appropriate HEA resources as well as material provided by the University. Further external reference points include responding to the reports of external examiners, as well as faculty staff engaging in research and the external examining of research students in other higher education organisations.

4 Background to the monitoring visit

15 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.

16 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Mike Slawin, Reviewer, and Professor Danny Saunders, QAA Officer, on 4 December 2018.

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