Belfast Bible College

Review for Educational Oversight by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

September 2012

Key findings about Belfast Bible College

As a result of its Review for Educational Oversight carried out in September 2012, the QAA review team (the team) considers that there can be **confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of Queen's University Belfast and the University of Cumbria.

The team also considers that there can be **confidence** in how the provider manages its stated responsibilities for the quality and enhancement of the learning opportunities it offers on behalf of these awarding bodies.

The team considers that **reliance can** be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the provider is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

Good practice

The team has identified the following **good practice**:

- the comprehensive nature of the student induction process, and in particular its residential study centre component (paragraph 2.8)
- the comprehensive and highly effective provision of pastoral care (paragraph 2.10)
- the effective linking of academic and pastoral personal development support (paragraph 2.11)
- the thoroughness of the opportunities for placement learning (paragraph 2.20).

Recommendations

The team has also identified a number of **recommendations** for the enhancement of the higher education provision.

The team considers that it is **advisable** for the provider to:

- further develop and embed structures and processes for the effective oversight of its responsibilities for the management of academic standards (paragraph 1.5)
- directly link the systems of peer observation of teaching and staff appraisal (paragraph 2.5).

The team considers that it would be **desirable** for the provider to:

- deliver all modules in the Cumbrian BA (Honours) Theology programme at one level only (paragraph 1.7)
- identify and disseminate good practice in learning, teaching and assessment (paragraph 1.11)
- establish student representation on the Education Development Committee (paragraph 2.6)
- consider the pedagogic value of a virtual learning environment in terms of interactive group teaching (paragraph 2.19)
- improve the version monitoring of all materials provided electronically to staff, students and other stakeholders (paragraph 3.6)
- check that publicity materials are correctly aligned with the formal agreements with university partners (paragraph 3.7).

About this report

This report presents the findings of the [Review for Educational Oversight](#)[1] (REO) conducted by [QAA](#) at the Belfast Bible College (the provider; the College). The purpose of the review is to provide public information about how the provider discharges its stated responsibilities for the management and delivery of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The review applies to programmes of study that the provider delivers on behalf of Queen's University Belfast and the University of Cumbria. The review was carried out by Professor David Eastwood, Ms Ann Kettle, Ms Patricia Millner (reviewers), and Mr Alan Nisbett (coordinator).

The review team conducted the review in agreement with the provider and in accordance with the *[Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook](#)*.[2] Evidence in support of the review included documentation supplied by the provider and its awarding bodies, and meetings with staff and students.

The review team also considered the provider's use of the relevant external reference points:

- the Academic Infrastructure.

Belfast Bible College (the College) was founded in 1942 with the purpose of training men and women for Christian service. The College settled in its current location (and sole campus) in Dunmurry, South Belfast, in 1983 with 35 full-time students. In 1994, the College became a constituent member college of the Institute of Theology at Queen's University Belfast. Numbers have continued to grow, necessitating various improvements and extensions to the site, as well as changes to the College structure. In 2006, the College adopted the following purpose statement, which underpins the work, direction and development of the College: 'Belfast Bible College is called to be a welcoming community in which God works to form his people by integrating spiritual, academic and practical education rooted in his Word, for growth in Christian life and service, locally and around the World.'

The external validation of a new undergraduate degree course in partnership with the University of Cumbria in 2010 and the concomitant increase in student numbers and staff, have necessitated the introduction of a range of new policies and procedures. These include maintaining the capacity of the College to welcome international students and to provide the learning opportunities which studying within a multi-cultural context provides. In 2011-12, higher education courses were taught by nine full-time and 10 part-time teachers. In 2011-12, total higher education enrolments were 200 (183 full-time equivalent students), of whom 172 were full-time students and 28 part-time.

At the time of the review, the provider offered the following higher education programmes, listed beneath their awarding bodies with 2011-12 full-time equivalent student numbers in brackets:

Queen's University Belfast
- Bachelor of Divinity/Theology (BD/BTh) (36.5)
- Graduate Diploma in Theology (GDip) (2)
- Master's in Theology (MTh) (11)
- PhD in Theology (4)

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[1] www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/tier-4.
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx.

University of Cumbria
- Certificate in Theology (CertHE) (21.5)
- Diploma in Theology (DipHE) (16.5)
- BA in Theology (92.5)

The provider's stated responsibilities

Because of the nature of the different partnership agreements and arrangements, the College's stated responsibilities differ across the two awarding bodies, with the College having more of a delegated responsibility for curriculum design, development and delivery and assessment in its University of Cumbria programmes than in its Queen's University Belfast programmes, where the Institute of Theology has a tighter control over such matters, as with other constituent member colleges of the Institute. However, College staff are able to participate in discussions and to influence curricular developments within this context.

Recent developments

In recent years, the College has undergone a number of developments in its higher education provision. In summary, these are:

- the new Centre for Youth Ministry Ireland partnership in 2008
- the new University of Cumbria partnership in 2010
- a number of changes to the lecturing staff
- a new Principal in 2011
- a new College structure in 2011 (reviewed and developed in 2012)
- a new learning resource centre on campus in 2012.

Students' contribution to the review

Students studying on higher education programmes at the provider were invited to present a submission to the review team. Led by the outgoing Student Chairperson and a mature student with quality assurance experience, students prepared a submission based on the returns from a questionnaire. The College provided support by explaining the nature and purpose of the submission and facilitating student representation at the QAA briefing session. The submission was clear and comprehensive, and provided a good basis for further discussion with students during the visit itself.

Detailed findings about Belfast Bible College

1   Academic standards

How effectively does the provider fulfil its responsibilities for the management of academic standards?

1.1   The responsibilities of the College for the management of academic standards are clear. They are determined by the nature and extent of its relationships with its awarding bodies. Those relationships are close and supportive and, until recently, the College has relied on relatively informal processes to meet its responsibilities for the management of standards and to oversee its higher education provision.

1.2   The College is a constituent member college of Queen's University Belfast's Institute of Theology (the Institute) and the clear relationship supports the College in its management of its responsibilities. The College is recognised for the delivery, on behalf of the University, of specific programmes at *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) levels 6 to 8. The College Principal sits on the Management Board of the Institute. It is the responsibility of the Director of the Institute to ensure, in conjunction with the Principal of the College, that the University's procedures of monitoring and review are observed. The College appoints separate programme leaders for the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, who liaise with the corresponding associate directors of the Institute. College staff who deliver the Queen's University Belfast programmes are Recognised Teachers of the University and are members of the relevant Subject Boards of the Institute; as such, they participate in the University's quality assurance processes and can propose new modules for approval by the Institute. Students are recruited and admitted by the University and are subsequently required by the Institute to apply to a specific constituent member college. Assessment is designed and undertaken through the subject boards of the Institute of Theology.

1.3   The partnership with the University of Cumbria was initiated in 2010 and has presented significant challenges for the College. It involved the validation of a BA (Hons) Theology programme based, in part, on a two-year programme of study previously offered by the College. The management of the programme is focused around a College programme leader working closely with a University programme leader. The College is responsible for the recruitment and admission of students and the selection, delivery and assessment of modules. During the first year of the implementation of the programme, three and six-monthly reviews by the University identified some logistical issues or teething troubles. The first Annual Evaluatory Report on the programme in September 2011 noted a move to a fruitful working partnership with the University, although the integration of different procedures and academic regulations had proved difficult for the College. An Annual Partnership Review in February 2012 reported an improvement in communication between the two institutions.

1.4   The College is in the process of formalising its academic management processes and introducing a revised structure of programme committees, chaired by programme leaders. These will report to the Education Development Committee, chaired by the Director of Education, also called the Education Development Team Leader. The programme committees, one for each of the awarding bodies, will be composed of members of the teaching staff, approved or recognised by the awarding bodies, representatives of associate tutors and student representative(s). The committees will be responsible for the oversight of such matters as determining which modules from the programmes will be delivered each year, operating an internal annual monitoring process, and responding to student feedback and matters raised by external examiners. The programme committees will report to the

Education Development Committee, which will have cross-college responsibility for teaching and learning, academic quality assurance, academic support and administration and library services. The Educational Development Committee will in turn report to the Leadership Team, which has collective responsibility for the running of the College in support of the Principal.

1.5   At the time of the review visit, committee membership remits and reporting arrangements, meeting cycles and links with the quality assurance procedures of the awarding bodies were still in the course of development. The programme committees had yet to meet and arrangements for the annual monitoring and periodic review of the College's higher education provision and the appraisal of its teaching staff were still at the planning stage. It is recommended as advisable for the College to maintain the current momentum towards the development and embedding of structures and processes for the effective oversight of its responsibilities for the management of academic standards. As it consolidates this development, it will need to ensure that the resulting processes and structures are aligned to those of its higher education partners.

How effectively are external reference points used in the management of academic standards?

1.6   The College admits in its self-evaluation document that until recently its only engagement with the Academic Infrastructure has been through its links with the awarding bodies. A review of the College's Disability Policy in 2011-12, however, took into account the guidance in the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* and other relevant external reference points.

1.7   The College's suite of non-validated certificate and diploma courses, which formed the basis of the University of Cumbria BA (Hons) Theology programme, was undifferentiated by level. Validation involved mapping its modules against levels 4, 5 and 6 of the FHEQ, resulting in some modules being offered and taught at two different levels with separate intended learning outcomes and assignments for students at different levels. The team was informed of the steps that had been taken to mitigate this situation in the short term. Module handbooks ensure that assignment details are clearly separated by level and it is planned that, by 2013-14, all core modules will be available at one level only. It is recommended as desirable for the College to move as soon as possible, within the constraints of the validation document, to offering each module in the programme at one level only*.*

1.8   The College's revised academic structure includes the External Advisory Group, composed of representatives of mission societies, churches and other employer organisations. The remit of the Group, which will report to the Leadership Team, includes reviewing and making recommendations on the suitability, content and development of programmes from the perspective of the organisations represented. The team considers that the development and expansion of this Group has the potential to provide the College with a useful external reference point in its management of standards

How does the provider use external moderation, verification or examining to assure academic standards?

1.9   In the case of the Queen's University Belfast validated programmes, the appointment of external examiners, agreement of module marks, student progression and degree classification and student appeals are the responsibility of the University. Assessment is designed and undertaken through the Institute of Theology's subject boards. In a pre-emptive development, in anticipation of changes to Institute policies, the College has begun anonymous marking of assignments and participated in inter-College marking, as opposed to internal second marking. External examiners report to the relevant subject

boards and do not distinguish between the Institute's constituent colleges. Responses to external examiners and the implementation of recommendations are the responsibility of the Director of the Institute, advised by subject boards and by the Institute's Education Committee, which includes representatives from the constituent colleges and reports to the Board of Management. It is intended that the new programme committees will, in future, review and address any comments from external examiners that relate to the College's responsibilities, such as improving feedback to students on assessment.

1.10   In the case of the University of Cumbria programme, College staff set and mark assignments, a sample of which is moderated by the external examiner and the University programme leader and reported on at the University's Module Assessment Board. In the first year of the programme, both moderators commented on a tendency towards generous marking, but subsequent reports indicate that this issue has been addressed. The University programme leader compiles a response to the external examiner in consultation with the College programme leader. Previously, the College Programme Leader provided feedback from the reports to module leaders and raised general issues with the Education Development Committee. In future, the University of Cumbria Programme Committee will discuss the reports and address any specific points that relate to the College's responsibilities. The Education Development Committee will consider general matters concerning assessment. At its first meeting, in September 2012, the Committee organised a training session on assessment to address concerns about some inconsistent marking.

1.11   Opportunities to use external moderation and examining to assure academic standards are limited at present by the College's reliance on informal means to implement recommendations for improvement and to utilise the professional expertise of its staff. However, the new academic structure of committees and processes for internal monitoring and review offers possibilities for the identification of good practice in teaching and assessment and its dissemination across the College's higher education provision. It is recommended as desirable for the College to use the new academic structure to identify good practice in learning, teaching and assessment, and disseminate it across the College.

The review team has **confidence** in the provider's management of its responsibilities for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of its awarding bodies.

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2   Quality of learning opportunities

How effectively does the provider fulfil its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities?

2.1.   The key responsibilities for the quality of learning opportunities are as described in paragraphs 1.2-1.4. However, the College has recognised limitations in the management system for the delegation of responsibilities for learning opportunities. In line with its Vision and Strategic Plan, the College is currently in the process of revising its management structures to include a significantly stronger central provision and new college-wide committee structures. Given the very recent nature of these changes, there is only limited evidence with which to evaluate the operational effectiveness of these new structures.

How effectively are external reference points used in the management and enhancement of learning opportunities?

2.2.	The College engagement with external reference points, including the alignments with FHEQ levels 4-6 through University of Cumbria validation and levels 6-8 through Queen's University Belfast validation, is as described in paragraphs 1.1-1.3.

How does the provider assure itself that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced?

2.3	The College does not currently have an effective Learning and Teaching Strategy. However, under the College's revised academic structures, responsibility for the development and implementation of a College Teaching and Learning Strategy now rests with the Education Development Committee. Discussions within this committee are continuing, with a finalised strategy scheduled for the end of 2012-13.

2.4	The Annual Programme Review is largely carried out by the two awarding bodies. However, the College recognises the need to supplement these procedures with its own additional review mechanisms. From 2012-13, therefore, the Director of Education, together with the Education Development Committee, will undertake responsibility for the construction and implementation of an annual timetable of activities designed to monitor and enhance the quality of teaching and learning. These will include a peer assessment programme, the consideration of annual reviews carried out by programme committees, and separate module, programme and teaching reviews.

2.5	The College operates an informal and limited system of peer review and peer observation of teaching. There is no clear available evidence of how reviewers or observers have been trained, how results are disseminated, how they are acted on by staff or line managers, or how they are used college-wide to inculcate additional good practice. However, the College is currently employing a professional consultant to address these issues and a more formalised, college-wide system of peer observation and assessment is scheduled to begin in 2013-14, although it is not envisaged that this will immediately directly feed in to a new system of staff appraisal. It is recommended as advisable that systems of peer observation of teaching and staff appraisal are directly linked.

2.6	Student feedback mechanisms on the quality of teaching and learning are largely effective and are detailed in paragraph 2.13. However, there is no student representation at Education Development Committee meetings, despite this committee's overarching responsibility for teaching and learning strategy. Proposals are in place to include student representation at programme committee level, but details of their selection and participation remain unclear. It is recommended as desirable that there should be student representation on the Education Development Committee.

2.7	Approval of College teaching staff by the validating universities is operationally effective. All staff teaching Queen's University Belfast validated courses have been awarded Recognised Teacher status by the University. Module leaders of University of Cumbria modules, together with staff teaching 50 per cent or more of any module, have been approved by the relevant University department. There are proposals to extend this from 2012-13 to staff who make any significant contribution to any University of Cumbria modules. It is proposed from 2012-13 to recognise part-time, temporary teachers as associate tutors and for them to be represented on the Education Development Committee. As a small college, the College has no specific recruitment policy and staff recruitment is effectively 'on the basis of need'. However, the selection process does involve a component which assesses teaching performance.

How does the provider assure itself that students are supported effectively?

2.8   The College operates a very effective week-long induction programme in which new students are provided with a range of information detailing academic and generic College issues. These include programme information and handbooks, and an introduction to the College support services, such as library and welfare provisions. Queen's University Belfast students also receive additional induction through the Institute of Theology. The first half of the induction week is conducted on campus and includes pastoral elements, such as the organisation of a buddying system. Organised by the Students' Committee, the second half of the week is off-campus in a residential local conference-study centre and involves all College students, thus allowing the new students to mix socially both within and between years. A comprehensive post-induction survey to gauge student feedback on the induction process has been introduced for the 2012-13 academic year. Students interviewed during the review visit confirmed the effectiveness of the induction process and, in particular, the value of the residential event. The comprehensive nature of the induction process, and in particular the residential study centre component, represents good practice.

2.9   The College does not operate a system of personal academic tutors, and there is no formal system for identifying failing or 'at risk' students. Plans to trial such a system in the 2012-13 year are under discussion. College programme leaders (also known as advisers of study) are the primary academic point of contact and are available to meet students on request.

2.10   Pastoral support for students is highly effective. At a pastoral level, all students are allocated to a Fellowship Group of approximately 12 students led by a member of staff. These meet weekly for general discussion and also provide students with the opportunity to meet individually with their Fellowship Group Leader, as necessary, to discuss any pastoral issues. Formal individual interviews with the Fellowship Group Leader also take place at the beginning, middle and end of the academic year. In addition, there is provision for contact with an internal Pastoral Care team. The team has an external adviser. At an informal level, and organised by the Students' Committee, there is a system of 'prayer triplets', where students provide mutual pastoral and spiritual support. Students interviewed during the review visit strongly confirmed the effectiveness of the provision of pastoral care. The comprehensive and highly effective provision of pastoral care within the College represents good practice.

2.11   Personal development programmes currently form an effective link between College academic and pastoral care. Academically, a personal development module is compulsory on University of Cumbria courses and optional for other students. However, personal development also occupies a central pastoral role within the Fellowship Group system. The effective linking of academic and pastoral personal development support, particularly in the University of Cumbria course, represents good practice.

2.12   There is no member of staff with specific responsibility for careers education, information, advice and guidance and the College recognises this deficiency, though student career progression, particularly for those seeking missionary positions overseas, is excellent. An Acting Disability Officer has recently been appointed and an accessibility audit commissioned; the results of which will lead to a review of the College's Disability Policy which currently exists only in draft form.

2.13   The College collects student opinion feedback in a variety of ways, and these are generally effective. Student feedback on Queen's University Belfast modules is obtained from the University's module evaluation and teacher evaluation forms. Student feedback on University of Cumbria modules is collected through a College-designed evaluation form, which is distributed, collected and collated by the programme administrator prior to

forwarding outcomes to individual teachers and the Staff-Student Consultative Group. In discussion, students gave examples of positive College responses to feedback, for example, in respect of improvements to perceived issues in IT and online resources. A student survey on relevant, non-academic aspects of student experience at the College was introduced in 2011-12, and it is proposed to make this an annual survey. There is no comprehensive end-of-year student survey, although there are plans to introduce one for the year 2012-13. In addition to questionnaire feedback, the College also obtains student views from class representatives' attendance at monthly meetings of the Staff-Student Committee. Students confirmed their confidence in the effective working of these committees.

What are the provider's arrangements for staff development to maintain and/or enhance the quality of learning opportunities?

2.14   The College's previous limited staff development and appraisal systems are being updated and a combined system is being developed for the 2012-13 year. It is envisaged that staff development priorities will emerge largely from the staff appraisal system. Nonetheless, there is currently no specific Staff Development Policy, no Head of Staff Development, and no overview of staff development needs. However, under the proposed Staff Appraisal and Development Policy, staff development will be the responsibility of the Leadership Team, and an already published draft Staff Development Policy has committed 2 per cent of gross salary costs to future staff development. The Education Development (ED) Team will review and contribute to decisions regarding staff development of ED Team staff.

2.15   The take-up of external staff development opportunities, such as courses and conferences, depends largely on the initiative of individual staff members and has neither been systematically documented, nor resulted in effective dissemination of the outcomes. The College does, however, offer its staff a number of generous development opportunities, such as one study day per teaching week, a sabbatical system for full-time lecturers and conference and book allowances. Staff members are also free to access Queen's University Belfast training courses, including the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education, on which two staff members are currently enrolled.

2.16   There is no formal induction programme for new staff to promote understanding of the College's policies, procedures and practices, though there are informal systems. There is no post-induction relevant training, no subsequent re-evaluation after a period of time and no probationary period leading to in-post continuing professional development targets. However, a staff induction proposal has already been drafted and a revised and expanded staff handbook is in final draft form.

2.17   The College recognises that there is no official process for the dissemination of good practice to the wider teaching staff. However, it has recently introduced a lecture programme to disseminate good practice arising from sabbatical research and a staff development seminar on creative teaching and assessment. This is provided by the Queen's University Belfast Centre for Educational Development, a Centre from which continuing input of expertise is planned for 2012-13 onwards. Also from 2012-13, the College is planning to use observations arising from its revised peer observation system in order to disseminate good practice, but no proposed operational details of this are currently available.

How effectively does the provider ensure that learning resources are accessible to students and sufficient to enable them to achieve the learning outcomes?

2.18   The College generally ensures that the provision of learning resources has meets the needs of its increasing number of students. Physical resources within the College are

good. The recent increase in student numbers has put pressure on library space and resources, but a new learning resource centre, opened in 2012, has extended library space by 80 per cent and dedicated study space has been provided for postgraduate provision. Library policy is under review, following the appointment of a new Senior Librarian who will be a member of the Education Development Committee. A new Library Committee has been established to structure student feedback and discussion of library issues. Students interviewed during the review visit expressed their satisfaction with the teaching rooms and library resources, and especially confirmed their appreciation of the quality of the online databases. Students also confirmed improvement in IT provision, following the recent appointment of a new IT support staff member. Staff resources are adequate, with teaching staff well qualified and all with active research interests.

2.19   The College does not have its own virtual learning environment, nor is it able to utilise effectively those of the two universities. As a management tool, the College operates a basic electronic student resource centre and is investigating the possibilities of its own virtual learning environment. However, there is no evidence that the interactive, group teaching advantages of a virtual learning environment are fully appreciated by staff. It is recommended as desirable that the College considers the pedagogic value of a virtual learning environment in terms of interactive group teaching.

2.20   The College has a strong and effective placement system underpinning practical training and work-based learning. All University of Cumbria students are expected to devote at least three hours per week, per semester, per year of their course to some form of practical ministry, together with a four to six week block placement carried out either in January or over the summer period of the second year. A practical training coordinator either approves students' own placement choices, or assists students to find and select placements. For Queens' University Belfast students, placement is optional with no mandatory block placement, but the College actively encourages these students to take part in the weekly placement system and many do so. While on placement, students are allocated to a supervisor who, with College training and advice, assesses the effectiveness of the student work. The thoroughness of the College's arrangements for the provision of placement learning opportunities represents good practice.

The review team has **confidence** that the provider is fulfilling its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of the intended learning opportunities it provides for students.

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3   Public information

How effectively does the provider's public information communicate to students and other stakeholders about the higher education it provides?

3.1   The College is effective in communicating with students and other stakeholders about the higher education it provides. The College shares responsibility for publicity and marketing information on its website, in the prospectus or promotional material produced for open days and recruitment fairs with its awarding bodies. The College also uses newspapers, magazines and online methods to advertise information about its higher education provision.

3.2   The website is well designed and easy to use. The course finder is particularly useful for identifying and locating the programmes offered. Further detailed information for individual programmes is provided under each listed awarding body. Although the international student market is stated as part of the College's Vision and Strategic Plan

2012-17, the team found, at the time of the visit, no references to overseas students or any information for potential applicants from non-EU countries. However, subsequently, and to the credit of the College, the team found that this deficiency had been remedied in the days following the review visit.

3.3   At induction, students receive a Belfast Bible College general handbook on a CD-ROM, which details useful general information applicable to all students. The CD-ROM also contains specific programme information. For students studying on University of Cumbria programmes, there are other informative guides, such as a customised undergraduate programme handbook, programme specifications and module descriptors. For students on Queen's University Belfast programmes, the CD-ROM contains separate postgraduate and undergraduate handbooks. These successfully supplement the hard copy of a student handbook produced by the Institute of Theology to ensure students receive all information relevant to their specific programme. From 2012-13, the information is also available on the new electronic Student Resource Centre.

3.4   The electronic Student Resource Centre platform is an interim measure while the College considers the establishment of a virtual learning environment. As such, the content available is still under development. However, a useful start has been made on the incorporation of some policies, such as Student Support and Pastoral Care and Student Complaints Procedure, and some corporate documents, for example the Vision and Strategic Plan 2012-17.

3.5   The College uses other communication channels. A biannual magazine, *The Link*, is produced in good quality hard copy and is available on the website. It contains articles written by staff, student stories and general news and updates about the College. A social media channel is being used and further developed to provide information and communicate with students.

How effective are the provider's arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of information it has responsibility for publishing?

3.6   The College has reasonably satisfactory measures in place for assuring the accuracy and completeness of information it has responsibility for publishing. In the case of University of Cumbria awards, the responsibility for ensuring the accuracy of public information is shared and there are close and effective working relationships between staff at both institutions. In the case of Queen's University Belfast, responsibility is shared for production of information for publicity purposes and the programme and module guides for students, but all information must be approved by the Director of the Institute of Theology before publication. The electronic resource hosts all programme specifications and module descriptors, and some more detailed standardised module guides for University of Cumbria programmes. The team found less information for the Queen's University Belfast programmes and there was a lack of consistency in the terminology for the levels within the programmes; a potential cause of confusion for students. It is desirable that the College improves the version monitoring of all materials provided electronically to staff, students and other stakeholders.

3.7   For the most part, the College complies with the requirements of the partnership agreements regarding the production of publicity material. However, the team found some variance between the College's website and prospectus, and the preconditions of the Memorandum of Cooperation with the University of Cumbria regarding use of the University logo and the link to the University website. It is desirable that the College checks that publicity materials are correctly aligned with the formal agreements with university partners.

3.8   There is a comprehensive Public Information Policy and Guidelines in draft form, which relates to all marketing, recruitment and admissions information on the College's website and for print and digital media. It sets out a thorough policy framework and identifies lead and secondary responsibility for production and checking of material. In consultation with other College staff, the Recruitment and Communications team is responsible for producing information about higher education for the website, in prospectuses and information disseminated at recruitment fairs and public events. Ultimate responsibility for the design, coordination of checking, liaison with awarding bodies and final approval and sign-off of information lies with the Recruitment and Communications Team Leader. The processes are potentially robust, but have yet to be tested. The programme leaders for University of Cumbria awards review, update and sign-off handbooks and forms each year to ensure that information to students is accurate and contains current advice on academic regulations. The College has put in place a clear template to standardise information provided in University of Cumbria module handbooks in electronic format. For the Queen's University Belfast awards, responsibility for programme and module information is shared, but must be submitted to the Director of the Institute of Theology for approval and sign-off.

3.9   The Recruitment and Communications Team Leader exercises effective editorial responsibility for the biannual magazine, *The Link*. However, the Principal provides guidance and approval prior to publication. Social media channels are also under the control of the Recruitment and Communications Team Leader. Currently, traffic is low. However, the College is aware of the need for close monitoring of inappropriate content and anticipates that, in future, inputs from other staff and students will be needed.

3.10   The College is moving towards formal processes to obtain feedback from users of its public information. In the admissions questionnaire carried out post-induction, students indicated overwhelmingly that the website and prospectus were very helpful in providing information, which allowed them to make a decision to apply to the College. At the meeting with the team, students reiterated this. To improve information provided, the students suggested more specific information on module content to help them make informed choices. All print and web-based information is available in accessible formats in line with the College's Disability Policy.

> The team concludes that **reliance can be placed** on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the provider is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

Action plan[3]

Belfast Bible College action plan relating to the Review for Educational Oversight September 2012						
Good practice	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
The review team identified the following areas of **good practice** that are worthy of wider dissemination within the provider:						
• the comprehensive nature of the student induction process, and in particular its residential study centre component (paragraph 2.8)	Analyse orientation student survey 2012-13	January 2013	Community Life Team	Survey analysis report produced	Leadership Team	Areas for improvement identified and communicated to the Leadership Team
	Create draft student orientation schedule 2013-14	April 2013	Community Life Team	Draft plan sent to Education Development Team Leader and Student Committee Chair for approval	Leadership Team	Feedback received from Education Development Team Leader and Student Chair
	Final draft signed off	Beginning August 2013	Community Life Team	Student orientation schedule distributed to new and returning students	Leadership Team	Student orientation survey will indicate increased level of satisfaction 2013-14

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[3] The provider has been required to develop this action plan to follow up on good practice and address any recommendations arising from the review. QAA monitors progress against the action plan, in conjunction with the provider's awarding bodies.

• the comprehensive and highly effective provision of pastoral care (paragraph 2.10)	Survey of Fellowship Group leaders regarding their experience of leading a group and level of attention required for individual students	January 2013	Community Life Team	Survey completed	Leadership Team	Report identifying areas of good practice and challenges to good practice produced for analysis by Community Life Team
	Training for Fellowship Group leaders on listening skills	January 2013	Community Life Team	Training takes place	Leadership Team	Feedback elicited from Fellowship Group leaders at conclusion of training on value and effectiveness
	Training for Community Life/ Pastoral Care Team (self-harm and suicide awareness)	November and 2012 and spring 2013	Community Life Team	Training Completed	Principal	Feedback elicited from Community Life/Pastoral Care Team at conclusion of training on value and effectiveness
	Monitor student requests for and duration of period of individual support from Pastoral Care Team	November 2012-April 2013	Community Life Team	Monitoring report compiled	Principal	Report contains relevant information to indicate appropriateness of level of support in relation to student requests

	Community life survey to gain feedback of student experience of all aspects of community life at the College	April 2013	Community Life Team	Survey completed and report compiled	Principal	Report contains relevant information from a significant percentage of the student body
	Submit Report to Principal (and College Board if appropriate) with recommendation for ongoing resources in Community Life Team as appropriate to needs indicated by Pastoral Care Requests Report and Community Life Survey	May 2013	Community Life Team	Report submitted to Principal for consideration and to be taken to the Board	Principal	Minutes of Leadership Team and Board
• the effective linking of academic and pastoral personal development support (paragraph 2.11)	Seminar for all students and staff on the connections between academic study and personal and spiritual development	29 November 2012	Community Life Team Leader and Queen's Undergraduate Programme Leader	Seminar takes place	Education Development Committee	Feedback from fellowship groups on value of seminar
	Review of Personal Development modules I, II and III in light of report of external examiner and student evaluation	Summer 2013	Cumbria Programme Leader	Meeting with personal development module leaders and Cumbria Programme Leader	Cumbria Programme Committee	Revised (as appropriate) module guides and assessments approved by external examiner for 2013-14

• the thoroughness of the opportunities for placement learning (paragraph 2.20).	Introduce an evening class in 2013-14 giving a basic, targeted exposure to a language commonly used in cross-cultural mission (such as French)	Autumn 2013	Placement Coordinator	Course takes place	Access Learning Programme Leader	Access Learning publicity for 2013-14 contains course
Advisable	**Action to be taken**	**Target date**	**Action by**	**Success indicators**	**Reported to**	**Evaluation**
The team considers that it is **advisable** for the provider to:						
• further develop and embed structures and processes for the effective oversight of its responsibilities for the management of academic standards (paragraph 1.5)	Review new education and programme committees after first year and create 'cycle of business' for each in 2013-14	July 2013	Education Development Team Leader/ programme leaders	Report on changes needed Cycle of business documented	Education Development Committee	Minutes of Education Development Committee showing approval
	Development of Teaching and Learning Strategy for 2013-14 onwards as part of Vision and Strategic Plan action plan for 2012-13	June 2013	Education Development Team Leader	Written strategy produced and approved	Board	Minutes of Board showing approval of written strategy
	Development of external advisory group(s)	March 2013	Principal	External advisory group(s) terms of reference written up	Leadership Team Education	Minutes of Leadership Team showing plans for implementation

	Set up formal monitoring process for students 'at risk' academically as part of Vision and Strategic Plan action plan for 2012-13	February 2013	Education Development Team Leader	Initial process in place for next semester	Development Committee	Minutes of Education Development Committee and details of process
	Standardisation of Associate Tutor role and package	June 2013	Principal, Education Development Team Leader and Bursar	Documented setting out role and package agreed	Finance & General Purposes Committee	Minutes of Finance & General Purposes Committee showing approval
	Review of Academic Administration structure, needs and resources	Spring 2013	Education Development Team Leader and Principal	Amended structure agreed by Leadership Team and sent to Finance & General Purposes Committee	Finance & General Purposes Committee	Minutes of Leadership Team and Finance & General Purposes Committee
• directly link the systems of peer observation of teaching and staff appraisal (paragraph 2.5).	Organise training for peer observers and observed	Feb 2013	Education Development Team Leader	Training session takes place	Education Development Committee	Feedback from attendees
	Production of forms for peer observation showing good practice and areas for improvement that will be used in appraisal	Feb 2013	Education Development Team Leader	Forms given out and explained at training session	Education Development Committee	Feedback from appraisers and appraisees on useful of forms

Desirable	Action to be taken	Target date	Action by	Success indicators	Reported to	Evaluation
The team considers that it is **desirable** for the provider to:						
• offer all modules in the Cumbrian BA (Hons) Theology programme at one level only (paragraph 1.7)	All core Cumbria modules to be taught at one level only from 2013-14	June 2013	Cumbria Programme Leader	Final Cumbria module list for 2013-14 shows only one level	Cumbria Programme Committee	Minutes of committee showing acceptance of modules
	Cumbria revalidation in 2014-15 to restrict the teaching of all Cumbria modules at one level only	June 2015	Cumbria Programme Committee	Revalidation documents show all modules taught at one level only	Education Development Committee	Minutes of committees
• identify and disseminate good practice in learning, teaching and assessment (paragraph 1.11)	Set up an ongoing series of training sessions for teachers on issues that arise from various sources of feedback	Jan 2013 and ongoing	Education Development Team Leader	Training sessions for spring 2013 set up and communicated to teachers	Education Development Committee	Feedback from teachers on effectiveness of sessions
	Set up an annual meeting for teachers to share good practice	May 2013	Education Development Team Leader	Meeting takes place	Education Development Committee	Minutes of Education Development Committee
• establish student representation on the Education Development Committee (paragraph 2.6)	Facilitate student representation at Education Development Committee	Dec 2012	Education Development Team Leader	Student representatives attend Education Development Committee from December 2012	Education Development Committee	Minutes showing student representatives attendance

• consider the pedagogic value of a virtual learning environment in terms of interactive group teaching (paragraph 2.19)	As part of the training sessions for teachers, set up a session on the pedagogical uses of a virtual learning environment	Autumn 2013	Education Development Team Leader	Session takes place	Education Development Committee	Minutes showing results of meeting and any follow up
• improve the version monitoring of all materials provided electronically to staff, students and other stakeholders (paragraph 3.6)	Ensure that all versions of electronic materials to be distributed externally are reviewed and accurately dated and all versions archived	January 2013	Recruitment and Communications Team	Out-of-date versions archived and all current versions correctly dated	Recruitment and Communications Team Leader	Periodic checks by the Team Leader to ensure ongoing compliance in this area
	Review and formalise process for annual update of handbooks for students	May 2013	Principal's Personal Assistant	Agreed process for updating and signing off communicated to relevant staff	Leadership Team	Review of summer updating process at autumn meeting
• check that publicity materials are correctly aligned with the formal agreements with university partners (paragraph 3.7).	Formal agreements with university partners reviewed with regard to publicity requirements Issues to be identified and rectified	January 2013 and ongoing on an annual basis	Recruitment and Communications Team Leader	All publicity correctly aligned with formal agreements Annual check completed as part of the ongoing review of publicity materials	Leadership Team Education Development Team Leader	Communicated to Education Development Team Leader when this has taken place and recorded in Education Development Committee minutes

About QAA

QAA is the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. QAA's mission is to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education.

QAA's aims are to:

- meet students' needs and be valued by them
- safeguard standards in an increasingly diverse UK and international context
- drive improvements in UK higher education
- improve public understanding of higher education standards and quality.

QAA conducts reviews of higher education institutions and publishes reports on the findings. QAA also publishes a range of guidance documents to help safeguard standards and improve quality.

More information about the work of QAA is available at: www.qaa.ac.uk.

More detail about Review for Educational Oversight can be found at: www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/tier-4.

Glossary

This glossary explains terms used in this report. You can find a fuller glossary at: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary. Formal definitions of key terms can be found in the *Review for Educational Oversight: Handbook*[4]

Academic Infrastructure Guidance developed and agreed by the higher education community and published by QAA, which is used by institutions to ensure that their courses meet national expectations for academic standards and that students have access to a suitable environment for learning (academic quality). It consists of four groups of reference points: the **frameworks for higher education qualifications**, the **subject benchmark statements**, the **programme specifications** and the **Code of practice**. Work is underway (2011-12) to revise the Academic Infrastructure as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

academic quality A comprehensive term referring to how, and how well, institutions manage teaching and learning opportunities to help students progress and succeed.

academic standards The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

awarding body A body with the authority to award academic qualifications located on the **framework for higher education qualifications**, such as diplomas or degrees.

awarding organisation An organisation with the authority to award academic qualifications located on the Qualifications and Credit Framework for England and Northern Ireland (these qualifications are at levels 1 to 8, with levels 4 and above being classed as 'higher education').

Code of practice *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for higher education institutions.

designated body An organisation that has been formally appointed to perform a particular function.

differentiated judgements In a Review for Educational Oversight, separate judgements respectively for the provision validated by separate awarding bodies.

enhancement Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of **learning opportunities**. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

feature of good practice A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

framework A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

framework for higher education qualifications A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks:

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[4] www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/reo-handbook.aspx.

The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland.*

highly trusted sponsor An education provider that the UK government trusts to admit migrant students from overseas, according to Tier 4 of the UK Border Agency's points-based immigration system. Higher education providers wishing to obtain this status must undergo a successful review by QAA.

learning opportunities The provision made for students' learning, including planned **programmes of study**, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios) and staff development.

learning outcome What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

operational definition A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in reports.

programme (of study) An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

programme specifications Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of **programmes of study**, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

provider An institution that offers courses of higher education, typically on behalf of a separate **awarding body or organisation**. In the context of REO, the term means an independent college.

public information Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

reference points Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured. Internal reference points may be used by providers for purposes of self-regulation; external ones are used and accepted throughout the higher education community for the checking of standards and quality.

quality See **academic quality**.

subject benchmark statement A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

threshold academic standard The minimum standard that a student should reach in order to gain a particular qualification or award, as set out in the **subject benchmark statements** and national qualifications frameworks. Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that students need to achieve in order to gain any particular class of award, for example a first-class bachelor's degree. See also **academic standard**.

widening participation Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.