



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of the Cambridge Theological Federation, May 2019

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 Cambridge Theological Federation (the Federation) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the May 2018 [monitoring visit](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 There are currently 243 students studying on higher education programmes at the Federation, compared with 314 students in 2017-18 as reported at the previous monitoring visit. There are 10 academic-related management staff - two full-time and eight part-time - in the Federation central team at Bounds House. The same number of staff were employed in 2017-18 although four were full-time and six part-time. The Federation as a whole currently has 40 academic staff - a slight decrease on the 42 academic staff employed in 2017-18.

3 The Federation's higher education provision continues to be validated by the University of Cambridge, Durham University and Anglia Ruskin University. Four new MA degrees have been validated by Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) and the first student cohorts were recruited in 2018-19. One of the Federation's member institutions, the Eastern Region Ministry Course, has entered into its own validation agreement with Durham University. It no longer has any students in the Federation, but remains an associate member. The operational review taking place at the time of the previous monitoring visit, has been completed and new organisational structures have been in place since September 2018.

Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The Federation is making good progress in implementing the recommendation from the May 2017 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) to revise its student representation structure. Since the last monitoring visit in 2018, the Federation has reviewed its student representation structure and implemented the actions identified in its annual review (paragraph 6). The Federation continues to consolidate the areas of good practice relating to academic governance; student personal and professional development; and the student attachment and placement system (paragraph 5). The Federation continues to apply consistent and appropriate procedures for student admissions, reinforced by clear policy (paragraph 7). The management of assessment is supported by a shared approach to marking and staff guidance on the use of assessment criteria (paragraph 8). The Federation monitors and reflects on retention and achievement (paragraph 9) and continues to work with national frameworks as appropriate external reference points (paragraph 10).

5 The Federation has built on the good practice identified in the 2017 review. Since the last monitoring visit, the Federation has undertaken a significant review and revision of its governance structure, which continues to operate effectively. Staff spoke positively about the new academic governance arrangements and the close working within and across the member institutions, or 'Houses'. The holistic and collegiate approach to student personal and professional development continues to enhance the student experience. Students spoke

positively of the support available to them both in terms of study support and the proactive and tailored approach of the Federation in meeting academic and professional development needs. The personalised student-focused placement and attachment system is evaluated through the Church of England annual self-evaluation and continues to provide valued opportunities for student development and ministerial formation.

6 As part of the wider governance changes, the Federation has reviewed its student representation structure and student representatives are now recruited to each of the three new validating university Oversight Groups. Both staff and students confirmed this change has ensured that meeting content is relevant and students can actively feed into the review and development of their academic experience. The Student Forum is active and the chair of the Forum attends meetings of the Federation Board. The Board receives reports from both the Student Forum chair and Oversight Group meetings, which provides effective student representation. Opportunities to support student representatives in their role take place through briefings. Students confirm that they also have strong feedback mechanisms within their own House, through tutors and House Principals, and these feed into Oversight Group or Board meetings via student representatives or the central staff team. Students identify strongly with their House and feel that the additional requirement to be represented in the Federation is onerous, but nonetheless students were positive about the changes the Federation had made. The Federation has produced a job description for student representatives and is now developing training.

7 The Federation's recruitment and admissions processes continue to be governed by the policies of the awarding bodies. Admissions processes and criteria are outlined clearly in the admissions policies of the individual Houses. The Federation has delegated authority from Durham University to admit standard entrants to its Common Awards programmes and provides comprehensive and detailed admissions information in its admissions policy, which it keeps under review. All students are interviewed by a Director of Studies before an offer is made. Interviews are used to ensure students have sufficient language requirements, are suitable for entry and have a genuine intention to study. The Federation's website provides clear information about admissions to courses and provides links to awarding university and House websites, including their entry requirements and processes. Admissions are tailored to meet the professional needs and previous academic experience of applicants. Students confirmed that the recruitment and admissions process was clear and supportive and tailored to their requirements. The Federation and its member institutions do not use agents in recruitment. Admissions are evaluated through cross-House admissions meetings - which discuss common issues and share good practice - at Oversight Groups and through the Church of England annual self-evaluation.

8 The Federation's approach to assessment is governed by the relevant university which awards its degrees. Assessment requirements are prescribed through module guides and qualifications are determined in accordance with assessment regulations. The Federation has a clear accreditation of prior learning process for its Common Awards with Durham University, which is set out in its accreditation of prior learning policy and on the website. Anglia Ruskin University students are directed to the ARU website. Accreditation of prior learning is not allowed for University of Cambridge programmes. New staff receive an induction to the relevant assessment procedures and the Federation provides clear instructions for marking. Since the last visit, the Oversight Groups have developed a shared approach to marking across awarding bodies which articulates a common tone for marking and feedback. The Federation has effective policies and practices in place for assessment, and all assessment is marked and subject to internal and external moderation. The Federation has clear procedures in place for managing plagiarism and students confirmed they are informed about assessment malpractice and well supported with specific learning needs. External examiner reports confirm that there are clear and effective processes for

assuring the quality of assessment - the standard of marking, feedback and determination of awards is consistently good, and assessment feedback is extensive.

9 There is a range of cohort sizes for the programmes offered; where these are small, this impacts disproportionately on the statistics for retention and achievement. Additionally, the data for cohorts starting in 2016-17 and 2017-18 is impacted by the transfer out of Eastern Region Ministry Course (ERMC) students. For cohorts starting in 2015-16, average retention was 85% (139 of 163) and achievement for completing courses was 97% (101 of 104). Adjusted for the transfer out of 34 ERMC students, retention for cohorts starting in 2016-17 was 89% (147 of 165) and achievement for the handful of courses which have so far completed was 100% (19 of 19). Adjusted for the transfer out of 42 ERMC students, retention for cohorts starting in 2017-18 was 90% (132 of 146).

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

10 The Federation makes active use of the Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) and policies and procedures refer to relevant sections. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook has been revised to include references to the new Quality Code. The Student Forum was consulted on these changes. The Federation was subject to a periodic review by the Church of England in March 2019 and, although at the time of this monitoring visit the report was not yet available, the Federation confirmed that recommendations arising had been enacted by the Federation and relevant Houses. The Federation has registered with the Office for Students and completed registration requirements.

Background to the monitoring visit

11 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.

12 The monitoring visit was carried out by Ms Colette Coleman, Reviewer, and Ms Helen Uglow, QAA Officer, on 17 May 2019.

QAA2399 - R10432 - Jun 19

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