



# Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Middlebury College - Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, November 2015

## Section 1: Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review panel concludes that Middlebury College - Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (the Centre) has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the November 2014 [Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight](#) report.

## Section 2: Changes since the last QAA review

2 There have been no significant changes since the review visit of November 2014. Student numbers have remained at approximately the same level, with 23 full-time students registered for the current term and 29 registered for the spring term. The number of courses and staff have remained broadly the same, although there are additional full-time staff being recruited for January 2016. There have been some minor changes in the timing of some of the elements of the course, particularly with the research essay.

## Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

3 In the 2014 review report, there was one desirable recommendation, namely for the Centre to extend its Quality Assurance Policy to the point at which it constitutes a comprehensive reference point for all quality-related processes and procedures. This has been achieved by the Academic Committee producing an updated and comprehensive Quality Assurance Policy document. This document was discussed and approved in June 2015 by the Academic Board, the body with responsibility for oversight of the academic programme. It is clear that the Quality Assurance Policy document, and its draft predecessor, has informed some of the operational decisions made by the Academic Committee, for instance on the selection and admission of students.

4 The initiative taken by the Centre in mapping its provision against relevant chapters of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) was identified as a feature of good practice in the 2014 review report. Senior staff regard the Quality Code as a useful reference point. Apart from the Centre's ongoing work in the area of disabilities, it did not appear that much further progress has been made in mapping since the previous review visit. The review team found no references to the Quality Code in quality management decisions over the year, which was an intended outcome of the College's action plan.

5 As with all Middlebury College programmes abroad, the Centre has a Faculty Advisory Board, which consists of senior administrators and faculty members from the College. The Advisory Board meets once every semester to consider academic issues that relate to the programme. In addition, two members of the Faculty Advisory Board visit the Centre annually and produce an annual monitoring report, which may be used by the Centre as the basis for making changes in the academic and support structure of the programme.

6 All decisions concerning student admissions are made by the Academic Committee. This is monitored by the Academic Board. All the students are already enrolled as full-time

students at North American universities or liberal arts colleges. The Centre admits students in their third or fourth year of study, with an occasional student in the second year of study. Admissions criteria are set by the Academic Board and are published in the Admissions Statement, which is available on the Centre's website. There are normally about 50 applications for places each semester. Recruitment activity is undertaken by Centre staff and by staff from Middlebury College's International Programs and Off-Campus Study Office. Students who are considering study at the Centre have to have a strong Grade Point Average (GPA), references from faculty members in their institution, and a clear personal statement. Students whom the review team met said that they were well prepared for their time in the Centre. This included information given to them before they left the US, and from the induction programme on arrival.

7 Assessment is undertaken by tutors using grading criteria in accordance with North American practice. There are regular meetings between the Senior Tutor and tutors to discuss teaching and assessment related issues. Students produce written work for tutorials, the research course and the seminar. A more substantive paper is written for both the research course and seminar and these are blind second-marked, with marks reconciled by the Academic Committee. Any academic malpractice noted by tutors is brought to the attention of the Senior Tutor. Students met by the review team commented favourably about the clarity of the assessment requirements and the thoroughness of both written and oral feedback on their work.

8 Students met by the review team commented favourably about the ways in which they were supported by staff and junior deans, the quality of the teaching, and the availability of learning support resources. The Centre has elected student members who meet weekly. Students feel able to raise any concerns through these meetings, although the informal contact between staff and students was also seen as very valuable and supportive. Students complete evaluative questionnaires at the end of each semester, which are used by the Academic Committee and Academic Board in order to consider any issues or changes.

9 Progress has been made in establishing systems for identifying and supporting students with disabilities drawing on the resources of Middlebury College. The Centre acknowledges that the current building presents a challenge for students with some forms of physical disability. Improved accessibility of the building is a high priority for the Centre and the building has been recently assessed for the installation of a lift.

#### **Section 4: Progress in working with the relevant external reference points relating to academic standards and quality for higher education**

10 The Centre's main external reference points are the requirements of the US institutions from which students come. In particular, the courses have to be approved by the academic management procedures of Middlebury College.

11 The Centre has mapped its provision against relevant chapters of the Quality Code since 2013, although further progress in mapping since the previous review visit has been limited (see paragraph 4).

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

12 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.

13 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr David Gale (Review Manager) and Professor Alan Jago (Reviewer) on 3 November 2015.

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