Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of CWR, t/a Waverley Abbey College, November 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 CWR, trading as Waverley Abbey College (the College) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the November 2017 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers).

2   Changes since the last QAA review

2   The total number of students currently enrolled is 160. This is a decrease of 10 (6 per cent) since the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER (AP)) in November 2017 when there were 170. All students are part-time. In October 2015 CWR's awarding body, Roehampton University, gave notice that it would not be renewing the partnership agreement and since that time courses leading to Roehampton University awards are being taught out with 27 students remaining enrolled on its programmes. CWR's new partner is Middlesex University and there are 133 students enrolled on its programmes. The College has no Tier 4 sponsored overseas students. There are 28 academic staff (headcount) representing 11.6 full-time equivalent, two of these staff are full-time, while the remaining staff are employed on varying part-time arrangements. Eighteen of the part-time teaching staff are contracted on an annual basis. A further seven staff are in administrative roles, equivalent to 4.2 full-time staff.

3   There have not been any substantial changes since the HER (AP) 2017 visit. Changes are limited to the introduction of new undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Spiritual Formation and to the relaunch of the MA Counselling, which was not offered last year.

3   Findings from the monitoring visit

4   Waverley Abbey College has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the 2017 HER (AP) and demonstrates appropriate engagement with relevant external reference points including the Quality Code (paragraph 18). Information that it produces is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy (paragraphs 5 and 8). It has progressed the three areas of good practice and the affirmations reported have been further developed (paragraph 5). The recommendations concerning timeliness of assessment feedback and central oversight of feedback timescales by Academic Board have been appropriately addressed (paragraph 7). The formal staff development plan to expand academic staff members' wider awareness of learning and teaching is continuing to be developed (paragraph 9). There is a comprehensive policy review schedule and process in place which has the potential to ensure that polices are monitored and evaluated in a routine and effective way (paragraph 8), but the systematic deliberate approach to link institutional strategic objectives to enhancement activities has yet to be fully implemented (paragraph 10).

5   The College has built on the three areas of good practice identified in the November 2017 HER (AP). The development of students' professional practice and skills through the curriculum and placement learning is constantly updated in line with professional body requirements and is described in the revised programme handbooks for all courses. The good standard of the comprehensive annual review of programmes is maintained and for the recently appointed Spiritual Formation programme leader, mentoring provided by the Academic Lead and supported by the Director of Higher Education, will aid in the quality of the production of the annual review. Good practice in providing information and support for placement and vocational learning has been developed, as described previously, by updating fieldwork activities and specific programme handbooks, which are distinct from generic student information, to incorporate the latest professional body requirements.

6   The College has made satisfactory progress on the affirmations. It has made a significant investment in library and online learning material resources which will continue to be introduced during the current academic year. Although National Student Survey (NSS) outcomes for learning resources were better in 2018 (59 per cent) than in 2017 (55 per cent), the College acknowledges that further work needs to be done and are confident that the 2019 survey will reflect the College's most recent actions. With regard to student contribution to College development above that of the programme, student representation at Academic Board has been agreed and the Waverley Abbey College Advisory Group is in discussion as to how its interaction with the student body will take place. At the student meeting, student representatives spoke about their attendance at Programme Boards but were less clear about whether there was any student attendance at Academic Board. It is too early for the College to evaluate the effectiveness of this action.

7   The two recommendations about assessment feedback have been suitably addressed. Firstly, the College has ensured that schedules indicating when students can expect feedback have been published in programme handbooks and there is an undertaking to communicate with students if there are changes. Secondly, Academic Board now has central oversight of compliance with assessment feedback schedules as it receives a report from Programme Boards where hand back times is a standing item so allowing timeliness of feedback to be monitored and reported. It is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of these actions.

8   To address the recommendation that new or amended policies should be routinely reviewed the College has produced a comprehensive policy schedule which tracks the three-year cycle for monitoring policies. The schedule is maintained by the Academic Registrar. Policy update is now a standing item on Academic Board, College Executive and the Waverley Abbey College Advisory Group meetings so that policies remain current and effective. The front page of each policy clearly shows the review date and next update.

9   The recommendation to formalise and implement a staff development plan has been satisfactorily addressed but is not yet fully embedded. The Trustees approved the Staff Development Policy in December 2017. Actions to produce a formal induction process for new staff, a schedule for supporting staff to pursue membership of AdvanceHE and a formal schedule of training continue to be under development. Staff have an allocated mentor when they join the College or take on a new role.

10   The College Executive and Trustees have discussed the recommendation that a strategic approach to enhancement which aligns with institutional objectives should be developed. A new Vision, Mission and Values statement is transitioning through the approvals process by the Trustees and further discussions will continue in order to decide how to formulate a systematic approach to continuous improvement of the student learning experience. This recommendation is due for completion in January 2019.

11   The College's processes for admissions are well managed and set out in its comprehensive Admissions Policy which was reviewed in January 2018. The policy includes clear principles and procedures for Recognition of Prior Learning and Appeals and Complaints. These are in line with the quality framework of the validating universities. The Academic Registrar has responsibility for operation of the policy and works closely with programme leaders and academic team. A dedicated Admissions Officer advises and supports potential applicants. The College uses Open Days, advertising and word of mouth to recruit students. It does not use agents.

12   Entry criteria are prominently shown on the College's website. The level of English competency required (IETLS 6.5 or equivalent) and regulations for non-standard entry are shown within the Admission Policy on the website. Students confirmed that information provided at Open Days and on the website was comprehensive and accurate. Applicants submit their qualification certificates with their application form on-line and the College retains the right to see original copies. All suitable candidates are interviewed using a published interview protocol which ensures consistency. It is a thorough process which explores the motivation to study, potential for success and genuine intention to study. Some candidates are asked to produce a piece of work to assess their level of written English. Students were appreciative of the sincere interest shown in them by staff, discussion of how the College could support any additional needs and the professional way the interview was conducted. As a condition of entry an applicant may be asked to attend a study skills course.

13   To ensure the integrity of the admissions process a weekly report is produced for the College Executive giving key data for each programme. Recruitment statistics are considered as part of the annual review process to assess inclusivity and look at comparative performance of students from different groups. Students felt that the admissions process was fair and transparent.

14   The College effectively operates the academic frameworks and regulations of its validating universities when assessing students to ensure intended learning outcomes at module and programme level are achieved and academic malpractice is mitigated. For Middlesex University programmes the College operates its own Academic Misconduct Policy and is diligent in keeping up to date with current guidance from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. Authenticity of student work is ensured by the range of assessment instruments, which includes methods where students must attend in person; for example, examinations, time constrained assignments, fieldwork, skills practicums and presentations. In other cases, for example personal reflection and other written work students must sign an academic integrity claim. In addition, the staff, who have close working relationships with students, are able to recognise changes in the style or standard of work. The College is introducing plagiarism-detection software in the near future. Students are aware of the issue of academic misconduct through their induction, the programme and student handbooks, and on the virtual learning environment. Staff new to the College receive training in assessment procedures and a recent new member of staff also participated in a Webinar on Academic Malpractice.

15   To ensure student work achieves the learning outcomes required, the learning outcomes in the module descriptor are mapped to assessment elements and reflected in the assessment criteria. A marking template ensures that all key elements of assessment have been covered. The College has an effective second marking system, which provides confidence that work is marked fairly and securely. Reports indicate that learning outcomes are achieved at the correct standard.

16   The Middlesex programmes started in 2016-17 and therefore there is no achievement data yet. Retention for Middlesex programmes; the BA (Hons) Counselling

averages at 82 per cent (60 out of 73) and the MA Relational Counselling has a retention of 83 per cent (5 out of 6).

17   Retention rates for Roehampton BA (Hons) Counselling (which is being taught out) is variable. Some groups have 100 per cent retention while others are much lower. In some cases, cohorts are very small with less than ten students and where there has been drop out from these, percentage retention appears very low. It is difficult to discern any pattern in attrition rates between groups. For example, a large cohort of 33 has a retention rate of 27 per cent. The College states that this is accounted for in large part by the fact that students enrol on a full degree, but exit with a Diploma or Certificate. Pass rates are high with many groups having 100 per cent success.

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

18   The successful outcome of the 2017 HER (AP) confirmed the College meets the Expectations of the Quality Code and it continues to use the Quality Code when reviewing its policies and carrying out its annual monitoring process.

19   The MA in Counselling, the MA Spiritual Formation and the BA (Hons) Spiritual Formation were successfully validated in May 2018. The College used a range of external standards, including Subject Benchmark Statements and professional body standards, to produce the student handbooks.

5   Background to the monitoring visit

20   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.

21   The monitoring visit was carried out by Mrs Pat Millner, Reviewer, and Mr Alan Weale, QAA Officer, on 13 November 2018.