



This review method
is ESG compliant

Annual Monitoring for Educational Oversight

Irish Baptist College

May 2026

Educational Oversight Review: Report of the monitoring visit for the Irish Baptist College, May 2026

Outcome of the monitoring visit

1. From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the monitoring team concludes that the Irish Baptist College (IBC or the College hereafter) is making acceptable progress since the May 2025 review in its continuing management of its responsibilities for academic standards and the management/improvement of the quality of learning opportunities.
2. The online monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Gareth Longden, Reviewer, and Dr Irene Ainsworth, QAA Officer, on 19 May 2026.

Changes since the last QAA review

3. At the time of the May 2025 review, IBC had a six-year validation agreement (effective from September 2023) with Spurgeon's College, London (SCL) for two undergraduate programmes, the Bachelor of Divinity (BD) and Bachelor of Theology (BTh), and a Master of Theology (MTh) postgraduate programme. The agreement followed a decision by the University of Chester, the College's previous validating partner, to cease validation arrangements at the College in August 2023. On 31 July 2025 SCL unexpectedly closed, leading to an emergency validation by the University of Chester for an intake in September 2025 as part of a new six-year academic partnership agreement (2025-2031) between IBC and the University.
4. The current Principal, who has been in the post since May 2024, has resigned with effect from 31 May 2026 to take up a new post overseas. The College has made interim arrangements to cover the period between the departure of the current Principal and the appointment of a new Principal. The Director of Training will have overall responsibility for the College's higher education provision during this interim period. The Chair of the College will assume the role of Executive Chair and will join IBC's Senior Leadership Team to support the College's leadership and governance arrangements for a period of up to one year. The Chair will be on site for one day per week to provide support to the staff team for six months initially.
5. The College currently has 23 undergraduate students (13 full-time and 10 part-time) and 17 part-time postgraduate students, compared to 24 undergraduate students and 19 postgraduate students in 2025. It has five full-time staff members, including three with teaching responsibilities, and two part-time administrators.



Findings

6. The monitoring team considers that IBC has responded to the unexpected closure of SCL in an effective, and student-focussed, manner. Students reported how they had both been kept informed of developments and were well-supported by IBC during what had the potential to be a concerning time. The swift, albeit short-term, arrangement of the new validation agreement with the University of Chester, is indicative of efficient management and leadership processes at IBC which has secured programme delivery and the quality of the student experience for the current cohorts. In the mid- and longer-term, IBC is fully cognisant of the fact that it will need to secure a longer-term validation agreement; it recognises that this will be a challenge, especially in the light of small student numbers and challenges across the higher education sector. The staff team reported that discussions about identifying a validation partner are progressing well and that viable options have been identified.
7. IBC has made acceptable progress in addressing the May 2025 review recommendations relating to student feedback, data protection training for staff, data collection and analysis, publication of entry criteria, and diversity of assessment tasks. Following review, approval and agreement by student representatives, senior management and staff in August 2025, the action plan responding to the May 2025 review was published on the College website [<https://www.irishbaptistcollege.org/policies>] in October 2025. The plan was subsequently updated following internal evaluation in January 2026 and it is due to be evaluated again in June 2026.
8. The team found that the College has engaged effectively with most of the five recommendations arising from the May 2025 review and has made good progress against four of them as indicated below. Progress against the recommendation relating to diversity of assessment tasks (Recommendation 5) has been delayed due to the conditions placed upon the College in the emergency validation arrangement with the University of Chester. The College intends to make progress with this recommendation when agreeing validation arrangements with a new partner. The team considers this to be a reasonable course of action given the terms of the validation agreement.



9. **Recommendation 1 (Strengthen the College's approach to developing action plans based on student feedback and ensuring the feedback loop is closed)** has been taken forward through a more intentional approach to gathering (for example through an annual student survey and acting upon student feedback. Feedback items are considered at the Student Voice Committee and progress there is monitored. Students reported how the use of feedback action plans supported the monitoring of items and helped to inform the student body of IBC's responses. Students who met the team were able to point to examples of how the College had responded to their feedback and gave confidence to the monitoring team that student feedback was actively gathered and engaged with positively. Staff members who met the team reported how they gathered feedback and used action plans to guide their response to addressing items of student feedback. The monitoring team recognises that the College gathers feedback from students via a number of pathways (module feedback, student surveys, student representatives, and through a number of different mechanisms such as surveys, Student Voice Committee, and the Open Door policy) and engages with that feedback in an effective and positive way which is appreciated by students.
10. **Recommendation 2 (Provide General Data Protection Regulation training so that all staff are aware of their responsibilities)** has been fully resolved through the training provided for all staff members.
11. **Recommendation 3 (Establish a systematic approach to the collection and analysis of data, both qualitative and quantitative, to inform enhancement activities)** has been advanced through the collection of data and increased opportunities for reflection upon that data. Data is also used to provide longer term perspectives on student outcomes and destinations. Staff members who met the monitoring team articulated how they use data to inform their enhancement activities both at the level of support for the individual student and to inform curriculum developments.
12. **Recommendation 4 (Ensure entry criteria for all programmes are communicated clearly and accessibly in published information)** has been fully resolved and all necessary information is available on the College website. Students confirmed that they were able to access that information prior to making their applications. Against all of these recommendations (Recommendations 1-4) the College has either fully resolved them or is making acceptable progress.



13. **Recommendation 5 (Extend the diversity of assessment tasks to ensure that students are provided with tasks that prepare them well for their intended careers)** is described by the College as being on hold. This is because the emergency validation agreement accepted the programmes on an 'as is' basis and precludes changes to the programmes except unless absolutely necessary. In the light of this, IBC has been unable to progress the matter, although it intends to take these discussions forward as part of negotiations with a new validating partner. Staff members observed to the team that in many ways the undergraduate provision was already assessed in quite a diverse manner, and that these forms of assignments (presentations, exegeses, reflections, journals as well as essays) were intended to support students entering ministry or exploring new careers. Staff members recognised that the postgraduate programmes were assessed in less diverse ways and that this is an area they will explore as they identify a new partner. While students who met the team said that they had not had discussions with the College about diversifying the range of assessment types they did report, especially for undergraduate programmes, that they felt that assessments already prepared them well for their intended ministry or careers, which the team noted was the specific focus of the recommendation. Students felt that postgraduate programme assessment was not as diverse as that for undergraduate programmes and could be usefully diversified to better support postgraduate students in their intended or current careers.
14. Minutes of the May 2025 Progression Board show that 30 students listed were continuing with their studies. Awards were conferred on six Bachelor of Theology students. Awards were evenly distributed between 1st, 2.1, and 2.2 degree classifications. Two students graduated from the Bachelor of Divinity, both with 1st class degrees. At postgraduate level, of the four awards conferred on students on the Master of Theology programme, two were with Distinction, one with Merit and one was an exit award of a Postgraduate Certificate. The minutes indicate a review of classifications in four cases and show that recognition was given to both exit velocity and the research portfolio to justify raising classifications. The monitoring team explored external examiner comments relating to assessment, including keeping the form of assessment under review, with staff and noted actions taken in response to external examiner feedback received.

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

15. IBC continues to ensure that the content of the programmes it offers is consistent with national qualifications frameworks through its engagement with its validating partner, the University of Chester. This has included an Academic Partnership: Due Diligence and Operational Review by the University in August 2025 leading to Academic Partner Course and Academic Partnership Agreements between the University and the College. Following the College's renewed partnership with the University, it has an External Quality Advisor and Link Tutor, as well as access to advice through external members on IBC's Academic Quality Assurance Committee.



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