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# Annual Monitoring for Educational Oversight

Union Theological College,  
Belfast

June 2026

# Educational Oversight Review: Report of the monitoring visit for Union Theological College, Belfast, June 2026

## 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 Union Theological College, Belfast (the College) is making **commendable progress** in its continuing management of its responsibilities for academic standards and the management and improvement of the quality of learning opportunities.
2. The monitoring visit was carried out by Peter Rae, Reviewer, and Naomi Gunny, QAA Officer, on 2 June 2026.

## Changes since the last QAA review

3. This was the third annual monitoring activity undertaken following the last full review of the College under the previous QAA Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER(AP)) method in May 2023. The 2025 annual monitoring report concluded that the College was making commendable progress, having completed all actions from the last full review and providing evidence of further enhancement.
4. The College's parent charity, the Presbyterian Church of Ireland (PCI), is currently undertaking a wide-ranging review of operations and as part of this review is considering the resources, staffing, governance, and vision of the College and how it should be developed. Following extensive discussions and with the support of the College, on 26 March 2026 the General Council of the PCI passed a resolution instructing the College to suspend enrolment to the BA(Hons) Theology programme awarded by St Mary's University, Twickenham. There are 31 students currently enrolled on the BA programme.
5. Teach-out arrangements have been put in place and the College's relationship with St Mary's University as an awarding body will end once all current students have completed. This constitutes a material change in circumstances, as determined by the Home Office, and an annual monitoring visit was therefore required.

6. The College currently has a total of 168 enrolled students, an increase of 17% (24 students) on the previous year. There are eight members of academic staff, including the Principal and Vice-Principal who hold dual academic and senior management roles. Two full-time academic staff departed their roles during 2024/25 and two new full-time roles, Dean of Ministerial Studies and Developments and Lecturer in Church History, were recruited to in 2025/26. The overall number of academic staff has therefore remained constant. The Vice-Principal also assumed the role of Director of Postgraduate Research in 2025/26. There are a further 11 members of staff fulfilling administration, operations, management and maintenance roles and there have been no changes in these roles during 2025/26.

## Findings

7. In reaching its judgement, the team reviewed the annual return document and the 93 items of supporting evidence submitted. Additional evidence was requested to assist the team in understanding the governance processes and level of involvement of faculty in the decision to suspend enrolment to the BA Theology programme. This was duly provided by the College and explored further during the visit.

### Progress against the action plan

8. The action plan developed following the 2023 HER(AP) was confirmed as complete in the 2025 annual monitoring report. The College noted in its 2026 annual return, that three of the actions remain ongoing based on their indicators of success. All three actions relate to identified good practice and affirmations. The actions are:
  - a. A review of the Disability Policy and Procedure. The policy has been updated but further development in conjunction with external experts is ongoing.
  - b. Development of Faculty and staff. CPD is reported by the College as continuing and encouraged, but the development of a CPD handbook has been delayed due to the ongoing PCI review, which may significantly affect institutional direction.
  - c. Increase student participation in reviews and surveys. The targeted 50% participation rate for module reviews was achieved in Autumn 2025 for all programmes except the MA programme, where the response rate was 17%, largely due, the college felt, to the nature of the MA cohort as part time and studying by distance learning. Response rates were reported to the Education Committee in March 2026, and the Committee was tasked with exploring ways to increase engagement.
9. Progress on all three ongoing actions should be followed up at the next review point, the QAA Educational Oversight Review scheduled for 2026/27.

### Internal action planning

10. The College has developed an action plan to ensure the targets of its internal Teaching and Learning Strategy are met and has established a timeline and monitoring process to ensure the outcomes are delivered. The College had originally intended to design



and implement a new 2026-2030 Teaching and Learning Plan but instead extended the 2020-25 strategy by a further year to ensure that the new plan is built on the strategic review currently being undertaken in partnership with the PCI.

### **Student data return**

11 In 2024/25, the last complete year of data available, there was an overall retention rate of 96% across the College's eight programmes, with six of 144 students leaving their programmes. Two of these six students transferred to other programmes within the College.

12 At programme level, the retention rates for MTh Old Testament and MTh New Testament were 50% and 66% respectively. The two programmes had a total of five students, and one student from each transferred to the MTh Biblical Studies programme which was launched in September 2025. The Old Testament and New Testament programmes are both being taught out during 2025-26 with the two remaining students due to graduate this academic year. The PGCert Biblical Greek had a retention rate of 66%, with one student having left the programme in 2024/25. All other programmes had retention rates of above 90% in 2024/25.

13 63% (7) of Level 6 students achieved a 2:1 or above in 2024/25, with 36% (4) achieving First Class Honours. Prior to 2024/25 one student had received an exit award and there had been no other completions. 29% (4) of Level 7 students achieved a Distinction in 2024/25, with the remaining 71% (10) being awarded a Merit. This represents an increase of 7% in Distinctions being awarded compared with 2023/24. There were no PhD completions in 2024/25.

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

14 The College has updated its Periodic Review policy to align with QAA Educational Oversight Review recommendations and has established a Micro-Credentialling Working Group following institutional engagement with the QAA Special Interest Group. The PCI review is examining the College's governance structure, anticipating a more transparent structure, in line with QAA advice.

15 The College's annual monitoring submission included a review of its operations against each of the 12 Sector-Agreed Principles of the UK Quality Code, demonstrating a detailed understanding of the requirements of Educational Oversight Review and a commitment to enhancement.

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