



Educational Oversight: desk-based analysis of Irish Baptist College, March 2022

Outcome of the desk-based analysis

1 From the annual return and documentary evidence, the monitoring team concludes that the Irish Baptist College (the College) is continuing to maintain academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities since the [March 2021 Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

Changes since the last QAA review

2 There have been no significant changes in the management, programme structure, accommodation or staffing at the College since the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER(AP)) in March 2021. There are currently 50 students undertaking programmes of study (34 FTE) - 30 undergraduates (27 FTE) and 20 postgraduates (7 FTE). The College employs five full-time academic staff and two administrative staff. The University of Chester, as the awarding body, continues to validate all programmes offered at the College.

Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The actions identified following the 2021 HER(AP) review have all been addressed, although some actions have yet to be fully implemented, evaluated and reported. To confirm progress with the recommendations, the monitoring team reviewed evidence, including the Student Handbook, the appeals regulations of the University of Chester and related documentation, and staff appraisal and peer observation records. Examination of the Admissions Policy, interview documentation and online student survey results provide evidence for continued progress on the affirmation. Quality and monitoring documents from the awarding body, an external examiners' report and minutes of Board of Study meetings evidence engagement with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code).

4 The HER(AP) of March 2021 made three recommendations, one affirmation and identified two areas of good practice. The College's Action Plan identifies key actions to address the recommendations, with clear targets and success indicators. Actions to address one of the three recommendations are complete, with implementation of the actions to address the other recommendations scheduled for April and June 2022.

5 Actions to address the recommendation to further embed the process for the monitoring and development of individual staff, including peer observation and staff appraisal, are underway and expected to be fully operational by April 2022. The College has achieved the action to continue with the current process of staff appraisal, with examples providing useful feedback and identifying staff professional development opportunities.

6 The peer observation process is underway for visiting tutors, and will include all members of staff later in the year. Peer observation shows practical suggestions for improvement, praise for effective performance and opportunities for self-reflection by the observer. Evaluation of the success indicators has not yet taken place as this will rely on student feedback gathered at the end of the semester and monitoring of peer observations

by the Management Committee and the Finance and Staffing Committee. Both meetings are planned for April 2022.

7 The College has achieved the actions related to the second recommendation - to clearly articulate the process of academic appeals in the Student Handbook. The handbook now contains comprehensive information explaining the process, with definitions to distinguish appeals from complaints and with helpful links to the University of Chester regulations and procedures.

8 The third recommendation - to introduce a process for postgraduate students to contribute fully to quality enhancement processes - is scheduled for achievement in June 2022. Actions are continuing through the existing process of module feedback, with further plans to establish an annual postgraduate online module review committee. As the action plan measures success through student participation, evidence of achievement of the objective is consequently pending.

9 The College completed the HER(AP) affirmation of action taken to articulate and implement a more formal admissions policy by October 2021. A clear Admissions Policy now includes a standard set of interview questions. Student feedback on the admissions process shows implementation to be informative and effective.

10 Although not formalised in the action plan, the College builds on the good practice identified by the 2021 HER(AP) review. The good practice identified in the independent study and study skills modules is effectively developing students' critical and transferable skills, and the inclusive community of learners has been further enhanced. The College builds upon good practice through an enhanced induction process with additional study skills sessions and improvements to the Independent Study module to incorporate more variety in assessment methods.

11 There is a total of 50 students across all programmes with the Bachelor and Master of Theology having 16 students on each programme. Two students study on the Bachelor of Divinity, three students are enrolled on the Graduate Diploma and Postgraduate Diploma, and four students on the MA in Theology. Retention rates for full-time programmes are higher than for part-time programmes but small cohorts make percentage comparisons unreliable. Retention rates for the Bachelor in Theology are 100% for the 2019-20 and 2020-21 cohorts. The Bachelor of Divinity has 100% retention for 2018-19 and 2020-21 and 50% for 2019-20, with four students in each cohort. The Master of Theology retention is 67% for 2018-19 and 50% for both 2019-20 and 2020-21, with six, seven and 10 students respectively. Pass rates are high at 100% for the full-time programmes of Bachelor of Theology and Bachelor of Divinity and the part-time Postgraduate Diploma in Theology, with seven, four and one students, respectively. The Master of Theology has a pass rate of 75%. Board of Study meetings review and evaluate enrolment, retention and pass rates within the College.

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

12 The College meets the expectations for standards through its own structures, policies and procedures aligned to those of the University of Chester. Validation events and the Annual Programme Renewal process of the University of Chester enable the College to ensure that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with relevant national qualifications frameworks, and that students can achieve or exceed national standards. The College uses external expertise (including through external examiners) to confirm that assessment and classification processes are reliable, fair and transparent.

13 The College responds to the Expectations of the Core and Common practices of the Quality Code. Completion of actions in relation to the 2021 HER(AP) review affirmation confirms a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system. Appropriately qualified and skilled staff are peer and management reviewed to ensure delivery of a high-quality academic experience. Survey evidence and actions to meet the recommendation show that the College actively engages students - individually and collectively - in the quality of their educational experience. Changes to the Student Handbook and links to the University of Chester regulations demonstrate accessible procedures for handling complaints and appeals.

14 The curriculum is reviewed and modified through the University of Chester Programme Renewal and Continuous Monitoring of Enhancement processes. Boards of Study meetings effectively allow the College to review student progress and academic standards and quality, and help drive improvement and enhancement.

15 Although there is evidence of engagement with the Quality Code, college documents and minutes do not explicitly reference the Core or Common practices to illustrate full engagement by staff or students. Board of Study meetings are brief, and provide limited evidence of systematic review of policies and procedures.

16 Other external reference points effectively informing College practices arise from engagement and membership of bodies such as the Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland, the Association of Bible College Principals, and the Association of Bible College Bursars.

Background to the desk-based analysis

17 The desk-based analysis 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/annual monitoring. 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 process or review.

18 The desk-based analysis was carried out by Dr Glenn Barr, Reviewer, and Simon Ives, QAA Officer, in March 2022. No meetings were held with students or staff, and the conclusions presented in this report are based on the analysis of documentary evidence submitted by the provider.

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