



Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of Irshad Trust t/a The Islamic 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 the Irshad Trust t/a The Islamic College (the College) is making acceptable progress with implementing the action plan since the November 2017 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA review

2 The College continues to deliver undergraduate and master's level programmes in a long-standing partnership with Middlesex University (the University). Programmes are designed to meet students' individual educational and employment needs, while adhering to Islamic moral principles and values. The College employs 18 administrative and support staff and a total of 20 academic staff, three of whom are full-time and 17 part-time. All academic staff are highly qualified, with many holding doctorates. There are 32 students studying at undergraduate level and 96 students registered on master's programmes. The majority of students study part-time.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The examination of a range of documents and meetings with academic staff and students indicate that the College has made acceptable progress overall with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision. The College is continuing to respond to the actions identified in the HER review of 2017. It has taken action to address the three recommendations, although further work will need to be done to articulate and evaluate actions being undertaken. The four areas of good practice are being further developed, albeit informally.

4 Good practice continues to be built upon, although not explicitly addressed in the College's action plan. An inclusive and supportive learning environment, with a collaborative and personalised approach to learning and achievement, continues to allow students to fulfil their potential. Meetings with student representatives and the student council, communication through the VLE and boards of studies are effective in developing a learning partnership. The extensive range of community outreach activities continues to enhance provision (paragraphs 7 and 8).

5 The College has made some progress addressing the three recommendations, although there is little evidence of formal evaluation of its actions through its deliberative committees. Staff understanding of the FHEQ has been extended primarily through its partnership work with the University. Grading criteria for each level of study have been developed and are becoming embedded in assessment practice. The College has made some progress in introducing a formal process for editorial oversight to secure the accuracy of information across all platforms (paragraph 9).

6 Processes for admissions continue to be effective. Interviews and testing of applicants ensure the appropriate selection of students who are well supported to achieve

their qualifications (paragraph 13). Policies and procedures for assessment are robust and external examiners confirm that students are treated equitably and receive valuable feedback on their assessed work (paragraph 14).

7 Changes to the curriculum, with new modules and revised credit ratings, have emerged from discussions between staff and students, responding to students' needs and aspirations. Students continue to be engaged in their learning, especially through peer engagement and the extensive range of community outreach activities. The introduction and embedding of personal development planning (PDP) has encouraged students' community involvement and employability. Examples of the latter include enabling students to be engaged as external speakers. The BA (Hons) Hawza Studies programme meets students' aspirations to become preachers and Imams. The College encourages students' critical thinking and analysis across all programmes. Annual awards recognise best achieving students, with strong competition for publication of their work in the College's annual journal.

8 Programme Vision Groups, replacing boards of study, have increased students' opportunities to share their views. A new safeguarding officer role has further strengthened student support and welfare provision. Students continue to value the supportive and collaborative learning environment. Meetings with student representatives and the student council, communication through the VLE and through boards of studies, are highly effective. Students provided examples to show how the College was responsive to issues raised, such as staff with poor teaching skills, and stated that problems raised were promptly resolved. Some students expressed concern about availability of published resources, an issue which the College is taking action to resolve.

9 The revalidation of programmes by the University in 2018 allowed the College to embed the principles of the FHEQ in the design and delivery of programmes. Revalidation processes supported the development of grading criteria for each level of study for each programme. Detailed programme handbooks now contain comprehensive information on programme and module learning outcomes, assessment criteria and grade descriptors, modelled against FHEQ levels. Staff development, facilitated through the University, has allowed College staff to understand and engage more effectively with the level expectations of the FHEQ. The Academic Board and College's action plan recognise the need for further staff development on marking, grading and assessment feedback.

10 The University's revalidation report recommended that the College formalise staff appraisal development in relation to learning and teaching pedagogies and encourage HEA membership for all teaching staff, and many are now fellows. Although there is no evidence of a systematic staff development process, the College has provided extensive staff training. External experts, including external examiners, have provided useful, practical training on levelness and good assessment practice. External examiners have noted the positive effect of this staff development in their 2017-18 reports. Examiners commented that written feedback was clear, relevant and useful to the students, and pointed to improvements in consistency across markers. Teaching staff are supported to attend conferences. Good practice in teaching, identified through peer observation and staff development is shared informally, although no detailed records of staff development are maintained, and the activities are not formally evaluated through the College's committees.

11 The College has made limited progress in formalising and embedding a process of editorial oversight to secure the accuracy of information across all platforms. Heads of department are responsible for information in their areas with oversight by the Head of Education, before approval is sought from the University. There is no evidence of a systematic process for signing off information or formal oversight by Academic Board.

12 The College is further developing its own action planning process by identifying priorities for the future, such as improving feedback on assessment, formalising the tutorial process and introducing peer observation. Although there is evidence that the College is making progress in these areas, the use of SMART targets for the University's annual monitoring reports is not extended to committee meetings or in developing internal action plans to provide effective oversight. The Academic Board meets monthly, although minutes are not fully detailed to allow consistent review of previous actions, nor an evaluation of their effectiveness.

13 Admission arrangements at the College remain effective with a detailed policy which informs appropriate decisions. Checking includes the sufficiency of applicants' English language competency, ability in Arabic, prior qualifications, suitability and intention to study. Students complete a standard application form and all candidates are interviewed. Applicants are guided to the most appropriate programme, based on their abilities and aspirations. A foundation year and two distinct BA pathways are available. Prior learning is appropriately recognised following the University's regulations. Students are appropriately inducted with relevant sessions from academic and support staff, including academic writing and good academic conduct. Retention and achievement figures show that students are recruited with appropriate abilities and the effective academic and pastoral support allows them to be successful.

14 The College uses an appropriate variety of assessments, including examinations, portfolios, presentations and group work, which enable students to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes. Comprehensive assessment regulations and procedures, including those for academic conduct, inform the assessment process. Sessions on academic writing, research methodologies and dissertation writing support the assessment process.

15 Students and external examiners confirm that assessors provide constructive feedback to allow them to develop their work further. External examiners declare that processes for moderating assessments are fair and balanced. Reports identify significant improvements in the quality of feedback and consistency of grading. One examiner identified modules where improvements could still be made in marking and feedback. Students were unaware of how to access the external examiners' reports, which according to the handbooks are available on request, but which are in fact published on the VLE. Students praised the extensive formative feedback and the high level of support through a staff open-door policy. However, students stated that feedback on some summative work was given late. The College does not have a systematic means of monitoring feedback timescales and relies on individual programme leaders to monitor this.

16 Student numbers on programmes are small with the largest group being 14 students on BA (Hons) Islamic Studies. Retention and achievement rates are very high at 100 percent for most programmes. The level 4 one-year programme in Qu'aranic Arabic from the 2016-17 cohort had eight enrolments, 75 percent retention and 50 percent achievement. The 2017-18 undergraduate cohorts have high retention rates but do not complete until between 2020 and 2023. Attendance data is monitored by College staff and analysis of student achievement data led to changes in the credit rating for some modules and for dropping the Arabic requirement on the BA Islamic Studies. Data on entry qualifications, disability, ethnicity, gender and age is included in annual monitoring documents, but there is little evidence of systematic use and analysis of data by the College's deliberative committees.

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

17 Staff development sessions support staff to increase their familiarity with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), and to discuss and share good practice. The revalidation of programmes with the University illustrated appropriate alignment with the Quality Code, the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. Programme handbooks clearly show programme and module learning outcomes, assessment criteria and grade descriptors against the FHEQ. Working with the University, the College is preparing to align its documents and procedures with the revised Quality Code.

5 Background to the monitoring visit

18 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.

19 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Glenn Barr, Reviewer, and Mr Simon Ives, QAA Officer, on 15 November 2018.

QAA2035 - R10310 - Jan 19

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2019
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557050
Web www.qaa.ac.uk