



## Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of London School of Theology, June 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 London School of Theology (the School) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the June 2017 [monitoring visit](#).

### 2 Changes since the last QAA review/Monitoring visit

2 There have been no significant changes affecting the School or its provision since June 2017 except that the MA in Integrative Psychotherapy programme has been phased out and there are no longer students enrolled on it. The overall number of students at the School studying for awards of Middlesex University (its sole awarding body) has risen by five per cent to 516 since 2017. This is made up of 290 undergraduates, 137 enrolled on taught level 7 programmes and 89 undertaking research degree programmes. The undergraduate programme in Theology continues to be delivered by through a range of delivery modes, including online and blended learning, and the three MA programmes by distance learning. The School currently employs 134 academic and administration staff, including 63 visiting lecturers. The number of full-time equivalent academic staff is 19. The administrative staff count amounts to 37 full-time equivalents. The senior management team has been strengthened by the appointment of a Director of Finance and Administration, and an Academic Secretary, Director of Academic Support. The Human Resources provision has also increased with the appointment of a Human Resources Officer.

### 3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The School is making acceptable progress in enhancing the quality of student provision. Actions arising from the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers), (HER(AP)), in June 2016 have been taken. Many have been completed, although it has not yet been possible to fully evaluate their effectiveness, and some are still ongoing. (paragraphs 4-8 and 13) Students are encouraged to engage more with their studies and with quality assurance and enhancement (paragraph 9). The admission policies reflect requirements of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), with clear procedures for confirming academic (and spiritual) motivation for study (paragraph 10). Programme monitoring reflects the requirements of the awarding body and has been enhanced by the introduction of additional School policies and overview mechanisms, including revised placement policies (paragraphs 11-12). Recruitment remains steady, and performance data indicate that in general retention, pass and achievement data continue to be acceptable (paragraphs 13-14).

4 The School's Teaching and Learning Strategy has now been reviewed and implemented, although it is too early to evaluate the impact. The virtual learning environment (VLE) became operational in September 2014, initially for students studying online. All students were enrolled on the virtual learning environment from October 2017, with online assignment submissions initiated in January 2018. Further work needs to be done on it to encourage greater academic and support interaction by staff and students. The School has

purchased and implemented new plagiarism-detection software, but it is too early to evaluate its impact.

5 The School has taken firm ownership of its own action plan and completed further actions in addition to those carried out following the HER(AP) and the 2017 monitoring visit. These are now fully integrated into its overall strategy. The School's recently established Operational Management Group (OMG) scrutinise the action plan and Enhancement Plan monthly to check progress and currency before reporting to the Academic Board. The School has implemented the recommendations from the HER(AP) report, and the further actions should contribute to the maintenance of academic standards and enhancement of the quality of student learning opportunities.

6 Staff, students and awarding body representatives have worked closely to revise and expand current academic regulations so they are now fully comprehensive. The academic appeals and complaints procedures, and students' terms and conditions are clearly defined, accessible, and meet the requirements of the awarding body. These can be found in relevant programme handbooks. Students confirm that they are made aware of the awarding body's regulations at the start of their programme. They also indicate that sufficient information is provided for them to make an informed decision to study at the School, and that such information continues to be fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

7 The School continues to develop its approach to the identification and support for students with additional learning needs and those with English as an additional or other language. Students with additional learning needs are supported by a Disability Adviser and externally sourced specialist staff as and when required. Some students feel additional support would be welcomed although they confirm that they had the opportunity to self-declare any additional needs at admission in addition to a full discussion at their induction. A new tutorial system has been established to enhance pastoral support, consisting of both small group and individual sessions. This is welcomed by the students and staff but it is too early in its implementation phase to assess its impact.

8 Staff thoroughly monitor and evaluate the impact of attendance patterns on the development and achievement of all students. It has reviewed its approach to the provision of study skills and a comprehensive programme is now embedded across all modules in all programmes. There is a well-stocked library, including access to relevant e-journals and databases. Specific academic skills tutorials have recently been established which support the students' academic development. However, some students indicate that the School could do more to help those re-entering education and those whose first language is not English.

9 The School takes deliberate and positive steps to engage students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience which staff and students confirm are fully embedded in the deliberative structures. Student representatives meet with the Principal on a weekly basis and there are student members of the Academic Board. The Course committee meetings specifically provide students with the opportunity to take part in organisational and developmental processes. The students confirm that the student representative system has had significant impact on the enhancement of their programmes and noted that their opinions are acknowledged and responded to.

10 Admissions policies and procedures are carefully designed. The School's procedural documents provide a precise framework for ensuring that the process works well and aligns with the Quality Code, providing clear and concise guidance to staff and to prospective students. Great care is taken to ensure that the prospective student, the School and intended programme are well matched and that students are provided with clear advice and guidance in relation to their career aspirations. Prior to admission, staff interview all

prospective students either face to face, or by interactive video if overseas, to determine suitability of individual candidates for their intended programme of study in response to their previous academic and spiritual experience and to assess their motivation to study, as well as their spiritual mission. There is a clear Accreditation of Prior Learning and Credit Transfer Policy. As a Tier 4 Sponsor, the School recruits international students who would require a Tier 4 visa to study in the United Kingdom. As such, the School requires all international and EU students to have an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score of 6.5 for undergraduate programmes and 7.0 for postgraduate programmes. A new Student Engagement Team has recently been set up to support recruitment, selection and the admissions process.

11 In addition to professional body requirements, all undergraduate programmes contain work placements that help to develop students' employability. Programme approval processes consider the management and delivery of placement learning opportunities. A draft Vocational Services Placement Process handbook has recently been developed which covers risk assessment, including health and safety; supervisor and student responsibilities and preparation and support for students on placement. Programmes use ecclesiastical practitioners to deliver guest sessions as well as hosting placements. In addition to enhancing employment potential, students confirmed that these placements help them to confirm or otherwise their original intended mission pathway.

12 Annual programme monitoring continues to be conducted in accordance with the requirements of Middlesex University and supplemented by the School. On a programme-by-programme basis, reviews take place each semester, informed by students. Reviews are discussed at various points within the School's deliberative structures. External examiner reports are also discussed, and actions agreed, leading to a formal response to awarding body. As part of the Annual Monitoring Report, the School analyses and reports on both qualitative and quantitative information.

13 For the academic year 2016-17, level 4 full-time undergraduate pass rate averaged 87 per cent, while 90 and 91 per cent completed levels 5 and 6 respectively. Part-time progression rates are acceptable, apart from the Theology and Counselling programme, where three students enrolled but only one progressed, the other two retaking failed units. The School intends to invest in a new student information system to enable it to keep a more detailed overview of progression and achievement data.

14 Of degrees awarded, approximately 12 per cent (six students) were awarded a first-class degree, 40 per cent (21 students) an upper second, 31 per cent (16 students) a lower second, and eight per cent (4 students) a third-class degree. Two per cent (1 student) was awarded an unclassified degree, and seven per cent (four students) an exit qualification. The proportion of first and upper second-class degrees was lowest for the BA Theology and Counselling programme (25 per cent). From its data analysis, the School identified concerns with the 2014-15 entry cohort. Changes in admission procedures and staffing have subsequently taken place. Successful completion rates for the three MA programmes in the 2016-17 academic year were between 77 and 100 per cent, involving a small cohort of 13 students. All the eight students completing MA/MPhil or PhD programmes were successful.

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

15 The School continues to demonstrate effective engagement with relevant academic and professional external reference points, including the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. The updated action plan shows that it reflects the precepts and expectations of the Quality Code as confirmed in

previous reports and documents. An example of this is in the nature of student support and guidance provided, evidenced in programme specifications, programme handbooks, reports for the awarding bodies and policy documents. The School has also recently completed a document of proposed enhancement activities 2018-19 which is referenced to the current Quality Code and to the requirements for registration with the Office for Students.

16 The School makes regular use of a range of professional links to inform the curriculum and its delivery, particularly through its use of part-time staff. These links include specialists drawn from the range of disciplines within the theological, music and counselling world, and professional associations. The School's Board of Trustees established the Academic Affairs Committee in 2017, with the role of reviewing all academic work of the School. Its membership includes stakeholders, thus providing a degree of externality. The British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy continues to accredit the BA in Theology and Counselling programme.

## **5 Background to the monitoring visit**

17 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.

18 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr David Malachi, Reviewer, and Dr Chris Amodio, Coordinator, on 12 June 2018.

**QAA2172 - R10003 - Jul 18**

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