

Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Luther King House Educational Trust, May 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 Luther King House Educational Trust (the Trust) has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the May 2017 [Higher Educational Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA review

2 At the time of monitoring visit there were 102 students studying at levels 4-7 for awards in Contextual Theology (57 BA Hons and 45 MA). There were an additional 15 students engaged on research degree programmes. The total of 117 students compares with 133 students recorded in the 2017 review (HER (AP)). All awards are validated by the University of Manchester, but in February 2018 the Trust was informed of the University's intention to withdraw from the current arrangement. The Trust has initiated a search for a new awarding body. A new Principal of the Open College, one of the five constituent Colleges of the Trust partnership, has recently been appointed.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The Trust has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the 2017 HER (AP) and demonstrates appropriate engagement with relevant external reference points (paragraph 15). Information that it produces is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. It has built on the two areas of good practice identified in the 2017 HER (AP) and the affirmations reported have been further progressed (paragraph 5). The recommendation to make the recording of decisions made and the consideration of data more explicit has been implemented (paragraph 6). Staff appraisal processes have been strengthened and student representation improved (paragraph 7) but the Learning and Teaching Strategy has yet to be implemented (paragraph 9).

4 The Trust has further developed the areas of good practice identified by the May 2017 HER (AP). It continues to strengthen its commitment to a strong collaborative ethos and multid denominational environment. Constituent colleges have responded to a consultation document concerning 'Future Life of LKH' and a new senior management committee is being developed to include a greater number of staff from across the partnership institutions. Learning support for the diverse student body continues to be a strong feature of the Trust. Study skills sessions and English language support have been further developed and delivered at induction, within module teaching and at timetabled sessions for all students. Individual student learning needs are assessed and addressed by the Trust and assistance is provided for students applying for Disabled Student Allowance and for enlisting additional external support where appropriate. The provision of tutorials and a new Personal Development Plan pro forma are appreciated by students. Study skills provision has been evaluated by students and they confirmed that sessions have been helpful. Students value the Trust's academic and professional development initiatives.

5 The two affirmations reported in the HER (AP) have been further progressed. With regard to admissions criteria, the Principals of the partner institutions review the admissions

process each year to ensure it continues to be fit for purpose. The interview procedure is carried out by two members of staff to establish that prospective students have sufficient fluency in English and the ability to engage in study at degree level. The Trust has consolidated its use of a schedule for the consideration of data. There is a comprehensive timetable addressing specific agenda items, which ensures that all data are presented for consideration at the appropriate committee. The amount of data produced has been expanded and the notes and commentaries helpfully facilitate thorough analysis. Data is also discussed at programme meetings and staff away days.

6 The Trust has addressed all four recommendations but not all have been fully implemented or evaluated. The Trust has taken steps to ensure much greater clarity about where decisions are made. The governance and management organisational structures are clearly set out in the Faculty Handbook in which the committee terms of reference clearly establish specific responsibilities. This enables the distinct areas of decision making of the Management Committee and Programmes Committee to be more clearly defined, and this is now evident in committee minutes.

7 The staff appraisal process has been strengthened. Each college has its own staff appraisal system in place reflecting particular denominational requirements. The Trust's processes ensure consistency in providing opportunity for discussion of the central academic data held including module feedback and student performance data. The Programme Leaders and Staff Development Officer look at all the data and returns and take responsibility for following up specific identified issues.

8 The recommendation to strengthen student representation, improve training for representatives and further develop the processes for closing the feedback loop has been addressed although not fully implemented. Due to the pattern of curriculum delivery and the make-up of the student body, which largely consists of mature students many part-time and with a range of external commitments, it is often difficult to obtain student attendance at meetings. The Trust has attended to this by providing travel expenses and this is appreciated by students. Student representatives are supported on an individual basis with advice from staff and are provided with guidelines on their responsibilities on Programmes Committees although students met by reviewers were uncertain of any particular training activity for student representatives. The small student numbers and close proximity of staff and students means that feedback is reported verbally in an informal way but also more formally through email and there is potential to use a designated space on the virtual learning environment (VLE) and student notice boards, although these ideas continue to be under discussion.

9 The progress on the recommendation that the Trust should develop an implementation plan for the Learning and Teaching Strategy has been paused due to the uncertainties which have arisen as a result of the University of Manchester's decision to terminate the validation agreement. Before this recent development only limited progress had been made with this recommendation and it had been decided to develop a new Learning and Teaching Strategy but the Board has now resolved to focus on establishing new validation arrangements and later ensure that the prospective strategy meets the requirements of new partnership agreements.

10 As noted in paragraph 5, the Trust's admissions criteria and processes were the subject of an affirmation in the 2017 HER (AP). The overarching policy is agreed with the University of Manchester and clearly set out in the Programme Handbooks and on the Trust's website. The majority of the Trust's undergraduate learners are mature students, often graduates, and intend to enter the ordained ministry. Selection processes are rigorous

and all prospective students are interviewed. The interviews assess English competency (which may include a written English Test), academic competency, motivation and intention to study. Admissions are kept under continuous review by the college principals (see paragraph 5).

11 The Trust follows the University of Manchester's regulations for annual programme monitoring. These include meetings of an Academic Panel, visits by the Collaborative Academic Adviser (CAA), completion of continuous monitoring report forms, and annual monitoring report forms and responses to external examiner comments. The Trust fully engages with these processes and no significant matters have been raised over the past year.

12 The BA and MA Programmes Committee play a key role in standards and quality monitoring overseen by the main Board. The committees use qualitative and quantitative data to complete the Continuous Monitoring Report and develop a comprehensive rolling action plan which is referred to throughout the year at every individual meeting to ensure that actions are completed and reported upon. Programme monitoring which includes student feedback is used effectively to bring about enhancement. For example, changes were made to hand in dates to spread student workloads more evenly.

13 The Trust provides opportunities for students and their representatives to contribute to institutional management. They attend meetings of the programme committees and a standing item allows them to raise matters of concern. Students provide feedback on teaching and learning through module evaluations which is reported on to the Programme Committee. The Trust is developing a BA and MA programme feedback form to provide information on students' experience of their academic programme as a whole. A dedicated student area of the VLE enables students and student representatives to communicate. The Student President is invited to attend all meetings of the Board to contribute to strategic discussions.

14 Retention rates for the level 6 programme in Contextual Theology need to be viewed in the institutional context. In the example of the 2014-15 intake of 13 students, there was an overall retention rate of 62 per cent; of a 2015-16 cohort of 19 students, 11 were continuing, a retention rate of 58 per cent, and of 18 students recruited 2016-17, 61 per cent are currently continuing. However, as noted, many of the Trust's students are graduates and therefore do not qualify for student finance. They may, therefore, elect to study some discrete elements of the undergraduate programme without wishing to gain a full award. Others without an existing qualification are content to exit with a DipHE, which is the minimum qualification for entry to the ordained ministry. On the postgraduate programmes, which are usually studied part-time, retention rates are uniformly in excess of 80 per cent.

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

15 The successful outcome of the 2017 HER (AP) confirmed that the Trust's higher education meets the Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) which continues to inform policy reviews and updates. The Trust has run staff workshops dealing with the Quality Code since 2014 and it is now accessible to both staff and students on the Trust's VLE. The Quality Code is currently being used in the Trust's updating of programme specifications together with the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

5 Background to the monitoring visit

16 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.

17 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mrs Patrica Milner, Reviewer, and Professor Nicholas Goddard, Coordinator, on 8 May 2018.

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