



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Luther King House Educational Trust, May 2019

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) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [May 2018 monitoring visit](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 At the monitoring visit in May 2018 there were 101 students studying at levels 4-7 for awards in Contextual Theology (60 undergraduate and 41 postgraduate). There were an additional 16 students engaged on research degree programmes. The total of 117 students equates with the student numbers recorded in the May 2018 review. Around half of the students on the BA programme are part-time, while almost all MA students are studying on a part-time basis. All awards are validated by the University of Manchester (the University), but since February 2018, when the Trust was informed of the University's intention to withdraw from that arrangement, the Trust has been in discussions to secure new awarding body arrangements for its taught programmes and its research degree.

3 There have been no significant changes at the Trust since the May 2018 monitoring visit. An appointment has been made to the position of Learning Resources Assistant. The staff and students whom the team met, spoke positively about the impact of this appointment.

Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The provider is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review, and enhance its higher education provision. Since the monitoring visit of 2018, the Trust has maintained its good practice in relation to the provision of and commitment to a multi-dimensional environment and to arrangements for learning support for its diverse student body.

5 Progress continues to be made in introducing enhancements in two areas subject to recommendations in 2017, namely, decision making and governance, and staff appraisal. However, work on updating the Trust's Learning and Teaching Strategy continues to be held in abeyance pending the finalisation of new awarding body arrangements. Further, though the student representation system is implemented, the level of student involvement in the work of deliberative bodies remains lower than that expected.

6 The Trust is awaiting the final outcome of its negotiations with an alternative university for validation arrangements for its BA and MA programmes. The Trust has taken care to ensure that staff have been fully consulted and that students have been informed of developments. An exit plan has been drawn up and students' interests are protected through ensuring that current students, and those admitted in September 2019, will be able to complete their degrees with the University. The review team was informed that for doctoral

provision, the University is reviewing its decision to end its validation arrangements and that it may yet continue to validate the Trust's PhD degrees.

7 The Trust continues to make progress in enhancing arrangements for learning support and in building on existing good practice in the areas of English language support and study skills. Students confirmed their satisfaction with the learning environment generally, including the Trust's multi-denominational ethos. The quality of learning support and opportunities for improvement are considered at programme committees and at staff away days. Study skills activities are provided while English Language support sessions are available throughout the academic year.

8 The Trust adheres to the University's regulations for annual programme monitoring. Monitoring report forms are completed for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes together with a teaching and learning action plan, and visits are made by the Collaborative Academic Advisor (CAA) following, which a report is submitted to the Trust. The Trust's Programmes Committees are central to the ongoing monitoring of quality and standards, together with regular Principal's meetings, which provide further opportunities for monitoring both academic and operational matters. These bodies make use of both qualitative and quantitative data to inform deliberations and decision making. The deliberations at programme committee level include consideration of actions in response to matters raised by the external examiner and matters raised by students.

9 Students and their representatives have opportunities for involvement in internal quality processes, and guidelines are provided for students who serve as representatives on the Programme Committees. Through agenda standing items, student issues are given full consideration during committee proceedings. Students confirmed that feedback on issues they raise is prompt and informative. However, while support and guidelines are provided for student representatives in undertaking their role, there is no formal training event. Further, despite continued efforts by staff, the Trust and its students acknowledge that due primarily to the nature of the programmes being studied the profile of the mature student cohorts, and external ministry commitments, the level of student involvement is not as consistent as is desired.

10 Action continues to be taken to strengthen staff appraisal processes, reflecting the denominational requirements of each College. Staff confirmed that the use of feedback data and student performance data is now fully established in these processes and in related action planning.

11 Progress in developing and implementing a new Learning and Teaching Strategy, continues to be on hold pending the outcome of matters relating to new validation arrangements for the Trust's academic programmes.

12 Admissions policy and processes continue to be subject to annual review through Principals' meetings, and this includes consideration of admissions criteria and their fitness for purpose in relation to data on withdrawal and failure. Opportunities for further improvements to processes, such as the introduction of group interviews for the BA programme and an extra level of induction, are also being introduced, in part as a response to external comment. The largest proportion of the Trust's undergraduate learners are mature students and all new entrants are interviewed. Potential AP(E)L applications are considered during the admissions process and are discussed at interview. Applicants are then supported by the Registrar and relevant academic staff in providing the necessary evidence. The Trust's continuing commitment to widening access and participation is evident through further improvements being made in support for language skills and study skills. Policy and procedure, including for induction arrangements, are clearly set out in

Programme Handbooks. Students commented positively on their experience of admissions processes and procedures.

13 Guidance for students on assessment-related matters and academic standards is available on the virtual learning environment, and in programme handbooks, programme specifications, moderation and marking criteria, and student help and guidance information sheets. Students confirmed awareness of these sources and how to access them.

14 All marked work is subject to a moderation process, and assessed work is made available to external examiners who attend Examination Boards and submit written reports which are considered through the Trust's deliberative committees. Issues arising and responses to external examiners are also discussed in other contexts such as staff away days. External examiner comments regarding marking consistency and support for Associate Tutors in assessment and marking practices have been followed up and actioned through staff away days and Programme Committee meetings. A new practice for annually reviewing marking practices has also been introduced.

15 Feedback to students on marked assignments submitted on time is to be completed within a three-week period, and this is generally achieved. However, the Trust acknowledged, through its Programme Committee, that the marking period for assignments submitted late due to mitigating circumstances has been inconsistent and some undergraduate students have had to wait too long. Steps have been taken to rectify this. Feedback to students on marked assignments is to be completed within a four-week period. The Trust has acknowledged through its Programme Committee that this is sometimes inconsistent for undergraduate students and the Registry has taken steps to rectify this in future, with a fixed four-week period introduced. The Trust has also added an additional submission point into the assessment schedule in response to the bunching of assessments. There is a process for considering malpractice, initially through the Programmes Leaders and thereafter the Academic Malpractice Panel. Students and staff confirmed that comprehensive information is provided on academic malpractice through help sheets, poster campaigns, and other sources.

16 Retention rates for the last three years provided by the Trust have risen for its full-time undergraduate programme from 53 per cent (2015-16) to 75 per cent (2017-18). Part-time retention rates have decreased over the same period of time from 75 per cent (2015-16) to 56 per cent (2017-18), but both modes have small cohort numbers in 2018 of nine full-time and two part-time respectively. Postgraduate retention rates over the past three years are around 80 per cent. The pass rate for undergraduates completing in 2018 is 40 per cent based on four students completing. Students commonly exit with a lesser award for the undergraduate award as they will have achieved the level required for entry to ordained ministry. Other students have exited due to financial issues. Some students at master's level pursue their studies for CPD purposes, though some may be withdrawn by their sponsoring church denomination, while at PGR level academic failure or discontinuation is rare. The overall picture indicates that few students discontinue due to academic failure or course dissatisfaction and that monitoring and tracking arrangements are in place from the point of admissions onwards to ensure that students who wish to exit early are properly advised and supported.

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

17 The Trust demonstrates its use of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) through conforming to awarding body academic regulations, policies, and procedures. In its internal quality assurance processes the Trust makes ongoing use of the Quality Code and the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement for the improvement of its

teaching programmes. For example, in one of its development sessions the staff team undertook a mapping exercise to review module content at levels 4 and 5 and drew directly on relevant chapters of the Quality Code. Programme handbooks make explicit reference to *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), and programme specifications are used.

18 The externality of the Trust's higher education provision is supplemented in other ways. Having obtained the necessary metrics for applying for a TEF award, the analysis of external data used during the application process, such as NSS data, facilitated the identification of opportunities for the enhancement of provision. During the academic year 2018-19 the Trust successfully registered with the Office for Students on the register of English higher education providers. Further, use is made of Competition and Markets Authority guidance on good practice in marketing in higher education to ensure that information provided on the Trust's website and in any published information is clear and transparent.

Background to the monitoring visit

19 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.

20 The monitoring visit was carried out by Professor Jethro Newton, Reviewer, and Ms Siobhain O'Mahony, QAA Officer, on 7 May 2019.

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