



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of The Markfield Institute of Higher Education, April 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 Markfield Institute of Higher Education (the Institute) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [April 2018 monitoring visit](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 In April 2019, there were 98 students at the Institute compared with 104 students in April 2018. 59 students were on the BA Islamic Studies programme and 33 were on five master's programmes leading to Newman University awards. Six postgraduate research students have been examined for a PhD awarded by the University of Gloucestershire, bringing the validating arrangement with that University to an end.

3 Seven new or revised programmes are planned to start in September 2019, subject to successful (re-)validation by Newman University. The MEd Islamic Education and MA Muslim Chaplaincy are to be discontinued. Since 1 January 2019, the Institute has had a cooperation agreement with the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KUL). Under this agreement, KUL registers research students and provides the main research supervisor with additional research supervision provided by staff from the Institute. There are currently three full-time and seven part-time academic staff, and two full-time and four part-time administrative staff.

4 The Institute has successfully applied for registration with the Office for Students and has developed, or revised, student-facing documents and policies as part of this process. It has also established a Student Council to enhance student engagement.

Findings from the monitoring visit

5 The Institute has made acceptable progress in continuing to monitor, evaluate and enhance its higher education provision. The Student Council is working well; the Institute continues to maintain an annually updated quality enhancement action plan which is monitored by the Management Board, although the Board does not consider the action plan at every meeting, nor does it consider all the individual actions for progress monitoring purposes. The admissions process is rigorous and fair, and is reviewed annually. Assessment is implemented in line with Newman University's requirements and demonstrates integrity in assessment setting; marking; and in the provision of feedback. Academic good practice is promoted and academic malpractice is dealt with appropriately. Student retention and achievement rates indicate that the number of students who discontinue their studies is low and students generally achieve the qualifications they are studying for.

6 Students have engaged enthusiastically with the newly-established Student Council which held its first meeting in March 2019 and includes student representatives and the Head of Quality as members. The Institute continues to use and update its management and

committee organograms which outline the arrangements for oversight of its higher education provision. The Management Board meets regularly and Senior Management Team meetings, which are more operationally-focused, have been formalised with minutes of meetings recorded. The Institutional Governance and Quality Assurance Handbook provides useful and comprehensive information on committees; quality assurance policies and procedures; student support and engagement; staff development policy; and procedures for evaluating the Institute's facilities.

7 Actions to enhance student learning opportunities are identified and monitored through the annually updated quality enhancement action plan and are informed by: student feedback; programme reviews and annual enhancement reports; QAA review reports; and validating university feedback. The Institute has now embedded Academic Board, which meets annually, into its quality assurance and enhancement processes. Academic Board maintains oversight of all academic matters related to the Institute's higher education provision and helps to inform the strategic approach to enhancing student learning opportunities. The Institute is considering holding three Academic Board meetings a year to reflect the cycle of academic activities.

8 Actions monitored for progress in the quality enhancement action plan for 2018-19 include: the establishment of the Student Council; addressing areas for development identified in the 2017-18 National Student Survey outcomes; preparation of policies and statements associated with the Institute's application for registration with the Office for Students; submission to this year's Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework; reviewing and submitting for (re-)validation of all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes; enhancing student support for graduate employment; and reviewing and updating the extenuating circumstances policy. Management Board minutes demonstrate that some key areas identified in the action plan are considered and that progress is discussed with annual meetings of Academic Board providing oversight of some areas of the action plan. The April 2018 monitoring report noted that the monitoring of actions included in the action plan 'is not always evident or formally captured'. Recent Management Board meeting minutes did not always demonstrate that the Board is rigorously reviewing progress on actions at each meeting, suggesting that there is further progress to be made with regard to action plan monitoring and evaluation.

9 Newman University approves programme entry requirements and the Institute's Admissions Committee is responsible for deciding whether to offer an applicant a place. The Admissions Committee documents decisions made and ensures that admissions criteria are met. The Admissions Team is responsible for processing applications and the formal admission offer. The admissions process is thorough, fair and systematic and students confirmed that it worked well with good communication at each stage of the process. The Institute aims to promote inclusivity and widening participation, and the majority of students are over 21. The Outreach Officer coordinates recruitment which includes open days organised by students, and the use of social media. The Institute does not currently use agents and there has been no overseas student recruitment for the last three years.

10 The Institute requires students to have a minimum of General Certificate of Secondary Education or equivalent in English language. International students are required to demonstrate at least Level B2 in English in line with UK Visa and Immigration requirements. Prospective international students for master's-level programmes need an average score of 6.5 in the International English Language Testing System. The Institute requires students to submit original copies of certificates for checking before submission to the Admissions Committee. Overseas students' qualifications are checked for equivalence through the National Information Centre for the United Kingdom (NARIC).

11 To assess an applicant's genuine intention to study, at interview the Institute looks for clear progression from previous study and commitment to study, together with the applicant's personal statement and references. The Institute reviewed its admissions policy and associated procedures following the introduction of student contracts and the Senior Management Committee considered and approved changes to the admissions policy.

12 Newman University is responsible for oversight of the assessment process and for ensuring that assessment is conducted according to the Assessment Handbook, which includes guidelines and templates related to the design, marking and approval process. The Institute conducts the assessment process with rigour and integrity and has processes in place to help ensure that students' work is their own and that they are not engaged in academic malpractice. Assessments are designed to ensure that learning outcomes for each module are met. There are two stages to assessment approval at the Institute - the module leader produces an initial draft which is checked by a second academic at the Institute before Internal Assessment Panel approval. Assessments are then sent to the external examiner and any comments are addressed before assessments are issued to students. The Assessment Handbook provides detailed information on the Institute's assessment principles together with guidelines on marking, double-marking and internal moderation. All dissertations are second-marked before being sent to the external examiner. Once these internal assessment processes have been conducted the external examiner, who is appointed by Newman University, is sent samples of marked assessments, with feedback, for moderation.

13 To ensure that students' work is genuine and to guard against academic malpractice, all written assignments are put through a plagiarism software detection system. The Institute informs students about good academic practice and academic malpractice at induction day, through the student handbook, and at regular semester briefings on plagiarism. Teaching staff also discuss these matters in their teaching sessions when briefing students on assessment requirements for modules. The plagiarism policy is included in the Student Handbook. The Institute reports low levels of academic misconduct and where it does occur, appropriate penalties are applied and cases are reported to Academic Board and discussed in annual programme reviews.

14 Students receive assignment briefs and submission deadlines early in a semester. Assessed work is returned with feedback within three weeks of students submitting their work and students report satisfaction with the feedback provided. Students can lodge an academic appeal according to the procedure provided in the Student Handbook. Where a student appeals against a mark awarded for an assessment, the Institute asks a lecturer who has not been involved in the particular module assessment to review all marking for the module. The Institute aims to address any academic appeals before formal assessment board meetings take place.

15 The retention rate for the 2017-18 BA Islamic Studies (22 students) and the MA Islam and Sustainable Development (seven students) is 100%. Of the remaining 30 postgraduate students, six discontinued their studies, including four on the MEd in Islamic Education which is no longer to be offered. Students discontinue their studies for personal, rather than academic, reasons. Most students are mature, may have been out of study for some years, or have other responsibilities which might impact on their study. The Institute provides academic writing skills sessions to students to provide support and to enable student achievement. In 2017-18: 17 students graduated from the BA Islamic Studies programme; 10 graduated from the MA Islamic Banking, Finance and Management programme; and four graduated from the MA Islam and Sustainable Development Programme.

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

16 As the validating body, Newman University has ultimate responsibility for the academic standards of programmes delivered by the Institute leading to the University's awards. The University takes account of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) and, since the Institute implements the University's procedures, it also works with relevant external reference points to inform higher education development. In addition, the Institute has reviewed policies and procedures in preparation for registration with the Office for Students. The *Institutional Governance and Quality Assurance Handbook* refers to the Quality Code and other external reference points used by the Institute to demonstrate its commitment to providing an education that is consistent with the Quality Code.

17 The Institute has been involved in reviewing and developing four undergraduate pathways and three postgraduate programmes to run from September 2019, subject to final approval by the University. Development of this provision has been informed by consultation with present and past students, external examiners and potential employers. The Institute has used Newman University's comprehensive programme specification template and has referred to external reference points, including relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Statements and Part A of the Quality Code to inform the design of the provision.

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 Professor Donald Pennington, Reviewer, and Dr Irene Ainsworth, QAA Officer, on 9 April 2019.

QAA2381 - R10425 - May 19

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