



Middlebury–CMRS Oxford Humanities Program

Recognition Scheme for Educational
Oversight Review by the Quality Assurance
Agency for Higher Education

November 2018

About this report

This is a report of a review under the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Middlebury-CMRS Oxford Humanities Program. The review took place on 13 November 2018 and was conducted by a panel, as follows:

- Emeritus Professor Diane Meehan
- Dr Elizabeth Briggs.

The main purpose of the review was to:

- make judgements about the provider's delegated responsibilities for the management of quality and improvement of learning opportunities
- draw a conclusion about whether the provider's public information is reliable
- produce a commentary on how effectively the provider discharges its responsibilities for academic standards
- report on any features of good practice
- make recommendations for action.

A summary of the key findings can be found in the section starting on page 3. The context in which these findings should be interpreted is explained on page 3. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.¹ More information about this the review method can be found in the [published handbook](#).²

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us

² www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/guidance/rseo-handbook-17.pdf

Key findings

The QAA panel considered evidence relating to the educational provision at Middlebury-CMRS Oxford Humanities Program (the Program), both information supplied in advance and evidence gathered during the review visit itself. The review has resulted in the key findings stated in this section.

Judgements

The QAA panel formed the following judgement about Middlebury-CMRS Oxford Humanities Program.

- **Confidence can be placed** on the Program's management of its responsibilities for the quality of learning opportunities.

The QAA review panel also concluded that the Program **satisfactorily** manages its responsibilities for academic standards in accordance with the requirements of its awarding partners.

Conclusion about public information

The QAA panel concluded that:

- **reliance can** be placed on the information that the Program produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers.

Good practice

The QAA panel identified the following **features of good practice** at Middlebury-CMRS Oxford Humanities Program.

- the high quality and diverse range of academic and pastoral support which enables students to realise their potential
- the comprehensive and detailed information provided during the recruitment and admissions process which helps students to make well informed and appropriate decisions.

Recommendations

The QAA panel makes the following **desirable recommendations** to Middlebury-CMRS Oxford Humanities Program.

- consider extending the remit of the tutor meetings to enable the formal sharing of good practice
- formally monitor the consistency of the delivery of tutorial courses.

Context

The Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies was founded as a study abroad provider in 1975 before in 2014 becoming part of the Middlebury College UK Trust, a non-profit making registered charitable company. Based in Oxford, Middlebury-CMRS Oxford Humanities Program (the Program) offers undergraduate Humanities courses leading to credits for overseas students attending for one or two 14-week semesters. There are four courses, a research course, a seminar and two tutorials; a wide range of options are available to students. The Centre is associated with Keble College, University of Oxford, where students are associate members of the Junior Common Room (JCR).

A newly appointed Principal has been in post since July 2018, replacing a transitional appointee who was seconded from Middlebury College. The new Principal is also an Associate Professor at Middlebury College. The Program's other full-time staff includes a Senior Tutor, Assistant Senior Tutor, and Administrator, with its part-time staff comprising the Librarian, two Junior Deans and some housekeeping staff. The Assistant Senior Tutor is employed on a three-year fixed term contract for early career researchers. The majority of teaching is undertaken by independent tutors.

Middlebury College is the awarding body for study abroad credits that are recognised by partner institutions and is responsible for maintaining the quality of the provision. Most students are recruited from higher education institutions in the USA that are accredited by the US Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education. The majority of students attend for one semester with the remainder studying for two semesters. Currently, there are 26 first semester students, with nine intending to complete a second semester. While the majority of students originate from Middlebury College, the Program works regularly with around 20 institutions, predominantly from North America, together with one Japanese University. Students on the current 2018 autumn semester programme are drawn from 11 institutions. The relationships with partner institutions of Middlebury College are approved for individual students rather than governed by formal written contracts. While no formal agreements are in place with these institutions, they formally approve the Program as a study abroad provider. This involves visiting the Program at least once as part of the approval process. All home institutions have awards recognised by the UK National Recognition Information Centre (UK NARIC).

Detailed findings about Middlebury-CMRS Oxford Humanities Program

1 Academic standards

How effectively does the Program fulfil its responsibilities for the management of academic standards?

1.1 The Program has an effective and well established academic governance structure. The Academic Board, originally established in 2012, has overall responsibility for the management of academic standards. The Board maintains strategic oversight of all aspects of the Program's academic programmes, including admissions processes, academic content and standards, and marking criteria. The Academic Board's membership includes academics from both UK and US institutions. The Principal and Senior Tutor also attend meetings in an advisory capacity. The Academic Board's annual formal meeting is usefully supplemented by regular informal meetings and email communication between the Program's academic staff and members of the Board. The panel confirms that the Academic Board operates in accordance with its stated remit, provides a source of expert external advice and plays a key role in the Program's management of academic standards.

1.2 The Academic Committee, comprising the Principal and Senior and Assistant Tutors, reports to the Academic Board and has responsibility for making academic decisions on applications, management of assessment processes and final grades, appeals and complaints, together with strategic oversight of enhancement and quality of the provision. The Academic Committee meets on a regular basis and its proactive and robust approach ensures that the programme operates effectively and that standards are maintained.

1.3 The Quality Assurance Policy Document (QAPD), reviewed annually, provides a definitive guide to the Program's formal policies and procedures and usefully supports its management of standards. The QAPD has previously been mapped against the requirements of the relevant sections of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). At the time of the review visit, the Program was awaiting publication of the guidance relating to the revised Quality Code before initiating any further updates. Key policies and procedures, such as the admissions statement, are also available on the Program's website.

1.4 The Program is responsible for the design and development of the programme including new course proposals and course reviews. Proposals for new courses, or revisions to existing ones, may be made by members of the Academic Board, Academic Committee or individual tutors and seminar leaders; these are initially submitted to the Academic Committee, which in turn makes recommendations to the Academic Board. Tutors the panel met were aware of the process and, in one case, had implemented it. The Program undertakes a rolling cycle of course reviews, predominantly on a subject basis, while seminars are reviewed annually.

1.5 Two faculty members from the relevant Middlebury Faculty Advisory Board make annual visits to the Program. The resulting site visit report is considered by Academic Board and action is taken as appropriate to any issues raised, the most recent report raising issues in relation to student experience rather than academic standards or programme content. The panel concludes that these visits enable the Program to draw on Middlebury's extensive expertise in managing the academic standards of study abroad provision and provide additional academic oversight.

1.6 Student applications are initially coordinated by Middlebury College's International Office. Decisions on applications are made by the Academic Committee in accordance with the Program's Admissions Policy and admission criteria set by the Academic Board. The minimum grade point average (GPA) requirement for applicants is normally 3.5. Students are also requested to liaise with their home institution to ensure they comply with its requirements. Unsuccessful applicants receive a personal letter from the Principal and those applicants wishing to complain about any aspect of the admissions process are also referred to the Principal. Successful applicants are contacted by the Middlebury Study Abroad office which refers them to the relevant sections of the Program's website; this provides comprehensive information on courses, frequently asked questions and practical information regarding travel and living in the UK. Students the panel met spoke very positively about the recruitment and application process, noting in particular the wide range of helpful information made available to them and the personal contact with, and advice given by, the Senior Tutor in relation to their choice of courses. The panel considers that the comprehensive and detailed information provided during the recruitment and admissions process, which helps students to make well informed and appropriate decisions is **good practice**.

1.7 Assessment is undertaken by individual tutors using grading criteria which accord with North American practice. Students the panel met confirmed that they are made aware of assessment criteria in a number of ways including during orientation and throughout the semester. They were also aware of the requirements of good academic practice. Tutors also confirmed that they are provided with marking criteria and that these are discussed with them on appointment in a meeting with the Senior Tutor. Tutors provide students with written feedback on progress, supplemented by oral feedback and discussion in tutorials, and submit final grades at the end of the semester; students reported some variability in the amount and quality of feedback received from individual tutors. Processes are in place to allow students to appeal grades. Assessment outcomes are reviewed at the end of the semester. Credits and transcripts are awarded by Middlebury College and credits are automatically recognised by the participating institutions. The panel found the Program's approach to assessment to be clearly articulated and rigorous.

How effectively are external reference points used in the management of academic standards?

1.8 The Program uses both UK and US external reference points in the management of academic standards. Its primary external reference points in relation to the USA are those of the participating institutions who approve the Program as a study abroad provider. The annual Middlebury Faculty Advisory Board visit and resulting report provides the Program with a useful, additional external perspective (see paragraph 1.5).

1.9 The Program is also accredited by the British Accreditation Council (BAC). The most recent accreditation took place in 2017 leading to re-accreditation for the full four year period. The report arising from the 2017 BAC visit was considered by Academic Board and the required actions and recommendations have been appropriately addressed.

1.10 The Program had previously mapped its activities, where appropriate, to the Quality Code and this exercise formed the basis of the development of the QAPD (see paragraph 1.3). The QAPD is discussed and reviewed at the annual Academic Board meeting and updated as required.

1.11 As noted in paragraph 1.1, membership of the Academic Board includes both UK and US academics and provides a useful source of external expertise.

How effectively does the Program use external scrutiny of assessment processes to assure academic standards (where applicable)?

1.12 The external examiner system does not apply to the Program. The latter has policies on, and operates, marking and double-blind marking of seminar and research essays that assure the integrity of assessment. The Senior Tutor receives all grades and tutors' comments, which provide additional oversight of the security of assessment marking; these are also considered through the Academic Committee. The Academic Board ensures that external expectations for maintenance and assurance of academic standards of assessment processes continue to be met, with outcomes reviewed annually.

The panel has concluded that the Program **satisfactorily** manages its responsibilities for academic standards in accordance with the requirements of its awarding partners.

2 Quality of learning opportunities

How effectively does the Program fulfil its responsibilities for managing the quality of learning opportunities?

2.1 The Program exercises a considerable duty of care for its students in managing the quality of learning opportunities, with policies and procedures articulated in the QAPD and in the Student Handbook. The Academic Committee is responsible for overseeing the quality of learning opportunities and for reporting student feedback and other course-related matters to the Academic Board (see also paragraphs 1.1-1.2).

2.2 Student welfare is overseen by Program staff. Students can undertake an online training programme before arrival and receive a subsequent induction and comprehensive orientation programme on arrival. Issues relating to personal and group security, health, and mental health are included in the Student Handbook and discussed in orientation talks. The Program follows the disabilities policy of the Middlebury College International Programme Department.

2.3 Associate student membership of Keble College affords wider university learning opportunities, cultural activities and sporting facilities. The Program has a Junior Common Room (JCR) organised by the students and run by an elected committee, which has funding for events and activities. The JCR is also able to represent the student voice and raise concerns formally with staff, although the current cohort of students has not felt the need to make formal representations in this manner. Since the Program is small, staff and student interactions are frequent and tend to be less formal so that issues may be discussed and responded to quickly and on an individual basis.

How effectively are external reference points used in monitoring and evaluation processes?

2.4 The Program responds primarily to the external reference points determined by the students' home institutions (see paragraph 1.8). In addition, the Program has regularly updated its QAPD as a reference point for quality management including the mapping of its policies and procedures against the Quality Code (see paragraphs 1.3 and 1.10).

How effectively does the Program assure itself that the quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and enhanced?

2.5 The Academic Board, working closely with the US institutions and Middlebury College, sets the strategy for learning and teaching, which is implemented by the Academic Committee. Program academic staff are members of Academic Committee and teach on the programme, together with contract tutors and seminar leaders who are overseen by the Senior Tutor. Academic staff at the Program are qualified to doctoral level and familiar with teaching practice in US institutions.

2.6 Academic staff and tutors are research active which enhances their teaching with up-to-date subject knowledge. At the end of each semester, students assess their courses using detailed questionnaires, which are evaluated by staff. There is a rolling cycle of course reviews, with seminars reviewed annually and discussed by the Academic Board.

2.7 Most of the appointed contract tutors are affiliated to the University of Oxford. Tutors are invited to meetings twice a semester to review and discuss their contributions to course delivery. While the minutes of these meetings demonstrate consideration of course delivery, the curriculum, and pastoral matters, the panel found no formal evidence of sharing good practice in teaching. The panel, therefore, considers that it would be **desirable** for the Program to consider extending the remit of the tutors' meetings to enable the sharing of good practice.

2.8 The first semester commences with a research course for four weeks. Students may select a research topic from a pre-determined broad subject area which they agree with their tutor. Students the panel met confirmed that relevant field trips are provided and commented positively on their value in enriching the curriculum and broadening cultural learning experiences.

2.9 Teaching is carried out in one-to-one tutorials, small group seminars and some lectures. Students adjust quickly to the system of one-to-one tutorials, which are based on review and discussion of two essays marked weekly by tutors. Students the panel met commented on the positive benefits to their studies of the individual academic support, which they receive from staff and tutors. Although regular, timely and constructive feedback on essay assignments enables the students to review their own progress and supports their individual development of skills and knowledge, students reported some variability in the amount and quality of feedback received from individual tutors. While students observed that the level of support from tutors in tutorials generally exceeds their expectations, not all tutors provide a consistent approach to tutorials. Following the recommendation in the BAC's report, the Program has undertaken teaching observations in seminars and lectures, but not in the tutorial setting. The panel considers it **desirable** for the Program to formally monitor the consistency of the delivery of tutorial courses.

How effectively does the Program assure itself that students are appropriately supported?

2.10 Student support commences pre-arrival during the application and admissions process. Students also benefit from an extensive orientation programme and ongoing support from members of staff, led by the Senior Tutor. Students the panel met expressed satisfaction with their experiences of the application and admissions support provided by Program staff through regular pre-arrival contact (see also paragraph 1.6). During the semester, formal and informal communications between the Senior Tutor and seminar leaders and tutors ensure that students are well supported. Tutors meet at the beginning and end of each term to review student performance and monitor personal or academic

concerns. Students recognise that they are fortunate to live and study in an environment that is conducive to supportive staff and student relations.

2.11 Effective communication between the staff and tutors ensures that student welfare concerns are addressed appropriately, with additional support provided by an external professional mental health counsellor. Junior Deans and all staff employed by the Program are trained in First Aid and mental health, and related personal safety matters. Ongoing student welfare issues are considered at the weekly meeting involving Junior Deans and operational staff. The panel considers that the high quality and range of academic and pastoral support, which enables students to realise their potential is **good practice**.

How effective are the Program's arrangements for staff development in relation to maintaining and/or enhancing the quality of learning opportunities?

2.12 The Program funds professional development opportunities and research activities for full and part-time staff. Currently the Assistant Senior Tutor is conducting research abroad. She has also been funded to apply for membership of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). Professional development of tutors is the responsibility of their own institutions.

How effectively does the Program ensure that students have access to learning resources that are sufficient to enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes of their programmes?

2.13 Students have their own personal laptop computers and access to additional desktop computers on site. Students can access free printing facilities and Wi-Fi access at the Program. The Program employs a librarian for its own library where students have borrowing rights to about 18,000 volumes. The Principal and the Senior Tutor oversee the running of the library, and both students and tutors may suggest additional purchases of books.

2.14 Students are also able to use the Keble College Library as well as having reading rights to the Bodleian Library network. Students commented that they were unclear about whether they could borrow books from Keble College Library. Staff the panel met confirmed that students can borrow the books but the system is complicated. The Librarian and academic staff provide further support on accessing resources, and students continue to use online resources from their home institutions and Middlebury College. Overall, access and availability of learning resources continues to be excellent.

The panel has **confidence** that the Program is fulfilling its responsibilities for managing and enhancing the quality of the learning opportunities it provides for students.

3 Public information

How effective are the Program's arrangements for assuring the accuracy and completeness of information it has responsibility for publishing?

3.1 The Program is committed to ensuring that its recruitment materials are clear, accessible, fair and accurate. The Principal has overall responsibility for the accuracy and completeness of information for which the Program has responsibility.

3.2 The Program's primary means of disseminating information to applicants, current students, North American institutions, and other interested parties is its website. Printed brochures are also distributed to Study Abroad offices at various US institutions. All information on the website and in the brochures is approved by the Principal and/or Senior Tutor who also mainly write the text; text may also be produced by staff at Middlebury College, or by the Program's administrator. The Bursar of Keble College is provided with all Program publications, which mention the College before they are published so that a check can be made that the relationship between the College and the Program is not misrepresented. Program staff check the websites of the institutions with which they have a relationship to ensure any information about the Program is correct; if errors are detected, corrections are requested.

3.3 A comprehensive student handbook is provided for students online, which covers a range of topics from pre-departure to arrival, information on living in the UK, academic and administrative matters, health and safety, banking, and contacting home while in the UK. The handbook is updated annually. Students the panel met confirmed that they had access to the handbook and make use of it as appropriate to their needs.

The panel concludes that **reliance can be placed** on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the Program is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers.

4 Action plan³

Middlebury-CMRS Oxford Humanities Program action plan relating to the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight in November 2018						
Good practice	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date(s)	Action by	Reported to	Evaluation (process or evidence)
The review panel identified the following areas of good practice that are worthy of wider dissemination within the [provider]:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the comprehensive and detailed information provided during the recruitment and admissions process which helps students to make well informed and appropriate decisions. 	To sustain and build on this area of good practice.	1) We will continue to provide comprehensive and detailed information during recruitment and admissions, and to update this information each semester as required. 2) As per the 2018 Academic Board minutes, a statement on 'Why Humanities Program?' will be drafted for the 2019 Academic Board, to be shared among potential students and American	1) Each semester, as is current practice. 2) Summer 2019 Academic Board, for publication in summer/autumn 2019.	Academic Committee, Academic Board	Academic Board	Academic Board minutes; Humanities document

³ The Middlebury-CMRS Oxford Humanities Program has been required to develop this action plan to follow up on good practice and address any recommendations arising from the review. QAA monitors progress against the action plan.

		institutions, to give a clearer sense of the Humanities focus of our program.				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the high quality and range of academic and pastoral support which enables students to realise their potential. 	To sustain and build on this area of good practice.	<p>1) We will continue to provide a high quality and wide range academic and pastoral support.</p> <p>2) Pastoral support is already a standing item on Academic Committee agendas, but not on Academic Board agendas. This should go on the agenda, and be the subject of a separate report by the Academic Committee to the Academic Board. This will enable more systematic consideration of this topic at a strategic level, to feed back into regular practice.</p>	<p>1) Each semester, as is current practice.</p> <p>2) Summer 2019 Academic Board.</p>	Academic Committee, Academic Board	Academic Board	Academic Board minutes; Humanities document.
Desirable	Intended outcomes	Actions to be taken to achieve intended outcomes	Target date/s	Action by	Reported to	Evaluation (process or evidence)
The panel considers that it would be desirable for the provider to:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> consider extending the 	To enable tutors to share good practice	'Sharing of good practice' to be added to agenda for	Spring Semester 2019 for Tutors'	Principal (chairing TM)	Academic Board	Minutes of Tutors' Meeting

<p>remit of the tutors' meetings to enable the sharing of good practice.</p>	<p>more effectively.</p>	<p>tutors' meetings. Reflections to be discussed at next Academic Board</p>	<p>Meeting; summer 2019 meeting for Academic Board</p>	<p>meeting), Senior Tutor (agenda and minutes for TM and AB)</p>		<p>and Academic Board.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> formally monitor the consistency of the delivery of tutorial courses 	<p>To clarify, consistency is not in itself a desirable outcome for tutorial courses. The diversity of subject matter, and the open-ended possibilities inherent in the format of individual one-to-one tutorials, makes consistency neither desirable nor achievable. But we do aim to provide consistently excellent tutorial teaching, however diverse this is in practice. Tutorial teaching is currently monitored by means of (1) staff contact with tutors and students during term (any issues being raised at relevant meetings of the Academic Committee), and (2) student evaluations of individual tutorials at the end of each</p>	<p>Academic Committee to draft a CTC. This to be discussed by the Academic Board, and approval/amendment/redrafting to follow as required,</p>	<p>Summer 2019 meeting of Academic Board, prior to including the CTC as part of tutorial monitoring from the autumn 2019 semester onwards.</p>	<p>Academic Committee, Academic Board</p>	<p>Academic Board</p>	<p>CTC document; Academic Board minutes</p>

	<p>semester, which are reviewed by the Academic Committee. This monitoring could be made more formal by measuring it against a formal document entitled 'Criteria for Tutorial Courses' (CTC), to be shared with both tutors and students, to provide a common baseline of expectations.</p>					
--	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--	--	--	--	--

Glossary

This glossary explains terms used in this report. You can find a fuller glossary at: www.qaa.ac.uk/glossary. More details and formal definitions of key terms can be found in the [handbook](#)⁴ for this review method.

Academic quality A comprehensive term referring to how, and how well, higher education providers manage teaching and learning opportunities to help students progress and succeed.

Academic standards The standards set and maintained by degree-awarding bodies for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Credit(s) A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as 'numbers of credits' at a specific level.

Enhancement The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in QAA's review processes.

Good practice A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's review processes.

Learning opportunities The provision made for students' learning, including planned study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, and resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios).

Learning outcome What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

Programme (of study) An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

Public information Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Widening participation Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

QAA2331 - R10364 - Feb19

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2019
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 5570050

Email enquiries@qaa.ac.uk

Web www.qaa.ac.uk

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

⁴ www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/guidance/rseo-handbook-17.pdf.