



Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Middlebury College-CMRS Oxford Humanities Program, June 2021

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 Middlebury College-Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (CMRS) Oxford Humanities Program (the Program) is making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [previous desk-based analysis](#) in January 2020.

The impact of COVID-19

2 As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the review was conducted online and included meetings with senior management teams, teaching staff and students. The scope of the evidence considered, and the nature of the judgements and operational milestones have remained the same but with some adjustments due to the online format. A risk assessment was carried out prior to the review to identify and mitigate any potential risks.

Changes since the last QAA monitoring report

3 Since the last annual monitoring report, the Program has not recruited any students owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. Students studying on the Program at the beginning of 2020 returned home at the end of the spring semester and completed their studies remotely. The review team met online with students from the 2020 cohort.

4 The Program is planning to welcome a new cohort of students in September 2021 and, at the time of the monitoring visit, had received 32 firm acceptances from students studying at Middlebury College and other sending institutions in the USA. Five of these students have enrolled for a full year in Oxford.

5 The Program currently employs six full-time members of staff - one of whom is on maternity leave, one is on full furlough and three are currently on flexible furlough arrangements. In July 2021, all staff currently on furlough will return to work on a flexible basis. The Assistant Senior Tutor has been promoted to Acting Senior Tutor and this contract has been extended until August 2022. Additionally, a new part-time Librarian and a second Junior Dean have been recruited.

6 Negotiations for the renewal of the lease of the current accommodation are ongoing, and approval has been obtained for additional premises to enable students to have self-contained accommodation while studying in Oxford as a response to the pandemic.

Findings from the monitoring visit

7 The review team concludes that the Program has made commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision. The actions from the 2018 Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight review have been implemented fully and have led to improvements in the provider's management of its

higher education. The academic standards of the provision and the quality of the learning opportunities have been maintained.

8 The program has used the period, when students were unable to attend in person owing to the pandemic, effectively to monitor and enhance the quality of the student learning experience in preparation for students arriving in September 2021. Pre-departure information has been updated and improved (paragraph 9). The College action plan has been reviewed and recommendations made following the Middlebury College Faculty Academic Board (FAB) visit in February 2020 and the British Accreditation Council (BAC) Report, have been addressed (paragraphs 9-13).

9 In response to recommendations from the BAC report of 2020 and the FAB visit in February 2020, the role of the Junior Deans has been reviewed and a second Junior Dean has been recruited. The Program website has been updated and the role of tutorials has been clarified. The effective orientation process encourages students to integrate with students at Keble College, Oxford and the Program is reviewing its processes for communicating to students actions taken in response to their feedback.

10 Information about the nature of the programme is now available on the website. This helpfully addresses students' questions about the content and rigour of the programme, assessment grading, the nature of tutorials and seminars, and gives details of the courses available. A useful set of frequently asked questions has been developed by Middlebury and CMRS.

11 Student enquiries relating to the programme are initially responded to by staff at Middlebury College (the School of Record) and further by staff supporting the Program in Oxford, who are able to respond to more detailed enquiries. Students at a meeting with the review team confirmed that the information available prior to their joining the Program was detailed and helpful and included supportive discussions with previous students.

12 Pastoral support is now a standing agenda item for the Academic Board. Students who had experienced learning in a 'virtual' environment owing to the pandemic, confirmed that they were fully supported in the transition to online learning. They commended the extensive support they received in arrangements (including finding flights) to return home at the beginning of the pandemic. Senior staff on the Program confirmed that they are constantly reviewing the situation related to the pandemic in line with government guidelines, and plan to provide additional support to students who intend to arrive in Oxford in September 2021.

13 The Criteria for Tutorial Courses (CTC) has been developed to provide a generic set of guidelines to ensure consistency between tutorial sessions and inform students about the nature of the tutorial system. This document has been approved by the Academic Board and will be implemented and evaluated when students return in autumn 2021.

14 The Employee Handbook has been thoroughly updated and provides a sound basis for a contract of employment with Middlebury College and, along with the Tutor Handbook, clearly sets out the expectations and role of tutors delivering the courses. Meetings with academic tutors have been established on a semester basis, and these provide an opportunity to share good practice. During the pandemic, virtual staff meetings have generally been held every week.

15 The quality of the student experience is effectively monitored through a detailed programme evaluation form. Middlebury College took the decision not to obtain formal feedback from students who were studying at the start of the pandemic. However, staff on the Program confirmed that they were in close contact with their students and that the nature

of the programme enabled them to respond effectively to issues raised. Former students spoke positively of the quality of the educational experience despite the considerable difficulties emerging during the pandemic and that the Program staff had been very supportive and responsive to any feedback they had made. They appreciated the demands provided by the Program and the academic challenge of the workload expected of them. Students are enthusiastic about the opportunities to integrate with students at Keble College and use the resources of the University, including the Bodleian Library.

16 Actions taken in response to reviews by the internal and external reviews by FAB, BAC and QAA are evaluated by the Academic Board which meets annually. The next meeting of the Academic Board is scheduled for June 2021.

17 As indicated in paragraph 3, the Program has not recruited any students since January 2020. Student achievement is measured in terms of their GPA (Grade Point Average) at the time of recruitment to the Program compared with their GPA at the end of their studies.

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

18 The Program effectively uses its close relationship with the University of Oxford and the academic tutors it employs as the main external reference point for subject expertise, quality of the learning experience and academic standards. Program staff work closely with academic tutors and the Faculties of the University to ensure that academic standards are met.

19 The School of Record (Middlebury College) and the other sending institutions act as external reference points for the recognition of academic credit achieved on the Program as equivalent to learning at their home institutions. The Middlebury College Faculty Advisory Board visits the Program in Oxford regularly to monitor standards and quality.

20 The Program is accredited by BAC, which monitors the standards and quality of the learning experience on an annual basis. The College also has UKVI Sponsorship which was renewed in April 2021.

21 The Program has continued to map its Quality Assurance Policy Document against the Expectations, practice, and advice and guidance of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

Background to the monitoring visit

22 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.

23 The monitoring visit was carried out (virtually) by Brenda Eade, Reviewer and Simon Ives, QAA Officer on Monday 28 and Tuesday 29 June 2021.

QAA2625 - R13093 - Aug 21

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