



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Nazarene Theological College, March 2017

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 Nazarene Theological College (the College) has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the March 2016 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA review

2 The College offers full and part-time undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in theology and youth work-related areas. These are validated by the University of Manchester and there are currently 195 enrolled students (87 students on undergraduate programmes and 108 on postgraduate programmes), compared with 167 enrolled in 2015-16 (73 on undergraduate programmes and 94 on postgraduate programmes). 12.55 FTE academic staff and 8.2 FTE administrative staff are employed. Links have been developed in Scotland for a youth and community pathway for the BA (Hons) Theology: Youth Work and Ministry programme. The College is currently recruiting a Director of Marketing who will report to the College's Senior Leadership Team, and has recently appointed an Innovation and Learning Resource Coordinator to support flexible learning.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The College is making acceptable progress in implementing the action plan arising from the HER (AP) in March 2016. The action and affirmation have been addressed and reasonable progress is being made on the aspects yet to be completed. The College continues to consolidate areas of good practice relating to staff development, student support, and research activity (paragraphs 4, 5, and 6). The College has developed its response to the recommendation on student data (paragraph 7) and the affirmation relating to placement learning (paragraph 8). Comprehensive admissions processes are in place to identify the suitability of students to study at the College (paragraph 9), and the College is examining strategies for widening participation further (paragraph 10). Structures and processes are in place for programme monitoring and review (paragraph 11 and 12) and enhancements arising from this activity have been identified (paragraph 13). The College operates with small cohort sizes; this impacts on retention and achievement and steps are being taken to utilise student data more effectively (paragraph 14).

4 The College has built on the areas of good practice identified in the HER (AP) visit in March 2016. The approach to staff development has been expanded, and staff were positive about the sharing of appraisals among senior staff using the new appraisal documentation. Outcomes from both academic and support staff appraisal feed into their personal training plans and the overall staff development plan. Staff were able to identify the benefits of sabbatical leave within their teaching, and students spoke positively of the quality of scholarship and teaching at the College.

5 The highly supportive learning and pastoral support environment has been strengthened through the appointment of an assistant chaplain with expertise in mental health nursing and addiction support. This appointment has been well received by students. Students also spoke positively about the formal and informal support available to them, together with the accessibility and willingness of staff to respond to their needs and the importance of this in creating an environment for them to develop.

6 The rich and active research environment has been further developed through the supervisor assembly, and staff were positive about how this activity has helped to develop their understanding of the expectations for research supervisors and the University of Manchester e-prog system. The College is seeking external funding for the next delivery of this activity. Staff acknowledge the benefits accruing from the incentivising of publishing activity; this has encouraged staff to focus on completing the work and writing that they are undertaking. The Wesleyan Holiness Digital Library project has been instrumental in disseminating research within the Church of the Nazarene, and the global library software project, in which the College has been a partner, has improved access to resources in sister institutions (particularly in Swaziland).

7 The College has made some progress on the recommendation relating to the use of progression and achievement statistics, and this is discussed in more detail in paragraphs 11 and 12. The impact of the continuous monitoring procedure and the subject area review, recently introduced, has yet to be embedded fully and evaluated.

8 Satisfactory progress has been made to improve communication with those involved in placement learning. A comprehensive placement communication audit has been undertaken, and a new Placement Manager took up their duties on March 1 2017. Benchmarking against ASET guidelines is being undertaken. Students were positive about placement learning, identified how representatives had been involved in designing the new arrangements, and were aware of the changes that had been made.

9 The College has a comprehensive admissions policy, which is followed by the admissions team and made available on the website. The registrar maps enrolment and admissions data over a rolling 10-year period, providing this information twice yearly to governors to determine the health of the provision. This data has not yet been used by the College to inform the admissions practices further, by examining areas such as learning gain. Processes are in place to ensure the sufficiency of applicants' English language competency, together with assessment of their prior qualifications, suitability and genuine intention to study. Interviews are held with applicants who also supply examples of work to the College to assess skills and determine any likely support needs that may be required. Students confirmed these admissions processes to be comprehensive and supportive.

10 The College is examining specific strategies to enable wider participation, such as focusing on more mature student entry or on those without a theological background, together with considering a proposal for a foundation or access programme. A new member of staff in the area of Marketing is being appointed, and will report to the senior leadership team on recruitment and admissions activity, including referencing against the requirements of the Competitions and Marketing Authority. The College has recently appointed a staff member with a remit for innovation and learning resources, and for moving forward the College's strategic priorities in the areas of flexible learning and accessibility.

11 The College is engaging further with quantitative data, supported by the registrar. The annual monitoring process has been documented further and developed in line with the awarding body (University of Manchester) requirements, which are changing from an annual review to a continuous monitoring process. Subject area course review meetings have been introduced each semester. These include visiting lecturer colleagues and a staff member

from another discipline to provide externality. During the meetings modules are reviewed to identify improvements and progress changes, together with examining student performance and feedback.

12 Outcomes of annual quality monitoring and review, including review of external examiner comments, are used to develop a Student Experience Action Plan. The plans are managed in Postgraduate and Undergraduate Course Working Groups, which student representatives attend. The Working Groups develop and monitor the plan locally and share and embed practices across staff teams. Twice yearly, the governors actively interrogate senior managers on progress made on the Student Experience Action Plan and other College developments.

13 The College has identified a number of enhancement activities through the programme monitoring and review processes. These include restructuring its youth and community provision and undertaking an internal audit of placement management and communication, and attending to clustered assessment deadline dates.

14 The cohort size of programmes offered is small. The average numbers of students initially enrolled per programme are: 2013-14: 3.8 students; 2014-15: 4.1 students; 2015-16: 3.6 students; and 2016-17: 4.3 students. Average student progression data across all programmes is: 2013-14: 90 per cent; 2014-15: 91 per cent; and 2015-16: 96 per cent. Although average student progression rates are good, there is variability in average achievement rates: 2013-14: 60 per cent; 2014-15: 52 per cent; and 2015-16: 100 per cent. These figures are affected by the low cohort sizes and by treating continuing students who change their mode of study as 'not achieving'. The College has, however, recognised the need to focus on student data and, in particular, achievement rates; this has been identified previously in paragraphs 7, 11, and 12.

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

15 Developments to raise awareness and appreciation of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) are continuing across all staff. In 2015-16, this included a series of 'Quality Code Breakfasts' led by the Dean. Policies and procedures are mapped to the Quality Code and the requirements, where applicable, of the University of Manchester. Placement learning is an important part of the College's offer, and reference to the Quality Code, *Chapter B10* was evidenced in the affirmation from the HER (AP) 2016. The College pioneered external recognition of the Youth and Community programme with the Joint Education Training Standards for Youth Work, and continues to use ASET as a reference for the placement activity.

16 Subject benchmarks are embedded in programmes and are the responsibility of the subject lead staff. The programmes will be reviewed against benchmarks as part of the University of Manchester's Periodic Review processes in May 2017.

5 Background to the monitoring visit

17 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.

18 The monitoring visit was carried out by Deborah Trayhurn, Reviewer, and Mike Ridout, Coordinator, on 23 March 2017.

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