



Monitoring visit for Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Nazarene Theological College, April 2018

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 the Nazarene Theological College (the College) has made commendable progress with continuing to monitor, evaluate and enhance its higher education provision 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 that are validated by the University of Manchester (the University). There are 211 enrolled students (106 students on undergraduate programmes and 105 on postgraduate programmes), compared with 195 enrolled in 2016-17 (87 undergraduates and 108 postgraduates).

3 The College completed its quinquennial institutional and periodic review with the University in May 2017 resulting in a further five year renewal of the validation agreement. The report included a number of commendations, no conditions, and a small number of recommendations. A revised BA pathway in Theology (Youth and Community), with an enhanced placement element, and two new MA Pathways ('Transforming Leadership' and 'Global Mission and Culture') have been introduced in 2016-17.

4 Newly appointed staff include an Assistant Dean, who oversees undergraduate programme-related areas, a Placement Manager, whose role has helped retain students on placement-based courses, and a dedicated Chaplain to support pastoral care.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

5 The College is making commendable progress in implementing its action plans arising from the Higher Education Review (HER) in March 2016 and the Annual Monitoring visit in March 2017. The HER single recommendation to make more evaluative use of progression and achievement statistics in the annual monitoring of course units (Expectation B8) has been thoroughly addressed (paragraphs 6, 7 and 13). There has been a comprehensive response to the single affirmation on improving communication among all parties involved in placement learning (Expectation B10, paragraph 8). The College continues to consolidate the three areas of good practice identified in the HER Report relating to staff development, student support, and research activity (paragraphs 9, 10 and 11).

6 Evaluative use of progression and achievement statistics in annual monitoring has been progressed not only at course unit level but also at all levels of course and institutional management and is linked to the College's strategic framework. Annual subject area review groups also monitor progression data and HESA data is monitored in the Undergraduate Working Group (UGWG) and the Postgraduate Working Group (PGWG).

7 The most recent University periodic review confirmed the effectiveness of College processes now in place for course unit review as well as the responsiveness to student views and external examiners. The Dean's biannual reports to the Board of Governors provide a detailed review of academic activity whilst the Registrar's report provides 10-year trends in enrolments and demographics to guide strategic decisions. College management also recognise the importance of qualitative analysis of data.

8 The College has significantly improved communication among all parties involved in the provision of placement learning. The Placement Manager, appointed in 2017, coordinates all aspects of placement learning, including training of placement supervisors, and regular Placement Committee meetings review all placement activities. A biannual event is hosted for placement providers to strengthen links and express thanks. Students express strong satisfaction with their current placement provision and the communication received.

9 Staff development opportunities contributing to the quality of the student experience (Expectation B3) continue to be expanded. There are considerable opportunities for staff to undertake sabbatical leave, participate in UK and international conferences or undertake research. The College organises an extensive programme of training events, lectures and research seminars. Staff are supported to complete further qualifications and receive an increment for HEA Fellowship. The staff appraisal system and personal training plans effectively identify and implement continuous professional development.

10 The highly supportive learning and pastoral support environment provides informal and formal opportunities for effectively meeting student needs (Expectation B4). The recent appointment of a new Chaplain, and the Assistant Chaplain's extensive experience as a mental health nurse, plus the use of counsellors, has enhanced available mental health support. Appointments of a Warden to support on-campus resident students and a Placement Manager have also strengthened College support services. Students spoke positively about these appointments, the accessibility of staff and the availability of personal and academic support. They also cited the personal approach and sense of community as key reasons for applying to the College. Sessions on academic writing and study skills, and student mentors, provide helpful support for students with mature and non-standard entry and have enhanced retention and achievement. A pre-entry programme to more fully prepare non-traditional entry students is also being considered. The University's Periodic Review commends the College on the work of the peer learning group, support for learning and its collegiality and sense of community.

11 The rich and active research environment and support for students undertaking research degrees continue to be enhanced (Expectation B11). An annual postgraduate conference, the display of staff and student published work, the University's annual Research Fair and a range of external research seminars and lectures provide regular opportunities for postgraduate students and staff to share research and scholarship.

12 The College has a comprehensive admissions policy and a robust process for monitoring and checking admission requirements including English language competency, prior qualifications, suitability and genuine intention to study. The detailed application form, interviews and testing allow the College to assess skills and determine any likely support needs. The College informs students of opportunities for recognition of prior learning and accredits claims appropriately. The College has broadened its intake through detailed monitoring of demographic trends and strengthening of support for students from minority groups or with additional needs. A mature entry route exists for students without a Level 3 qualification and support for these students has led to improved retention and achievement and progression to study at postgraduate level. Students confirmed the admissions processes to be fair and effective, allowing them to make informed choices about their study. Governors maintain an overview of enrolment trends through the Registrar's report on

10-year trends. The University controls admissions to research degrees and monitors progress through its own systems.

13 College procedures for quality monitoring are thorough and comprehensive. The process of continuous quality monitoring, in place of annual monitoring, that had just been introduced at the last monitoring visit is now embedded. The UGWG and the PGWG generate and maintain comprehensive action plans and evaluative Student Experience Action Plans. These documents inform Continuous Monitoring Report forms that are submitted to the Academic Board and to the University. Joint meetings of the UGWG and PGWG ensure that common issues are identified and common opportunities and good practice shared. Student views feed into the reports from evaluative questionnaires analysed at module level and via student representative input to committee meetings.

14 Student engagement is strong with the Student President, Vice-President and student representatives taking an active part in College committees and groups and holding regular Student Council meetings. Engagement is enhanced by means of informal coffee and community meetings, a noticeboard, e-mail bulletins and a student section on the College's virtual learning site. Students value the range of easily accessible informal processes but also believe that formal structured procedures would sometimes be more appropriate. Student representatives receive a job description and are trained informally by committee chairs or outgoing student representatives. The representatives reported variability in their preparedness for their role because of a lack of formal training. For the student council the Chaplain inducts the Vice President and the Principal inducts the President.

15 Cohort sizes continue to be small for most of the programmes although enrolments are increasing. Aggregate retention across all programmes remains high with an increase in part-time retention from 73 per cent for the 2015-16 cohorts to 88 per cent for the 2016-17 cohorts although there was a fall from 92 to 82 per cent in this period for full-time cohorts. Students appreciate the flexibility the curriculum offers which allows a range of completion dates dependent upon the proportion of study adopted. Degree programmes may last three, six or 12 years, and consequently the College has a high proportion of continuing students, which impacts on the pass rates. For example, from the 2014-15 intake of 26 full-time students, two discontinued and one took an exit award, 16 completed, with 14 passes, leading to a pass rate of 61 per cent, although seven are still on programme.

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

16 The College's policies and procedures are mapped to the Quality Code and the requirements, where applicable, of the awarding body, the University of Manchester. A series of now completed breakfast meetings have increased staff familiarity with the Quality Code.

17 The College is a member of ASET (The Work-Based and Placement-Learning Association), which is used as an external reference for placement activities.

18 Programmes are reviewed against subject benchmarks as part of the University of Manchester's Periodic Review processes, most recently in May 2017.

19 Youth and Community courses are jointly monitored and validated by the National Youth Agency (NYA) and the Community Learning and Development Council (CLD), while ordination-track awards meet the requirements of the Eurasia Regional Course of Study Advisory Council (RCOSAC) in the Church of the Nazarene, with annual reporting and a five-yearly approval for ordination to ministry.

5 Background to the monitoring visit

20 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.

21 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Glenn Barr, Reviewer, and Ms Jacqueline Young, Coordinator, on 10 April 2018.

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