

Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Newbold College, March 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 Newbold College (the College) has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the February 2017 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA review/monitoring visit

2 Newbold College continues to offer undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Biblical and Pastoral Studies and Theology, validated by the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD). The College also offers degrees conferred by Andrews University (AU), USA, in Religious Studies, Theology, Business Studies and Humanities, a degree in Business Studies conferred by Washington Adventist University (WAU), USA, as well as a BA and an MA in Theology with the Theologische Hochschule Friedensau (THF), Germany. The College has 87 full-time higher education students, which represents a 12 per cent decrease in numbers from the previous year. The College is a registered charity and its mission is to foster a Christ-centred and diverse learning community that prepares students for service in a changing world.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The College has made acceptable progress in the majority of areas identified in the action plan related to the Higher Education Review of 2017. The good practice in the provision of learning resources to meet the needs of students continues to be consolidated. The team found that progress has been made in respect of recommendations and affirmations, though not fully completed in the case of updating the complaints and appeals processes and external approval of assignment briefs (paragraphs 5-9). The team met with staff and students during the visit and reviewed a wide range of documentary evidence.

4 The Academic Resources Committee effectively manages learning resources to meet the needs of students (paragraph 5). With regard to recommendations, external examiner reports are now published on the College's website (paragraph 6). External review of assessment briefs to comply with awarding body requirements continues to be an area for development (paragraph 6). Revision of the complaints and appeals policies and processes has not yet been finalised (paragraph 7) The Programme Approval Policy has been revised and approved (paragraph 7). Work has taken place on the virtual learning environment (VLE) to facilitate access to a wider range of resources (paragraph 8). To further support the management and review of enhancement initiatives, an Enhancement Coordinator has been appointed to support the College Enhancement Strategy and to ensure the student voice informs initiatives (paragraph 9).

5 The Academic Resources Committee which meets twice per semester, has a remit to keep learning resource provision under review, including online resources available through the VLE. Students expressed broad satisfaction with resources provided online and through the library which is well stocked and managed by approachable and helpful staff.

6 At the time of the visit, only a small sample of assignment briefs for the UWTSD provision were confirmed as approved by external examiners, and this remains an area for

continued development to comply with University's requirements and the previous review recommendation. Assessment briefs viewed by examiners were largely deemed fit for purpose. External examiner reports are now available through the College's website and students confirmed that they are able to access the reports.

7 The College is continuing to work on the revision of its complaints and appeals policies, with the Academic Quality Assurance Committee maintaining oversight of developments prior to final drafts being approved by the Academic Board. The Complaints Policy has been redrafted and the final version is scheduled for approval by Academic Board in April 2018, prior to publication. The Appeals Policy is scheduled for further review and development in 2018. Academic Board has approved a revised Programme Approval Policy, which is now available through the College website.

8 The Virtual Learning Environment Policy sets out minimum programme content requirements for the College VLE and has been approved by the Academic Board. The College has appointed a member of staff to monitor and support compliance with information and content requirements across programme areas. Students confirmed that they have access to sufficient resources and information through the VLE, including assignment briefs and assessment related materials.

9 The College has established a Strategic Planning Group to drive forward enhancement objectives set out in the Enhancement Strategy. To further embed enhancement as a key focus, objectives are now included in the Strategic Plan. Enhancement objectives and responsibilities are also included in the remits of key College committees including Academic Board and the Academic Quality Assurance Committee. The College has appointed a new Enhancement Coordinator to facilitate implementation and monitoring of progress.

10 The Admissions Policy effectively outlines the College's admissions criteria. Clear entry requirements are detailed, including those for programmes delivered in partnership with the College's overseas awarding bodies. Applicants are required to provide evidence of their academic qualifications and English language proficiency. Applicants who do not have English as a first language are required to demonstrate language competency through achieving not less than 6.0 overall in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) for undergraduate and 6.5 for postgraduate programmes. All students are required to sit an English Language test at the College prior to enrolment and may be required to enrol in the College's English Language Centre in order to reach the required standard before being able to progress to degree level studies. Students are also required to complete a detailed personal statement and have a telephone interview to confirm their commitment to study their programme of choice. Students confirmed that information on admissions requirements is clearly and accurately presented on web pages and in promotional material.

11 The Academic Board maintains effective oversight of student and programme performance including summaries of the programme monitoring reports introduced in 2017. External examiner reports are systematically reviewed, and the College's Programme Boards discuss recommendations and actions which are reported and reviewed at Academic Quality Assurance Committee and at Academic Board. The Academic Quality Assurance Committee also receives annual programme reports and produces a summary report for Academic Board identifying common themes, areas for improvement and good practice. Action plans from annual reports are monitored by the Academic Quality Assurance Committee, programme teams and Programme Boards across the year. The College recognises the need to implement more systematic approaches to the monitoring of student retention, progression and achievement and is developing processes including the requirement for data to be included in annual monitoring reports. Student representation on Academic Board and the Academic Quality Assurance Committee enables

students to comment on key priorities. The College is also increasingly engaging students with quality assurance through a regular cycle of questionnaires and qualitative feedback from student forums.

12 The newly appointed Enhancement Coordinator has introduced mid module evaluations, and there are plans to introduce end of year module evaluations. The new surveys will provide additional data on student satisfaction and to highlight areas for further development of learning and teaching enhancement. Peer observations of teaching take place annually and inform staff appraisals which are then linked to the identification of objectives for the enhancement of teaching and learning.

13 The College recruits very small numbers of students on all undergraduate programmes, the largest group being on the BA(Hons) Biblical and Pastoral Studies where there are 17 students spanning the three years of the programme. The MA in Theology attracts the largest numbers of students, with 40 students currently on programme, and 100 per cent of students who completed in 2016-17 achieving their master's degree. Retention rates on programmes range from 54 to 100 per cent. The higher withdrawal rates on some programmes are often a result of one or two individual withdrawals from group sizes of less than five or six students. Across all programmes in 2015-16 the withdrawal rate was 18.8 per cent, and for 2016-17 this has fallen to 14.2 per cent. For the UWTSD provision, retention rates are satisfactory, with 73 per cent retention at undergraduate level, reflecting good inter-year progression, and 85 per cent at postgraduate level. The achievement rate for those students completing the programmes is 100 per cent for both undergraduate and postgraduate courses across all programmes. The College is now making data review a standard requirement for annual monitoring and review of data is being included in discussions at programme boards. The Academic Quality Assurance Committee will oversee data usage and report to Academic Board.

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

14 The College programmes validated by UWTSD are referenced to the FHEQ. The College aligns its policies and procedures to the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, acknowledging this as a key reference point to design policies and processes for maintaining academic standards and quality. The British Accreditation Council inspected the College in October 2017 and accredited it against the higher education inspection standards.

5 Background to the monitoring visit

14 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.

15 The monitoring visit was carried out by Ms Lynn Fulford, Reviewer, and Mrs Mandy Hobart, Coordinator, on 15 March 2018.

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