



## Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Newbold College, March 2019

### 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) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the March 2018 [monitoring visit](#).

### Changes since the last QAA review/monitoring visit

2 The majority of students at Newbold College are studying undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Biblical and Pastoral Studies, and Theology, validated by the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD). There are also a significant number of students on Business Studies degree conferred by Washington Adventist University (WAU), USA. The College also offers degrees conferred by Andrews University (AU), USA, in Religious Studies, Theology and Humanities, as well as a BA in Theology with the Theologische Hochschule Friedensau (THF), Germany. The College has 96 full-time higher education students, which represents a 10% increase in numbers from the previous year. The College is a registered charity with a vision to be the Seventh-day Adventist Christian higher education institution of choice in Europe with a mission to foster a Christ-centred and diverse learning community that prepares students for service in an ever-changing world.

### Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The College is making acceptable progress against its action plan following its 2017 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER(AP)). It has developed its areas of good practice (paragraph 4) and addressed its six recommendations. This is the second annual monitoring visit since the full HER(AP) and the two recommendations not fully completed in the last visit are now complete. The College publishes external examiners' reports online, fully engages with its awarding bodies' requirements for assessment briefs and observes a minimum content guide for its virtual learning environment (VLE). Having revised its complaints and appeal policies, the College informs students about the complaints process and offers support (paragraph 7). The College has continued its work on the affirmations of developing an internal programme approval process, considering its enhancement strategy and establishing a strategy group that focuses on enhancement (paragraph 8). The College has also set further actions for quality improvement using its own quality assurance systems (paragraphs 9-11).

4 The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Board of Governors continue the good practice of monitoring the comprehensive approach used to identify and meet the learning resource needs of students. Academic and library staff maintain regular monitoring to consider staff and student learning resource needs. Students note the improvement in library and IT facilities but would welcome further improvements to the library stock. The College continues to respond, within reason, to student resource demands.

5 The SLT and Board of Governors continue to review external examiners' reports and publish them online, ensuring student accessibility. Even though it publishes examiners'

reports in programme handbooks, students are not fully aware of this. The College fully complies with awarding body requirements for the approval of assessment briefs, tracking these in exam board minutes. Students would like criteria to be clearer and master's students would like assessment tasks to be more explicit about their requirements. The College has addressed this previously, however, they do aim to develop this further in consultation with students.

6 The College's revised Online Learning Guidelines ensure consistency in the articulation, implementation and monitoring of minimum content of the VLE. Staff understand the minimum expectations for module content, but students state that while most do, not all modules meet that requirement. They would also like staff to be more creative with online resources. The College recognises there is variable practice and aims to build on the revised policy in the longer term.

7 In addressing the previous recommendation, the College has published online a revised version of its complaints process which, together with a revised draft of the Academic Appeals policy, has made its complaints and appeals processes comprehensive and coherent. At the first assembly during Induction Week, students learn how they can feedback to the College through various means. Students are able to articulate the difference between complaints and appeals and how to access the policies.

8 The Academic Quality Assurance Committee (ACQUAC) is the official internal approval panel for new academic programmes, completing the affirmation of ensuring programme development follows a robust and systematic process. The one iteration of the process used enables students to scope programme content and review a programme draft. A carefully mapped Enhancement Statement completes the affirmation of developing a policy to explicitly embed enhancement in the strategic framework. The College's newly established strategic planning group produced a revised Strategic Plan in 2017 completing the affirmation for establishing a new enhancement strategy group that includes staff and governors. Staff recognise that enhancement is embedded throughout their practice and management.

9 The College's process for annual monitoring starts with module level evaluation by staff and students and progresses through the departmental heads to the ACQUAC; and from there, to Academic Board and Board of Governors. The College recognises it can do more to close the quality loop, but this is about improvement rather than essential action. The College uses the annual monitoring process to highlight good practice and areas for improvement.

10 As part of its ongoing monitoring process, the College has drawn out other areas for focus. Through its partnership with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) staff might be able to access its accredited scheme to obtain one of the four levels of Fellowship. No staff have yet applied because the College is considering its own scheme. The College has developed and published a Staff Professional Development Policy, which combines research and other development activity. Master's students praise the opportunities they have to engage with research active staff. Staff provide many examples of funding for research and study activities such as conference attendance and doctoral funding.

11 The College undertakes to ensure a consistent three-week turnaround for marked work, tracking this through exam boards. Students describe variable practice across staff and programme teams in terms of timeliness and comment that sometimes they do not have enough space between assessment tasks to build on the feedback provided. There is a key communication issue - students believe the turnaround time is two weeks, not three, indicating the College needs to focus student thinking around assessment feedback.

12 The College's well-considered Admissions Policy ensures recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. The Recruitment, Marketing and Retention team undertake all recruitment activities, including international events. Students with internationally-recognised qualifications in English can enter any of the degree programmes. Students that do not meet those criteria can enrol at the English Language Centre which provides ongoing support throughout their studies. All students who speak English as a second language require an IELTS score of 6.0 for undergraduate study and 6.5 for postgraduate study.

13 All applicants present certified copies of their academic credentials and international students provide a transcript in English or a certified English translation. The Administrative Officer (Admissions) checks this against UK NARIC's international comparison database. The College requires all applicants to provide a written statement outlining their reason for choosing the College to test students' genuine intention to study. Applicants must provide two references and the College's Administrative Officer (Admissions) monitors email exchanges with applicants, especially for those who must apply for a Visa. Students confirm the process of admissions is supportive. The College requires standard entry tariff of two A levels or equivalents.

14 To operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including the recognition of prior learning, the College's exam boards continue to manage assessment with rigour and integrity. Students submit all written assignments on the VLE through plagiarism detection software. Students are articulate about the nature of academic malpractice and how to avoid it. They describe assessment practice as variable, with some feedback being late and some staff providing more feedback than others (paragraph 11).

15 The 96 students are on programmes offered in partnership with Andrews University (AU), University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) and Washington Adventist University (WAU). There is an agreement in place with Theologische Hochschule Friedensau, but this has no enrolments. The College has constant and supportive contact with its awarding bodies. The UWTSD programmes provide the main bulk of the provision, with the WAU programme providing the other main tranche. The AU programme is part of a liberal arts style programme with reduced appeal, although it is chosen by students from many countries. Students and staff value the multinational nature of the learning community.

16 The BA Hons Biblical and Pastoral Studies maintains steady numbers but does not have a Level 5 cohort because of low Level 4 enrolment in 2017-18. Of those students, all either failed or withdrew. Data indicates 100% retention rates in the 2017-18 cycle, demonstrating improvement since the 2015-16 cycle, where some courses fell as low as 33%. Pass rates for the only completed cycle were lower than the College would like in only two instances, and usually matched by improved retention rates. The College is aware that with small numbers, changes in one or two student's behaviour can dramatically affect statistics, but they recognise that where there is a dip in retention in one year, they can respond rapidly the following year.

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

17 The College's last external review was the annual monitoring visit by QAA in March 2018. It is, however, seeking its American partners' consent to review their provision to satisfy the British Accreditation Council. This is not a requirement of the American partners.

18 The College continues to map its practices against the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and engaged in a Quality Code consultation workshop in 2017. Although it is not required, the College prepares all programme documentation for its non-UK awarding bodies

in line with QAA Guidelines for Preparing Programme Specifications and Subject Benchmark Statements. The College liaises with its awarding universities by phone or email, in person or virtually ensuring its practices remain in step with its partners. Given its range of partners, the College addresses a variety of external reference points well.

## **Background to the monitoring visit**

19 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.

20 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mark Langley, Reviewer, and Kevin Kendall, QAA Officer, on 20 March 2019.

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