



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Spurgeon's College, June 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 Spurgeon's College (the College) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the June 2018 [monitoring visit](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 The College offers theological education through undergraduate and postgraduate programmes to prepare students for Christian mission and ministry. Programmes are validated by the University of Manchester, University of Wales and the University of Chester, though programmes are being taught out and final recruitment, to Manchester validated programmes, will cease following the 2019-20 intake. There are 294 students currently enrolled on designated courses - 217 undergraduate and 77 postgraduate. This is a slight reduction compared with 308 students enrolled in 2017-18 - 231 undergraduate and 77 postgraduate. The College currently employs 21 full-time staff, 17 part-time staff and 13 visiting lecturers.

3 The College continues to prepare its application for degree awarding powers. The College is planning to deliver ministerial training and entry-level programmes at a new partner site in Birmingham in 2019-20. The College has identified a strong prospective partner for the validation of research degrees and has begun development of proposals for new provision and recruitment in spring 2020. Review of the undergraduate portfolio has continued with validation of new programmes planned for delivery from 2020.

Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The monitoring visit focused on key actions emerging from the academic action plan (AAP) 2018, updated in April 2019. Actions have been addressed and the College is developing approaches to periodic evaluation of the effectiveness of the annual monitoring processes and governance structures to focus on monitoring and review activity (paragraphs 7 and 8); coordinating oversight of learning support (paragraph 9); extending formal staff engagement with Advance HE (paragraph 5); and maintaining the extensive range of external expertise used to enhance the student experience (paragraphs 5 and 6).

5 The College continues to engage externally with professional colleagues globally in the Baptist Union and more widely across the higher education sector. External expertise supports quality assurance and enhancement processes, and College staff continue their research and scholarly engagement. Appraisals for professional and academic staff are being implemented gradually, with updating of standardised job descriptions begun. The College has continued to support continuing professional development activity for staff with several engaged in applying for Advance HE membership. Academic peer review has been reintroduced, and developments and good practices discussed with colleagues at regular staff teaching meetings.

6 Proposals for the development of the undergraduate portfolio to be introduced in 2020 will expand the routes available for professional ministerial practice. External development resources have been used to assist with the curriculum design, and detailed unit content is being commissioned. The new programmes will update design and delivery approaches, and increase opportunity for students to develop academic skills, work and contextualised assessment. Students who met with the review team confirmed their support for the developments and the general engagement of the student body with these processes. Staff development is proposed across 2019-20 to ensure smooth implementation of the BA curriculum revision and support ongoing development of provision college-wide.

7 The College has prepared, but not yet implemented, plans for oversight of centralised approaches to reporting and monitoring. It has determined a new academic governance framework with a revised committee structure and terms of reference. A strengthened Quality Assurance Committee is intended with extended scope beyond student feedback and to be chaired by an external member. An independent Audit Committee will be introduced in 2020 to increase monitoring approaches to the College's work, particularly reviewing the effectiveness of the academic action plan. The new approaches will add focus and streamline institution-wide annual monitoring processes, enabling faster responses and clearer tracking of actions at various levels outside of Academic Board.

8 Approaches to periodic evaluation of annual monitoring are not yet in place. Key performance indicators to measure the effectiveness of annual monitoring are intended to be introduced as part of an institution-wide process. Following their training received in 2018, the Senior Management Team will include discussion and planning for implementing such measures at their annual evaluation meeting in July 2019. The delayed processes are to be introduced in stages from autumn 2019.

9 The Learning Support Committee introduced in 2018-19 provides opportunity to monitor and develop focused discussion of learning support issues with clearer communication systems. Committee operation was welcomed by staff, and students spoke positively of the support and understanding available to them, relating to their pastoral and academic needs. Committee activity has highlighted opportunities for the College to restructure learning support, and senior staff intend to review the learning support function and discuss operational approaches further.

10 The admissions policy and separate undergraduate and postgraduate admissions protocols have all been reviewed and revised in the current academic year. A number of changes were made, including to no longer interview students with necessary qualifications and meeting key academic and visa requirements for the undergraduate and postgraduate open courses. Admissions processes are overseen and evaluated by the Admissions Committee, and reported to Academic Board. The College has an access and participation plan which is reviewed through a monitoring group chaired by a governor.

11 English language requirements are set out in the admissions policy and protocols, including IELTS testing protocols where appropriate. Pre-sessional study skills courses are offered through an online higher education preparatory programme which all applicants to undergraduate taught and online programmes are encouraged to complete. Students confirm that staff provide comprehensive admissions support and the College identifies, at this first point of contact, any applicants with specific individual support needs for referral to the learning support team for appropriate assistance.

12 The College's learning, teaching and assessment framework operates under the overall regulatory framework of the University of Manchester. There is an internal system of moderation which external examiners have confirmed, provides a clear record of discussions between first and second markers or moderators. The College has an academic malpractice

policy and procedure supported by an academic malpractice protocol and guide for staff. Students reported developments in connection with creative approaches to delivery and assessment practices, and use of plagiarism-detection software as a reporting system for staff.

13 The College has developed its transparency data set and reviews of student retention and achievement in conjunction with the newly-introduced OfS and HESA transparency data return on applications, offers, acceptances and registrations. There is a range of cohort sizes for the programmes offered, and, where these are small, this impacts disproportionately on the statistics for retention and achievement. Over the past three academic years, average retention, progression and achievement rates have been high. For cohorts enrolling in 2015-16, average retention was 92% (56 of 61) and achievement for the courses which have completed was 94% (32 of 34). Retention for cohorts enrolling in 2016-17 was 91% (70 of 77) and achievement for the courses which have so far completed was 97% (29 of 30). Retention for cohorts enrolling in 2017-18 was 96% (82 of 85).

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

14 The College continues to make appropriate use of external reference points. It is aware of changes to the Quality Code for Higher Education and will review and revise relevant documents against the changes. Subject Benchmark Statements are referenced in tutor evaluation forms for each unit, and have also been used in drawing up the proposed intended learning outcomes of the new BA curriculum. A staff training day for online as well as onsite tutors in May 2019 included a 'marking exercise' referring to these standards as well as the College marking criteria. A review of the College carried out on behalf of the Baptist Union in November 2018, commended the College for its ministerial training provision.

Background to the monitoring visit

15 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.

16 The monitoring visit was carried out by Ms Deborah Trayhurn, Reviewer, and Ms Helen Uglow, QAA Officer, on 27 June 2019.

QAA2431 - R10444 - Aug 19

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