



## Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of St John's College Nottingham Ltd, June 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 St John's College Nottingham (the College) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [June 2016 monitoring visit](#).

### 2 Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 60 students compared with 108 in 2016-17 and 223 recorded in the June 2016 annual monitoring visit report. Most of these students are enrolled on programmes leading to Durham University awards at levels 4 to 7, with the majority of students (38) enrolled on the level 5/6 Graduate Certificate. There are seven students due to complete University of Chester awards in 2018. These are being 'taught out' since the 2014 decision to offer only Durham University programmes. Appropriate arrangements are in place to safeguard the interests of the remaining University of Chester students. The decline in student numbers reflects the decision made by the College in 2014 to cease recruitment to on-campus delivery. Additionally, the College made a strategic decision to suspend all recruitment for the academic year 2016-17. All of the students within the scope of the monitoring visit were distance learners.

3 During the period since the 2016 monitoring visit, the College has continued to undergo significant restructuring including the disposal of part of the College estate. Negotiations to merge with an institution with a complementary profile and mission are at an advanced stage. There have been no full-time teaching staff appointed since the last monitoring visit on account of the institutional restructuring and the overall reduction of both staff and student numbers. A limited number of part-time academic appointments have been made including a specialist in digital pedagogies. However, appointments were made to the new posts of Director of Studies and Registrar in November 2016, Course Administrator in February 2017 and Business Development Manager in March 2018, and there has been some adjustment to senior management responsibilities.

### 3 Findings from the monitoring visit

4 Previous monitoring visit reports confirmed that the College had implemented all of the recommendations arising from the original 2012 review. Since 2016, the College has made acceptable progress with continuing to monitor and enhance its higher education provision under challenging institutional circumstances. A key example is the College commitment to the Strategic Staff Development Plan and the linking of peer review of teaching to staff appraisal (paragraph 5). Students have a significant input into the Academic Management Committee (paragraph 10). The College website has been redesigned, the Virtual Learning Environment improved and the College has addressed its obligations under General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Prevent Duty (paragraph 7). However, the review team found that there was some inconsistency in the application of College policies such as the timing of the return of marked work, the provision of student induction

and variation in the quality of tutorial support. During 2017-18 there has been no student representation on the College Council of Trustees (paragraphs 6, 7, 10).

5 The Strategic Plan, which incorporated recommendations from the 2012 review as well as the College's own identification of strategic priorities and action points, continues to inform College academic policies and priorities. However, it has not been updated for the 2017-18 academic year and the current strategic plans, produced at the request of the Trustees, are largely concerned with business planning in order to establish a secure institutional future and do not address specifically academic matters.

6 The new approach to staff appraisal, peer review and staff development, developed in response to the 2012 recommendations, has been adapted to take account of career planning and review at a time of profound change for the College and includes both academic and support staff. Due to current circumstances, a specific focus has been placed on team building, career change and career planning/review. A full peer review of teaching processes took place during the 2017-18 academic year with reports considered at the Academic Management Committee, which reports through the Leadership Team to the College Council.

7 Tutor training is now programmed on a regular schedule and made available to all academic staff and associate tutors, although it has been recognised by the Academic Management Committee that tutors need to discharge their roles consistently and that the quality of service that students received was 'mixed'. There is some inconsistency in the application of College academic policies including variation in the turnaround time for marked work and the amount of guidance given with regard to reading lists. Not all new students receive a formal induction. However, students appreciate the helpfulness of academic and support staff and a training day on digital pedagogies was held in February 2018, led by a staff member from Durham University.

8 The College website has recently been redesigned, the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) improved and all marking is now done online. The College has developed a data protection policy to meet the requirements of the GDPR and consulted with relevant authorities to meet its Prevent Duty obligations. However, while policies are regularly updated, there is no version control policy. The action plan arising from the 2016-17 self-evaluation identified a need to improve the utility of the VLE to meet the requirements of distance-learning students - this action point was due for completion by June 2018. Student awareness of key policies such as Complaints and the College Student Charter is limited. A complainant was identified by name in the minutes of the Academic Management Committee which are available to students in breach of privacy protocols.

9 The College has comprehensive and well-articulated Admissions Policies in place for the recruitment and admission of students. Supporting policies are detailed and cover procedures for applicants with criminal convictions and those with disabilities, together with guidance on Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), and grounds for appeal of admissions decisions. There is a Special Admissions Policy for applicants who do not meet standard entry criteria. The majority of College students are already graduates, over 21 years of age and studying part-time. Applicants intending to enter the ministry undergo an extensive selection process devised by the Church of England as well as the College admission procedures. Intention to study is assessed by range of references that are required to confirm suitability as well as academic ability. Processes include admissions tests and interviews, although non-ministry applicants are not interviewed. English language requirements are clearly specified and are subject to the overarching regulations agreed by the Church of England (C of E) Ministry Division and the University of Durham Common Awards Scheme; a minimum IELTS score of 6.0 is required.

10 The College operates processes for annual monitoring and review which ensure that academic standards are maintained and provide opportunities for enhancement. A detailed annual self-evaluation is produced for Durham University Theological Education Institutions (TEIs) Common Awards scheme and the Ministry Division of the Church of England. This also includes the University of Chester programmes which are being 'taught out'. The College draws on a wide range of available information for consideration, including: undergraduate and postgraduate application and admissions data; student summaries by programme, including retention and progression data; external examiner reports and results of student feedback, including the National Student Survey (NSS) and Module Evaluation Questionnaires. Staff and students are involved in the monitoring process through the annual staff conference, programme committees and the Academic Management Committee. Although the processes involved in the production of the annual self-evaluation are thorough and generate an Action Plan which is overseen by the College Council, key actions identified are not currently incorporated into the College Strategic Plans.

11 The College encourages student engagement in College Management and its commitment to working with students in partnership is set out in the Student Charter and Student Contract. There is provision for student representation on College committees and boards and student representatives play an active role on the Academic Management Committee where external examiners' reports are considered and module feedback is reviewed. Module Evaluation Questionnaires (MEQs) which are now completed through the VLE (although participation rates are low) are used for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data regarding the students' views on each module delivered. The President of the St John's Student Association was an ex-officio trustee member of the College Council and other senior management committees in 2016-17. At the end of the last academic year, the Student Association was put into abeyance and, in September 2017, the Council invited a student drawn from the Midland Children and Youth Ministry (MCYM) group (who receive teaching on the campus but are not within the scope of this monitoring visit) to represent the interests of all students, including distance learners, on the Council. However, there has not been student participation on the Council during 2017-18 and the voice of the College's distance learners is therefore not represented at the most senior College level. The current student representatives on the Academic Management Committee have not received training and there is no online meeting system for student representatives or online facility to enable them to respond to other students.

12 For the full-time cohorts recruited in 2014-15 for diploma programmes completed in 2016, the achievement rate was 90-100 per cent (19 students). The achievement rate of ten 2015 MA students was 90 per cent, and 18 out of 20 Graduate Certificate students gained the award - also a 90 per cent achievement rate. As noted, recruitment was paused for 2016-17.

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

13 There is evidence of appropriate engagement with a range of external reference points. The College mapped its policies, procedures and practices against the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) in 2015. Reference was made to the Expectations contained in relevant sections of the Quality Code when policies were revised in 2015. Although the College makes good use of external examiner reports which are available to student representatives, they are not routinely made available to all students as specified in Chapter B7 of the Quality Code. The College makes extensive reference to the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications* (FHEQ). The qualification descriptors for each programme relate to the corresponding descriptors in the FHEQ together with the *Subject Benchmark Statement: Theology and Religious Studies*, published by QAA, and inform award programme specifications, which are highly detailed. The Ministry Division of the

Church of England specify learning outcomes which inform the design and structure of the Durham University TEI Common Awards Framework. This provides important external benchmarks for the College and informs the expectations of the College's awarding bodies.

## **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 Dr Helen Corkill, Reviewer, and Professor Nicholas Goddard, Coordinator, on 6 June 2018.

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