



## Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of The Markfield Institute of Higher Education, April 2017

### 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 Markfield Institute of Higher Education (the Institute) has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the April 2016 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

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

2 Since the last review in April 2016, The Markfield Institute of Higher Education has secured postgraduate student loan funding and participated in the National Student Survey (NSS) and Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey. Newman University continues as the awarding body for the taught undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The University of Gloucestershire continues as the awarding body for the final cohort of 13 postgraduate research students, who are enrolled on either an MPhil or PhD qualification. The Institute cannot recruit any further postgraduate research students until it has secured a new awarding body for the postgraduate research qualifications.

3 Since April 2016, the overall student population has decreased by 32 per cent from 126 to 86 students. There are currently 37 undergraduate students and 36 postgraduate taught students enrolled on the same programmes of study as at the last review. These are the BA Islamic Studies, MA Islamic Studies, MA Islamic Banking, Finance and Management and the MEd Islamic Education. The Institute plans to develop some new programmes of study that will combine Islamic Studies with education or law. There are currently five full-time and five part-time academic staff, and two full-time and three part-time administrative staff. One member of staff combines the role of administrator (0.3 FTE) and academic tutor (0.7 FTE). The Institute occupies the same premises as at the last review and has recently launched a new website.

### 3 Findings from the monitoring visit

4 This was the first monitoring review since the last full review took place in April 2016. There had been a previous Review for Educational Oversight in 2012 and three subsequent annual monitoring reviews. The review team considered documentation, and held meetings with students from all programmes and with academic and support staff. Topics for discussion included the institutional action plan, impact of the new academic structure, management of information, staff development and student engagement. In addition, the team discussed the Institute's strategic plans, use of external reference points, admissions and annual monitoring. The overall outcome has been informed by the following findings.

5 The Institute has sustained and developed the features of good practice that were identified at the last review (paragraphs 6-8). These were about effective student engagement plus the use of external expertise to inform programme development and

internal peer review. It has made acceptable progress in implementing all recommendations from the review in line with its internal action plan (paragraphs 9-12). The recommendations concerned the clarity of deliberative structures, approval of programme modifications, English language requirements for international applicants and approval of published information. The Institute has also made acceptable progress in respect of approaches to securing standards or improving quality, which had been affirmed at the last review (paragraph 13). These were the approaches to consideration of external examiners' reports, teaching opportunities for postgraduate researchers, and the strategic approach to enhancement of learning.

6 In terms of the good practice, the Institute has continued to make extensive use of benchmarks and external advice. The Institute consults external stakeholders about planned developments. During 2015-16, the Institute invited an experienced lecturer from another provider to contribute to the peer review of teaching and learning. The aim was to obtain external feedback on teaching quality to enable continuous development of teaching and learning. The external reviewer trained tutors in giving and receiving personalised feedback. Information about the capability and staff development needs of all tutors was provided for the teaching and learning coordinator. In light of positive impact on the quality of teaching, the Institute plans to use biennial external peer review and annual internal peer review. The peer review process informs annual appraisal and the implementation of both individual and group professional development activities.

7 The Institute has a well-defined teaching and learning strategy that focuses on engagement, enhancement and learning. Students remarked on the high level of subject knowledge of their lecturers and its positive impact on their learning.

8 The Institute has retained an inclusive culture for capturing the student voice, which leads to higher levels of engagement in formal committees. The small size of the Institute engenders a consultative and open atmosphere within which students feel able to consult staff formally and informally. There are numerous mechanisms for capturing student feedback and the Institute is responsive to student comments and requests for resources. The Institute outlines its approach to student engagement in the student charter and student handbook. There are effective arrangements for student representation and participation in staff-student consultative meetings, programme boards and Academic Board.

9 As recommended, the Institute has established and clearly documented the formal reporting lines for its higher education deliberative structures. It undertook a review of its committee and management structures in 2016 and established an Academic Board, through which it maintains effective oversight of academic quality and standards. The Institute has clarified the reporting arrangements to the Academic Board by specifying and publishing the terms of reference of all committees. The Academic Board uses management information about student recruitment, progression, retention and achievement for strategic planning. The Institute's review of its structures has had a positive impact on the arrangements for student engagement in quality enhancement.

10 The Institute ensures that modifications to programmes are approved through Newman University processes using the University's programme change and request form. Proposed changes are initially considered formally by the relevant external examiner and then by the Institute's course leaders' committee. The Institute has introduced a formal internal process for programme developments whereby the Academic Board considers proposals prior to them being submitted for consideration by Newman University. The Institute plans to establish an external advisory board to allow external stakeholders to contribute to programme developments.

11 The Institute has amended the English Language requirements for overseas entrants to postgraduate taught programmes, with effect from September 2017. International students should possess an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) qualification with an overall average score of 6.5 and a minimum component score of 6.0.

12 The Institute has formally documented and implemented its process for approval of published information about its programmes. This enables it to ensure that all information is complete, accurate and consistent. The process has been revised such that information items are now checked and authorised by two people in addition to the author. The Principal then authorises information items for publication and designated items are considered by the awarding body, prior to publication.

13 The Institute ensures that external examiners' reports are considered at three committees that include student members. It also makes the reports available through the virtual learning environment. The Institute cannot currently provide opportunities for postgraduate research students to gain teaching experience, instead of which the Institute provides postgraduate research students with an internal research conference. The Institute has developed its strategic approach to enhancement of learning through its revised committee structure and clearer reporting arrangements.

14 The Institute has effective mechanisms for the fair admission of students which meet Expectation B2 of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. The admissions policy and procedures apply to all programmes and the relevant awarding body approves the entry requirements, which are presented clearly in programme specifications. The Institute sets standard admission criteria and tariffs, including for English language ability. It requires that international applicants can show that they have achieved a designated score (6.5) for secure English language tests approved by the Home Office. The Institute interviews students and reviews personal statements and references to gauge English language competence, subject interest and intention to study. When evaluating intention to study, staff consider progression through previous studies, a student's level of commitment to their chosen programme and the payment of fees. The Institute's admissions team processes all applications and an admissions committee decides whether an applicant can gain admission and on what basis. This includes recognition of prior learning on the basis of formal qualification to gain exemption, which the Institute encourages, where relevant. The Institute verifies the equivalence of international qualifications through the UK National Recognition Information Centre (UK NARIC).

15 The Institute has thorough arrangements for programme monitoring that enable the Academic Board to maintain strategic oversight of standards and quality. Programme teams complete annual monitoring reports, which consider qualitative and quantitative information on programme performance and the comments of external examiners. The reports evaluate student recruitment, progression and achievement data, as well as feedback from surveys of students including the NSS and the DLHE. Students are involved in considering the annual monitoring reports at staff-student consultative committees and course committees. The Academic Board uses the outcomes of programme monitoring to inform its academic planning.

16 The Institute maintains data tables for each cohort of students which incorporate statistics for recruitment, retention, progression and student attainment. The Academic Board uses this information to inform strategic planning. In April 2017, the Institute recorded 86 students enrolled on one undergraduate and three postgraduate taught programmes plus 13 postgraduate research students. The Institute attracts mature and part-time students and offers students the flexibility to change modes or rates of study. For the provision as a whole, taken over the period 2012-13 to 2015-16, the Institute's retention rates on individual

programmes ranged from 67 to 100 per cent. The overall pass rate for the same period ranged from 88 to 100 per cent of enrolled students.

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

17 The Institute is making acceptable progress in using the Quality Code. It is supported in this by its awarding body for taught programmes, Newman University. Staff from the Institute have attended training provided by the University on the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) guidance. This training informs the way in which the Institute makes modifications to the programmes and the publication of related information for applicants and current students.

18 The Institute has given detailed attention to reviewing individual policies and procedures in relation to external reference points for UK higher education. In addition to the Quality Code, it makes reference to the CMA guidance for higher education providers. The Institute increasingly refers to professional body regulations and requirements, for example those of the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (CILEx), to inform the development of a planned new programme.

#### **5 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 Mr Jonathan K Baker, Reviewer, and Dr Anne M Miller, Coordinator, on 27 April 2017.

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557050  
Web [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)