



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education, 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 The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education (the Foundation) has made commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [March 2018 monitoring visit](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 The total head count of students at the time of the visit was 354: 46 full-time and 308 part-time of whom 240 are on undergraduate programmes and 114 on postgraduate and research programmes. There have been no material changes in senior management, premises or student numbers since the previous review in 2018. The Foundation is in the process of building and using a database, which should improve access to and analysis of data. The Foundation has discontinued recruitment to the BA Theology with Newman University since September 2014.

Findings from the monitoring visit

3 All actions identified in the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER (AP)) 2016 report have been implemented fully and examined at monitoring visits in 2017 and 2018. Positive steps have been taken to build upon the improvements made and enhance the provision of learning opportunities. The two features of good practice have been further developed in ways that enhance students' prospects for learning (paragraphs 5-6). Progress continues towards embedding good practice in the areas of the two recommendations made in 2016 (paragraphs 7-9). Positive steps have also been made in implementing and embedding the two affirmations identified in the 2016 report (paragraphs 10-12). In addition, since the last QAA monitoring visit, the Foundation has produced an overarching institutional action plan, which links to the existing risk register, and has established an Audit Committee with designated responsibility for monitoring progress made in completing all actions identified by the Foundation and assessing potential risks.

4 The Foundation continues to build upon the good practice in the integrated academic and pastoral support provided to all students. Students continue to participate in regularly scheduled study skills classes. Personal tutor roles have been more clearly defined in staff workshops, and independent students now have the same access to the full range of personal tutors as their church-supported colleagues. The Well-being Officer now undertakes activities aimed at early intervention and involves personal tutors in discussions in cases where students seem to be struggling.

5 The Foundation continues to develop and extend the extensive library provision, particularly in respect of improving online resources for off-site students. Moving the VLE to a central Church of England Ministry Division Hub has provided students with additional opportunities to access further extensive e-resources. Students registered with Durham have access to the Common Awards 'HUB', which provides access to extensive information and

reading material. Books in hard copy, subscriptions to online journals, and books external to the Common Awards contracts ensure that research students and those registered on Newman University Courses have parity of access to reading list materials.

6 The Foundation has ensured that teaching and learning is clearly differentiated by subject and level and that students are adequately prepared for their assignments. Academic Handbooks provide precise details about programme qualifications, level requirements, subject details and guidance on assessment preparation. Module Handbooks, issued in a standardised format, provide specific information on the assignment tasks and submission requirements for each module. All modules have dedicated space on the VLE that provides information and guidance. To evaluate success, the Foundation has added a question on the clarity of information in the module review questions for students and has received positive feedback about the module handbook from external examiners.

7 Teaching multiple levels in the same classroom has declined markedly since the 2016 HER (AP) report, as a consequence of declining numbers on the Newman Undergraduate teach-out programme and the acquisition of additional classroom teaching space. Priorities are given to the well-being of individual cohorts. For example, in respect of the Placement Module, which embraces split levels, ten versions of this have been developed to ensure that different cohorts on a specific programme receive the requisite information.

8 The Foundation has actioned fully and built upon the recommendation to provide students with clear and relevant module and programme information. Standardised formats exist for all handbooks, which ensure that all required content is provided. In addition, a new section has been added to module handbooks indicating changes that have been introduced as a consequence of feedback obtained from students on the previous delivery of the module. Students are provided with detailed programme information at their induction with continued access to comprehensive information on the VLE. Students the review team met were very positive about the information and support offered.

9 The Foundation has implemented the affirmation to strengthen student engagement and the student voice and continues to build upon the progress made. Two student representatives attend Governor's meetings and provide student perspectives on relevant issues. Students are members of the Academic Management Group, the Academic Quality and Standards Group and the Student-Staff Community Forum that is chaired by a student. Inductions take place for student representatives, including those serving on formal committees, to ensure responsibilities are understood, representatives produce role descriptions. In addition, students have been involved in the decision to seek registration with the Office for Students and are currently engaged in preparations for the Foundation's Periodic Ecumenical Review, scheduled to take place in 2019.

10 A new method of module feedback has been introduced to improve the quality of student responses. Module surveys now take place in the classroom, rather than online, and feature a set of standard written questions and a discussion forum, where students record impressions anonymously that are subsequently reviewed in class discussions with the lecturer. Results have been reviewed by staff and student members in the Academic Quality Standards Group, and staff members in the meeting confirm that the new initiative has improved the quality of response.

11 In response to student feedback and comments made in the QAA report of 2018, the Foundation now ensures that all students use plagiarism-detection software to access a text-matching report prior to the submission of summative assessment and receive detailed instructions about accessing and interpreting these reports. Students the review team met confirmed this. The Foundation also has developed a very useful proofreading policy that

sets out clear guidelines for reviewing student assignments. Staff members and students attending the meetings confirmed that the majority of students do not use the provision.

12 The Foundation continues to operate a highly complex admissions system, with processes determined by church and validating university requirements. All members of the Academic Planning Group and Registry are now involved in the admissions, registration and enrolment of students for 2018-19 that has been completed with positive results. Admissions policies and procedures, including APL policies, are published on the website and conform to the procedures specified by validating universities. The Academic Planning Group oversees the admissions process for students sponsored by churches and independent students at levels 4-7, and the Research Committee oversees the process for programmes at level 8. The Principal reviews admissions data in the formal reports presented to the Board of Governors for review and commentary.

13 The Foundation seeks to ensure that students have equal opportunities for success. All new students are interviewed before starting their programmes to ensure that the mode of study selected is appropriate and that programme entry is at the right level. With the exception of transfers from another recognised institution, all new undergraduate students are admitted initially onto the Cert HE programme. To accommodate students who already have a degree in a different subject area, the Foundation has recently developed a new pathway for individuals completing the Cert HE with an average mark of 60 per cent wherein they may progress directly to part-time postgraduate study in the same subject area.

14 Building upon the positive experience gained in providing an undergraduate taster module, the Foundation has extended its provision of taster courses to postgraduates in 2018-19, and positive responses from students have been received. Students registered for credit-bearing modules must meet the English-language entry requirements set by Durham and Newman universities. The Foundation uses the IELTS system as an external reference point. In addition, applicants may be asked to provide a sample of written work and undertake an interview to assess English comprehension skills and their intentions for study. Students the review team met confirmed this.

15 The Foundation's assessment procedures are carried out with rigour and integrity and conform to the validating University's requirements. Reports provided by external examiners and awarding bodies support this. Module handbooks and academic programme handbooks in standardised format provide students with detailed information about assessment requirements that can also be accessed on the VLE. Lecturers are provided with details about assessment requirements. Students submit summative assessments through plagiarism detection software in all modules, including taster courses and receive detailed feedback in preparation for submitting their next summative work. Some formative assessment (formative assessment being a requirement now in every module, not just Common Awards modules) is submitted in written form and the plagiarism-detection software can be used to assist students in learning how to interpret feedback.

16 Students are informed about academic misconduct and plagiarism and the penalties that may be applied at their induction and study skills sessions. Detailed information can be accessed on the VLE, in Academic (Programme) Handbooks and in the Foundation's Malpractice Policy and Procedures adopted for Common Awards.

17 The Foundation's processes for internal and external verification of assessments and external examining ensure that students achieve the learning outcomes required and assessments are marked fairly and securely. Staff members review and amend module assessments prior to distribution. Assignments are marked, moderated and externally examined anonymously. Foundation lecturers first-mark assessments; a Foundation lecturer who is not part of the subject team for that module moderates the assessment, a third senior

staff member may be called in to review individual pieces if the marker or moderator suspect any academic malpractice. External examiners (appointed by the relevant validating university) review summative assessments at all levels, along with teaching material and directions to students to ensure that marking is fair and at the appropriate level. University representatives can attend any foundation level exam board (usually attending one per year) and have access to any script. Senior managers review results and respond formally to comments made in external examiner reports. Results are recorded in batch sheets, reviewed and subsequently provisionally approved by the Foundation's Internal Examination Board. Thereafter confirmed module results are submitted formally to the University's Examination Boards, which ensures that academic standards in respect of assessment have been met. The University exam boards confirm students' qualification, determine compensation and classification of an award, if applicable.

18 There has been an overall reduction in student headcount of 30 (9 per cent) partly explained by the pause in admissions from the Lichfield Diocese, who are redesigning their Reader Programme, and the teach-out of the Newman University programmes. Retention rates show an increase from 2016-17 (92 per cent) to 2017-18 (98 per cent) and in pass rates for those who completed, an increase from 2016-17 (88 per cent) to 2017-18 (92 per cent). Many students are part-time and complete studies over a longer period than usual. Individual student reports are provided for those sponsored by churches.

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

19 The Foundation continues to engage fully with a range of relevant external reference points aimed at supporting and enhancing academic and professional standards and teaching quality. It is aligning its policies and processes to the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education. Its awards are aligned to the FHEQ and the Common Award Framework is validated by Durham University who are responsible for programmes being at the appropriate level. The Foundation's delivery of programmes meets requirements of the Anglican and Methodist sponsoring churches. Programmes are informed by the Subject Benchmark Statement for Theology. The Foundation registered with the Office for Students and is currently applying for TEF and has provided all the required information. Academic staff are strongly encouraged to undertake individual research, which informs all programmes.

Background to the monitoring visit

20 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.

21 The monitoring visit was carried out by Dr Tommie Anderson-Jaquest, Reviewer, and Mr Millard Parkinson, QAA Officer, on March 19, 2019.

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