



## Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education, March 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 Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education (Queen's) has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the [March 2016 Higher Educational Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

### 2 Changes since the last QAA review

2 Queen's continues to deliver undergraduate, postgraduate and research programmes to students who are mainly sponsored by the Church of England or the Methodist Church after being selected for public or ordained ministry in their denomination. The total student numbers have slightly decreased, from 388 in 2016 to 371, due to the reduction of enrolments on the teach-out programmes validated by Newman University. The Centre for Continued Ministerial Development is now operating, providing lifelong learning for existing ministers. A new property that is being added to the existing campus from April 2017 will replace accommodation currently rented from the University of Birmingham.

### 3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 Queen's has taken ownership of the action plan that it has developed since the 2016 HER (AP) report. The leadership team and the Staff-Student Community Forum (SSCF) monitor the achievement of key targets and evaluate their effectiveness. The Board of Governors considers progress against targets. Clear actions have been taken to address both recommendations. Teaching and learning is now more clearly differentiated by subject and level (paragraph 4) and Queen's has put in place mechanisms that ensure effective oversight of programme information (paragraph 5). Queen's has continued to make good progress in the two areas affirmed during the last review visit (paragraphs 6 and 7) and has made effective developments in both areas of good practice (paragraph 8).

4 The teaching and learning is now more clearly differentiated by subject and level so that students are adequately prepared for their assessment. Teaching of dual levels has now ceased for the vast majority of modules. Students confirm that lecturers use a range of teaching styles across the various modules; that learning outcomes are clearly differentiated for all levels in module handbooks; and that they are prepared well for assessments. New students receive clearer pathway guidance at induction, and individual timetables are emailed to continuing students.

5 There are now mechanisms to ensure effective oversight, to manage the variability in practice in the provision of programme information to current students. There is a standardised template for each module handbook and its page on the virtual learning environment. There is a systematic annual update of handbooks, with addendum pages given to continuing students. The Academic Dean now has ongoing responsibility for

ensuring the currency and accuracy of academic handbooks issued to students, which have recently been reviewed and standardised across the provision to ensure that electronic and printed versions are identical.

6 The work being undertaken to strengthen the student voice was affirmed in the 2016 HER (AP) report. Queen's has continued to make good progress with student engagement. Coupled with the appointment of a staff member to foster student engagement, an intentional approach by senior management to improve this area has resulted in significantly stronger student participation within the committees, which positively impacts on the quality of provision. There is active student representation within the Board of Governors, which receives minutes of the SSCF meeting, and Queen's intends to make these minutes available to all students on the virtual learning environment.

7 The other action that was affirmed during the last review visit was the introduction of plagiarism-detection software as part of the adoption of the Common Awards framework. The use of this plagiarism-detection software has been trialled and successfully introduced for all Common Awards programmes well ahead of schedule. Academic staff are now actively working towards its use within Newman programmes at the start of the next academic year.

8 Queen's has developed and established good practices that make particularly positive contributions to the academic standards and quality of the student experience. The integrated academic and pastoral support for all students continues to be highly responsive and facilitates their development and achievement. Staff training in mental health awareness to further improve pastoral support for students has taken place following the designation of a senior member of staff to focus on student wellbeing.

9 The comprehensive, effectively managed and enhanced library provision continues to provide an extensive and responsive service to students. This provision has been further improved following a review of the 2015-16 Library Survey and an internal review of the technological infrastructure. This has resulted in a substantial upgrading of the IT facilities available to students and the addition of a new print management system.

10 Queen's has a clear, comprehensive admissions policy and process covering its wide range of programmes and entry routes. Although this is systematically applied to ensure that independent students meet the admissions criteria for their course, including their level of English language, the Foundation places reliance on the different sponsoring churches to perform these checks for ministerial candidates. Appropriate further support with English is provided for new students if required, as such needs are routinely identified early on in the course either by personal tutors or through formative assessment. The applicant's suitability for their chosen programme, as well as their genuine intention to study, is thoroughly assessed either by the sponsoring church for ministerial candidates, or at interview with Foundation staff for independent students.

11 There are effective processes in place for the monitoring and regular review of the provision. Queen's produces an annual monitoring report to each awarding university. It also draws on feedback on the programmes within external examiners' reports and responds effectively to issues raised. In addition, the internal committee structure facilitates the development and review of the curriculum, including improvements to existing modules as well as the addition of new ones. The National Student Survey has been introduced in the current academic year to obtain comparative/whole programme data. Queens uses end-of-year feedback from staff, as well as feedback from students, as an intrinsic component of programme review. For example, staff feedback regarding pressures on the timing of some course components has led to effective action in enhancing the provision by reviewing the overall timetable for all courses. Queen's has also made changes to the

daytime student pathway to improve levels of theological reflection, following concerns raised by the external examiner on two occasions.

12 Queen's normally enrolls undergraduate students onto either a Certificate of Higher Education, a Diploma of Higher Education or the top-up BA, and rarely directly onto the BA programme. The data supplied demonstrates that retention, progression and achievement rates are almost always 100 per cent. This trend appears to be consistent. When retention rates fall below 100 per cent, however, they are distorted by the flexibility of the programmes and the small cohorts. For example, for the 2013-14 three-year full time BA Theology course the pass rate is stated as 50 per cent, but this represents a cohort of six where two students were awarded an exit award of Certificate of Higher Education and one transferred to another awarding body's programme.

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

13 Queen's demonstrates effective engagement with relevant external reference points and interrogates its practices against the indicators of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) termly in the leadership team meetings. Queen's used the Subject Benchmark Statement for Theology and Religious Studies, and *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* during the revalidation of the programmes by Newman University, together with learning outcomes taken from the national framework for the training of ordained Anglican ministers.

14 Regular staff development days consider how Queen's policies and procedures align to the indicators in the Quality Code. For example, the autumn term 2016 session considered the Quality Code, *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others*. Staff say that the Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research degrees* has been very useful in directing their relationship with Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

#### **5 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 Mike Coulson (Reviewer), and Catherine Fairhurst (Coordinator), on 13 March 2017.

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