Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of The Salvation Army Trustee Company t/a William Booth College, November 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 the Salvation Army Trustee Company t/a William Booth College (the College) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the November 2017 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers).

2 Changes since the last QAA review visit

2   There have been no material changes since the 2017 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER (AP)) visit. The College continues to deliver vocational courses in Salvation Army Officer Training leading to the Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE) awarded by the University of Gloucestershire.

3   The College experienced a decrease in new enrolments in the 2017-18 academic year with 14 full-time students and one part-time student enrolling compared to new intakes of between 20-30 students in previous years. For 2018-19, 18 full-time and two part-time students are newly enrolled. There are 31 full-time and six part-time distance learning students at the College. This compares to 36 full-time and six part-time students in November 2017. The 2017 review visit report noted that 13 full-time staff contribute to teaching, supplemented by a further 40 (approximately) external and guest lecturers. The College's data return indicates that it currently has 10 full-time staff contributing to teaching and 10 staff contributing to teaching on a fractional basis.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

4   The monitoring visit confirmed that the College has continued to develop good practice previously identified and has made acceptable progress in addressing the four recommendations and the single affirmation identified in the 2017 HER (AP). The College's academic, pastoral and learning support arrangements continue to provide individualised support to meet students' needs (paragraph 5); the outcomes of student feedback are made available through the library and shared network drive (paragraph 6). Tutors' meetings have been used to share external examiner feedback (paragraph 7). The College is taking action to consolidate enhancement activities to manage the further development of learning opportunities (paragraph 8). It has yet to complete the recommendation relating to extending the sourcing of external examiners in readiness for the selection of a new appointee (paragraph 9), and has made some progress in trialling the use of discussion forums on the VLE but recognises that this, along with the further development of the VLE, is work in progress (paragraph 10).

5   The 2017 HER (AP) identified as good practice the College's carefully tailored academic, pastoral and learning support that meets the individual needs of students from a range of backgrounds. It has continued to provide individualised support to meet students' needs. Although the member of staff with overall responsibility for student support last year

has now moved on, the College appointed a replacement who is proactive in identifying students' needs and alerting colleagues accordingly. Students provided several examples of how learning needs were assessed, usually during admissions, and interventions provided to make learning accessible to all. A comprehensive study skills week during induction is complemented by the provision of ongoing support from the Learning Support Officer. All students are allocated a pastoral support officer who is their first port of call though this need is fulfilled by the Distance Learning Coordinator for distance learning students. Students appreciated the College's role in supporting tutors to engage in Continuing Professional Development as the students also benefit from this.

6   The College was recommended to ensure that the outcomes of student feedback are made easily and readily available to all students. Actions in response to student feedback are discussed at Course Management Committee meetings, minutes of which are available via the library and shared network drive. Student representatives also provide feedback to students on any issues raised. As the development of the virtual learning environment (VLE) is still in progress, the goal of sharing responses to student feedback on the VLE has not yet been achieved. Further development of a DipHE 'homepage' is planned for the VLE.

7   The College was recommended to ensure the scrupulous and widest possible use of external examiner feedback throughout the academic year. The latest external examiner report confirms that previous feedback has been acted upon. Staff confirmed that the feedback was discussed at tutors' meetings and the recently held Tutors' Day. A comparative marking exercise was undertaken at the Tutors' Day and future enhancement plans include peer observation of moderation.

8   The College was recommended to consolidate enhancement activities in order to manage the further development of learning opportunities. It is now working towards a structured approach to enhancement. The current approach of pulling together various action plans, which include operational tasks and strategic level enhancements, has provided the College with the opportunity to engage in a process of identifying common themes that would constitute the basis of an enhancement strategy. The College has developed a consolidated action plan which represents a first step towards an enhancement strategy. There is an increasing understanding among staff of the definition and significance of enhancement though this is work in progress and the understanding of what enhancement means in the context of higher education needs to be developed further across all staff and senior management.

8   The College was recommended to extend the sourcing of external examiners in readiness for the selection of a new appointee in 2020. This recommendation, which was to be addressed by December 2018, has yet to be completed given that the appointment is not due to be made until 2020. However, the College has continued to network with other theological institutions in readiness for the next appointment. The potential for conflicts of interest arising from recruiting from a limited pool of external examiners, given the nature of the subject matter, continues to present a challenge.

9   The previous review report affirmed the recent and ongoing development of journals/reflective logs to enhance learning among the student body. The College has made some progress in trialling the use of discussion forums on the VLE but recognises that this, along with the further development of the VLE, is work in progress. Second year students noted the improvements made to the VLE over the past year and viewed this as a positive development that will be accelerated due to the transfer of a technology expert from within the Salvation Army to the College.

10   The admissions procedures are non-standard in nature, reflecting the fact that the student population is made up of predominantly mature students. Salvation Army Officer training comprises three elements namely, Knowing, Being and Doing with Knowing (the academic component). Formal qualifications are normally considered alongside experience in determining suitability for admission to the DipHE. The course is only open to individuals selected by the Salvation Army Candidates Unit who can demonstrate their lifelong commitment to the vocation through a rigorous and multi-tiered admissions process which includes an interview with the Course Leader or designated representative. There is no standard academic requirement but candidates undergo an English and Mathematics test. In some instances, candidates deemed unlikely to succeed academically on the programme or who lack the requisite language skills, follow an alternative non-credit bearing route, either from the outset or at some point during the programme. In the latter case, support and dialogue precedes any decision to withdraw from the DipHE.

11   A wide range of assessment methods designed to support learning outcomes are employed with a preponderance of written assignments. The College is in the process of exploring the use of the VLE for online journals and discussions, pending further development of the VLE, which was introduced a year ago. The College is working closely with the University of Gloucestershire to review the course assessment strategy and has developed marking criteria to cover both upper and lower ranges. Though no software is used to detect academic malpractice, the size of the student body, the absence of anonymous marking, and familiarity with relevant texts allows markers to detect changes in voice, style and breaches of academic conventions. Students are expected to uphold high ethical standards in line with their chosen vocation and also receive guidance at various stages of their student journey. Internal verification of selected assignments is supported by external verification by the University and external examiners. All failed assessments are reviewed by a third marker. The University appoints the external examiner taking account of recommendations from the College.

12   As previously indicated (paragraph 3), new student enrolments increased from 14 full-time students and one part-time student in 2017-18 to 18 full-time and two part-time students in 2018-19. Progression and retention rates are generally high at over 90 per cent, and pass rates are 100 per cent reflecting the strong pastoral care and academic support provided by the College. Retention rates for distance learning students range from 0 per cent (one student) to 100 per cent with the average student numbers between one to three. On occasion, a student may choose to withdraw to continue on the vocational pathway to ministry within the Salvation Army.

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

13   The College has included relevant references to external reference points (the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), FHEQ, UKPSF and Subject Benchmark Statements) in the Staff Handbook and Course Handbook for students. Strategies and Policies related to learning and teaching and student engagement reference relevant sections from the Quality Code. Information about the higher education sector, the Quality Code and the QAA review is provided in staff meetings, training and induction for new tutors and includes references to the Professional Standards Framework. Staff are also encouraged to engage with the Quality Code as part of their continuing professional development and some staff attend external events including those organised by the University on General Data Protection Regulation, Course Strategy, and the National Student Survey.

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 Laila Halani, Reviewer, and Dr Irene Ainsworth, QAA Officer, on 15 November 2018.