



## Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Trinity College, Bristol March, 2017

### Section 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 Trinity College Bristol (the College) has made commendable progress with implementing the action plan from the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#) in March 2016.

### Section 2: Changes since the last QAA review visit

2 Since the last QAA review the number of students at the College has risen from 144 (2015-16) to 186 (2016-17). An Academic Dean has been appointed with oversight of all academic programmes run by the College jointly with Bristol Baptist College, with which the College works in very close partnership.

### Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The College has completed and evaluated all the action points arising from the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) report of March 2016. In particular, the full implementation of all its recommendations has resulted in a clear enhancement of the quality of education at the College (paragraphs 4-6). Admissions policies and procedures are both robust and supportive of applicants (paragraph 7). The quality processes are thorough and fit for purpose; a problem arising during the last academic year was quickly identified and rectified (paragraph 8). Student statistics are detailed and accurate (paragraph 9). Use of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) is well embedded in the College (paragraphs 10 and 11).

4 The College has successfully consolidated and developed the features of good practice identified in the 2016 review report. This process, which includes a full evaluation, is clearly documented. The positive approach to staff scholarship is being fostered by a fortnightly research seminar, termly teaching and learning workshops, and sabbaticals every five years. Speakers with widely different backgrounds and perspectives continue to be invited to contribute to a range of modules. This is much appreciated by the students. The effective partnership between staff and students is being extended by consultation with student representatives on proposed new modules and student representation on the Curriculum Development Group. The integration of the assessed leadership module with the non-assessed School of Leadership will promote a College-wide approach to leadership studies.

5 The good practice associated with all aspects of placement activity continues. A range of different types of placement are available to provide students with opportunities relevant to their areas of interest. Placements are confirmed or selected on the basis of the opportunities they provide for students to achieve the programme learning outcomes and, for the Church of England ordinands, the required formational and professional development. Review of this area of activity is ongoing. In particular, individual placements are continually checked to ensure that they provide appropriate learning opportunities. Students were enthusiastic about the support they receive for all aspects of placement

activity, the diverse range of placements available and the opportunities for reflection. For the feature of good practice concerning admissions, see paragraph 7.

6 The College has also met in full the recommendations, and has fully implemented the actions that were affirmed in the 2016 review report. This process has resulted in a clear enhancement of the quality of education at the College. Following the issue of helpful notes of guidance for minute writing, there has been greater clarity in recording decisions and actions assigned to individuals, including comprehensive action logs. Even in the rare cases where the notes have not been fully implemented, the minutes leave no doubt about the action to be taken. The peer observation process now includes a requirement for the observer to comment on the impact of teaching practice on student learning. This has been successfully implemented. Strategic oversight of the postgraduate research programmes has been secured by the appointment of the Academic Dean (see paragraph 2) to whom the Director of Postgraduate Research, who has a detailed knowledge of all matters concerning both programmes and individual students, reports. There is now a clearly articulated process for internal selection, approval and support of first and second supervisors of research students. A formal induction for supervisors is in place to ensure that they are aware of relevant policies and procedures. The College now ensures that students undertaking research programmes at a distance have access to an appropriate research environment, by requiring these students to indicate their access to such an environment before completion of the admissions process and by regularly monitoring the currency of such information. Plagiarism-detection software has been successfully deployed.

7 The College continues to operate a joint undergraduate and taught postgraduate admissions policy approved by Durham University. This policy is supplemented by specific additional guidance and training for those involved in the admissions process. All students are interviewed to ensure that vocational, training and practical requirements can be met. During the interview, candidates meet academic and support staff, including the placement coordinator. The needs of both the family and the candidate are given careful consideration. While the interview is rigorous, care is taken to ensure that the candidates are given impartial advice about their options. Unsuccessful candidates are offered advice and support. The way in which the College takes full account of individual student needs and circumstances during the admissions process for taught programmes was identified as a feature of good practice in the 2016 review report and remains so. The research postgraduate admissions process is also thorough and caring. Potential candidates are put in contact with a possible supervisor so that a dialogue can take place to ensure that the College has the appropriate resources to support a particular area of study. All applications are carefully considered by the Research Applications Committee, which gives equal weight to supervisory capacity and candidate qualifications. Both taught and research students met by the review team commented favourably on the thorough and supportive approach throughout the admissions process.

8 The annual programme monitoring processes of the College comply rigorously with the quality systems of the awarding bodies and culminate in two annual reports to Durham University for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes and to the University of Aberdeen for postgraduate research programmes. The latter report includes a record of the progress of each individual student registered at the University of Aberdeen. However, following the transfer of responsibility for all new students from the University of Bristol to Durham and Aberdeen universities, no analogous record is available in the report to the University of Bristol, or in any other of the College's committee papers of the postgraduate research students who are still registered there. There is, however, clear evidence that these students are supervised with meticulous care. The initial stage of programme monitoring is the responsibility of the Teaching and Learning Committee, and its minutes provide ample evidence of its careful review of individual modules that feeds into the annual report to Durham University. There is an effective student representation system and students are

members of key committees, including the Teaching and Learning Committee, which enables them to contribute fully to the quality processes. This is supplemented by student questionnaire feedback at module and programme level, which is analysed with exceptional care. The College recognises that not all of its quality processes were consistent. In particular, the external examiner, whose report is central to these processes, had drawn to light a confusion between second marking and moderation. This has now been rectified, partly as a result of the efforts of the newly appointed Academic Dean (see paragraph 2), who has assumed responsibility for the overall management of quality processes.

9 The student statistics in annual reports from the College to the awarding bodies comprise detailed records of the progression of students from the beginning to the end of the academic year that the report covers. In these reports, the records are combined with those from Bristol Baptist College (see paragraph 2) to provide an integrated result. While these statistics are meticulously calculated and are acceptable to the awarding bodies, they have limitations for the purposes of trend analysis. The following figures, agreed by the College and the reviewers during the review visit, provide a record of the successful completion of the College's own students, calculated from the beginning to the end of their programmes. Of the 52 undergraduate and taught postgraduate students who enrolled in the year that enabled them to qualify in 2015-16, 39 (75 per cent) completed successfully. Five students (10 per cent) transferred from full to part-time study or have extended their period of study and are expected to complete after 2015-16. Eight students (15 per cent), all of whom were studying part-time, withdrew for a variety of personal reasons. Of the eight BA students graduating in 2015-16, six graduated with upper second class honours and two with lower second class honours. Of the 10 research students who started in 2011-12, five have successfully completed, four are due to submit in 2017-18 or 2018-19, and one withdrew.

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

10 As noted in earlier reviews, use of the Quality Code is well embedded in the policies and procedures of the College. In addition to engagement with the policies and procedures of the awarding bodies, the College has undertaken further work to enhance this aspect of its practice. A review of College policies and procedures against the Quality Code by the newly appointed Academic Dean noted that there continues to be appropriate alignment. The Quality Assurance Steering Group is continuing a detailed review of individual sections of the Quality Code to enhance relevant policies and procedures. Engagement with awarding bodies, internal committee activity, and attendance at QAA events ensure that staff are familiar with this key reference point. Use of the Quality Code is included in induction activities for new staff.

11 As a consequence of the religious nature of the provision, the taught College programmes are subject to Church of England Ordination requirements. While this is managed through the Durham University Common Awards structure, the College has input via the Common Awards Management Board, the Theological Education Institution Forum and the Continuing Implementation Group.

#### **Section 5: Background to the monitoring visit**

12 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.

13 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mrs Catherine Symonds, Reviewer, and Mr Robert Jones, Coordinator, on 22 March 2017.

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