

Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of St Mellitus College Trust, March 2016

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 St Mellitus College Trust (the College) has made acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [previous monitoring visit](#) in March 2015.

Section 2: Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 As outlined at the previous monitoring visit in 2015 most of the undergraduate provision is now with the Church of England Ministry Division Common Awards Framework, validated by the University of Durham, as well as an MA Theology, Mission and Ministry. Middlesex University remains the awarding body for the MA Christian Leadership, and the BA (Hons) Theology and Youth Ministry programmes.

3 The College has continued to expand; since the 2015 monitoring visit the number of students on accredited courses has increased to 409 (February 2016).

Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The College has made acceptable progress on the recommendations in the 2013 Review for Specific Course Designation report. The College has maintained the three areas of good practice and demonstrated good progress with the advisable and desirable recommendations, with further work to do in some areas.

5 The College has further enhanced its good practice in student support. Formation groups remain central to the pastoral environment. The formation group tutor has a role in developing and supporting the individual student in terms of their academic progress and their development as a rounded and emotionally intelligent individual. The formation group's membership also serves as a supportive network for others in the group. The formation group tutor meets with their students regularly during term time and at residential study weeks. They also visit their students on placement, at which time they will meet the placement supervisor and sometimes family and friends of the student. Placement supervisors take part in a supervisor training day and have an open invitation to attend academic sessions held by the College. Although there are other effective mechanisms for feedback from students and stakeholders, and for communication both ways, the role of the formation tutor is key in this provision. Students commented on how well the College has maintained its good practice in an environment of intellectual and personal growth.

6 The College has maintained its progress with the development of an appropriate committee structure with clear policies and procedures, including a Monitoring and Approval of all Public Information Policy. The College continues to use clear agendas and minutes with action points, with all staff receiving the agenda and resulting minutes from the weekly Senior Management Team meeting. At the time of the visit the College was in the process of implementing a new staffing structure, developed over the previous eight months. The new structure is informed by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) and

one of its aims is to provide a separation between delivery and quality monitoring and improvement. As such, it is developing in line with the increasing complexity of the College.

7 The College has made progress with implementing the peer review system, which is now linked to the staff appraisal scheme. Staff find the peer review system and the appraisal process useful in enabling them to develop their skills and knowledge. The College is gathering evidence from module feedback and appraisal to identify and share good practice, as well as to respond to staff development needs. Summative common threads are reported to the Management Committee; part of the agenda of staff meetings is reserved for teaching staff to discuss an area of good practice or an issue that requires improvement.

8 A new virtual learning environment has been developed in discussion with other providers of the University of Durham's Common Awards Framework. The prototype to be piloted with a group of students was reviewed at the visit. Material from the current version will be transferred across, making accessibility easier and more focused for the individual student. Students already find the current version very useful but more facilities will be available through the newer version. The timeframe for implementation includes early piloting with a group of students, followed by amendments to be made following feedback and full implementation in September 2016.

9 The College continues to maintain an admission procedure that is rigorous, informative and inclusive. Information presented to prospective students is reliable and useful in assisting them to make informed decisions about the programmes of study available at the College. Prospective applicants are able to attend an open or welcome day, to which families are also invited and during which time they are able to find out more about the College. The application process includes the writing of a free text passage, Motivation for Study, which informs the College about the applicant's level of English, followed by a one-to-one interview. Students found this process, and the subsequent induction period, very useful and felt that they were able to get the information that they needed.

10 Programme monitoring and review is thorough and effective. Oversight of programme monitoring and review currently rests directly with the College's Director of Studies, supported by the Academic Coordinator. The Director of Studies is a member of the College's Senior Management Team, providing the link to the College's management body, and has the seniority to achieve the quality monitoring of programmes. The College works well with its validating bodies to achieve this, and often improvements will be made in year with the awarding body link tutor as a result of a module review. Feedback from students at the end of each module informs the process, as does the feedback from the external examiners.

11 The assessment of students is rigorous and thorough, and follows the policies and procedures of the awarding bodies. The recent upgrade of plagiarism-detection software has enabled students to better understand where, for example, their use of quotations is becoming too extensive, and as such has improved their final submission of work. Assessors generally return marked work promptly - usually in under four weeks - and feedback given to students shows them how to improve. Success rates are high, with 100 per cent retention and achievement on most programmes for those completing in 2014 and 2015. There are relatively low numbers of students on the BA (Hons) Theology and Youth Ministry programmes completing in July 2016, and on the Certificate in Theology programme, which completed in July 2015. The former has a retention rate of 60 per cent and the latter 70 per cent, with a 100 per cent pass rate. However, these lower retention rates were due mainly to two cases of illness, and some transfers to other programmes, as well as some early leavers.

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

12 The College aligns its provision with the requirements of Middlesex University and the Church of England Ministry Division, which constitutes an essential external benchmark for the College's programmes. These are now articulated through the Common Awards Framework, which is validated by the University of Durham.

13 The College is responsive to the requirements of its awarding bodies, which in turn respond to the Quality Code. The language of the Quality Code is being introduced into documentation and policies. There is a Quality Code section on the agenda of Senior Management Team meetings, and the new organisation structure brings greater clarity in the responsibility for continuing to ensure provision at the College is aligned with the Quality Code. The College has planned Quality Code training for specific staff members to enable them to better understand how the Code can enhance their practice and the wider student experience. The College has recently reviewed its procedures for recruitment, selection, and admission, and as such drew closely on the expectations of the Quality Code.

Section 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 Heather Barrett-Mold, Coordinator, and Mr Stephen Harris, Reviewer, on 1 March 2016.

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