



BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM INSPECTION (Independent Higher Education)

INSTITUTION:	Maryvale Institute
ADDRESS:	Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham Cathedral House St Chad's Queensway Birmingham B4 6EU
HEAD OF INSTITUTION:	Ms Sophia Pain
ACCREDITATION STATUS:	Accredited
DATE OF INSPECTION:	14 December 2023
ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE:	Continued accreditation, 28 March 2024

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the institution

Maryvale Institute (MI/the Institution) is an international Catholic college established in 1980 as an institute for adult faith formation. MI offers part-time courses and programmes in further and higher education relating to the Roman Catholic faith.

The Institution was originally based in Maryvale House, a Grade II listed building that dates back to 1752 and has been associated with the Archdiocese of Birmingham in the United Kingdom (UK) since the mid-eighteenth century. In 2019, Maryvale Institute merged with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham, formally becoming part of the Birmingham Diocesan Trust. Maryvale House became the responsibility of the Diocese. The Institution has moved its business address to the Diocese in Cathedral House in Birmingham.

The mission of Maryvale Institute as a diocesan, national and international college is to be a leader in the provision of lifelong learning for all and for research opportunities in Catholic Evangelisation, Catechetics, Theology, Philosophy and Religious Education in order to serve Christ's mandate and His Church's mission of evangelisation in contemporary society.

Maryvale Institute is a recognised Higher Institute of Religious Sciences (HIRS). It is currently the only such institute in the English-speaking world to offer Bachelor's degrees and Licentiate degrees, which are at postgraduate level, in Divinity. These ecclesial degrees are validated by Faculté Notre Dame which is the theology faculty of the École Cathédral in Paris, on behalf of the Congregation for Catholic Education in Rome.

Maryvale Council is responsible for the Institution as a constituted committee of the Diocesan Board of Trustees. The Institution is managed by a Senior Management Board (SMB), an Academic Board (AB) and the HIRS Council. The SMB reports to Maryvale Council. The SMB's membership comprises the Academic Registrar, the Director of the HIRS and the Academic Dean. The Institution's finance and Human Resources (HR) support are provided by diocesan finance and HR staff.

There is a small team of six permanent academic staff, three of whom are part time. The delivery of the provision is supported by a pool of 90 associate lecturers drawn from academic institutions and the Catholic Church in the UK and overseas.

2. Brief description of the current provision

MI offers two ecclesial degrees being the Ecclesiastical Licence and the Bachelor of Divinity. These are awarded by Faculté Notre Dame and will continue to be taught by the Institution.

The Institution also offers academic degrees, which are a Master of Arts (MA) in Catholic Applied Theology and a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition, in addition to doctoral study. The Institution is currently teaching out its Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Master of Philosophy (M Phil) and academic degree programmes. The PhD and M Phil are validated by Liverpool Hope University (LHU). The academic degree programmes are validated by The Open University (OU).

All programme delivery is online, with the aim of replicating the previous residential experience online as far as possible.

At the time of the inspection, there were a total of 86 students enrolled, of whom the majority are female. All students are part time and over the age of 18. The majority of students are aged between 22 and 65 and are from the UK and the Republic of Ireland. The Institution has previously enrolled students from Singapore, Macau, Nigeria, the United States of America, Canada, Hong Kong and Australia.

The Bachelor's degree enrolls in October and the Licentiate in January each year. Both of these programmes are validated by Faculté Notre Dame. Enrolment requirements are in line with normal higher education requirements.

The scope of the British Accreditation Council (BAC) accreditation is thus Maryvale Institute, within the Diocese, and covers the programmes offered by HIRS, the remaining LHU PhD programme students and the academic degree programmes currently being taught out.

3. Inspection process

The inspection was carried out online over one day by a single inspector. Meetings were held with the Chair of Maryvale Council and the Chief Operating Officer of the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the Academic Dean, Director of the HIRS, two Programme Directors, the Registrar, the Interim Registrar, the Academic Administrator, and a representative group of staff and students. A live, online teaching session was observed. Documentation was made available before and during the inspection. All staff and students co-operated fully with the inspection process.

4. Inspection history

Inspection type	Date
Full Accreditation	20–21 March 2009
Interim	28 May 2010
Re-accreditation	1–2 March 2013
Interim	16 April 2015
Re-accreditation	5-6 April 2017
Interim	5 March 2019
Re-accreditation	27, 28 & 30 September 2021

PART B – JUDGEMENTS AND EVIDENCE

The following judgements and comments are based upon evidence seen by the inspector during the inspection and from documentation provided by the institution.

1. Significant changes since the last inspection

The Archdiocese decided in March 2022 to discontinue recruitment to its academic degree programmes which are currently in teach-out. As these are part-time programmes, the full teach-out will not be complete until 2025/26. The PhD and M Phil programmes are also being phased out as LHU has decided not to offer PhD programmes in partnerships. The further education programmes have now concluded, and the remaining students have received their awards.

Discussions are nearing conclusion with a potential university partner to offer the MA and BA degrees that are currently validated by the OU, and to re-establish the PhD programme. The Diocese, in supporting HIRS, has decided to resume recruitment to the Bachelor of Divinity and the Ecclesiastical Licence programmes that are offered by HIRS and awarded by Faculté Notre Dame.

Maryvale Institute no longer operates from a physical base. All staff work from home and teaching and assessment are online. The previous residential weekends and week-long study periods are now delivered online. In-person oral assessments have taken place for the Bachelor of Divinity programme and alternative arrangements will be made for those unable to attend in person.

2. Response to action points in last report

5.14 The Institution must include an explanation in its student fees policy of how it addresses requests for refunds.

The Institution has included an appropriate explanation in its student fees policy of how it addresses requests for refunds. Accordingly, this action point has been completed.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

It is recommended that strategic planning takes into account the views of the wider community as well as those relating to members and institutions of the Catholic faith.

MI is an international Catholic theological college and is part of the Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham. There is external input into its strategic planning process from the Catholic community, and account is taken of the needs of other dioceses. Members of the wider community are free to present their views on the strategic plans of the Institution, and these views are considered in good faith. This recommendation has, therefore, been met.

It is recommended that policies are examined and revised in accordance with their review dates.

It was intended that staff would work through the policies due for review during the summer of 2023. Unfortunately, owing to recent staff changes and other personal issues, this has not taken place. Work is now ongoing to catch up. This recommendation has therefore not yet been completed.

It is recommended that the Institution continues with the replacement of its current database.

MI has progressed in replacing its database and is currently making use of the new database. This recommendation has therefore been met.

The Institution should reflect on how to create space for academic staff to reflect on teaching delivery in a timely fashion.

Academic staff's reflection on their delivery is an intrinsic part of the annual monitoring review of each programme. Staff come together through the Academic Board to review all the Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) to the validating partners, which include reflections on teaching delivery.

Opportunities exist for staff to attend seminars to discuss methodologies. These seminars are led by invited specialists from the partner universities. Academic staff meetings take place and annual training sessions for academic staff are programmed. Regular contact is maintained with associate academic staff. Access to online forums is encouraged, and feedback from academic staff demonstrates that attendance at such events provides useful opportunities to reflect on teaching methods.

It is felt by senior academic managers that when in-person teaching is operational again, it will be appropriate to further consider how space can be created to reflect on teaching approaches. This recommendation has therefore been implemented.

It is recommended that the Institution amends its academic appeals policy to incorporate the role of validating partners.

MI has amended its academic appeals policy, which now explicitly references the role of the validating partners. Students therefore have access to information on how to make an appeal both to the Institution and its partners. This recommendation has therefore been met.

The Institution should widen the scope of its published guidance on complaints and include reference to the validating partners, as appropriate.

MI has widened its published guidance on complaints to include the escalation of a complaint to a validating partner should the matter not be satisfactorily resolved by the Institution. This recommendation has now been actioned.

It is recommended that the Institution reviews its attendance policy in preparation for the resumption of residential delivery.

The attendance policy has been reviewed and amended to take account of potential future residential delivery. This recommendation has therefore been actioned.

4. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements

4.1 Governance, Strategy and Financial Management (spot check)

The standards are judged to be: Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

Maryvale Institute's current organisational structure is appropriate for the size of the Institution. It enables all relevant stakeholders to have a clear picture of the Institution's management hierarchy.

The committee structure is clear and functions effectively, as shown in the minutes of meetings. The SMB is responsible for the operational management and strategic direction of the Institution. Academic matters are addressed by the AB, which ensures that academic freedom is maintained.

Reports to the Diocese show that regular risk assessments are undertaken and that senior management works to mitigate such risks and takes appropriate action when these are identified.

A strategic plan from 2020 is currently being reviewed in the light of the changes in academic provision. The student voice in the various committees ensures that students have an input into the planning process.

The plan appropriately emphasises the financial viability of the academic programmes, the quality of the student experience, and the independence of the Institution in its decision-making process. Thus, the Institution is well supported by the Diocese in its strategic planning processes.

Regular online meetings, that are clearly recorded, ensure that communication with stakeholders, including partners, is maintained.

Processes are in place for senior management to review their own performance and that of the Institution against appropriate key performance indicators. The annual institutional review draws on the annual reports from each programme. The Institution therefore assesses its own performance against an appropriate set of key objectives.

4.2 General and Academic Management and Administration (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met

Partially Met

Not Met

Comments

The management and administrative structure is appropriately defined and operates effectively. The terms of reference are regularly reviewed, allowing the Institution to amend its structure as the need arises.

Students are represented on the SMB, AB and programme committees. All committees have appropriate terms of reference, with meetings recorded and action points set. Meeting records demonstrate that the action points from the previous meetings are reviewed, providing an effective follow-up and approval mechanism for actions carried out.

The website includes the Institution's policies and procedures, which are comprehensive in scope and detail. Administrative policies are robust, and the associated systems meet the operational needs of the Institution.

The current new database does not have the capabilities expected of it. MI is making the best use it can of the new database and spreadsheets while it sources a further replacement.

Inspection findings demonstrate that the student records are accurate and are kept up to date. Access to student and staff information is maintained securely through a system of hierarchical permissions in accordance with the data protection policy. Appropriate Information Technology (IT) support is provided, and remote access to the systems is secure.

Examination administration is effectively managed, including the moderation of assessments in accordance with the requirements of the validating partners.

Records show that all staff are appraised annually. The process is robust and includes a review of their achievements over the period since the previous appraisal and identifies Continuing Professional Development (CPD) needs. For academic staff, appraisal includes a review of scholarship and research. Appraisal also includes regular teaching observations. Staff confirmed that the appraisal system operates effectively and provides an effective opportunity to discuss their achievements, aspirations and CPD needs.

Programme reviews are no longer required by the validating partners for courses that are currently teaching out. However, academic standards are still monitored through the Institution's quality assurance mechanisms, based on those of the partner organisations. This ensures that standards are properly maintained.

There are effective mechanisms in place for proposing new programmes that include due diligence on prospective validating partners.

Publicity material is fair, accurate and up to date.

4.3 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met

Partially Met

Not Met

Comments

Teaching on the Institution's courses encourages students to be self-motivated and independent learners. Students are well-supported in their studies by course materials on the VLE, course handbooks, study guides, advice on completing assessments and dissertation supervision. Thus, students have access to suitable resources to support their taught sessions.

Feedback from students is gathered on a regular basis and informs the programme review reports and the annual institutional review. Feedback to students on their progress, particularly following assessments, is said by them to be informative and encouraging. Inspection findings confirm this to be the case.

Student Advisors, who themselves are Maryvale Institute graduates, provide students with specialist help on written assignments and vivas, which is much appreciated by students.

Teaching materials are current and informed by academic research undertaken by the Institution's teaching staff. Academic staff receive two weeks' research leave each year to use flexibly. Academic staff contribute to journal articles, attend conferences, contribute to media discussions, and prepare chapters for textbooks. The Institution's annual conference in 2022 engaged all academic staff and as a result has enhanced their careers. The effect of these initiatives has enhanced MI and its staff's academic standing.

Students confirmed that they are provided with annual assessment and work schedules on the VLE. Assessments clearly relate to the course's intended learning outcomes and are internally and externally moderated. External examiner reports show that students are achieving the expected standards, confirming the effectiveness of the teaching provided by MI. Students indicated that they are provided with guidance on academic misconduct, including plagiarism. Appropriate detection software is used by both academic staff and students.

Students are very complimentary about the high quality of teaching and the unique nature of the subject matter on their courses. They also commented positively on the conduct of seminars for discussion and exchange of ideas. In addition, they value the speedy response they receive to any queries they may have. This contributes to a very positive learning experience for students, which is enhanced by the attention to detail provided by staff. Students also value the individual support they receive.

4.4 Student Support, Guidance and Progression (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met

Partially Met

Not Met

Comments

Students confirm that pastoral care is excellent. Staff have been trained in welfare issues, and all staff are involved in ensuring the well-being of the students. Validating partners have commended the Institution on its high-quality provision of pastoral care.

The comprehensive induction for students at the start of their programme covers study skills, access to the library, policies and procedures, academic misconduct, safe use of IT, and how to obtain pastoral support. By means of the VLE and other messaging services, the Institution communicates effectively with its students.

Teaching staff, programme directors and administrators all provide academic support and guidance via telephone, messaging and the VLE. In particular, the Institution provides one-to-one tutorial support that ensures individual students can discuss their academic issues with their tutors. The effect of this is that students receive clear and targeted guidance.

The safeguarding policy includes recognition of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. The Institution has carried out a risk assessment and provided staff training that covers prevention of radicalisation and extremism and safeguarding. All staff have undertaken this training. MI has clear policies on the avoidance of discrimination and abusive behaviour. These are made clear to prospective students and staff.

Students have access to a fair appeals and complaints procedure, which is available on its website.

The student database records attendance and punctuality at online teaching sessions, and any absences are quickly followed up by administrative staff. Regular absence is followed up by academic staff, who provide counselling as appropriate. In addition, viewing of pre-recorded lectures is logged on the VLE and monitored by staff, since students are expected to have watched these before taking part in online tutorials.

The student support and guidance offered by MI are effective and comprehensive. Students confirmed that they believe they are well-supported in their academic development. Every effort is made to accommodate students who have special educational needs.

4.5 Premises, Facilities and Learning Resources (spot check)

The standards are judged to be: Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The library continues to be housed in Maryvale House, and a member of staff provides services on a part-time basis, supporting students with access to electronic resources and requests for physical stock. An alternative location is being explored for the library stock.

The library holds approximately 20,000 items, with many books available for lending. Copies of high-demand texts are kept for reference purposes only inside the library, but essential resource material is available online. Students have access to proprietary databases to search for academic literature and e-journals. Computer terminals and internet access are also available in the library for students to use.

Students have access to the online library at all times. Students also have access to the online libraries of the Institution's validating partners. In pursuing their studies, students are well-supported by online resources recommended by academic staff during tutorials. The Institution ensures that students can easily access the library, which allows them to prepare for tutorials. This in turn ensures that students can gain maximum benefit from the tutorials.

IT services are managed by a suitably qualified and experienced ICT co-ordinator who is provided by the Diocese. An external IT consultancy provides maintenance of the system network, hardware and website under a service contract. The software that is in use is up to date.

Students confirm that they are well-supported in accessing online resources, and that any access issues are speedily resolved.

4.6 Quality Management, Assurance and Enhancement (spot check)

The standards are judged to be: Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The views of students and other stakeholders are regularly obtained, recorded and analysed in the various committees, and appropriate action is taken. Students' views are received through module and programme evaluation surveys and via representation on programme committees, HIRS and the Academic Board. Informal feedback is received during tutorials, which is an effective and efficient method of obtaining student feedback that allows quick resolution of issues.

The Institution's quality assurance systems are available in the programme handbooks and on the VLE. These systems ensure that quality is embedded throughout the Institution and that students receive a high-quality learning experience.

The Institution reviews its own performance against appropriate indicators, taking account of the AMRs for each programme. The AMRs are provided to validating partners. The quality assurance process reviews previous actions taken and includes student evaluations. AMRs are considered by the programme committees, the Academic Standards Committee (ASC) and the Academic Board before submission to the validating partners. This allows the Institution to take action on issues raised and provides reassurance to the validating partners that such issues have been appropriately addressed.

A comprehensive institutional review summarises the contents of the AMRs, thereby evaluating performance across the programmes. This ensures that the Institution is systematically reviewing its own performance, including taking account of commentary from external examiners and meeting the requirements of its validating partners.

Academic staff share good practice through programme committee meetings and informally through individual conversations. Good practice is communicated in the AMRs and recorded by the ASC and AB.

4.7 Online, Distance and Blended Learning (spot check)

The standards are judged to be: Met Partially Met Not Met NA

Comments

Students commented that they are well-supported by academic and technical staff in accessing their online study materials and tutorials. All staff have been trained in the delivery of online teaching and learning and are well-equipped to support students effectively. The Institution uses a proprietary interactive virtual platform supported by a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to deliver its online learning.

Academic staff have a clear understanding of the challenges of meeting online delivery and consequent student demands, particularly in respect of administering online assessments. Consequently, academic and support staff work proactively to ensure that programmes run efficiently, and students are able to access materials and tutorials with ease. This serves to enhance the overall student experience.

Students receive guidance before enrolment on the level of digital literacy that will be expected of them. The Librarian and the IT Manager offer guidance on effective online study. Students can take part in mock online vivas and oral examinations as practice for the real assessments. This ensures students are competent in the technical aspects of the online assessments and identifies any areas of weakness to be addressed.

The online delivery is favoured by the majority of students and is inclusive for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, students based at a distance from Birmingham, and, particularly, international students.

4.8 Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated. Yes No

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS

The Institution is well-managed and governed, with a clear distinction between governance and academic management so that effective independence is maintained by senior staff on academic issues.

Management processes are robust, and administration is efficient, which enables students to pursue their courses effectively.

Teaching is of a high standard and is well-received by students and the attention to online delivery processes guides students to learn independently and at their own pace.

Students receive strong academic and pastoral support, which enhances their learning experience and robust processes are in place for collecting and acting on student feedback.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

None

High

Medium

Low

RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT *(to be reviewed at the next inspection)*

It is recommended that policies are examined and revised in accordance with their review dates.

It is recommended that the Institution pursues the replacement of its current database.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS – FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE

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THE INSPECTION WAS CARRIED OUT BY:

Richard Smith

Lead Inspector