



Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight: Middlebury College-CMRS Oxford Humanities Program, monitoring report, July 2024

Outcome of the desk-based analysis

1 From the annual return and documentary evidence, the monitoring team concludes that the Middlebury College, Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies Oxford Humanities Program (M-CMRS) is continuing to maintain academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities since the last review under the [Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight \(RSEO\)](#) in June 2023.

Changes since the last QAA review

2 M-CMRS is a study abroad provider that offers two undergraduate humanities programmes leading to credits for overseas students. M-CMRS is associated with Keble College, University of Oxford; and Middlebury College is the awarding body for study abroad credits that are recognised by partner institutions - mainly in the US. During the academic year 2023-24, there were 29 students enrolled on the regular programme (autumn); 43 on the regular programme (spring); and 19 students attended the Museum Studies programme in May 2024. Overall numbers for 2023-24 are slightly higher than in previous years (82 in 2023-24 compared to 79 in 2022-23 and 75 in 2021-22).

3 Since the last review, there have been no significant staffing changes, except that the Facilities and Maintenance Coordinator, who had been appointed at the time of the last visit, has now commenced in post. There remain five full-time and two part-time members of staff, plus two Junior Deans who provide out-of-hours cover, and academic tutors (known as 'contractors') who deliver the modules. There have been no changes to programmes offered or premises.

4 In March 2024, M-CMRS withdrew from British Accreditation Council (BAC) accreditation in order to simplify the oversight of its provision in the UK by a single body - the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

5 There have been no material changes affecting the provision since the previous monitoring visit in June 2023.

Findings from the desk-based analysis

6 The review team concluded that M-CMRS is continuing to monitor, review and enhance the higher educational provision for its study abroad international students

It also continues to manage its responsibilities for academic standards in accordance with the requirements of its awarding partners. It has made progress against its Action Plan, relating to the three areas of good practice identified during the last visit and has a clear plan to complete action regarding the Terms of Reference of the Academic Board.

7 An area of good practice identified in the 2023 review was the continuous commitment to academic and pastoral support to enable students to achieve positive outcomes. This practice has continued. Student feedback provides evidence that students have good access to staff, both formally and informally, with students praising the accessibility of academic staff. Students are supported in their learning via these opportunities to gain academic advice but also through the formalised, timetabled study skills sessions. While M-CMRS are looking into ways in which they can increase engagement in these study skills seminars, these sessions nevertheless provide opportunities for students to learn the academic skills required for the achievement of successful outcomes in UK higher education. In terms of pastoral care, Junior Deans provide out-of-hours support to students so that there is always someone available to support students. Students continue to enjoy very high levels of academic and pastoral support.

8 Another area of good practice identified in the last review was the provision of access to a wide range of learning resources to support students in their studies. M-CMRS continue to maintain and enhance their provision in this respect and continue to monitor student satisfaction. Student feedback is very positive regarding their access to libraries, and particularly to the Bodleian library system. M-CMRS monitors students' use of resources and uses the results of its analysis for future planning needs and student inductions. The appointment of the new Facilities and Maintenance Coordinator has already had an impact and M-CMRS is now upgrading its audio-visual equipment in its teaching and learning spaces (lecture theatre, seminar rooms, library room and common room) to enhance the student experience and improve support for student learning.

9 M-CMRS continues to maintain the good practice of providing practical learning opportunities available to Museum Studies students. M-CMRS has continued its relationship with Compton Verney, their main partner, who provides such practical learning opportunities. This year, M-CMRS, through Compton Verney, has organised four days of co-curricular cultural activities offering insights into the operations of a museum, including talks, visits to the gallery and park, shadowing of staff and participation in relevant events. It is clear that M-CMRS has begun to extend the good practice of offering practical learning opportunities beyond the Museum Studies programme to the regular programme, and students attended a 'Conflict Transformation Symposium' that took place at Keble College in March 2024. M-CMRS will review the format of the event and consider whether this is successful as a practical learning opportunity for those on the regular programme.

10 The last QAA review under the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight identified one desirable recommendation: to review the Academic Board's terms of reference in relation to its decision-making function. M-CMRS has made some progress in this area and has reworded the terms of reference to make it clear that, while there is an expectation that the Academic Board's recommendations will be followed, the Dean of International Programs at M-CMRS retains a right to veto. M-CMRS acknowledges that work in this area is not yet complete and has established a timeline in its Action Plan 2023-24 for completion of further action in the summer of 2024.

11 M-CMRS's Action Plan 2023-24 includes further discussions around the role of the Academic Board in the oversight of academic standards. There are plans to discuss a wide range of issues, including grade boundaries, the use of artificial intelligence in assessments

and workload. These discussions and subsequent actions will feed in a timely way into the broader review of the role of academic oversight that is provided by the Academic Board. M-CMRS's Quality Assurance Policy Document states that the Academic Board has a wide range of responsibilities including monitoring of admissions decisions; maintaining strategic oversight of course design, development and approval; ensuring that courses are high quality and well-designed; reviewing student evaluation questionnaires; approving marking criteria; and setting the strategic objectives for teaching. The Academic Board currently meets annually, and the minutes do not show actions or reports relating to all these responsibilities. Further work identified by M-CMRS is required to ensure transparency and clarity over the nature of the Academic Board's decision-making function and how this connects with the management of M-CMRS, its Academic Committee and Dean of International Programs, as well as with the requirements and standards set by Middlebury College. It is noted that the minutes of the last Academic Board (2023) suggest that the Board might not incorporate all of the purposes included in its terms of reference. For example, the reports from the relevant M-CMRS officers do not seem to cover all the relevant matters relating to academic standards. Members of the Academic Board currently hold senior academic roles at UK and US institutions, though it is not clear whether this is a requirement of membership. The reviewers are not unduly concerned about the role of the Academic Board (and its role as providing external reference points is valuable) given that M-CMRS intends to continue as planned to work towards greater clarity in terms of identifying the responsibilities of the Academic Board, including the criteria for its membership.

12 Student numbers on the programmes offered by M-CMRS are small but the performance data provided in the documentation indicates that all students who enrolled on the programmes in the last year completed successfully. All students on the M-CMRS regular programme (autumn 2023 and spring 2024) were retained and successfully completed their credits (one was exempt from one element of the programme on medical grounds). Those on the M-CMRS Museum Studies programme (summer 2023) were also all retained and successfully completed their programme.

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

13 M-CMRS disaffiliated from the BAC in the last year, and QAA is now its main external reference point in the UK. M-CMRS's Quality Assurance Policy Document (QAPD) has drawn together the key processes through which it monitors its provision, maintains quality and standards, and meets any regulatory requirements or advisory expectations in the US and the UK (such as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education). The revised QAPD will be approved by the Academic Board this summer (2024). As noted in a previous report, the academic team is aware of Subject Benchmark Statements but do not feel that the provision of the programmes delivered by M-CMRS relate closely enough to a single subject area for them to be used directly. This is a reasonable judgement in the view of the review team, given the context of M-CMRS, though it is useful for M-CMRS to remain up-to-date with recent developments in the new QAA Subject Benchmark Statements as these are useful overarching themes that could enhance the design and delivery of any curriculum (for example, relating to accessibility, equality, diversity and inclusion, and education for sustainable development).

14 Members of the Academic Board, who oversee M-CMRS's academic programmes, are external to M-CMRS and to Middlebury College. Board members hold senior academic roles in UK or US universities. They are not staff of M-CMRS and provide external reference

points for the programmes. In this sense, their role is crucial to the maintenance of academic quality and standards, as well as to ensuring adherence to quality codes in the UK and US. The minutes of the Academic Board show that meaningful discussions take place to ensure maintenance and enhancement of quality and standards. Nevertheless, the results of the action plan already being undertaken by M-CMRS to develop the terms of reference of the Academic Board, will be able to provide greater clarity over how the Academic Board oversees all its areas of responsibility and contributes effectively to its role as an external reference point. As well as stating the purpose of a Board, terms of reference usually incorporate details of the membership (and terms), and any reporting relationships.

15 Grades are awarded by Middlebury College, Vermont - one of the leading liberal arts colleges in the US. As such, M-CMRS is subject to its quality assurance processes. This includes an onsite visit by the Faculty Advisory Board every two to three years. This visit took place in January 2024. The formal report is awaited at the time of this review, but the visit will help enhance an understanding of how M-CMRS operates. Communications between Middlebury College and M-CMRS are strong, and this allows for constant informal monitoring. Next year, it will be useful to see the latest report of the Middlebury College Faculty Advisory Board (FAB) to see examples of how M-CMRS incorporates any feedback or actions.

Background to the desk-based analysis

16 The desk-based analysis 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/annual monitoring. 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 process or review.

17 The desk-based analysis was carried out by Professor Liz Crolley, Reviewer, and Dr Judith Foreman, QAA Officer, in July 2024. No meetings were held with students or staff, and the conclusions presented in this report are based on the analysis of documentary evidence submitted by the provider.

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557000
Web www.qaa.ac.uk