

Office for
Students



Assessment for quality and standards initial conditions B7 and B8

Westminster Theological Centre

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Executive summary

Type of assessment	Initial conditions B7 (quality) and B8 (standards)
For	Westminster Theological Centre
Advice to the OfS on B7	Westminster Theological Centre has credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with conditions B1, B2 and B4 from the date of registration
Advice to the OfS on B8	The standards set for the courses Westminster Theological Centre intends to provide, and the achievement of students on these courses, appropriately reflect sector-recognised standards

How we assess providers applying to register

For providers seeking registration with the Office for Students (OfS), the OfS will assess their application and relevant evidence to determine whether the provider satisfies the initial conditions of registration. For providers that applied for registration on or after 1 May 2022, this includes an assessment of whether the provider satisfies initial conditions B7 (quality) and B8 (standards) as set out in the regulatory framework.¹

For this assessment, the OfS appoints an assessment team that includes external academic experts. The assessment may include a visit to the provider by the assessment team, after which it produces a report. The report does not consider matters which may have occurred after that period.

As part of the registration process the OfS also assesses risk against the related revised ongoing conditions of registration. These cover the following areas: academic experience (condition B1), resources, support and student engagement (condition B2), assessment and awards (condition B4) and sector-recognised standards (condition B5).

1. This report is an independent assessment of Westminster Theological Centre (WTC) about its compliance with the Office for Students' (OfS's) initial conditions of registration for quality (condition B7) and standards (condition B8).
2. The report shows the findings of an independent assessment team. It does not represent a decision by the OfS about WTC's compliance with these conditions of registration.
3. The OfS's regulatory framework sets out that a provider wishing to access the benefits of registration must register with the OfS.
4. As part of the registration process, the OfS must assess whether a provider satisfies the initial conditions of registration, including initial conditions B7 (quality) and B8 (standards).
5. Concerning the OfS's initial condition of registration for quality (condition B7), the assessment team found that, if registered, WTC has credible plans that would allow it to comply with the

¹ See [Regulatory framework for higher education in England](#).

OfS's ongoing conditions of registration for academic experience (condition B1), resources, support and student engagement (condition B2), and assessment and awards (condition B4).

6. Concerning the OfS's initial condition of registration for standards (condition B8), the assessment team found that, if WTC were registered, the standards set and applied for any relevant awards granted to students who complete a higher education course that WTC intends to provide appropriately reflect applicable sector-recognised standards.
7. WTC delivers a range of part-time higher education courses in kingdom theology. These include a Certificate in Higher Education at Level 4, a BA (Hons) at Levels 4-6, a Graduate Diploma at Level 6, and an MA at Level 7. The University of Chester validated the courses from 2010 to 2023, with Birmingham Newman University (BNU) taking over validation in 2023. WTC is teaching out the courses validated by the University of Chester until academic year 2027-28.² Subject to validation, WTC is also intending, from September 2026, to pilot a revised version of its Certificate in Higher Education course in a Category-C prison.
8. In accordance with the guidance on registering with the OfS (Regulatory advice 3),³ the OfS decided that it was necessary to undertake an assessment visit to WTC to gather evidence and provide advice to inform the OfS's decision about whether WTC satisfies the initial conditions B7 and B8. The OfS decided that this assessment should be undertaken by assessors able to provide expert academic judgement.
9. The purpose of the assessment is to provide advice to the OfS to enable the OfS to decide whether WTC satisfies initial conditions B7 and B8 and whether there is any regulatory risk.
10. The evidence from the assessment informs the OfS's decisions about whether to register WTC and, if registered, whether any mitigation is necessary.
11. The OfS appointed an assessment team that consisted of two academic expert assessors and a member of OfS staff. It asked the team to give its advice and judgement about WTC's compliance with initial conditions B7 and B8.
12. The team considered a range of information submitted by WTC as part of its application for registration.
13. The assessment team visited WTC in May 2025 during which time it met with students, staff, teaching faculty, external examiners, staff from the validating partners, and viewed the library. As no teaching takes place at WTC's premises in Cheltenham, the assessment team also visited two of WTC's hub centres at Bristol and Manchester in March 2025 to observe teaching delivered to groups of students via pre-recorded lectures (canned content) and video conference seminars.

² Validation enables a provider to deliver higher education when it might not otherwise have the expertise and resources to create new courses itself, or have the powers to make the award.

³ OfS, 'Regulatory advice 3: Registration of English higher education providers with the OfS'.

Introduction and background

14. Westminster Theological Centre (WTC) is a registered charity and not-for-profit, interdenominational, charismatic theological college with the vision of taking rigorous and accessible kingdom theology into the heart of the local church across the UK. Its mission is 'to deliver transformational theological education within prophetic, worshipping and learning communities throughout the UK, in partnership with local churches'. Its vision is 'theological education integrating the best of scholarship with the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit to transform, heal and release God's people into His purposes'.
15. WTC has been delivering a range of part-time, validated higher education courses since 2008, firstly in partnership with the University of Wales Lampeter (2008-2010) and subsequently with the University of Chester (2010-2023) and BNU (2023 onwards).
16. WTC currently delivers the following part-time higher education courses:
 - Certificate in Higher Education in kingdom theology
 - BA (Hons) in kingdom theology
 - Graduate Diploma in kingdom theology
 - Graduate Diploma in kingdom theology with church planting and leadership
 - Graduate Diploma in kingdom theology and student ministry
 - MA in kingdom theology.
17. The Graduate Diplomas including student ministry and church planting and leadership are validated by the University of Chester. The church planting and leadership course will continue to be an optional track on the Graduate Diploma validated by BNU. Although it no longer recruits new students to courses validated by the University of Chester, WTC will continue to teach out students on the Certificate and Graduate Diploma courses until academic year 2025-26, and BA and MA students until 2027-28.
18. Students who successfully complete the Certificate in Higher Education course are able to progress to the BA course at Level 5. Students who successfully complete the Graduate Diploma in kingdom theology can progress to the MA course with a final grade of 60 or over. If their grade is less than 60, they could still be admitted to the MA course by successfully completing an interview process.
19. Each higher education course is designed to be part-time and flexible to enable students, many of whom are working, to study where they are, but also in community. For undergraduate courses, students attend twice-yearly residential teaching events as well as a weekly hub night (20 teaching evenings a year, and two additional induction and celebration events). For postgraduate courses, students attend the residential teaching events and one teaching Saturday per module studied. The specialist Graduate Diplomas also include a mini-residential for each module.

20. WTC has 232 part-time higher education students enrolled, 82 per cent of whom are over the age of 30. This consists of 121 students on the Graduate Diplomas, 47 on the MA, 40 on the BA, and the remaining 24 on the Certificate in Higher Education course. The overall figure is slightly lower than in recent years but the numbers have remained broadly similar since 2021-22. WTC currently has three full-time faculty staff, 13 UK-based adjunct faculty staff, and 11 international guest lecturers. Adjunct staff are lecturers who deliver teaching and assessment at WTC but are usually based at other higher education providers.
21. WTC intends to grow its student numbers gradually to approximately 185 full-time equivalents (FTEs) by 2028. WTC expects the primary growth to come through the BA and MA courses, where class sizes are smaller, and so growth can be primarily accommodated through current structures. Similarly, the hub model means that each location has scope for growth, and the model itself is reproducible.
22. The Board of Trustees is the governing body of WTC. Among its responsibilities are ensuring that WTC complies with its governing document, charity law, company law and any other relevant legislation or regulations, including the regulatory framework for higher education in England. The trustees have delegated the day-to-day decision making and running of WTC to the principal and senior executive team (SET).
23. The SET meets weekly and consists of the principal, chief operating officer and chief technology officer. Working closely with the SET is the Directors' Group, which consists of directors with responsibility in both the academic and operations teams of WTC. The Directors' Group is made up of directors of Student Services, Events & Partnerships, Hub Operations, the dean of studies, the registrar and the members of the SET. They meet monthly to update each other on current priorities, to discuss and make decisions on both academic and operational areas, and to provide feedback to the SET on current areas of focus.
24. The full academic team consists of the senior academic team (principal, president, dean of studies) along with the registry team and learning development tutor. The senior academic team meets regularly to discuss issues as they arise and make academic decisions. They then meet weekly with the registry team to update each other on current priorities and foci.
25. Three times a year, the faculty (including adjunct and guest lecturers) is invited to attend a Board of Studies meeting online with the academic and registry teams. These meetings provide opportunities to discuss good teaching practice and standards, engage in other aspects of faculty training, to share progress on academic and research projects, and to keep faculty staff informed and connected with the activities of WTC.

Assessment process

Initial condition B7: Quality

26. WTC submitted a quality plan and supporting evidence, as required by the OfS's guidance for providers applying for registration (Regulatory advice 3).⁴
27. The assessment team sought further evidence which was received on 28 March 2025, 4 April 2025, and 28 April 2025. The team undertook a visit to WTC's premises in Cheltenham on 14 and 15 May 2025, where it met with:
 - management staff, including members of the senior executive team and senior academic team
 - student support staff, including those responsible for hub operations, student services, study skills and resources
 - academic staff, including adjunct faculty staff and guest lecturers
 - prison programme director
 - external examiners and representatives of awarding bodies
 - a range of students across Levels 4-7.
28. As WTC does not deliver any teaching at its central office in Cheltenham, the assessment team attended hub nights in Bristol and Manchester on 31 March 2025. This provided an opportunity to assess teaching resources and learning spaces, and to observe pre-recorded lectures (canned content) and video conference seminars. As part of the assessment visit, the assessment team also viewed the library at WTC's premises in Cheltenham.
29. The assessment team had access to WTC's virtual learning environment (VLE) and Google Drive from 28 March 2025.
30. The evidence enabled the team to assess whether WTC complies with the requirements set out in initial condition B7, which requires that it has credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with conditions of registration B1, B2 and B4, and requires it to have the capacity and resources to deliver these plans.

Initial condition B8: Standards

31. WTC submitted information relevant to the academic standards of the courses it intends to provide if registered, including course documentation, programme specifications and module outlines.⁵

⁴ OfS, '[Regulatory advice 3: Registration of English higher education providers with the OfS](#)'.

⁵ See Annex I, 'Guidance for providers on the assessment of initial condition B8 (standards)' at '[Regulatory advice 3: Registration of English higher education providers with the OfS](#)'.

32. WTC submitted evidence of student achievement in assessed work and associated records of this achievement for the courses it intends to provide if registered (see also Annex A for the approach to sampling).
33. Because WTC provides a limited number of courses, the assessment team, in reaching its view on B8, has considered information relevant to all the courses it intends to provide upon registration.
34. The 'sector-recognised standards' are set out in a document published by the OfS.⁶ These set out the standards that all registered providers are required to meet and were used by the team for its assessment.
35. The standards the OfS has identified as applicable are:
- A.1: Qualifications at each level
 - A.2: Volumes of credit
 - A.3: Qualification descriptors, specifically:
 - A.3.1 Descriptor for a qualification at Level 4
 - A.3.2 Descriptor for a qualification at Level 5
 - A.3.3 Descriptor for a qualification at Level 6
 - A.3.4 Descriptor for a qualification at Level 7
 - B: Classification descriptors for Level 6 bachelors' degrees.
36. The assessment team considered the evidence available to provide advice on whether WTC complies with the following requirements set out in condition of registration B8: that WTC demonstrates, in a credible manner, that any standards to be set and/or applied in respect of any relevant awards granted to students who complete a higher education course provided by, or on behalf of, WTC (if registered), whether or not WTC is the awarding body, appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards.

⁶ OfS, 'Sector-recognised standards'.

Part 1: Assessment of condition B7: Quality

37. This section sets out advice on whether Westminster Theological Centre has credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with conditions B1, B2 and B4 from the date of registration.

Condition B1: Academic experience

Does Westminster Theological Centre have credible plans to ensure that the students registered on each higher education course receive a high quality academic experience (B1.2)?

38. The assessment team considered WTC's plans to ensure that students registered on each higher education course will receive a high quality academic experience. In doing so, the assessment team first considered the factors set out below at B1.3 alongside any other information relevant to ensuring a high quality academic experience.

Subcriterion B1.3a

Does Westminster Theological Centre have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is up to date (B1.3a)?

Advice to the OfS

39. The assessment team's view is that WTC has credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is up to date. This is because it uses effective processes to ensure courses are current and it effectively monitors and critically reviews courses to keep them up to date.

Reasoning

40. The assessment team examined a wide range of information to assess whether WTC has credible plans to keep its courses up to date, including programme specifications, module data sets, a module benchmarking checklist, Academic Quality Assurance Policy, Teaching and Learning Strategy, and details of the curriculum review process. The team also held meetings with senior staff, core teaching staff, and adjunct and guest lecturers.
41. The documentation shows the subject matter for WTC's courses to be appropriately in line with current thinking and practices in the sector in terms of expected knowledge and understanding, and subject-specific, intellectual and generic skills.
42. WTC has in place an effective system for ongoing reviews of programme specifications and individual modules to ensure they are up to date. Its two main strands for doing so are clearly laid out in its process for curriculum design. The first strand consists of a curriculum review of each course that takes place every two years and is led by the senior academic team. The intention is to discuss any staffing issues and possible adjustments in response to evidence relating to student experience and module currency. Programme development panels, consisting of representatives of the student body, teaching faculty, registry, and Board of

Trustees, then review the recommendations of the senior academic team prior to having the option to make counter-recommendations. Although to date there has been only one round of this process in 2024, the meeting minutes to date confirm that the evaluation of content currency was a part of the review process. For example, the initial process in 2024 produced discussion about increasing representation of global majority and womanist voices in the BA and Certificate courses. The senior academic team expect that evaluation of content currency will continue to be part of the review process.

43. The second strand consists of the senior academic team conducting a smaller annual curriculum audit. This complements the more in-depth, pedagogically based, two-yearly review by focusing on issues such as staff capacity, turnover and study leave. In addition to these two strands of review, there is an annual review, beginning in March each year, of all module content, which is supervised by the dean of studies. This addresses currency of content, for example in bibliographies. Taken together, the assessment team is assured that these offer an effective approach to keeping the curriculum up to date.
44. WTC has a clear strategic approach for faculty training to keep the curriculum, and teaching and learning, up to date. This is laid out in the Teaching and Learning Strategy. This approach is also evident in the faculty induction process, regular faculty training days and twice-yearly Boards of Study, which always include a training component. Meetings with the senior academic team and adjunct and guest lecturers confirmed that faculty training days and Boards of Study are regularly used for this purpose. Examples of topics covered at recent faculty training days include marking, academic integrity, engaging with diverse scholarship and theological perspectives, and teaching best practices such as the role and potential of existing IT tools and increasing awareness of neurodiversity. There is also a well-established and valued system of staff peer review which takes place primarily at residential teaching weeks (see also paragraph 66).
45. In response to the growing trend in theological research towards inclusion of female, global majority and other historically marginalised voices, the assessment team saw evidence of WTC seeking to keep its curriculum up to date by addressing this shift. Some lecturers are addressing issues of race and gender in modules such as 'Jesus and the Prophetic Community' and 'Women in the Old Testament', and adjunct lecturers indicated a commitment to inclusion of these topics. The MA course indicates commitment to 'inclusivity and decolonising the curriculum'. Meetings with lecturers and staff responsible for academic support confirmed that the dean of studies routinely checks module bibliographies and uses residentials and Boards of Study to encourage the representation of marginalised voices. Staff have also put together bibliographies for students on relevant themes, for example the theology of disability, LGBT and creation care, and works emerging from historically marginalised people, including those written by black scholars of the Old Testament. A meeting with students on the BA and Certificate courses confirmed they were aware of these lists. While these developments are positive in keeping the curriculum up to date in relation to perspectives and topics, the team considers that there is scope for the expansion of some lists, for example the 'creation care' bibliography is currently limited in its scope.
46. While WTC identifies with the charismatic tradition of the Church, the assessment team found evidence in module reading lists of a breadth of, and attentiveness to, intellectual developments in the wider Christian tradition which has contributed to keeping its courses up to date. The team also met with lecturers who, in comparison with their perceptions or

experiences of 'confessional' theological colleges, see WTC as willing to engage widely with different traditions. Indeed, not all lecturers self-identify as 'charismatic', but nevertheless feel very included in the faculty. The core teaching staff confirmed this commitment to engaging with the wider Christian tradition and feel it is vital given that the charismatic tradition had, historically, sometimes been suspicious of academic theology.

47. Overall, the faculty has a strong and active research profile. There are several clear examples of where staff research has informed teaching: for example, members of the assessment team observed a teaching session at a hub visit in March 2025 where the lecturer on the module 'Peace, Reconciliation and the Politics of Jesus' clearly drew directly on his current research. Full-time core teaching staff are entitled to two weeks per year FTE for research and a three-month sabbatical every four to five years. Full-time teaching staff are encouraged to attend conferences and may spend up to £1,500 per academic year on professional development. Although adjunct staff are not offered the same levels of support, those met by the team were complimentary about WTC's willingness to publicise their research outputs and to allow them to attend conferences while in England for WTC residentials.

Subcriterion B1.3b

Does Westminster Theological Centre have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course provides educational challenge (B1.3b)?

Advice to the OfS

48. The assessment team's view is that WTC has credible plans to ensure that each higher education course provides educational challenge. The documentation available demonstrates the rigour and difficulty reasonably expected of higher education courses in the context of the subject matter and the level appropriate to the provider's courses.

Reasoning

49. The assessment team examined a range of documentation relating to the content, pedagogy and assessment of courses taught at WTC. This included programme specifications, assignment briefs, and the BNU validation decision document. The team also held meetings with a range of staff, students and external stakeholders.
50. Each of the programme specifications includes subject benchmark statements which map clearly to individual modules. The higher education courses are well established and have been scrutinised and approved by BNU as WTC's validating partner and before this by the University of Chester. An online student survey by the University of Chester in 2023 indicated that the vast majority of students felt their studies were helping them to develop critical faculties through the application of facts, theories or methods to evaluate or judge a point of view, decision or information source, and to examine strengths and weaknesses of their own views. The external examiners for both the undergraduate and postgraduate courses have praised the quality and academic rigour of WTC's courses and this was confirmed in a meeting with them.
51. The assessment team's review of WTC's content and assessment for each level of study, as evident in learning outcomes, indicates an appropriate progression of educational challenge

from Levels 4-7. For example, 'knowledge and understanding' progresses in the following way: understanding of foundational concepts and articulation of relevance of Christian theology (Level 4); relating concepts and cultural influences and evaluating them and showing a reasonable understanding of specialist terminology and methodologies (Level 5); demonstrating detailed knowledge and critical understanding, reference to advanced scholarship and forming arguments based on synthesis of evidence and critical engagement with primary and secondary sources (Level 6); systematic and wide-ranging knowledge, the ability to make critically informed judgements, and sophisticated analysis of primary sources in relation to key concepts and theories (Level 7). Discussions with students confirmed their perception of a level of educational challenge appropriate to their stage of study.

52. A review of assignment briefs confirms appropriate levels of rigour and difficulty in the expectations of the tasks and the instructions regarding which resources are, or are not, appropriate for the relevant level of theological study. At Level 5, for example, 'The Gospel of John' module requires students to critically interpret the gospel in its historical and socio-cultural setting, identify literary features in relation to narrative structure and theological themes, and evaluate the relevance of the Johannine gospel for Christian discipleship and service. At Level 7, in contrast, the 'Luke-Acts' module requires assignments to demonstrate critical assessment of theological context and content and demonstration of critical interpretation through exegetical skills, and critical engagement with at least five academic scholars and commentators.
53. There is also an appropriate progression of educational challenge in expectations of independent learning. This is evident, for example, in a comparison between Level 6 and Level 7 modules. At Level 6, there is often an expectation of student independence in assessments, examples being in the 'On the Incarnation' module where students select one of four Patristic texts on which to write a critical commentary, and the 'Foundations for Spiritual Formation' module where there is an option to apply a theology of the human body to a contemporary social issue of the student's choice. At Level 7, there is an appropriately greater scope for independent study and the cultivation of original ideas in summative assessment. Examples include writing an analysis of an Old Testament book of choice ('Reading the Old Testament for the Church' module) and choosing an ethical issue to apply methods to write about ('Faithfully Performing the Biblical Drama' module). At the visit, students on the MA and Graduate Diploma courses confirmed that the freedom to study independently increased at the rate they expected for these levels.

Subcriterion B1.3c

Does Westminster Theological Centre have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is coherent (B1.3c)?

Advice to the OfS

54. The assessment team's view is that WTC has credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is coherent. This is because the evidence available demonstrates the breadth, depth and incremental learning reasonably expected of higher education courses in the context of the subject matter and the levels of the courses.

Reasoning

55. The assessment team considered the coherence of each higher education course, including the breadth and depth of study and the order in which subjects, concepts, skills and practices are introduced and delivered. To do so, the team reviewed documentation, including programme specifications, module data sets, assignment briefs, and module evaluations. The team also met with a range of staff and students.
56. The WTC senior academic team informed the assessment team that it had set out to develop a core curriculum which is academically robust and well-rounded and, at the same time, reflects the aims and priorities of the majority of their students, which is to develop a greater personal understanding of theology rather than to train for professional roles. This was confirmed in meetings with students who also stated that the breadth and depth of teaching is a notable strength of WTC.
57. The nature of the student cohort provides a rationale for the relative lack of focus on topics such as practical theology, although there is a stronger connection to practical theology in the Graduate Diploma in church planting and leadership. This course aims 'to equip graduates in other disciplines with theological and practical knowledge for church planting and leadership in the UK, Europe, and beyond'. While the team considers that the current overall focus of the curriculum is appropriate for what WTC sees as its students' main motivations for learning and its traditional approach to theology, it also thinks that it would be appropriate for WTC to consider the inclusion of practical theology in future curriculum developments, alongside the continuing growth in engagement with global majority, female, LGBT and other historically marginalised theological voices (see also paragraph 45).
58. Each course has appropriate building blocks of study. For example, the BA course moves from overview and foundational modules at Level 4 (examples include 'The New Testament Journey', 'Classics of Early Christian Literature' and 'Theological Foundations for Spiritual Formation') through to more focused subject- and skills-based content at Level 5 (examples include 'The Gospel of John' and 'The Bible and Intertextuality' modules), and subsequently to more conceptually and methodologically advanced and independent research at Level 6 (such as the modules 'Christology Ancient and Modern' and 'Theology and Praxis'). At Levels 5 and 6, various modules prepare students to operate with greater independence and attention to research methods. A review of module evaluations confirms that students are of the opinion that subjects, concepts and skills are introduced at appropriate times and taught at a suitable pace. The evidence seen by the team confirms that subjects and skills are taught in an appropriate order and build on each other throughout the course, and that key concepts are introduced at the appropriate point in the course content.
59. Although there has only been one full curriculum review to date, the minutes of the meetings indicate a clear focus on curriculum balance between breadth and depth of course content. Senior staff met by the assessment team also confirmed that the previous review had influenced decision making in terms of curriculum balance between breadth and depth, with examples including the senior academic team being persuaded to retain a module which has an integral position within the curriculum, as well as a decision to prioritise consideration of biblical language provision in the curriculum offering.

Subcriterion B1.3d

Does Westminster Theological Centre have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is effectively delivered (B1.3d)?

Advice to the OfS

60. The assessment team's view is that WTC has credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is effectively delivered because the evidence available demonstrates an appropriate balance between delivery methods, and between directed and independent study or research, as relevant to the level of the course.

Reasoning

61. The assessment team visited two WTC teaching hubs in Bristol and Manchester in March 2025, and examined key documents, including the Teaching and Learning Strategy, Academic Quality Assurance Policy, faculty handbook, a sample of module evaluations, a sample of canned content and residential lectures, and feedback from student representatives. At the visit, the team met with a range of staff and students.

62. The WTC Teaching and Learning Strategy lists five modes of delivery:

- residential: two per year, in early September and early January, with WTC ensuring that all adjunct and guest lecturers who are teaching that year can attend
- canned content: pre-recorded lectures that are viewed during weekly hub nights. They may also incorporate peer-to-peer discussion activities
- video conferencing: short seminars are delivered live online during weekly hub nights, whereas full lectures are delivered live online during teaching days on the MA course
- mini-residentials: for the church planting and leadership course and student ministry course, teaching also occurs via in-person teaching events, which usually last two days
- MA teaching days: instead of weekly hub evenings, MA students gather for periodic teaching Saturdays with a full day of live online teaching from the module lecturer. Flexi-MA students (with no hub affiliation) can also zoom into the online teaching.

63. The assessment team looked at the balance of delivery and is assured this is carefully considered and appropriate, and overall achieves its ambition of enabling distance learning alongside a sense of learning in community. The intention of WTC is that the residentials should 'set the tone' for study during the year, giving students an opportunity for meeting their lecturers, being orientated to the modules and to engage with resources for skills development. Students met by the team tended to be very positive about their experiences at residential teaching weeks, particularly being in an environment so conducive to learning. As well as being integral to teaching delivery, residentials also play a very important role in building a sense of belonging and community with, for example, one MA student commenting that they felt 'instantly at home' at their first residential.

64. WTC claims that 'key to WTC's Teaching and Learning Strategy is the unique and innovative delivery model for its university validated programmes, which enables students from across the UK to study part-time in their local context, while studying in community with other students in local learning 'Hubs' around the country'. The use of regional 'hubs' as a context for canned content and video conference seminars is distinctive in theological education. It enables student interaction and an enhanced sense of academic community. Students are expected to watch canned content together at the hubs, and these videos will often include a built-in pause for student discussion. The video conferences also occur at the hubs and allow the students to discuss the canned content talks with the lecturer and to engage face-to-face with students in the classroom and virtually with those at other hub sites. The assessment team attended two hub sessions, in Manchester and Bristol in March 2025, and were impressed by the quality of teaching and level of engagement as students moved between canned content, video conferences, and pastoral and library sessions. Each hub has a hub director and the intention is that these roles not only offer practical advice and direction on where to find study support, but also facilitate the operational delivery of course materials. Students met by the team agreed that the hub directors play an important and effective role as a point of contact between students and WTC.
65. WTC claims to be a 'highly relational college' (where a strong emphasis is placed on the quality of interactions between staff, and between staff and students) and the assessment team found the hubs to be an important contributor to this approach. Student attendance is, whenever possible, encouraged with the Attendance Expectations Policy seeking to ensure student engagement with the hubs. The expectation is that students will normally attend hub sessions in person, with a notional 60 per cent attendance level in place. In discussions with students, it was clear that the hubs contribute to a sense of community of practice and belonging and allow peer-to-peer support, including prayer. While the hubs in general deliver on their purpose, WTC might in future seek to enhance them further. Some students on the BA and Certificate courses, particularly those living further away, informed the team that they wanted the hubs to allow more time for peer-to-peer engagement, including the chance to learn from each other. Some students also stated that the distance they have to travel to their hub impacts their attendance and the time they can spend there.
66. WTC aims to ensure the consistency of delivery through a programme of staff induction, training and peer-to-peer review. Hub directors are expected to attend an induction to their role every year. All new faculty staff are introduced to their role through an induction process. A systematic approach to training is laid out in the Academic Quality Assurance Policy. The twice-yearly residentials are particularly useful in this respect, offering in-person training and addressing relevant topics such as improving classroom practice, supporting students with learning needs, academic integrity, and marking. A peer-review system runs as a two-year rolling schedule, which the full-time core teaching staff believe contributes to quality of delivery. The faculty peer-review register indicates this is well organised, while evidence from peer reviews and meetings with teaching staff at the visit suggest that the process is well established and effective in improving teaching delivery.
67. There is an appropriate balance of directed and independent study across the curriculum (see also paragraph 53). The importance of independent learning, with appropriate student support, is embedded in the Teaching and Learning Strategy as one of four priorities for the provider. The study skills resources available to all students offer a structure of support for

independent learning (see also paragraph 75), while the online library resources available to students are sufficient to enable adequate independent enquiry (see paragraph 84).

68. The learning and teaching methods at undergraduate level place increasing emphasis on independence at Level 5 and then an independent project is expected at Level 6. At Level 5, there is an optional 'Independent Learning Module' where the student is expected to identify and design a project in conversation with a tutor. At Level 6, the intended subject-specific skills outcomes for the BA course include to 'develop projects and assignments which sustain and evaluate an argument, largely through independent enquiry, and which draw on a range of scholarly resources including research articles and primary sources'. Also at Level 6 there is a core 'Research Methods' module which advises students on how to approach developing a research proposal. This offers good preparation for the 8,000 word dissertation module which demands significant self-direction and requires students to engage with a set core text on research methods. At Level 7, there is an appropriate expectation around independent study and the cultivation of original ideas (see paragraph 53). At the visit, students on the MA and Graduate Diploma courses confirmed that the freedom to study independently increased at the rate they expected for these levels.
69. The assessment team's review of a sample of grading and feedback from essays indicates a thorough and consistent approach to feedback, both in summary grade mark reports and in-text comments. With the faculty being international in nature, this range of academic backgrounds brings a diversity of experiences and expectations around approaches to marking and grading. However, it is evident that WTC takes great care to ensure a consistency in marking and grading assignments. Adjunct and guest lecturers commented that WTC takes marking and feedback very seriously and provides very helpful support through the staff induction and peer-review processes referred to in paragraph 66. In addition, there is a system of co-marking in place for new staff. External examiners' reports and discussions with the external examiners confirm that the delivery and consistency of marking and student feedback are robust. A sample of module evaluations also confirms a high rate of student satisfaction with the clarity and consistency of feedback.
70. WTC recognises there is scope to expand on an assessment approach which largely consists of traditional essays (see also paragraphs 74 and 137). This has been picked up previously through a BNU programme approval panel and in external examiners' reports. While progress has been gradual, the assessment team is confident that WTC is being proactive in moving towards a diversification of its assessment methods in line with current higher education pedagogical practices. For example, the topic has been discussed at recent faculty training days and Boards of Study and is also covered during the induction process for new staff. WTC also underlines the value of diverse assessment methods in its Academic Quality Assurance Policy which encourages teaching staff to include a range of summative assessment methods. Examples of non-traditional forms of assessment that have already been introduced in modules include: recording a video presentation ('Jesus and the Prophetic Community' module), writing or recording a sermon ('Bible and Intertextuality' module), and artistic performance or presentation ('Theology and Praxis' module). Meetings with senior staff and lecturers confirmed a commitment to diversifying methods, while external examiners and awarding body representatives met by the team also confirmed that WTC is already responding to their feedback in positive ways.

Subcriterion B1.3e

Does Westminster Theological Centre have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course, as appropriate to the subject matter of the course, requires students to develop relevant skills (B1.3e)?

Advice to the OfS

71. The assessment team's view is that WTC has credible plans to ensure that each higher education course, as appropriate to the subject matter of the course, requires students to develop relevant skills. The documentation available demonstrates the knowledge, understanding and other skills reasonably expected of a higher education course, in the context of the subject matter and level of the course.

Reasoning

72. The assessment team examined a range of evidence relating to the development in skills across the courses. These included programme specifications, learning outcomes, a sample of assignment briefs, and a selection of skills-based resources available to students via the VLE. In addition, the team held meetings with a range of staff and students. While the assessment team took care to hold WTC to the requirements outlined in B1.3e, it also kept in mind the profile of WTC students throughout its analysis, in particular that most of them tend to study to deepen their understanding of theology rather than to further their professional careers.
73. Each of the programme specifications indicate an appropriate progression and incremental development of cognitive, practical, professional and communication skills in learning outcomes across Levels 4-7. By Level 6, students are expected to be able to apply complementary methods of study, to have the ability to resolve problems and make decisions, and to sustain and evaluate an argument, largely through independent enquiry. A review of a sample of module assessments confirmed to the assessment team that these skills are being taught and assessed at the appropriate level. For example, an essay question in 2023-24 for the module 'The History of Christian Spirituality' gives students an example of desert fathers' writing and students are asked to use their analysis of this for a wider discussion of the spiritual goals of the fathers. Similarly, an essay question in 2023-24 for the module 'Galatians: Text and Theology' required an exegesis of a Bible passage, considering both its historical and literary contexts, and showing how interpretation has been developed by ancient and modern scholars. The assessment team therefore concludes that teaching and assessment of skills are consistently appropriate to the relevant level.
74. As discussed previously in paragraph 70, there is scope for WTC to diversify further its approach to assessment and this includes the assessment of skills (see also paragraph 137). This was picked up in the 2022-23 and 2023-24 external examiners' reports for the BA course. However, as discussed in paragraph 70, the assessment team is assured that WTC is proactively working to diversify its assessment in response to advice provided by external examiners and its validating partner, with examples including more diverse approaches to assessment of communication skills, including preaching (an example being in the modules 'Jesus and the Prophetic Community' and 'Bible and Intertextuality').

75. WTC offers an impressive range of support to students, including in the area of skills development. The range of support is discussed more fully in section B2.2b (see paragraphs 98-107) but, in relation to skills development, includes:
- weekly drop-ins and bookable 1:1 study skills sessions with a dedicated study skills team including the learning and development tutor
 - two online drop-in sessions held by the dean of studies each week for students to seek academic advice
 - written resources available on the VLE covering a range of topics including IT skills, library training, reading and critical thinking, additional resources specific to biblical exegesis, and writing critical commentaries
 - the introduction of a fresher's day in September 2025 which will include skills orientation and training
 - additional skills support for students with backgrounds or characteristics which may result in challenges, for example for students with 'disrupted educational backgrounds', those 'who did not excel at school', those who 'have not studied for a long time', and those with 'a disability or neurodivergence'.

B1 conclusions

Does Westminster Theological Centre have credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with condition B1 from the date of registration?

76. The assessment team considers that, overall, WTC has credible plans to ensure, if registered, that students on higher education courses would receive a high quality academic experience.
77. Documentation provided by WTC and meetings with staff, students and external stakeholders assured the assessment team that the provider has processes in place to ensure that courses remain up to date, provide sufficient educational challenge, are coherent and effectively delivered, and require students to develop relevant skills within the context of its student cohort.
78. The assessment team considers that the courses currently offered by WTC are up to date and that the provider has robust processes to ensure that they remain so, including curriculum review, peer-to-peer review, and student feedback. WTC is also very receptive to feedback from its external examiners and awarding bodies and the assessment team is confident it will continue to be so. WTC clearly understands its student body and provides a curriculum which is robust, relevant and achieves high levels of student satisfaction. Where there are areas for improvement, for example in the diversification of assessment methods, there is clear evidence that WTC is aware of the issues and is being proactive in bringing about change in response to feedback from its awarding body and external examiners.

79. The assessment team noted that the requirement of condition B1 is expressed as a principle that can be satisfied in different ways. The assessment team is of the view that the evidence set out above is sufficient for it to make an overall view in respect of initial condition B1. Considering its findings at B1.3a, B1.3b, B1.3c, B1.3d and B1.3e above, and the reasoning they contained, the assessment team's view is that WTC has credible plans to ensure its students will receive a high quality academic experience.
80. The assessment team did not identify any broader concerns relevant to condition B1 to report to the OfS.

Condition B2: Resources, support, and student engagement

Subcriterion B2.2a

Does Westminster Theological Centre have credible plans for how each cohort of students would receive resources which are sufficient for the purposes of ensuring:

- i. a high quality academic experience for those students**
- ii. those students succeed in and beyond higher education (B2.2a)?**

Advice to the OfS

81. The assessment team's view is that WTC has credible plans for how each cohort of students would receive resources which are sufficient for the purposes of ensuring a high quality academic experience for those students, and that those students succeed in and, where appropriate, beyond higher education.

Reasoning

82. The assessment team visited WTC's premises in Cheltenham and two of its regional hubs in Bristol and Manchester. It also examined a range of evidence, including the faculty handbook, external examiners' reports, a sample of staff CVs and job descriptions, physical library resources, and digital resources such as the VLE and Google Drive. The team also met with students and a range of academic and support staff.
83. WTC makes a range of physical and digital library resources available to students. Students have access to libraries affiliated to the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries and there is also a small library in the Cheltenham office although this is rarely used by students. While each of the hubs has a physical library with books based on core bibliography sources for each module, WTC does not claim to offer a parity of book resources in these libraries and student representatives' feedback to both the provider and assessment team indicates that some hub libraries have scope for improvement. The assessment team found that, while the physical library resources in Bristol and Manchester were adequate, a proportion of the books in the latter were popular-level evangelical and/or charismatic books rather than serious academic works by evangelical and/or charismatic scholars. However, as discussed below, the team considers there to be adequate online resources, and the popular-level and/or charismatic books can still have an important part to play in exemplifying and critically discussing 'popular' theology.

84. The digital resources provided by WTC via its online library are adequate and, in general, students find these sufficient for their studies. The online library currently offers access to nearly 10,000 books with the main collections available to students being EBSCO and the American Theological Library Association. WTC students registered on courses still validated by the University of Chester continue to have access to the university's online resources. However, students on courses now validated by BNU no longer have access to the University of Chester's online resources or those of BNU. While online resources are generally adequate, the BNU programme validation panel commented to WTC in 2023 on some of the limitations of digital sources: 'there is a need to ensure that the resources are sufficient, particularly for the dissertation; and to consider whether you need to look at using more resources'. In addition, MA students met by the team suggested that resources for study at Level 7 are not as strong as for undergraduate study. However, students met by the team praised the dedication of WTC staff in helping them to access physical and digital library materials which are otherwise difficult to get hold of.
85. In its written correspondence and in discussions with the assessment team, WTC did recognise the need for improvement in the provision of resources for students and has stated that this is a priority area for development. This issue has also been discussed in meetings with student representatives. As a result, WTC is expecting to have access by September 2025 to Perlego, a significant online academic resource which some students have been paying for individually. WTC is also in advanced talks with another academic online platform called ProQuest to secure a level of access for its students.
86. Despite some gaps and variations in the provision of physical and online library resources for students, the team is assured that WTC recognises this as a priority area for development and has credible plans in place to address the current areas of weakness. This should ensure that WTC could meet the requirements of condition B2.2a if it were registered. In particular, WTC's plans for all students to have access to the significant online academic resource Perlego, and potentially ProQuest as well, should make a significant difference to the quality and quantity of online library resources available to students at all levels of study. Also, due to the nature of the student body and the methods of delivering courses, having more effective online resources in place will be crucial in ensuring that WTC has physical and digital learning resources that are adequate and deployed effectively to meet the needs of its cohort of students.
87. The faculty handbook details the online systems available to support students through their studies and similar information is available to students in a folder they receive at their first residential. WTC has designed its own college data management system (known as CDMS), to which students have access to certain areas through the student portal MyWTC. There is also a lot of introductory teaching on the initial residential, which includes an introduction to MyWTC and other tools. MyWTC provides a spine of continuity through the course levels, allowing students to update relevant personal data and access the VLE, library, study skills resources, assessment materials and grades, study materials and faculty announcements. Additionally, Google Drive gives students access to core module materials. Although the existence of multiple systems might potentially be confusing, students met by the team stated that these systems are well integrated and that they are able to operate them effectively and easily access the necessary IT support when required.

88. The WTC delivery strategy relies on twice-yearly residentials (held at the University of Nottingham) and 12 regional hubs, and these provide adequate physical locations and resources (see also paragraphs 63-65). The location and time of year of residentials can be challenging for some students. Those met by the team, however, spoke very positively of their experiences at residentials and the benefits. Benefits covered teaching, academic and pastoral support, being able to focus on their studies, and enabling them to meet other staff and students and feel part of the WTC community. The Bristol and Manchester hub locations, which the assessment team visited for a teaching night in March 2025, were well set up for learning in terms of their capacity, technology for synchronous and asynchronous learning, and other hardware. Where student representatives have given critical feedback to WTC on hub resources, for example concerning issues around hardware such as scanners and printers, the team found that WTC demonstrates it is taking seriously these concerns by completing, and reporting back to students, relevant actions. As detailed above, some students would like to see the hubs used more to facilitate enhanced 'communities of practice' (see paragraph 65).
89. WTC intends to grow its student numbers gradually to approximately 185 FTEs by 2028 (see also paragraph 21). WTC expects the primary growth to come through recruitment of more students to the BA and MA courses, including those in the 18-25 age group, where class sizes are smaller, and so growth can be accommodated largely through current structures. Similarly, the hub model means that each location has scope for growth, and the model itself is reproducible. In addition, WTC's delivery model is supported by the development and use of the CDMS system which provides a single, integrated student management system designed to automate routine data and administrative tasks. Benefits of the CDMS system include:
- a streamlined and more effective student application process
 - facilitation of a personalised student support package which can easily be shared with relevant teaching and support staff
 - central access to all relevant documentation, information and processes
 - improved communication across different staff teams.
90. This all combines to save considerable time for teaching and support staff, time which can then be put into effective, one-to-one support for students. The team also saw evidence of draft documentation, including a programme specification for a proposed Certificate for Higher Education course to be piloted in a Category-C prison from September 2026. This will be based heavily on WTC's current Certificate course and would be validated by BNU. A prisons programme director has been appointed to oversee the development of this initiative.
91. WTC states the following principles concerning qualifications held by its academic staff:
- Senior academic positions (president, principal, dean of studies) require a doctoral qualification.
 - For academic subjects, the lecturer must carry a qualification equivalent to the level above the class(es) they teach so, for example, someone teaching a BA or Graduate Diploma module must be qualified to a minimum of masters' level.

- Wherever possible, a doctoral qualification is preferred for lecturers teaching academic subjects.
 - For practical or ministry-based subjects, the lecturer must carry sufficient experience in that field whereby 'sufficient' usually means 'extensive' (10+ years at an influential level).
92. These principles help to ensure that students are being taught by someone with the necessary academic training and that WTC can offer access to practical and/or professional experience on modules which require this. A review of academic staff CVs assured the team that these principles are being applied in practice.
 93. WTC's approach to teaching relies heavily on the use of adjunct and guest lecturers. Overall, a review of CVs indicated that this approach brings in academics who are well suited to the courses they teach and who have a strong credibility in their academic field. This is sometimes combined with a unique, relevant experience in Christian ministry, for example in reconciliation or leadership. Students met by the team confirmed the quality of the teaching they receive at WTC, including the benefits of being taught by those with academic and practical knowledge of their subject. The use of guest lecturers also enables WTC to occasionally bring in high-profile and distinguished theologians.
 94. The faculty handbook sets out the expectations and support available to academic staff in relation to course development and delivery while there is also a comprehensive induction process. Discussions with adjunct and guest lecturers confirmed that they have the resources and training necessary to use WTC systems in order to offer a high quality student experience. For example, where possible, canned content teaching sessions are made while staff are attending the residential so that they can access technical support to enhance the quality of the content. WTC also makes effective use of online platforms such as CDMS and the VLE to enable adjunct and guest lecturers to engage effectively with their students, for example giving them access to relevant learning materials, and learning support appropriate to their individual needs.
 95. While the reliance on adjunct and guest lecturers could potentially present a risk to its delivery model in terms of the staff team being sufficient in number and deployed effectively to deliver in practice, the team heard evidence of WTC's track record of successfully recruiting and retaining these scholars by advertising vacant posts and also via its networks at home and abroad, particularly in the United States. The support and training for staff, highlighted throughout this report, also provides confidence that adjunct and guest lecturers are strongly supported in their roles. Examples include the induction process, peer reviews, reviews of teaching content, and staff training at residentials and Boards of Study.
 96. In meetings with the assessment team, adjunct and guest lecturers did raise concerns about the time it takes to mark assignments and provide feedback to students where there are larger module cohorts. They have raised this with WTC which has begun to introduce more marking support for lecturers with larger cohorts. While the team is confident that WTC is aware of this issue and has credible plans in place to provide the necessary support to lecturers, this is an area that WTC will need to remain alert to should student numbers grow in future. This is to ensure that the staff team remains sufficient in number in relation to an adequacy of staff time, as well as the effective deployment of staff to deliver in practice.

Subcriterion B2.2b

Does Westminster Theological Centre have credible plans for how each cohort of students would receive support which is sufficient for the purposes of ensuring:

- i. a high quality academic experience for those students**
- ii. those students succeed in and beyond higher education (B2.2b)?**

Advice to the OfS

97. The assessment team's view is that WTC has credible plans for how each cohort of students would receive support which is sufficient for the purposes of ensuring a high quality academic experience for those students, and that those students succeed in and, where appropriate, beyond higher education.

Reasoning

98. WTC offers an impressive range of support to students. This is particularly important given that a significant proportion of WTC students have not studied for many years or have no academic background. Students are made aware of the support available through the student support handbook. Direct support is available from a dedicated study skills team which offers weekly drop-ins and bookable 1:1 study skills sessions. Additionally, there are written resources available for students on the VLE which cover topics, including:

- referencing
- IT skills
- choosing and interpreting assignments
- finding sources
- library training
- taking notes
- reading and critical thinking
- structuring essays
- writing assignments
- additional resources specific to biblical exegesis
- writing critical commentaries
- example essays.

99. WTC is proactive in identifying and offering support to students who might be lacking in specific skills. The learning development tutor reviews all essay marks and contacts individual students directly if:

- a. they fail in an assessment
- b. they are regularly scoring below 40 per cent in assessments.

100. Contact is recorded on the CDMS. Students met by the team confirmed their awareness of the availability of these study skills resources, how to access them, and the range and quality of the support available. An MA student commented that the relational culture at WTC underpins this strength in offering academic support to students. A student approaching the end of the BA course commented that WTC had significantly improved their range of skills resources during the previous six years. WTC is also set to further enhance its study skills support by offering new students a fresher's day, which is to include skills orientation and training.
101. WTC asserts that its aim of equipping 'the whole people of God' means it will prioritise the offer of additional support for students with backgrounds or characteristics which may result in challenges, including in the area of skills. This includes support for students with 'disrupted educational backgrounds', those 'who did not excel at school', those who 'have not studied for a long time', whose previous studies have not included writing essays, and with a disability or neurodivergence. The commitment and strategy for achieving this aim is clearly set out in a document entitled 'WTC Student Support Provision'.
102. Any student with a declared disability or neurodivergence will be contacted at the beginning of their studies by a learning development tutor, who will agree a package of support which may include bespoke study skills support and reasonable adjustments in areas, including teaching delivery and assessment. The agreed student support plan, with the student's permission, is made available to faculty staff and the relevant hub director. Neurodivergent students, for example, might request that residential notes are printed on coloured paper or in a specific font and font size, submit a draft version of all assignments for feedback, and receive extra time in exams. Students met by the team confirmed that they were aware of the support available and an undergraduate student who had received this support confirmed that it had been very good.
103. WTC's offer of a high quality academic experience for students relies in part on its capacity to provide a 'relational' environment in which to learn. For the impressive one-to-one support outlined in the preceding paragraphs to be effective, this relational approach requires a solid underpinning and seamlessness which WTC has in the form of the CDMS, for example in communicating to adjunct and guest lecturers any study support packages which have been agreed for individual students (see also paragraph 87). This provides an effective infrastructure for supporting students while also freeing up staff time to offer these levels of individualised support.
104. WTC makes some use of formative teaching and assessment as part of its academic support for students but recognises this is an area for improvement (see also paragraphs 139-142). For example, the BA programme specification states that 'generic skills are developed through the learning ethos of the centre and specifically through formative learning methods such as class discussion, group seminar presentations, assignment proposal development, dissertation research, and presentations'.
105. Discussions with both lecturers and students assured the assessment team that opportunities for formative learning are offered and a reasonable proportion of students are engaging with them. For example, the module 'Exploring the Old Testament' includes a presentation that is meant to inform a summative exegesis and theological reflection. However, curriculum documentation indicates that formative opportunities for students, and particularly for

formative assessment, are still quite limited in their scope. The senior leadership team confirmed that this is an area which remains open for improvement. The assessment team was assured, however, through discussions with the senior team that WTC is considering carefully how to take this forward, for example by making greater use of the VLE to employ formative assessment methods such as quizzes.

106. WTC provides very effective support for students in its marking and feedback for summative assignments while clear guidelines and expectations on marking for teaching staff are set out in the faculty handbook. Training on marking is offered as part of the faculty induction process and this includes clear expectations regarding feedback to students. The assessment team found that sample marking, including for the MA dissertation, reflected WTC's aspirations for feedback of thoroughness, transparency and constructiveness. Students met by the team confirmed that they welcomed this support and had experienced it on a regular basis.
107. WTC has adequate support in place for students in relation to academic conduct. The faculty makes use of Turnitin's plagiarism tools, while students are required to watch a video about plagiarism as part of their induction. Students are also required to confirm that they will abide by WTC's Academic Conduct Policy, which they receive a copy of, before they can continue their studies. The assessment team reviewed the Academic Conduct Policy and found it to be clear and robust. The policy clearly lays out the process which will be followed in cases of suspected academic misconduct and the potential disciplinary measures:
 - a. an internal review by the dean of studies
 - b. an interview with the student
 - c. the case brought to WTC's Academic Integrity Panel.
108. Overall, WTC has very low rates of academic misconduct, typically only two or three cases per year, which are actionable for escalation for disciplinary measures. Staff believe this is in part due to the students' motivations for learning which tends to be for deepening their own understanding rather than for other reasons such as professional advancement.
109. A discussion with core teaching staff indicated that WTC is aware of the challenges facing higher education in relation to artificial intelligence (AI) and has been encouraging faculty staff to write assignments in ways which make the work of AI easier to recognise, for example by designing assignments that also show 'work-in-progress'.
110. WTC has an employability statement in its programme specifications. However, based on data from applications, alumni surveys and student employment status, it considers that most of its students are not studying to further their careers and its courses are not currently marketed in this way. WTC undertakes an alumni survey every five years which also includes qualitative questions about the impact of their studies, for example on new roles they have undertaken as a result of their studies. The assessment team's discussions with students tended to confirm that most are studying for the primary purpose of deepening their understanding of theology. The faculty will offer advice to students who indicate an interest in further study and discussion with students confirming this advice is available if required. If so, it is usually the case that students indicate an interest either in studying the MA or Graduate Diploma courses, or they wish to join a PhD programme elsewhere.

Subcriterion B2.2c

Does Westminster Theological Centre have credible plans for how it would ensure effective engagement with each cohort of students which is sufficient for the purpose of ensuring:

i. a high quality academic experience for those students

ii. those students succeed in and beyond higher education (B2.2c)?

Advice to the OfS

111. The assessment team's view is that WTC has credible plans to ensure effective engagement with each cohort of students to ensure a high quality academic experience and that those students succeed in and, where appropriate, beyond higher education.

Reasoning

112. The assessment team reviewed a range of documents including module evaluations, student surveys, student representative meetings, governance structure, and a student action report. The team also held meetings with a range of students from different courses.

113. WTC engages effectively with each cohort of students. In its quality plan, WTC asserted the high value they place on the development of a sense of community in which all staff and students are engaged. Staff advocate community culture among themselves and students are welcomed into this. In meetings at the visit, the assessment team continually heard about the emphasis on the relational nature of WTC. The emphasis on community engagement and a shared educational experience also came through clearly at the hub meetings attended by the assessment team in Bristol and Manchester and the role of the hub directors is central to this. At the twice-yearly residentials, there is also a strong emphasis on developing community and relationships through face-to-face contact between faculty staff and students, shared worship, and informal conversations over meals and in the times between lectures.

114. The assessment team explored how feasible the relational model will continue to be with WTC's plans for growth. Students and senior staff met by the team emphasised how important the relational model is and, given it reflects a core value for WTC, there is a strong intention to preserve it. Central to this will be the role played by the CDMS which frees up staff time to engage with students (see paragraphs 89, 100 and 103) and the hub model which still has considerable scope for growth in student numbers and can be replicated across the UK. Indeed, the growth of hubs, both in size and quantity, is seen by WTC as necessary for students to enjoy an optimum experience given that some have very small numbers at present.

115. The main sources of feedback from students are module evaluation surveys and student representative meetings. Overall, feedback from students is very positive. However, response rates vary for module evaluations, so WTC is actively considering how to obtain higher response rates, for example by changing the timing of evaluations.

116. Each hub has a student representative who attends twice-yearly meetings with senior staff. The assessment team saw evidence of a wide range of topics being discussed at meetings including residentials, hubs and hub culture, canned content, video conferencing, the library, assignments, MyWTC and the VLE. The minutes also show clear evidence of student engagement and positive, constructive feedback and actions offered in return. For example, in response to student feedback that one segment of the hub nights felt 'directionless', WTC took the decision to provide additional training for hub directors. The student representative action report (2023) also details the questions raised by students and responses made by the provider.
117. WTC is supportive of the role of student representatives. All students are informed about the role and its value when they begin their studies, and an outline of the role is included in the student handbook that is available to all students online. Once the student representatives have been elected, they are contacted by the dean of studies to provide guidance on how the role works. Once in post, representatives are supported through reminders from the registrar, and a culture of all staff being accessible to students and student representatives.
118. WTC conducts a full curriculum review every two years and the 'process for curriculum design' sets out how students participate in it. The first part of the process consists of an academic review panel which draws on feedback received from faculty and students. The second stage involves a consultation process consisting of programme development panels which include two students (or one student and one alumni student) representing the appropriate academic course. The team saw evidence from these processes of active engagement by students, for example in discussions regarding the continuation of the module, 'Peace, Reconciliation and the Politics of Jesus' and its importance within the overall structure of the course.
119. In terms of student surveys, WTC collects data periodically on student satisfaction levels from current students, alumni, and through the University of Chester, with results supporting the value and impact of the courses. For example, more than 90 per cent of students and recent alumni reported their studies to be personally transformational and meeting or exceeding expectations. In the curriculum review 2024 documents there is evidence of student and alumni feedback regarding the module Peace, Reconciliation and the Politics of Jesus (BA Level 5), influencing the decision about whether it should remain in the curriculum.

B2 conclusions

Does Westminster Theological Centre have credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with condition B2 from the date of registration?

120. The assessment team's overall view is that WTC has credible plans to enable it, if registered, to comply with the requirements of condition B2 in relation to resources, support and student engagement.
121. WTC acknowledges there is scope for improvement in its online resources but the assessment team is assured that it has credible plans to deal with this, in particular the forthcoming availability of Perlego for all students. WTC has appropriate staffing levels and,

alongside core faculty staff, WTC effectively deploys adjunct and guest lecturers to deliver their courses.

122. One of WTC's strengths is the extensive support it provides to students and the team heard several examples of this in practice. Student engagement is also effective with students having sufficient opportunities to provide formal and informal feedback to WTC and it is very responsive in dealing with any issues raised by students and student representatives.
123. Considering its findings at B2.2a, B2.2b and B2.2c above, and the reasoning contained therein, the assessment team's view is that WTC has credible plans to ensure high quality resources and support, and effective student engagement.
124. The assessment team identified no broader concerns relevant to resources, support or student engagement to report to the OfS.

Condition B4: Assessment and awards

Subcriterion B4.2a

Does Westminster Theological Centre have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is assessed effectively (B4.2a)?

Advice to the OfS

125. The assessment team's view is that WTC has credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is assessed effectively.

Reasoning

126. The assessment team considered WTC's plans to ensure that students are assessed effectively by considering a sample of residential folders, module data sets, assignment briefs, and samples of student work.
127. The module data sets are in effect the module handbooks and these clearly indicate the learning outcomes expected for the module, as well as referencing the relevant benchmarks the module meets. The language of the learning outcomes appropriately demonstrates the increased challenge as the levels increase, indicating the developing expectations of critical engagement and analysis. Similarly, the team saw evidence that the associated assignment briefs also aligned with this increase in educational challenge and match the learning outcomes outlined in the module data sets.
128. For example, for the Level 4 module 'Exploring the Old Testament' the learning outcomes stated in the module data set and associated assessment brief are identical. Namely that it expects students, at the end of the module, to be able to:
 - articulate an understanding of the significance of the Old Testament for Christians
 - demonstrate competency in biblical exegesis

- interpret biblical texts with attention to genre, literary technique, and the author's theological agenda
- demonstrate facility in applying insights from the Old Testament to their own life and cultural contexts.

129. Similarly, for the Level 5 module 'The Gospel of John', the learning outcomes stated in the module data set and associated assignment brief state that, by the end of the module, students will be able to:

- critically interpret the Gospel of John within its historical and socio-cultural setting
- show an ability to identify the Gospel's literary features in relation to its narrative structure and theological themes
- evaluate the relevance of the Johannine gospel for Christian discipleship and service.

130. Similarly, for the Level 6 module 'Theology and Praxis', the learning outcomes stated in the module data set and associated assignment brief state that, by the end of the module, students will be able to:

- demonstrate critical awareness of the intricacies of the theological foundations of various church practice
- critically assess key theological texts on church praxis, interacting with both classical positions and more recent, modern discussions
- critically evaluate theological proposals as they relate to church praxis.

131. The assessment team is therefore assured, from looking at a significant sample of module data sets and assignment briefs, that, as levels of study progress, there is a clear requirement in learning outcomes and associated assessments for an increase in educational challenge, for example in the ability of students to engage critically with an increasing range of texts. This increase in educational challenge was also evident in the sample of assessed work analysed by the team.

132. The number of sources students are expected to consult also demonstrates increased expectations and challenge as the levels progress. Module data sets are available to students and contain a link to the reading strategy on the Google Drive which indicates, as a guideline, the minimum quantity of sources expected at each level for a 2,000 word essay. The minimum number of sources ranges from five at Level 4 to 12-15 sources at Level 7. Assignment word count might reasonably demonstrate increased stretch and rigour as levels progress. The core teaching staff met by the team stated that allocated word count has always been dictated by the awarding bodies. Word counts for assignments are set out in the assignment briefs and are as follows: for undergraduate Levels 4-6, the word count is per 20 credits and so a module with this number of credits would total 4,000 words; and for the MA at Level 7 the word count is 5,000 words.

133. The assignment briefs, written by WTC staff and approved by BNU, contain a link to the marking criteria at the appropriate level and these are also available on a Google Drive link.

The link enables easy access so students can see the level of work required for each marking bracket. The marking criteria clearly demonstrate the increased challenge as the levels increase, and the assessment team noted from samples of student work that marking and feedback are appropriate. Feedback from lecturers is detailed, both through in-text and summative comments, and indicates how students can improve their work. Support for assessment is offered to students through clear information given by tutors on the assessments, particularly through the assignment briefs. All assignment briefs are detailed and give helpful advice to students. There is also study skills support and one-to-one support when students request it.

134. At present, there are no different marking criteria for diverse assessment methods such as sermons or presentations. For example, for the module 'Core Communication Skills for Preaching and Public Speaking', students need to deliver a 10-15 minute sermon with notes and video recording, which carries a weighting equivalent to a 1,000 word essay. This is submitted as part of a portfolio, with a 1,000 word critical reflection along with audience feedback forms and preparatory notes. The module 'Bible and Intertextuality' allows for an oral presentation instead of an essay or book review, comprising 50 per cent of the assignment for the unit. The marking criteria used for all assignments address five areas and, although written primarily for assessing essays, they are adaptable for oral presentations too. Although the assessment team does not regard the use of a single marking criteria as a significant concern at present, it does support WTC's ambition to develop an appropriate set of marking criteria as they diversify further the methods of assessment in future.
135. WTC provides a good level of training and support to academic staff for marking, including how to detect AI, plagiarism and unacceptable academic practice. WTC provides a marking guidance document and induction for new faculty staff which discusses this. WTC has created a new role this academic year for an experienced member of staff to focus on overseeing all aspects of marking, including the delivery of training, monitoring marking standards for each module, and ensuring the moderation process is fulfilled. In addition, recent faculty training days have focused on marking and academic integrity. This has included discussions on ChatGPT and the implications of AI, which pooled together experiences and insights of adjunct and guest lecturers from their own institutions.
136. The assessment team explored how WTC is dealing with assessment design and AI. Lecturers met by the team indicated that students quite frequently discuss their essays with them prior to submission, and some take advantage of the option to submit a formative essay outline or abstract. This means that lecturers are often aware of the topics students are writing about before essays are submitted for marking. Academic staff met by the team are also aware of asking a range of different questions which makes it difficult for students to use AI, while faculty training days and Boards of Study provide opportunities for ongoing discussions and shared learning around assessment design and AI. WTC's Academic Conduct Policy is up to date, thorough and clearly states what academic conduct is, as well as copying, plagiarism and the use of AI tools. The policy also indicates clearly the process and penalties for 'unacceptable academic practice'. None of the failing assignments seen by the assessment team were due to academic malpractice and it was confirmed in meetings with staff that WTC has few cases of plagiarism or unacceptable academic practice. In the few cases where it does happen, it is usually by accident in the early part of the academic year as students become used to writing assignments.

137. The assessment team considered the variety of assignments students engage in and noted that the majority are essay-based (see also paragraphs 70 and 74). This has also been raised by external examiners and through a recent validation process with BNU in which WTC has been encouraged to diversify its assessment methods. Doing this would provide students with greater creative potential to express their learning in different ways, as well as helping students with assessed learning needs (such as dyslexia) to communicate their knowledge, learning and reflections in other than a written form. While WTC has stated that due to the nature of theology, it is appropriate that the majority of summative assessments remain essay-based, it also recognises the importance of diversity of assessment both to enhance the learning experience for all and to cater for a wider range of learning skills and needs.
138. While one of the key objectives behind the ambition to diversify assessment methods is related to student needs and enhancing the learning experience further, the assessment team is assured that the current approach does test the relevant skills as required by B4.2a. The team saw examples of diversification of assessment, including the use of artistic presentations of Christ, preaching a sermon, and the choice of an oral presentation. In addition, discussions with staff and external examiners confirmed that senior staff are working hard with faculty staff to diversify assessment methods and this is gradually increasing each year, although the MA course remains very heavily reliant on essays.
139. The assessment team examined WTC's use of formative and summative assessment (see also paragraphs 104 and 105). Other than the assignment brief for the module 'Core Communication Skills', where a formative assignment for creating and submitting a preaching video is required, WTC does not require formative assessments in its modules. While module data sets do not indicate that any formative work is required (only summative assessments), assignment briefs usually state that 'all students are entitled to submit an essay plan or introductory paragraph to their lecturer for comments before writing their essay...students with a SAFF [Standard Assessment Feedback Form] are entitled to receive comments on one draft of their essay before submission'. Therefore, although not a formal requirement for students to submit formative assessments in most modules, the assessment team was assured through discussions with the senior team that WTC is moving towards all modules at all levels, including some level of formative assessment for students to engage in prior to submitting their summative assignments. As such, faculty staff are asked to include such assessments in their modules in line with WTC's Academic Quality Assurance Policy. Students informed the team that where they have used formative methods, they have found them to be helpful.
140. The BNU validation decision in June 2024 stated that one of the conditions of validation was the need for a clear policy and guidance, and feedback, on formative assessments. As noted in paragraphs 104 and 105, the senior leadership team confirmed that this is an area which remains open for improvement but the assessment team was assured that WTC is considering carefully how to take this forward, for example by:
- providing greater clarity around expectations for, and feedback on, formative assessments
 - making greater use of the VLE to employ formative assessment methods such as quizzes which students can do online and can be either marked automatically online or by tutors.

141. The team was also informed that the further development of formative assessments, including guidance and feedback, will also be addressed as a key priority in the next curriculum review. The team also recognises that formative work is evident in the assignment briefs and students are encouraged during each module to make use of the opportunities available to submit formative assessments to aid them in their summative assignments. In addition, formative assessment methods for each course are outlined and include:

- essay plans and introductions
- textual annotations and commentaries
- oral presentations
- group-led discussions
- class-based quizzes.

142. Therefore, while there remains scope for improvement, the assessment team is assured that the provider recognises the issues and the value of formative assessments and is taking credible steps to further develop its approach.

143. Reasonable adjustments are made for students who have had their learning needs assessed. As well as general study skills support available to all students, specific support is offered to students with atypical neurodiversity. This includes testing for dyslexia, one-to-one support, and additional support and time for students with a Standard Assessment Feedback Form (SAFF) report. The student support handbook has detailed information about neurodivergence and support for students. It includes names and contact information for the learning development tutor, and the director of events and partnerships (for residential and hub events). A sample essay seen by the team included an atypical neurodiversity feedback request form at the front of the essay, giving helpful guidance on marking and items on which the student would particularly value clear feedback.

144. The assessment tasks for the modules are clearly focused on, and appropriate to, the knowledge and understanding of the topic being taught. Some assignments offer the possibility of a sermon or oral presentation which specifically relates to the employability or practical skills which may be required, particularly for students who might enter work in ministry contexts. Currently, however, the proportion of students seeking such employment following their course is relatively low. Staff met by the team stressed that WTC is not an ordination college so there is no direct trajectory towards a career as a result of studying there.

Subcriterion B4.2b

Does Westminster Theological Centre have credible plans to ensure that for each higher education course assessment is valid and reliable (B4.2b)?

Advice to the OfS

145. The assessment team's view is that WTC has credible plans to ensure that each higher education course assessment is valid and reliable.

Reasoning

146. The assessment team reviewed the documentary evidence, including module data sets, assignment briefs, student work, minutes of assessment boards and external examiners' reports. The team also met with students and academic staff.

147. The assessment team considered whether each higher education course delivered by WTC makes use of assessments that are valid. Assessments are mapped onto the learning outcomes for the modules, and therefore test what they were designed to assess. Example assignment briefs considered by the assessment team give a clear indication of how the assessments address the learning outcomes for the module. For example, in the module 'Exploring the Old Testament', the first assignment option is:

- Exegesis Component: includes an explanation of the meaning of a key passage from a selected book linked to essay one, paying careful attention to literary genre, literary context, literary structure, key words and phrases, imagery, and characterisation where appropriate.
- Teaching Component: includes conducting a Bible study, sermon, or talk of at least 20 minutes with 3 or more people on a selected passage (students are assessed on their written work and not their teaching, but this component needs to be completed for a pass).
- Reflection Component: includes reflection on teaching experience in the final 500 words of the essay, including how teaching changes perspective, the insights that other students bring, questions or issues that were difficult or beneficial to articulate, and the challenges faced.

148. The assignments tie in closely with the associated learning outcomes which are:

- demonstrate competency in biblical exegesis
- articulate an understanding of the significance of the Old Testament for Christians
- interpret biblical texts with attention to genre, literary technique, and the author's theological agenda
- demonstrate facility in applying insights from the Old Testament to their own life and cultural contexts.

149. The close mapping of learning outcomes and assignments demonstrates that the assessments test what they are designed to assess. In addition, each module has a data set which sets out an introduction to the module, learning outcomes, an overview of the assessments and bibliographies. Detailed information about the assignments is found in the assignment briefs.
150. Evidence that the assessments are valid and test what they are designed to assess is also demonstrated in the student work seen by the team. The team saw extensive evidence of assignments demonstrating where students have answered the assessment questions and met the learning outcomes, including examples where students have failed to do so. Students met by the team confirmed the clarity of information available to them which makes it easy for them to understand what is required in an assessment.
151. The assessment team also explored whether assessment was reliable in requiring students to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills in a manner consistent between registered students and over time. The team found marking and moderation processes to be robust. The marking training guidance document states that there is a three-week turnaround period for marking and moderating, and that all assignments are marked to the standards set out in WTC's marking criteria. The faculty handbook outlines marking and moderation processes and responsibilities.
152. In a response to a comment made by the external examiner in a 2023-24 report about whether there should be a stronger involvement from core or more experienced staff when newer markers are brought in, WTC responded by appointing a new role to oversee the marking and moderation process. The intention was to relieve unnecessary pressure on teaching staff and to ensure the consistency of marking and moderating is closely monitored throughout the year. In addition, WTC scheduled a training day focused on assessment and moderation for all teaching staff at the start of the academic year 2024-25, and redesigned marking training for new faculty members to include some co-marking with one of the senior academic team before that person is appointed as the lead marker for a module.
153. The team also explored how consistency of delivery, marking and moderation is maintained between core teaching staff and those employed as adjunct or guest lecturers (see also paragraph 135). The dean of studies, together with a former member of staff who now oversees assessments, check consistency of marking and moderation. Other practices to ensure consistency include:
- co-marking with new staff
 - training sessions on marking
 - monitoring quality of 'canned content' lectures
 - a robust peer-review process so every member of staff is reviewed in a two-year period.
154. The faculty handbook clearly describes expectations of teaching staff, including responsibilities, course preparation, teaching, marking, moderating and supervision.
155. WTC uses Turnitin to detect plagiarism for all written summative assignments. This supports markers and moderators in their assessment of assignments, helping to ensure that

assessments are reliable in ensuring consistency in the assessment of knowledge and skills between students on the same course and over time (see also paragraphs 135-136). In addition, detailed advice on marking is given in the marking training guidance document.

156. The team saw evidence that the recording, management and processing of student assessment is detailed, consistent and fair, and results in assessment profiles where comparable marks are awarded to students demonstrating similar levels of achievement. Evidence for the validity and reliability of assessments is triangulated by external examiners' reports which highlight the consistency of marking and assessment methods, clarity of marking criteria, and appropriateness of assignments.
157. WTC has three external examiners who closely scrutinise and report on assessment processes and a wide range of assignments each year. Reports are shared with WTC and its validating partners, and WTC subsequently responds to the comments made by each of its external examiners. This provides a valuable external perspective to confirm that the assessments remain valid and reliable. In addition, any recommendations are taken into WTC's annual review of module syllabi and assignments.

Subcriterion B4.2c

Does Westminster Theological Centre have credible plans to ensure that for each higher education course the academic regulations are designed to ensure that relevant awards are credible (B4.2c)?

Advice to the OfS

158. The assessment team's view is that WTC has credible plans to ensure that, for each higher education course, the academic regulations are designed to ensure that relevant awards are credible.

Reasoning

159. The assessment team examined evidence to do with the assessment of students' work, marking criteria, programme specifications, external examiners' reports, student discipline relating to academic matters, the requirements for relevant awards, and the method used to determine classifications.
160. The awards granted by WTC are managed through academic regulations set by the validating partners and its own general academic regulations. The team found that WTC effectively manages and monitors risks to the credibility of awards within the context of their agreements with their validating partners and its own general academic regulations. The team also found WTC's academic regulations to be consistent and clear, facilitating understanding for students, and those assessing student work, of the achievement required to receive each award. WTC's academic regulations are easily accessible to all students in their MyWTC portal account, and documented in WTC's policies, procedures, and other published documentation.
161. As outlined in its Academic Quality Assurance Policy, WTC has total control over the design of modules and BNU approves them. BNU also approves summative assignments, which are

included in module data sets, including their rationale. BNU would have to approve everything termed as a substantive change to a module, for example to do with modes of assignment.

162. In their marking training guidance, WTC instructs markers to make marks very clear and to provide a rationale for why they have allocated a specific grade, especially when on a boundary between two grades. The final determination of awards and classifications is the responsibility of the validating partners and they have a consistent approach to doing so.
163. The assessment team reviewed learning outcomes and examples of assignment briefs for each course. It is evident from this review that learning outcomes and assignment briefs make clear what is required of a student to achieve the award they are studying for. Assessment criteria are linked to learning outcomes to ensure that students are being assessed in line with the requirements of their award. Examples of student-assessed work seen by the team also provided evidence of students being accurately marked against appropriate learning outcomes.
164. WTC has a robust Academic Conduct Policy which sets out the process for disciplining students if they are suspected of academic misconduct. This process and the steps that WTC has taken to minimise academic misconduct are discussed more fully in paragraph 107.
165. WTC is currently planning to introduce a new course in September 2026 to pilot with prisoners, which will be based closely on their existing Certificate in Higher Education but with some distinct modules to reflect the context in which it is being delivered. An agreement is already in place with a prison to run the pilot and a prisons programme director has recently been appointed to oversee the process. The director will work with the dean of studies to produce the necessary validation paperwork by August 2025. A draft programme specification was shared with the assessment team prior to the visit. The process being undertaken and WTC's track record in having higher education courses validated over a number of years indicates that the new award will also be credible.

Subcriterion B4.2d

Does Westminster Theological Centre have credible plans to ensure that for each higher education course, the academic regulations are designed to ensure the effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language in a manner which appropriately reflects the level and content of the applicable higher education course (B4.2d)?

Advice to the OfS

166. The assessment team's view is that WTC has credible plans to ensure the effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language in a manner which appropriately reflects the level and content of applicable higher education courses.

Reasoning

167. The assessment team reviewed documentation, including the Admissions Policy and Procedure, assignment briefs and marking criteria.

168. WTC has an effective system in place to ensure the assessment of technical proficiency in the English language prior to entry to a higher education course. A particular score on an International English Language Testing System (IELTS), or equivalent examination such as Test of English as a Foreign Language Internet-based Test (TOEFL iBT), is required for students for whom English is not their first language. For undergraduate courses, an IELTS score of 6.0, or a TOEFL iBT score of 72, is required. For postgraduate courses, an IELTS score of 6.5, or a TOEFL iBT score of 88, is required. The expectations for technical proficiency in the English language and its implications for a successful application to study are clearly outlined in WTC's Admissions Policy and Procedure. WTC is in the process of creating a Certificate in Higher Education for prisoners and this will also require an IELTS score of 6.0 or TOEFL iBT score of 72.
169. With respect to course assessments, the importance of technical proficiency in English is clearly outlined in the assignment briefs, including an indication of the required writing and referencing style for assignments.
170. Technical proficiency in the English language is also assessed in the marking criteria for Levels 4-7, which address clarity of language, spelling, grammar and referencing. For example, the criteria which examines presentation considers grammar, spelling, punctuation and syntax.
171. The assessment team recognises that assessments provided by WTC are not just intended to test English language ability, although the predominance of essay-based assessments leans this way. Diversifying assessment methods, as discussed in paragraphs 70, 74 and 137, should enable students to demonstrate skills other than just written fluency, particularly those related to their work or future work. For example, presentations and preaching are used as other methods of assessment while also clearly requiring competence in the English language.
172. Currently, there are a very small number of students at WTC, mostly European, for whom English is not their first language. In addition to the English language requirements described in paragraph 168, most of these students have studied in England before and so their English language skills are well developed. Should the student demographic change in future, the assessment team is confident that WTC has the admission requirements and levels of study skills support in place to support students for whom English is not their first language.
173. The assessment team verified the technical proficiency in the English language of WTC's students at all levels in oral and written form by sampling summative assessments, meeting students during the visit and attending hub evenings in Bristol and Manchester. In all instances, the assessment team noted the technical proficiency demonstrated by students to be of a level appropriate to the level and content of their academic studies.

Subcriterion B4.2e

Does Westminster Theological Centre have credible plans to ensure that relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously (B4.2e)?

Advice to the OfS

174. The assessment team's view is that WTC has credible plans to ensure that relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously.

Reasoning

175. The assessment team reviewed documentation, including WTC's Academic Quality Assurance Policy, module benchmarking checklists, the process for curriculum design, external examiners' reports, minutes of module assessment board meetings, and minutes of Boards of Study meetings. The team also held meetings with senior staff, external examiners and representatives of the awarding bodies.
176. The assessment team is satisfied that WTC and its validating partners are keeping under review the credibility of the awards being granted over time through the various processes in place. Each of the courses taught by WTC has been validated over the years by a recognised awarding partner from the University of Wales, Lampeter (2008-2010) through to the University of Chester (2010-2023), and BNU (2023-present).
177. WTC has a robust process for designing and reviewing modules, as indicated in the Academic Quality Assurance Policy, with BNU approving the modules, summative assignments and rationale which are then included in module data sets. BNU also approves any substantive change to a module such as the modes of assignment. BNU confirms that the course material meets the quality and standards of the university and validates the module(s) for delivery from the following academic year. Additional documentation which demonstrates the rigorous approach of WTC to curriculum design and monitoring are the module benchmarking checklists and process for curriculum design.
178. WTC monitors degree outcomes and produces a spreadsheet each year indicating, for example, progression of students from the BA to MA course. Student module board results are produced annually, indicating module results, student progress, and outcomes. These indicate the credits which have been achieved by students and demonstrate the credibility of the final award achieved.
179. WTC has three external examiners who have a close view of assignments and courses. External examiners are required to comment on:
- scope of examinations and examination methods
 - marking standards and degree classifications
 - assessment feedback

- student performance
- course learning aims and outcomes
- structure and syllabus
- developing students' independence and potential
- teaching methods and teaching quality
- good practice identified.

180. Reports produced by undergraduate and postgraduate external examiners agree that the standards at WTC in these categories are appropriate, robust and fair, in line with the discipline, offer appropriate challenge, and allow students to grow their potential and demonstrate their knowledge, skills and critical thinking ability. These reports again demonstrate the credibility of the awards offered by WTC.

181. The courses offered by WTC through the University of Chester and BNU are very similar in terms of design and content, which has enabled WTC to maintain consistency in course and module content, and credibility in the awards granted. For example, the programme specifications for the two BA courses indicate that both have identical aims and closely aligned learning outcomes. In addition, the modules have the same titles, structure and content, for example the 'Exploring the Old Testament' modules have learning outcomes that are almost identical. Senior staff confirmed that there has been no significant difference in module outcomes for students on similar courses validated by BNU and the University of Chester.

182. The assessment team considers that the awards granted by WTC to its higher education students reflect the relevant knowledge, understanding and skills. The review of curriculum content and assessment tasks demonstrate that students are assessed on their knowledge, understanding and skills in areas relevant to the subject matter of the course, and at the level appropriate for the module and course being studied. Sections B4.2a and B4.2b show that WTC effectively assesses students and makes use of valid and reliable modes of assessment. Section B4.2c shows that the academic regulations governing the assessment regime are credible and consistently applied. They therefore help to ensure that assessment and the subsequent awards are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously.

B4 conclusions

Does Westminster Theological Centre have credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with condition B4 from the date of registration?

183. The assessment team considers that, overall, WTC has credible plans to ensure, if registered, it would comply with the requirements of condition B4 with reference to assessment and awards.

184. Notwithstanding the need for greater diversification of assessments and improvements to formative assessments, the assessment team found that WTC's course documentation, assessment regulations, and assessment and marking procedures demonstrate that students are effectively assessed, and those assessments are valid and reliable. The course validation and review processes demonstrate that the academic regulations are designed to ensure that relevant awards are, and remain, credible. The team found the admissions procedures, standards evident in students' assessed work, and the engagement of students during meetings and observed hub sessions demonstrate a good level of technical proficiency in the English language in a manner which appropriately reflects the level and content of the courses. In addition, through students' assessed work, assessment board processes and external examining procedures, WTC demonstrates that the appropriate processes are in place to ensure that relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously.
185. Considering its findings at B4.2a, B4.2b, B4.2c, B4.2d and B4.2e above, and the reasoning they contain, the assessment team's view is that WTC has credible plans to ensure students will continue to receive a high quality academic experience.
186. The assessment team identified no broader concerns relevant to assessment and awards to report to the OfS.

Part 2: Assessment of condition B8: Standards

Requirement (standards)

Does Westminster Theological Centre demonstrate in a credible manner that the standards set for the courses it intends to provide, if it is registered, appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards?

Advice to the OfS

187. The assessment team's view is that the standards set for the courses WTC intends to provide, if registered, appropriately reflect applicable sector-recognised standards.

Reasoning

A.1: Qualifications at each level

188. Based on the evidence provided, the assessment team's view is that the titles of qualifications delivered by WTC accurately reflect students' achievement, and the typical volume, level and field of study undertaken.

189. The awards currently offered by WTC are detailed here. The provider intends to continue to offer most of these courses if they are registered with the OfS, although the courses currently validated by the University of Chester will be gradually taught out until academic year 2027-28. The Graduate Diploma in kingdom theology and student ministry will be discontinued at the end of the academic year 2025-26:

- Certificate in Higher Education in kingdom theology
- BA (Hons) in kingdom theology
- Graduate Diploma in kingdom theology
- Graduate Diploma in kingdom theology with church planting and leadership
- Graduate Diploma in kingdom theology and student ministry
- MA in kingdom theology.

190. WTC also has plans to introduce:

- Certificate in Higher Education in theology or kingdom theology (with prison chaplaincy support).

191. The assessment team takes the view that WTC has identified and applied appropriate titles for each qualification considered here. The courses and their titles align with the requirements set out in Table 1 of the OfS sector-recognised standards.

192. Each course is set at the appropriate level from the Certificate in Higher Education at Level 4 through to the masters' degree at Level 7. This can be seen in the programme specification

for each course with, for example, the masters' degree requiring 180 credits at Level 7 and the Graduate Diploma requiring 120 credits at Level 6.

193. The titles of the awards WTC offers convey appropriate information about the level of the qualification, the volume, nature and field of study undertaken. The programme specifications for the various awards clearly indicate the aims of the course, including the subject areas taught. For example, the BA programme specification states that the course comprises: '(1) the core disciplines of biblical studies, Christian theology, spiritual formation, and mission, and (2) the associated disciplines of church history, spirituality, ethics, and world religions, in order to equip Christians with extensive biblical and theological knowledge, and a critical understanding of their own traditions'.
194. Likewise, the draft programme specification for the proposed Certificate in Higher Education for prisoners demonstrates WTC's plans to align with the sector-recognised standards for a course it intends to provide in the future.

A.2: Typical volumes of credit for qualifications

195. The assessment team's view is that WTC has demonstrated in a credible manner that, if registered, the courses it is currently delivering and those it plans to deliver, appropriately reflect those requirements outlined in part A.2 of the sector-recognised standards document.
196. The required volume of learning, in terms of credits for each award, is outlined in the programme specifications for each course. The team reviewed the total credit value and the required credit at each level for all the courses WTC intends to provide if registered. Each course appropriately reflects the credit values set out in Table 2 of the sector-recognised standards document. For example, the Level 7 masters' degree has a total credit value of 180 credits, all at level 7. This exceeds the requirement in Table 2, where 150 credits are required at Level 7. The BA (Hons) degree requires 360 credits with 120 credits at Level 4 qualifying a student for the Certificate in Higher Education, 120 credits at Level 5 qualifying the student for a Diploma in Higher Education, and 120 credits at Level 6 for the full BA degree. Again, these exceed the requirements on Table 2 of the sector-recognised standards document.

A.3: Qualification descriptors

197. The assessment team's view is that WTC has demonstrated in a credible manner that, if it is registered, the courses it intends to provide, appropriately reflect the standards set out in part A.3 of the sector-recognised standards document.
198. The team considered programme specifications and a sample of assessed student work across modules and levels in order to assess the alignment of WTC's courses with qualification descriptors in A.3 of the sector-recognised standards. The team then mapped learning outcomes against the qualification descriptors. By doing this, the team was able to establish whether the outcomes and attributes expected by the provider for each course aligns with those expected for the award of the relevant qualification in the sector-recognised standards.
199. For all courses that WTC intends to provide, if registered, learning outcomes demonstrate alignment with qualification descriptors as set in part A.3 of the sector-recognised standards document.

200. The Level 4 provision appropriately reflects the descriptors for a higher education qualification at Level 4, set out in paragraphs 14 to 17, in section A.3.1 of the sector-recognised standards. For example, at Level 4, the sector-recognised standards state that Certificates of Higher Education are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- knowledge of the underlying concepts and principles associated with their area(s) of study, and an ability to evaluate and interpret these within the context of that area of study
- an ability to present, evaluate and interpret qualitative and quantitative data, in order to develop lines of argument and make sound judgements in accordance with basic theories and concepts of their subject(s) of study.

201. These qualities are evident in the learning outcomes of Level 4 modules which require students to be able to interpret, describe, evaluate, and identify. For example, the module 'The New Testament Journey' requires students to:

- interpret New Testament texts locating them in their literary, theological and formative historical contexts
- describe and offer evaluation of current scholarly debates in New Testament scholarship, especially surrounding Jesus and the interpretation of the Gospels
- appropriately identify and describe the relationship between specific biblical texts and the theology and practice of Christian life, work and ministry.

202. The Level 5 provision appropriately reflects the descriptors for a higher education qualification at Level 5, set out in paragraphs 19 to 23, in section A3.2 of the sector-recognised standards. For example, the sector-recognised standards state that Level 5 qualifications are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- knowledge and critical understanding of the well-established principles of their area(s) of study, and of the way in which those principles have developed
- ability to apply underlying concepts and principles outside the context in which they were first studied, including, where appropriate, the application of those principles in an employment context
- knowledge of the main methods of enquiry in the subject(s) relevant to the named award, and ability to evaluate critically the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems in the field of study
- an understanding of the limits of their knowledge, and how this influences analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge.

203. These qualities are evident in the learning outcomes of Level 5 modules, for example the module 'The Gospel of John':

- identify the Gospel's literary features in relation to its narrative structure and theological themes

- describe and offer critical evaluation of how the Johannine author unveils Christ and highlights the gospel's message
- evaluate the relevance of the Johannine gospel for Christian discipleship and service.

204. The Level 6 provision appropriately reflects the descriptors for a higher education qualification at Level 6, set out in paragraphs 25 to 29, in section A.3.3 of the sector-recognised standards. For example, the module 'Theology and Praxis' requires students to critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data to make judgements by:

- demonstrating critical awareness of the intricacies of the theological foundations of various church practices
- critically assessing key theological texts on church praxis, interacting with both classical positions and more recent, modern discussions
- critically evaluating theological proposals as they relate to church praxis
- critically articulating the rationale of the application of church praxis in a given Christian tradition.

205. The Level 7 provision appropriately reflects the descriptors for a higher education qualification at Level 7, set out in paragraphs 31 to 34, in section A3.4 of the sector-recognised standards. For example, the module 'Faithfully Performing the Biblical Drama' requires students to demonstrate a systematic understanding of knowledge, critical awareness of current problems, and evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship by:

- demonstrating a detailed knowledge of biblical material pertaining to ethics and drawing upon it critically and with theological rigour in dialogue with Christian tradition and contemporary moral theologians in articulating a Christian ethical perspective
- reflecting critically upon their own methods and conclusions in Christian moral reasoning
- describing and critically evaluating a range of Christian understandings in relation to Christian moral concepts and consider their place in Christian discipleship and witness.

B: Classification descriptors for Level 6 bachelors' degrees

206. The assessment team's judgement is that WTC has demonstrated in a credible manner that, if registered, the courses it intends to provide appropriately reflect the standards set out in part B of the sector-recognised standards.

207. Part B of the sector-recognised standards document is relevant to the BA (Hons) in kingdom theology. The course appropriately reflects the classification descriptors set out in Table 3 of the sector-recognised standards. The programme specification for the BA course sets out information on aims and learning outcomes, delivery of the course, and structure of the course.

208. Table 3 of the sector-recognised standards is reflected in the descriptors for the degree evident in the programme specifications. The learning outcomes for the degree are arranged into three areas: knowledge and understanding; subject-specific skills (including practical and

professional skills); and advanced skills and experience. These areas map onto the five learning outcome areas outlined in part B of the sector-recognised standards: knowledge and understanding, cognitive skills, practical skills, transferable skills and professional competencies.

209. Assessment criteria for the degree are clearly set out in WTC's marking criteria for Level 6. The criteria map onto Table 3 of the sector-recognised standards. The criteria are included in the BA programme specification and are available to students through a Google Drive link in assignment briefs.

Requirement (student achievement)

Does Westminster Theological Centre demonstrate in a credible manner that the achievement of students on the courses it intends to provide, if it is registered, appropriately reflect applicable sector-recognised standards?

Advice to the OfS

210. The achievement of students on the courses WTC intends to provide, if it is registered, appropriately reflects applicable sector-recognised standards.

Reasoning

A.1: Qualifications at each level

211. The assessment team examined a range of assessed work, including failed assignments, which provided direct evidence of the level of work assessed, and reviewed recent external examiners' reports, and details of module assessment boards. This showed that assessment of student work is in line with sector standards and that awards currently made to students on each course appropriately reflect the titles set out in the programme specifications.
212. External examiners' reports back up the findings of the team's review of assessed work in showing that the provider's assessments are fair and appropriate for the awards provided, and that they align well with the academic standards expected in similar courses at other theological providers.

A.2: Typical volumes of credit for qualifications

213. WTC has demonstrated that the design of its courses ensures that each course requires the correct volume of credit. WTC's delivery of teaching and learning, combined with module board processes and evidence from external examiners' reports, demonstrate that students earn an appropriate volume of credit for the awards they receive.
214. WTC has planned its learning and teaching activities on the basis that each credit equates to 10 learning hours. Module credits and associated learning hours are explicitly stated in the module data sets. For example, 'The History of Christian Spirituality' is a 20-credit module which has 200 learning hours allocated between 156 hours of independent study combined with 44 scheduled 'contact' hours made up of 16 hours of lectures, eight hours of canned content, four hours of video conferences, and 16 hours for academic drop-ins.

215. For module boards, WTC produces a chart with the volume of credits achieved by each student for the modules they have undertaken. The chart indicates whether or not each student has achieved the correct volume of credits to allow them to progress to the next level of study, or to graduate.

A.3: Qualification descriptors

216. The assessment team's view is that the achievement of students awarded higher education qualifications at WTC appropriately reflects all parts of the relevant descriptors at Level 4 as set out in paragraphs 13-17 in Section A.3.1 of the sector-recognised standards, at Level 5 as set out in paragraphs 18-23 in Section A.3.2, at Level 6 as set out in paragraphs 24-29 in Section A.3.3, and at Level 7 as set out in paragraphs 30-34 in Section A.3.4. The assessment team reviewed a sample of module data sets, assignment briefs, and examples of student-assessed work for each higher education course that WTC delivers at Levels 4 to 7.

217. The team found direct evidence that assessed student work is at the appropriate threshold level and, based on a sample, students consistently meet the relevant descriptors for each award. For example, a Level 5 assignment reviewed by the team and awarded a mark in the 50s was assessed appropriately and met the relevant descriptors for the award: evidence of good knowledge and understanding of key concepts but, at the same time, examples of weak argumentation and limited interaction with a variety of sources. Similarly, comments for a Level 4 essay with a mark in the low 70s demonstrate that the student had engaged well with primary and secondary sources and now needs to develop critical analysis. The comments reflect the Level 4 descriptors regarding knowledge and understanding and the ability to present, evaluate and interpret information.

218. The assessment team mapped course learning outcomes against the qualification descriptors and found that the learning outcomes are fulfilled through the outcomes of the modules against which students are assessed. Learning outcomes are detailed in programme specifications, module data sets, and assignment briefs.

219. Assignment briefs are effectively connected to the learning outcomes outlined in the module data sets, meaning that assessments are focused on examining whether students have demonstrated the required skills for the level of the course. Learning outcomes for modules connect appropriately with the qualification descriptors set out in sector-recognised standards.

220. The tasks set for assignments are appropriate for the level of each course. There is an appropriate increase in the complexity of assessments with students at higher levels expected to demonstrate higher level skills. Work is assessed appropriately with students receiving marks which are aligned with their performance relative to the learning outcomes. WTC's marking and moderation protocol is robust and helps to ensure that the marks received by students are appropriate.

B: Classification descriptors for Level 6 bachelors' degrees

221. The assessment team considered a range of documentation, including the BA programme specification, a sample of Level 6 assignment briefs and module data sets, and a sample of assessed work at Level 6, including marks across different classifications and a failing mark.

The team found evidence that the marks awarded for student achievement were consistently in line with the relevant classification descriptors, and that feedback clearly indicated the reasons for the mark, and referenced the relevant marking criteria and learning outcomes. Feedback provided to students also makes it clear how the student could improve their marks in future.

222. The assessment team's view is that the classification descriptors set out the outcomes and attributes expected for the award of a bachelors' degree within a particular classification because they articulate what students must demonstrate to achieve at each level. The programme specification for the Level 6 bachelors' degree sets out information on aims and learning outcomes, with the latter addressing relevant descriptors, including knowledge and understanding, and subject-specific skills (including practical and professional skills) for Level 6.

Annex A: Approach to sampling of evidence

223. Westminster Theological Centre (WTC) currently delivers a range of part-time higher education courses in kingdom theology, ranging from the Certificate in Higher Education at Level 4 to the MA at Level 7. Although it no longer recruits new students to the courses validated by the University of Chester, WTC will continue to teach out students on the Certificate and Graduate Diploma courses until academic year 2025-26, and BA and MA students until 2027-2028.
224. Due to the relatively small number of higher education courses, it was deemed proportionate and representative to request a sample of course content and anonymised assessed work for each course:

Birmingham Newman University

- BA (Hons) in kingdom theology – to include:
 - four pieces of assessed student work from one student that was awarded the final degree in 2023-24 - this should comprise at least one assessment not at Level 6, as well as assessment briefs, mark/grade awarded and feedback given
 - four pieces of assessed student work from one student that was not awarded the final degree – this should comprise at least one assessment not at Level 6, as well as assessment briefs, mark and/or grade awarded and feedback given
 - all module specifications.
- Graduate Diploma in kingdom theology – to include:
 - four pieces of assessed student work from one student that was awarded the final award in 2023-24 – this should include assessment briefs, mark and/or grade awarded and feedback given
 - four pieces of assessed student work from one student that was not awarded the final award – this should include assessment briefs, mark and/or grade awarded and feedback given
 - all module specifications.
- MA in kingdom theology – to include:
 - two pieces of assessed student work from one student that was awarded the final award in 2023-24 – this should include assessment briefs, mark and/or grade awarded and feedback given
 - two pieces of assessed student work from one student that was not awarded the final award – this should include assessment briefs, mark and/or grade awarded and feedback given
 - all module specifications.

- Certificate in Higher Education in kingdom theology – to include:
 - two pieces of assessed student work (this should be from two different students and should not be from the same module) – this should include assessment briefs, mark and/or grade awarded and feedback given.

University of Chester

- Certificate in Higher Education in kingdom theology – to include:
 - programme specification.
- BA (Hons) in kingdom theology – to include:
 - programme specification
 - a sample of one module specification for each level
 - two pieces of assessed student work (this should be from two different students and should not be from the same module) – this should include assessment briefs, mark and/or grade awarded and feedback given.
- Graduate Diploma in kingdom theology – to include:
 - programme specification.
- Graduate Diploma in church planting and leadership – to include:
 - programme specification.
- Graduate Diploma in kingdom theology and student ministry – to include:
 - programme specification.
- MA in kingdom theology – to include:
 - programme specification
 - three module specifications
 - two pieces of assessed student work (this should be from two different students and should not be from the same module) – this should include assessment briefs, mark and/or grade awarded and feedback given.

225. In addition, WTC provided extracts of final examination and/or award board documentation:

- for all the above courses
- that show credits accumulated, awards granted and classifications, covering the 2022-23 and 2023-24 academic year

- documentation from any boards concerned only with module outcomes or progression are not required.

226. The assessment team considered this an appropriate sample of programme and module specifications to enable it to advise on whether the standards set for the courses provided by WTC, if it is registered, appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards. It covered a range of levels and took account of the transition to a new validating partner.

227. WTC provided student-assessed work, evidence of student achievement, and exam board paperwork. For each piece of student work, WTC provided the relevant assessment brief, assessment mark and the feedback given to the student. The assessment team considered this random sample of student work to be a proportionate and representative sample to enable it to reach a view on whether the achievement of students on the courses provided by WTC, if it is registered, appropriately reflect the applicable sector-recognised standards.

Annex B: List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
AI	artificial intelligence
BNU	Birmingham Newman University
CDMS	college data management system
FTE	full-time equivalent
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
MyWTC	the name of WTC's student portal system
OfS	Office for Students
SAFF	Standard Assessment Feedback Form
SET	senior executive team
TOEFL iBT	Test of English as a Foreign Language Internet-based Test
VLE	virtual learning environment
WTC	Westminster Theological Centre



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