

The Markfield Institute of Higher Education

TEF Year Four Provider Submission

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1. Provider context

This submission has been developed by the Institute's staff in consultation with student representatives.

Why the Institute was established?

The Markfield Institute of Higher Education (MIHE) is a small institution with an average of 90 students per year (over the last four years) registered on its validated academic programmes. Founded in 2000 it fills an important gap in UK higher education provision. Whilst numerous institutions in the UK provide courses in Islamic Studies at secondary and further education levels, there is a noticeable lack of such provision at a higher educational level, offering education that transcends narrow cultural standpoints and limited orientalist perspectives. MIHE was initiated to fill this gap, thereby making a significant specialist contribution to the field. The Institute offers a range of academic and professional development programmes centred on the study of Islam and Muslims in a number of academic fields, such as, Islamic studies, economics and finance, sustainable development, education studies, and chaplaincy and pastoral care.

The following programmes are currently offered and validated by Newman University:

Undergraduate Degree Programmes

- BA Islamic Studies
- BA Islamic Studies with Arabic
- BA Islamic Studies with Education
- BA Islamic Studies with Pastoral Care
- BA Islamic Finance and Accounting

Postgraduate Degree Programmes

- MA Islamic Studies
- MA Islam and Pastoral Care
- MSc Islamic Economics, Finance and Management
- MA Islamic Education
- MA Islam and Sustainable Development
- MPhil/PhD degrees (in collaboration with KU Leuven, Belgium)

Our vision

Is to become a world-class institution of higher education hosting a number of research centres specialising in Islam and Muslim studies, and characterised by teaching and research excellence. This will be achieved through active intellectual engagement and quality academic programmes. The uniqueness of MIHE's education and research stems from its distinctive approach of integrating the richness and high standards of traditional Islamic scholarship with cutting-edge research methods, academic rigour and critical analysis.

Our mission

Is to make significant contribution to the social and economic development of societies through teaching and generating knowledge in our specialised range of subject areas. We endeavour to produce graduates who become future leaders in their fields and/or communities bringing benefit to society through problem-solving, creative and critical analysis, research, enterprise, and providing leadership for a just, cohesive and sustainable world.

Campus facilities

The Institute is located on an attractive 9.3-acre campus, in the pleasant village of Markfield, situated in the East Midlands. Its main purpose-built building was opened in 2003 by Prince Charles (now King Charles). This building has administrative offices and modern resources/facilities to support teaching/learning such as a lecture theatre, classrooms, social spaces and canteen facilities for students. In addition, the Markfield campus hosts a large library, an on-site conference centre, a publication company, and residential accommodation facilities. Students also have access to Moodle (a virtual learning environment) and a range of e-learning resources to support their studies, supported by campus-wide Wi-Fi access.

In addition, educational programmes are delivered at two other satellite venues in London and Birmingham. Classroom and social spaces for teaching/learning are hired at these venues. Both venues are registered as education sites and are equipped with the required teaching/learning resources. Courses delivered at these sites are the ones for which there is sufficient recruitment. Students at these satellite venues are also able to access the resources at the main campus. Teaching at the satellite venues commenced in the academic year 2019-2020 in response to student request on the basis that studying close to home would reduce travel time and cost. This coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown period.

Student composition

Prior to 2013 our students were predominantly from overseas. The composition gradually changed, with the majority of students over the last ten years derived from the UK. As the contextual data shows (see the Office for Students TEF student outcomes and experience measures website: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-outcomes-data-dashboard/data-dashboard/>), our students come from various cities across the UK,

Our UK-based students tend to be first generation students stemming from underrepresented ethnic backgrounds and low-income families. This necessitates scaffolding student learning throughout their years of study, and opening up avenues for social mobility to them. In addition, over the last four years we have seen the number of female students gradually increasing, and in the current academic year their numbers have surpassed that of their male counterparts.

The Institute, with the support of its students, set up a formal student representative body in 2019 (named the Students Council), whose task was to work independently and coordinate the students' voice, as well as, provide leadership in organising student activities, including cultural, social and recreational activities. Students elect their representatives from each course and each level of study. The elected representatives become the members of the Students' Council, which is invited to various decision-making committees (e.g. course committees and the Academic Board) to represent the students' voice.

Widening Participation

The Institute is committed to widening participation, and supporting students to access, succeed in, and progress from, higher education into further studies or graduate-level employment. The Institute sees widening participation as an integral part of its mission and ensures that its strategy is sufficiently proactive and continually under review [REF 1]. In line with the government's policies for widening participation, the Institute offers tailored support to underrepresented groups of students (e.g., low-income, young carers, those who live with a disability or are from an ethnic-minority background).

Our recruitment data indicates that the majority of our students come from communities that would not traditionally encourage its members to pursue Higher Education at UK HEIs [REF 2]. A large

cohort of students come from traditional Islamic seminaries/schools (*daral ulum*). The Islamic studies courses offered by the *daral ulums* are primarily at further education level and are aimed at developing faith leaders - in mosques and within the community. Even though these courses are between 5 – 7 years duration, their qualifications are not recognised in the UK, resulting in limited career choices for their graduates.

The majority of students on the undergraduate programmes come from non-traditional backgrounds and hence the 'educational distance' required to be traversed is larger than normally expected at higher education. In view of this, the Markfield Institute is playing an important role in widening participation through opening up higher education pathways to students from these backgrounds so that they can continue their studies on Islam and Muslims and obtain recognised HE qualifications, which in turn opens up opportunities in a number of professional careers.

Careful attention is given to students' mental health. The relatively small size of the campus offers ample opportunity to engage with students (especially those living on campus) and to spot any early signs of mental health issues.

Education Gain

The Institute is committed to supporting students to succeed in their studies and future careers. We believe that the success of our students is our success. The Institute's programmes are designed to provide in-depth knowledge and critical understanding of the chosen subject areas (cognitive gain), as well as to support students in readiness for employment by providing opportunities to develop essential academic, employability and soft skills, together with ethical skills and important positive attributes such as self-confidence, creativity, resilience, open-mindedness, integrity, and leadership.

To ensure our students achieve the education gains and succeed in their studies and beyond, we give careful consideration to a range of areas for measuring education gains – including the level and quality of the learning support accessible to students, whether assessments are appropriate and intellectually stretch students, the extent to which academic and employability skills development are embedded into the delivery of modules, and provision of wider opportunities and support to develop employability skills and commercial awareness for employment. For this, students' engagement and feedback is imbedded in the institutional structure to constantly enhance students overall experience, academically, socially and psychologically [REF 3]. Our students are, therefore, partners in shaping and developing their academic programmes as well as the Institute overall.

Before joining MIHE, students from the *daral ulums* have not generally been exposed to contemporary or critical approaches to the study of Islam and Muslims,

Thus, the Institute provides extra support to help students from such backgrounds to develop critical thinking and analysis skills, and to develop their own independent reasoning, arguments and conclusions on issues. The type of support is elaborated further in the report.

We endeavour to offer a student learning experience underpinned by high-quality teaching from academics who draw on their disciplinary research and professional practice. By learning through solving problems, independent research and inquiry-based approaches, students develop as reflective, independent and self-directed learners who understand the crucial relationship between research and new knowledge and are motivated to engage in further study.

The Institute's approach to supporting the above educational gains and evidence of the gains achieved by our students are elaborated in the remainder of the submission below. In summary, in addition to the classroom environment and independent study, students are encouraged to join a range of workshops on personal development and employability skills, as well as, engage in the Institute's range of activities, such as open days, enrolment days, graduation ceremony, school visits, marketing efforts, production of promotional videos and podcasts, etc. [REF 4], in addition to being involved in the activities of the Students' Council. These further varied approaches provide many opportunities to develop essential skills for work readiness as well their broader personal development.

2. Student experience

Teaching Quality

Students are supported to achieve academically, grow in confidence and realise their potential. To achieve this, students are encouraged and supported to be reflective practitioners, informed by research and constantly evaluating their performance. Tutors work with students, individually and in small groups, and provide them with the required support to help improve their academic performance. The focus of our support is to enable students to learn through their own independent exploration and develop their research capacity. In addition, staff endeavour to underpin their teaching by research in the field.

The average student numbers per class over the last four years have been for undergraduate programmes and for postgraduate programmes [REF 5]. Because of the small numbers of students on the academic programmes, the class sizes are also small, which enable staff to tailor time, attention, support and teaching to the individual needs of students. This is appreciated by students.

Staff are involved with students from the commencement of their studies – from initial induction sessions to providing pastoral care and academic support throughout their time at the Institute, including extra-curricular activities and providing basic careers guidance. We aim to create a community of learners on the campus, whereby, students learn from each other as well as from their classes and their own independent studies.

The table below shows the NSS results for the key student experience indicators for the past six years, since the last TEF submission – between 2016 – 2022.

		Question categories				
Year	Measures	The teaching on my course	Learning opportunities	Assessment and feedback	Academic support	Learning resources
2016-17	% Agree	82.81	72.92	62.5	72.92	70.83
2017-18	% Agree	92.65	90.2	82.35	88.24	62.75
2018-19	% Agree	95.31	93.75	84.38	93.75	81.25
2019-20	% Agree	88.46	87.18	75.00	79.49	73.72
2020-21	% Agree	96.00	93.33	86.00	84.00	81.33
2021-22	% Agree	93.38	94.12	83.82	92.12	80.88

The data indicates that students' satisfaction with the quality of teaching, assessment and feedback, academic support and learning resources, has generally increased over this period.

However, during the Covid-19 pandemic period the ratings by students on these indicators slightly fell as the direct contact with the students was hindered due to the lockdown. It appears that the lockdown period did slightly impact negatively on students' experience.

The indicators that were rated slightly low over this period were 'assessments and feedback' and 'learning resources'. The Institute has ongoing consultation with the Students' Council (the students' representative body) to understand the reasons for this lower ratings on these indicators. It appears that some students hinted that they do need extra one-to-one support on their assessments outside the classroom. In view of this, in 2020-21 academic year a dedicated staff (Academic Support Officer) to provide this extra support was appointed. However, the appointments made by students with the Academic Support Officer indicated that very few students actually accessed this support; those doing so, however, did so frequently, suggesting that only a small number of students did need such support. The general support provided by module tutors such as in-class and one-to-one support appeared to be found adequate by the majority of students.

The Institute also shares its strategy with the students' representatives to address their concerns in these areas – such as providing extra study skills sessions, more detailed guidance and support on assessments, and staff training. The learning resources are also continually enhanced – e.g. via purchase of extra copies of books that are in greater demand and subscribing to additional online resources via EBSCO and JSTOR databases. However, the Institute is committed to continue to enhance its support and resources to improve students' satisfaction and enrich their experience by ongoing discussions with students' representatives and identifying support needs of students.

The Institute offers ongoing academic support to students through lectures, seminars/tutorial sessions, one-to-one academic support, special academic skills workshops and academic writing surgeries. These aim to provide academic support to help students improve their attainment rates and outcomes. A number of academic support workshops are available to students in addition to their tutorial sessions and individual support provided by tutors. These workshops include reading strategies and critical reading and writing skills; writing effective essay reports, and critical reflection writing; referencing and bibliographies; approaching assignments, revision and examinations; and dissertation workshops.

The Institute analyses students' attainment data for each module and course through programme reviews and the Academic Board [REF 6]. It also take into consideration the results of the NSS and graduate outcome data. In light of the data analysis and students' qualitative feedback, the Institute attempts to put in place structures/means to improve attainment levels through enhancing support or providing more focused support for specific groups of students who are underachieving.

Learning Environment

The Institute endeavours to provide an intellectually stimulating environment that aims to challenge and stretch students academically, encourage reflective and independent learning. An open and safe space is provided for students to identify and discuss difficult topics, and to research their own contexts and professional practice. On the postgraduate programmes, and their tutors help them to bridge situated knowledge that they have acquired through their practice through educational research, provide access to contemporary modern educational research tools for researchers and professional development

The quality of the learning environment is annually reviewed through the Academic Board [REF 6] and academic committees. The knowledge and research activities of staff and the quality of the learning resources (including the library, online resources, Moodle and visiting scholars and experts) are essential to providing an environment that is stimulating and conducive to effective learning.

Students have access to learning resources through the Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle), online e-resources (EBSCO and JSTOR databases) and the Institute's library. EBSCO and JSTOR databases provides e-books and online reports and journals in all subjects areas that are taught including Law, Religion/Theology and Philosophy, Education and Economics/Business and Management. The collection of learning resources, both books and journal papers (hardcopies and e-learning resources), accessible through the Library and online via the Moodle, offers a rich resource for wider reading and research. MIHE's learning resources provides both the primary sources and the wider contextual reading necessary to sustain academic activities. New resources are constantly identified and added to update the collection. The library is adjacent to Kube Publishing Ltd. (on the same site), which publishes and sells a wide range of cutting-edge academic books on Islam, providing much contemporary research material.

Current and new staff are expected to be specialists in their subject areas with a PhD and a track record of research. All academic staff are research active and attend external academic events and research conferences. This ensures that our academic expertise supports students' learning effectively.

To provide a research environment, the Institute holds two internal research conferences per year in which academic staff present their working papers; a reading group meets once a month; and a students' dissertation conference is organised annually in which all students share their dissertation research in progress. Students are invited to all these activities for their academic development. Additionally, the Institute organises on average one open lecture per month during the academic year (seven lectures per academic year) to which academics from other UK HEIs are invited to deliver guest lectures to share cutting-edge research with our staff and students.

MIHE has established access to experts from a wide range of institutions working within fields of education, pastoral care, charities and NGOs, economics, banking, finance, accounting and management. Staff from these organisations also contribute to different class sessions to share real world experience of their respective fields with our students. These efforts enrich students' knowledge and experiences. Moreover, students are encouraged and supported to work towards getting their dissertations or academic papers published.

In short, the Institute endeavours to provide an effective learning environment that academically challenges students and supports them in their intellectual and professional development. Continuous efforts are being made to enhance the learning resources and close communication with staff and students is maintained for feedback and to identify areas for further enhancements.

Staff development and training

The ongoing development of staff is essential in enhancing the students' experience. New academic staff are expected to complete a higher education teaching qualification.

In addition, regular staff training is held to enhance teaching quality. These training sessions also include sharing good teaching practices. In 2022, the Institute held its first internal teaching/learning conference, at which all academic staff presented their experiences in trying out new teaching/learning methods. These included use of educational technologies and online practices for engaging students in their learning outside the formal class sessions. In addition, peer observation of teaching is instituted to ensure ongoing enhancements in the quality of teaching. Senior academics from another UK HEI have also been invited to provide feedback on staff

teaching sessions. These measures have assisted in improving teaching quality and as a result impacted on improving students' satisfaction (as indicated in the table above). The QAA Higher Education Review (2016) also identified this as good practice: "The use of external expertise in the internal peer review process, which makes a significant contribution to the development of learning and teaching (Expectation B3)".

The Institute's teacher development initiatives includes the introduction of coaching for academic staff (introduced in 2021-22) through pairing staff to coach each other, and organising special workshops from the current academic year, such as, steps for coaching, the context and practice of coaching and mentoring, introducing literature on coaching, and teacher training on assessments, research supervision, inclusion, lesson planning, education technologies, working with international students, publishing research, networking, and professional education ethics. This will also include supporting staff in the process of acquiring membership of the HEA.

Student engagement and feedback

The Institute provides a number of mechanisms for the ongoing engagement of students in improving the quality of learning opportunities alongside ascertaining their feedback on the delivery of their programmes. Regular communication is established with students via emails to keep students informed of the support and services they can access, providing needed information and guidance on forthcoming events and deadlines, and informed of changes/developments that affect their course of study. Student representatives are invited to course committees (one per semester [REF 7]), annual programme review committees [REF 8], and academic board meetings (three per year). In addition, all students are invited to provide their feedback and evaluation on the delivery of each module. For this, the Institute encourages students to provide their ongoing feedback to ensure their views are considered during the course of the module delivery; this is in addition to the formal end of module evaluation by students [REF 9]. The data from the end of module evaluations by students over the last four years indicates over 80% satisfaction for all taught modules. The module feedback is analysed and issues identified for enhancing the quality of teaching/learning. In addition, all students from all programmes and levels of study complete an end of year survey. The students also have an opportunity to complete an end of year survey on their studies, and subsequent data indicates over 80% on average satisfaction for all academic programmes over the last three years (excluding the 2019-20 academic year, where the survey could not be carried out due to the lockdown period).

Furthermore, students are invited to 'two meetings per year with the Rector and Senior Management Team' (held once each semester, with separate sessions for postgraduate and undergraduate students). These meetings are normally accompanied with a dinner/lunch with the students attending. The Rector discusses the broader development of the Institute and how students can engage in these, as well as, seeking to understand directly their experiences at the Institute.

As a result of student engagement and feedback through a range of channels, a number of changes have been instituted to enhance students' learning experience. The library opening times are increased during periods of assessment deadlines, investment was made in 2019 to improve the quality of campus-wide Wi-Fi, enhancing online learning resources, and a new computer lab to teach specialised software for qualitative and quantitative analysis was established. The QAA Higher Education Review (2016) also identified this as a good practice: "The culture engendered by the Institute for capturing the student voice, which leads to a high level of engagement in formal committees (Expectation B5)".

The Students' Council also plays an important part in the wider engagement and development of students. A range of activities are organised by the students themselves with the support of the Institute such as cultural events (e.g. an ethnic day was organised in November 2022 by students,

which celebrated diversity, identity and belonging), sports and trips – e.g. students organised trips in 2021-22 to Spain and Cambridge – this helped with identity development through heritage and cultural awareness, self-management skills, financial planning, life skills via travelling

Such activities help create students' collective identity and cohesion as a small community. Opportunity for personal growth and development and increased cultural awareness, respecting of diversity and difference.

Feedback comments from External Examiners

External examiners also play an important part in providing an external perspective on students' work and performance, improving input into the enhancement of assessments and opinions on minor modifications to modules and new programme design. The comments from external examiners are deliberated upon and action to address any concerns is taken. External examiners reports are discussed with students at course committee meetings and are also made available to them via Moodle.

In short, the above discussion highlights that the Institute has effective systems and practices in place to monitor and enhance the quality of teaching and learning to enable students to achieve their educational and professional goals. Considerable efforts to improve the quality of teaching have been made over the last four years and are making a positive impact as reflected in our NSS results and graduate outcomes data. These efforts are also continuous. Close communication with staff and students is maintained for feedback and to identify areas for further enhancements.

3. Student Outcomes

The Institute has reduced tuition fees compared to universities in our endeavour to widen participation, and provides more tailored support to students to enable them achieve their potential, successfully complete their studies and progress into employment, or further studies. Students are provided academic support by their module tutors and course leaders as discussed above. In addition, pastoral care support is provided to those seeking personal help to address issues that might be hindering them in their studies.

As a result of this support the overall continuation and completion rates are above 80% for all courses over the last four years [REF 11].

However, we are continuing to examine this data closer and formulate appropriate strategies to enhance continuation and progression rates.

We recognise that non-academic factors also contribute to the non-completion of degree courses. Besides pastoral and welfare support, we assist students who are under financial pressure and who, as a result, are at risk of withdrawing from the Institute. Depending on the circumstances, we provide hardship (bursaries) payments; offer fee discounts and also scholarships where available. In addition, we develop an individual payment plan to help students pay their fees gradually over the academic year, via instalments.

The Institute's full-time progression indicator value of 57.5% is below the benchmark value (62%). Though 90% of graduates from MIHE were employed or in further education (as reported on the Discover Uni website: <https://discoveruni.gov.uk/course-details/10023452/MIHEBAISA/Full-time/>), only 45% of these were in high-skilled jobs. This is an ongoing concern for the Institute and in consultation with our current students and alumni we have attempted to put in place a number activities to improve our progression rates. These are discussed below.

Our survey of alumni shows that some of our graduates have gone on to play leading and positive roles in their communities, places of employment and in society in general. They have become agents of change, leading in education as teachers, lecturers and researchers, whilst others positively impact their local communities as youth workers, advisors, within policy development, or as chaplains at universities, prisons and hospitals. Our alumni, primarily from overseas, have been instrumental in the development of Islamic banking and finance in both private and government sectors, both nationally and internationally. To help all students to progress in this manner and play leading roles in their communities and societies, the following activities have been initiated by the Institute:

- To support students to develop their employability knowledge and skills in order to access high-skilled jobs, the Institute has been delivering a course (Career Planning and Employability Skills for the Information Age) over the last four years that has eight two-hour workshops to support students in their broader personal development, employability skills awareness and career planning. These workshops include: Information age employability skills awareness; understanding personal strengths and weaknesses, personal branding, ethics and integrity; problem-solving approaches and decision making skills; interpersonal and team-building skills; leadership skills and entrepreneurship; setting up new businesses; CV and application letter writing, and building resilience. Attendance to these workshops and completion of the set assessments are recognised on students HEAR records (Higher Education Achievement Record)
- Students who perform the role of student representatives and student ambassadors are also recognised on their HEAR. In addition, students are encouraged and supported to engage with opportunities beyond the curriculum to develop wider leadership, team building, and project management skills and experiences, and in recording appropriate achievements in relation to these.
- The students are also informed of job postings via social media and assisted in their job applications.
- As discussed above, the Institute has an established public speakers series, where guest lecturers who are usually senior academics from universities or professionals from industry are invited to share with staff and students their research or professional experience.
- Potential employers from schools, charities, development agencies, and other fields are invited to give presentations to students and staff. We are also working with networks of schools, community organisations, financial institutions, charities and development organisations to assist our graduating students to find employment and internships. These organisations are invited to attend our campus to meet our students and discuss career opportunities.
- Students are encouraged and supported to work towards getting their dissertations or academic papers published.
- Students are participating in the activities of the Institute's Centre for the Study of Wellbeing – e.g. they are engaged in producing a podcast series and online resources development, these benefit all students, allowing them to be exposed to different health and wellbeing topics, experts in the field and different approaches and perspectives to holistic wellbeing. Furthermore, the podcast series allows students to identify additional mentors and experts

from their communities. This also provides specific development for those students who apply to take on the volunteer roles of podcast coordinators and content developers (an opportunity open to all students).

This discussion highlights that the Institute has effective teaching and learning practices in place, a conducive environment for learning that academically challenges students and supports them in their intellectual and professional development, and a process for supporting students into HE, to succeed in their studies and to progress into employment or further studies. It recognises that due to its specialised focus, it faces many challenges to expand and support students to progress into highly skilled employment.

Many of our students hold significant positions of responsibility in the community such as faith and community leaders and the Institute is equipping them to be able to fulfil these roles in a better informed manner, as well as, help them develop public engagement, speaking, communication skills and real world application of knowledge.

4. References

- REF 1: Access and Participation Statement: Can be found on our website at: https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/6296327c4208d939a1166c71/62be0a598176def879b23a0b_Access%20and%20Participation%20Statement.pdf
- REF 2: Internal data: recruitment data available on spreadsheet reports; in addition data available from the Institute's TEF students numbers workbook (provided by the OfS)
- REF 3: Internal records: students feedback recorded in minutes of a number of meetings including course committee meetings, Academic Board meetings, Management Board minutes, as well in the minutes of meeting of the Students Council
- REF 4: Publically available information: Students work can be found on the Institute's Youtube channel as well as on social media
- REF 5: Internal data – number of students enrolled on each module
- REF 6: Internal – minutes of the Academic Board meetings
- REF 7: Internal – minutes of course committee meetings
- REF 8: Internal – annual programme review reports
- REF 9: Internal – students module evaluation questionnaire feedback for each module
- REF 10: Internal – annual external examiners reports
- REF 11: Published data by the OfS for the Institute – continuation, completion and progression data, available via the OfS website