



THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND

## **Ministry Council**

# **Periodic External Review Follow-up Report**

**Bath and Wells Diocesan  
Reader Training Course**

March 2017

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## **Senior Reviewer's Follow-up Report to the May-June 2015 Periodic External Review**

### **Introduction**

Following the report published in September 2015, the Bath and Wells Team produced a clear Action Plan responding to each of the report recommendations. I was pleased to sign this off in November 2015 as an appropriate way of responding to the report. A year later, in November 2016, I met with the Rev Jennifer Cole the Course Leader for Reader Ministry and Bishop Ruth Worley, the Bishop of Taunton, who has oversight of Reader Training, to conduct final stage of the review process. I would like to thank them both for the time they gave to this follow up visit.

### **Context**

There has been significant change within the Diocese of Bath and Wells since the PER. The prospect for this was noted in the original report – a new diocesan strategy was emerging and there was a vacancy in the see of Taunton. Reader training has now been brought into a new Department for Ministry for Mission led by the Bishop of Taunton, which comprises five teams – mission, evangelism, discipleship, vocations and training. The Director of Reader Training at the time of the PER is now the Team Leader in the Discipleship team. The Assistant Director of Reader Studies at the time of the PER, is now the Course Leader for Reader Ministry within the Training Team. There was a vacancy in for the Team Leader post in the Training Team at the time of the follow-up visit, though that has now been filled. This new structure is a significant development for the Diocese as it looks to enabling new forms of lay ministry and to encourage further integration between different forms of training, discipleship and vocational development. It has also created a context in which Reader Training is more closely aligned with the Bishops' priorities and Diocesan Vision.

These changes take forward the thrust of several of the report recommendations and can certainly be seen as whole-hearted and positive response by the Diocese of Bath and Wells to the PER. The degree of change also makes some of the recommendations somewhat redundant at least in the particular way they were phrased. In some cases, full implementation has had to wait until these structural changes have taken place, but is now underway.

### **Recommendation 1**

**We recommend that, as recommendation 16 and 22-23 are taken forward, the Course seeks out ways in which teaching and staff development can be enhanced by drawing on the resources of the universities.**

The previous links with Trinity College, Bristol, have been forged into a new, stronger partnership covering, teaching, tutor support, and consultancy.

*Recommendation implemented; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 2**

**We recommend that the course makes clear in the incumbents' guide what opportunities should be given students in their parishes, particularly in preaching and leading worship, and creates systems which ensure the quality of feedback given by the Training Incumbents, and that this forms part of the Course's assessment of the student.**

A new guide for Reader Training Incumbents has been produced incorporating these recommendations. The induction processes have also been strengthened, deepening the relationship between Course and Training incumbent.

*Recommendation implemented; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 3**

**We recommend that the course assesses the possibility for reshaping the role of training incumbents, such that their work becomes more integral to the delivery and assessment of the Course's work with the students.**

The role of Reader Training Incumbents was reviewed in February 2016 and improvements have been incorporated into the Reader Training Incumbents guide.

*Recommendation implemented; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 4**

**We recommend that the Course reviews its programme to ensure that it openly draws on the expertise and experience of other faith communities and secular organizations.**

The review took place in February 2016 and the course was revised to bring in these perspectives and expertise in a number of places.

*Recommendation implemented; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 5**

**We recommend that there is a thorough review of the curriculum, which:**

- **establishes a clear theological, formational and educational rationale**
- **marries this to the training needs of Readers given the ministries which they will actually undertake in the Diocese (as opposed to the feedback of how students found the sessions)**
- **relates to national guidelines**
- **guides staff recruitment (rather than vice versa)**

This review took place in February 2016, drawing on the experience of the South West Ministerial Training Course, and the policies and approach to Reader training in the diocese updated, including for example making the 'spiral curriculum' more explicit.

*Recommendation implemented; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 6**

**We recommend that the Course gives careful consideration to whether joining the Common Awards programme through the South Central Regional Training Partnership would, on balance, help it achieve and maintain a more coherent approach at the national standard.**

After consideration, it was decided not to join the Common Awards programme. However, the marking scheme from Common Awards has been introduced into the Exploring Christianity course to gain some of the benefits of a clearer national standard.

*Recommendation implemented; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 7**

**We recommend that the formation criteria specified by Ministry Division in May 2014 are introduced as the basis of assessment for licensing and are included in the documentation given to students.**

The processes for assessment of suitability for licensing have been overhauled. The formational criteria are now central to this process, and the process makes clear that the decision over licensing is taken by the Bishop acting on the advice of the assessment panel.

*Recommendation implemented; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 8**

**We recommend that ways of strengthening corporate life are reviewed including consideration of the use of Friday nights, introduction of social media and other IT facilities, and space given to prayer and/or support groups of course participants during the residential programme.**

This was reviewed in February 2016, and a number of changes made to strengthen the corporate life, such as new uses of social media, training days starting with Breakfast and developments in the patterns for prayer and worship.

*Recommendation implemented; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 9**

**We recommend that course participants are involved in the planning, preparation and leading of the various acts of corporate worship during the course, and that**

- **participants are encouraged to bring into this worship the breadth of the traditions they are from**
- **the exploration of innovative forms of worship is encouraged**
- **Structures are put in place for students to receive feedback from staff and peers.**

Significant changes have been made to implement this recommendation. Worship at training days is now led by students, the pattern including a range of different styles and patterns. The diversity and opportunities to learn are being further enhanced by bringing in external people from different traditions and with different expertise. There is a clear structure for group discussion and reflection on student led worship.

*Recommendation implemented; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 10**

**We recommend that Readers in training are encouraged to have a spiritual director, and the Course supports them in finding one.**

This is taken forward by the Readers Council. The encouragement to have a spiritual director comes at selection and is reinforced through annual Reader

returns. The diocesan advisor on spirituality is available to help Readers, including Readers in training, find a suitable spiritual director.

*Recommendation implemented; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 11**

**It is recommended that reflective writing exercises are lengthened and formally assessed.**

The reflective writing exercises have been substantially developed. The new pattern for encouraging theological reflection, incorporating different elements such as intentional conversation, monitored closed social media groups and a 'viva' is currently being piloted with a substantial evaluation in place for the summer of 2017. While not implementing the letter of this recommendation, the developments fully satisfy the intention.

*Recommendation implemented; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 12**

**We recommend that aims and learning outcomes are explicit in *Formation Years* units and are set in consultation between the course team and the Visiting Teacher for each session, being circulated in advance to the students**

This now takes place, and there is now significant intentional conversation taking place between the course team and visiting teachers.

*Recommendation implemented; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 13**

**We recommend that each unit of the *Formation Years* training is mapped to clarify where it fits with regard to the proper balance between the academic, formational and practical aspects of training.**

This mapping exercise took place in February 2016 and this balance is clearer in the updated Reader training policy

*Recommendation implemented; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 14**

**We recommend that all Visiting Teachers are given a common set of written guidelines on best practice in adult education and that at least one training**

**session is made available for them each year, in which best practice can be shared.**

This is now done.

*Recommendation implemented; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 15**

**We recommend that the course team explores how online resources and opportunities to become co-learners could best be made available to students**

This is being taken forward as part of the in-service training days with tutors and the course team.

*Implemented being taken forward; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 16**

**We recommend a review of the processes for assessment within *Exploring Christianity* to ensure consistency and transparency, including:**

- **support and training for tutors**
- **the most effective use of moderation**
- **A more standardised marking scheme in which the assessment criteria are made more transparent to students.**
- **clearer guidelines on Plagiarism and consideration of the use of Plagiarism detection software**

A thorough review has taken place and a new marking scheme was introduced in October 2016. A marking workshop for the team of tutors and moderators took place with support from Trinity College Bristol. A process of transition and communication is underway.

*Implemented being taken forward; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 17**

**We recommend that assessment remains part of the training during the Formation Years.**

The assessment process during the Formation Years has been made more explicit, including for example reflection on feedback on sermons.



*Recommendation implemented; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 18**

**We recommend that consideration is given to better integration of academic and practical learning by structuring the material studied in Formation Years 1 and 2 in a spiral curriculum.**

Better integration was considered carefully in the review in February 2016, and a number of changes made to increase and better communicate integration of academic and practical learning.

*Recommendation implemented; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 19**

**We recommend that the balance between male/female and lay/ordained *Exploring Christianity* tutors and *Formation Years* Visiting Teachers should be regularly reviewed and recruitment practices examined in order to find better ways of modelling lay female leadership to the students in training.**

This has been taken seriously by the Course and the balance between male/female and lay/ordained tutors and visiting teachers is a matter of continuing review. However, the Course also needs to achieve a geographical spread of tutors across the Diocese. I am content that this is being attended to given the constraints, however would urge the course to be proactive in continuing to seek ways of encouraging a better balance among tutors and visiting teachers.

*Implemented being taken forward; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 20**

**We recommend that opportunities to teach on the programme are advertised within Diocesan media and beyond (e.g. the website); that full records are kept of how individuals are recruited and selected; and that consideration is given to involving a qualified Reader in the appointment process of the Visiting Teachers**

This recommendation was implemented with support from the Diocesan communications team in time for tutor recruitment 2016/17

*Recommendation implemented; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 21**

**We recommend that job descriptions for the roles of *Exploring Christianity* tutor or Visiting Teacher are created so that expectations of these roles are made transparent.**

Draft job descriptions have been produced and work is ongoing with Trinity College, Bristol, to complete this work.

*Implemented being taken forward; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 22**

**We recommend that staff development be given a higher priority, with topics announced in advance of meetings so that there is the opportunity to prepare and to reflect. A pack of sample materials should be provided as part of induction for all Visiting Teachers.**

Material is now available during staff induction. A programme for in service training is being developed with advice from Trinity College, Bristol. The marking workshop in October 2016 was an example of this.

*Implemented being taken forward; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 23**

**We recommend that the limit of 35% of face-to-face time being from Visiting Teachers is implemented, and a team of associate staff is recruited who could take more than one session each, perhaps co-leading so that each could be exposed to other ways of teaching**

Action has been taken to improve the sense of a 'continuous thread' of staff presence throughout the course, and how this can be further improved is part of the discussions with Trinity College, Bristol. I am content that the spirit of this recommendation is being attended to, but would urge the course to continue seeking ways of building up a team of teachers with whom the students have an ongoing relationship and limiting the use of visiting teachers.

*Implemented being taken forward; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 24**

**We recommend that urgent attention be paid to the age, gender and social profile of Readers in training.**

The profile of Readers in the diocese is not directly the responsibility of the training team, but rather of the Reader Council and the Archdeaconry Wardens

of Readers. This recommendation was discussed at some length at the Reader Council meeting in February 2016. A number of actions primarily focused on better communication have been taken forward. This is also an area of considerable focus by the Bishop of Taunton as the Diocese seeks to generate younger vocations for a range of ministries. Adjustments have also been made to Reader selection conferences to help with this issue.

*Implemented being taken forward; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 25**

**We recommend that the course reviews its emerging structures for student representation to ensure that the student body has a clear role in decision making regarding the Course.**

Understandably it was not possible to implement this recommendation before the major diocesan structural reorganisation which brought into existence the Department of Ministry for Mission and its five teams. The need for student representation is recognised, a pilot is underway and the Course has highlighted the area in its self-evaluation criteria for 2016/2017.

*Implemented being taken forward; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 26**

**We recommend that a single formal oversight body is established for the course, which operates under the same guidelines and with the same sense of responsibility as a legal governing body. Such a body will need to fit within the Diocesan structures but should become the clear place where the Course is held to account and standards are driven up. Its membership should include those with appropriate expertise from outside the diocese.**

This recommendation has been taken forward within the diocese through its major structural reorganisation which brought into existence the Department of Ministry for Mission and its five teams, one of which is Training within which Reader Training is located. There is now a clear, tight, structure with the five Team leaders meeting regularly with the Bishop of Taunton, with an appropriate focus on team working and driving up standards. This approach to oversight of the course is different from that which existed previously and from the recommendation. However, it appears to be at least as effective in driving up standards as that described in the recommendation; particularly given the new focus on partnership with Trinity College, Bristol, the South West Ministerial Training Course and Sarum College. Therefore, I am content that the intention of this recommendation is fully satisfied.

*Recommendation implemented; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 27**

**We recommend that the Course reviews the accommodation it uses for teaching, to ensure that it does not have an undesirable impact on the demographic which comes forward for Reader selection, or communicate to those in training inappropriate messages as to the nature and values of the Church.**

To a significant degree the Course is tied into using Diocesan buildings for significant parts of its programme, and therefore change and development is tied into somewhat longer diocesan timescales. A review has been taken forward by the Diocesan Secretary of the main building used. While I would continue to urge the Course to continue to reflect on the connection between the buildings it uses and the message and experience of potential and current trainees, I am content that this recommendation has not been lost, and that process has been reasonable given the constraints.

*Implemented being taken forward; no further action.*

### **Recommendation 28**

**We recommend that the Course carefully reviews the negative impact the use of the Old Deanery as the base for the Course might be having on potential Readers with disabilities, and engages energetically with the Diocese Board of Finance to advocate for better provision within the Diocesan Offices for those with disabilities.**

An accessibility audit of the Old Deanery was carried out by the Diocesan Open to All Disability Officer, and these matters have been further considered in the Diocesan Secretary's review of the building. Some changes have been made and awareness has been raised of the importance of managing the use of the facilities to ensure visitors with additional needs are fully accommodated.

*Implemented being taken forward; no further action.*

I commend the Diocese of Bath and Wells and the team involved in Reader Training for the openness and energy that has been put into taking forward the numerous, detailed, recommendations of the PER.

Revd Dr Jeremy Duff, Senior Reviewer  
March 2017