# THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

## Ministry Council

## Periodic External Review Report

Bath and Wells Diocesan Reader Training Course

May – June 2015

# CONTENTS

**GLOSSARY**

| | |
|---|---|
| [CA]VLE | [Common Awards] Virtual Learning Environment |
| CMD | Continuing Ministerial Development |
| DBF | Diocesan Board of Finance |
| FHEQ | Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications |
| SCRTP | South Central Regional Training Partnership |

**LIST OF REVIEWERS**

**The Rev'd Dr Jeremy Duff, Senior Reviewer**, Vicar of St Paul's Widnes within the South Widnes Team, Diocese of Liverpool

**Dr Marion Gray**, Reader at Immanuel & St Andrew, Streatham, Diocese of Southwark; formerly Director of Reader Selection and Reader Training tutor, Diocese of Southwark.

**Prof Helen King**, Head of Classical Studies, Open University; Licensed Lay Minister, Diocese of Oxford

**THE PERIODIC EXTERNAL REVIEW FRAMEWORK**

On behalf of the sponsoring churches, review teams are asked to assess the fitness for purpose of the training institution for preparing candidates for ordained and licensed ministry and to make recommendations for the enhancement of the life and work of the institution.

Within the structures of the Church of England, this report has been prepared for the House of Bishops acting through the Ministry Council.

In coming to their judgements, reviewers are asked to use the following outcomes with regard to the overall outcome and individual criteria:

**Confidence**

Overall outcome: a number of recommendations, none of which question the generally high standards found in the review.

Criteria level: aspects of an institution's life which show good or best practice.

**Confidence with qualifications**

Overall outcome: A number of recommendations, including one or more of substance that questions the generally acceptable standards found in the review and which can be rectified or substantially addressed by the institution in the coming 12 months.

Criteria level: aspects of an institution's life which show either (a) at least satisfactory practice but with some parts which are not satisfactory or (b) some unsatisfactory practice but where the institution has the capacity to address the issues within 12 months.

**No confidence**

Overall outcome: A number of recommendations, including one or more of substance which raise significant questions about the standards found in the review and the capacity of the institution to rectify or substantially address these in the coming 12 months.

Criteria level: aspects of an institution's life which show either (a) generally not satisfactory practice or (b) some unsatisfactory practice where it is not evident that the institution can rectify the issues within the coming 12 months.

**THE REPORT OF THE PERIODIC EXTERNAL REVIEW OF THE DIOCESE OF BATH AND WELLS READER TRAINING COURSE**

**May – June 2015**

**SUMMARY**

**Introduction**

The Diocese of Bath and Wells Reader Training Course is an integral part of the School of Formation within the Diocese. Its two core staff members – the Director and Assistant Director of Reader Studies - both have other roles within the School of Formation and more widely within the Cathedral/Diocese.

The current Reader Training Course has evolved within the Diocese. From 1990 onwards it has had the same rough shape – an 'Education for Discipleship' phase, where potential Readers sit within a broader lay cohort, followed by a focused 'reader training' phase. The Education for Discipleship phase was originally 'Christian Foundations' and in 2000 was revised to form the current *Exploring Christianity* course. This is shared with a number of Dioceses in the South West. It is taught in a dispersed pattern in study groups across the Diocese.

The focused reader training phase, called the '*Formation Years'* has also continued to evolve since 1990, with the post-licensing elements, and the feed into ongoing CMD, gradually being strengthened. It has never been part of any university validation or accreditation. The Diocese is a partner within the South Central Regional Training Partnership, but that Partnership does not supply courses or have students itself – it supports its partners, including Bath and Wells, in their educational work. The Bath and Wells reader course fits within the South Central Framework for Reader Training, and its staff are part of the collegiality of the Training Partnership. Formerly the Bath and Wells reader course came under the national Reader Moderation scheme. This Periodic External Review is the first review/accreditation/inspection process the course has undergone.

The Reader Course has seen 9-12 students enrolling each year. A majority are female (70% in 2013 and 2014) and an overwhelming majority over 50 (90%).

The Review took place primarily over two extended weekends May 16th – 18th and June 26th – 28th, and involved the observation of one training day and one residential for the *Formation Years*, tutor training and moderation for the *Exploring Christianity* Course, interviews with training incumbents, current and

former students, staff and visiting teachers, and among others the Diocesan Bishop, Warden of Readers and Diocesan Secretary. The reviewers were supplied with a comprehensive set of documentation for the course, including the handbooks supplied for students, the course's self-evaluation reports and action plans for 2012-13 and 2013 -14, a helpful guide to the history and evolution of the course, and documents relating to the staff and the diocese's strategy and finances. The reviewers want to express their thanks to the staff and students for their generous hospitality, co-operation and openness.

**Summary of outcomes**

We found a great deal of good practice within the Bath and Wells Reader Training Course – a warm community committed to learning and formation, some excellent teaching, much that was very well and carefully organised, and genuine integration into the diocese it serves. However, as was perhaps inevitable for the Course's first real external review, in most areas we also found weaknesses and areas where practice could be improved.  Therefore in almost all areas our confidence in the course was qualified, and we have identified a significant number of recommendations which are aimed at helping the Course to tighten up and improve its practice so that it can better serve the mission of God within Bath and Wells.

| CRITERIA | OUTCOME |
|---|---|
| A.  Aims, objectives and evaluation of the | Confidence |
| B   Relationships with other institutions | Confidence with qualifications |
| C   Curriculum for formation and education | Confidence with qualifications |
| D Community and corporate life | Confidence with qualifications |
| E Worship and training in public worship | Confidence with qualifications |
| F Ministerial, personal and spiritual formation | Confidence with qualifications |
| G Teaching and learning: content, method and resources | Confidence with qualifications |
| H Practical and pastoral theology | Confidence with qualifications |
| I Teaching staff | Confidence with qualifications |

| | |
|---|---|
| J All staff | Confidence with qualifications |
| K Students | Confidence with qualifications |
| L Governance, management, constitution and organisation | Confidence with qualifications |
| M Business planning and risk management | Confidence |
| N Financial policies and cost-effectiveness | Confidence |
| O Reserves policy and statutory liabilities | Confidence |
| P Accommodation | Confidence with qualifications |
| **Overall Outcome** | Confidence with qualifications |

**General observations**

The Report is written in relation to the Criteria set out in the *Quality Assurance and Enhancement in Ministerial Formation* Handbook October 2014. The paragraphs follow the Criteria which are printed in *italic* type. The reviewers' comments are in normal type and the recommendations in **bold**.

This Review takes place at a time of significant change within Bath and Wells Diocese. A new diocesan strategy is emerging, which is likely to bring significant change to the role of Readers, and therefore to the Reader training required. We found a genuine openness on behalf of the staff within the Reader Training Course to change in response to this emerging strategy and to use this Review as a way of further strengthening their work. The Diocesan senior staff are also fully supportive of the existing course, while conscious of the likely need for it to evolve rapidly in the changing context.

Some of the strengths and weaknesses of the Course arise from it being a small, 'stand-alone' Diocesan course which does not have university or other external accreditation. This has been the clear choice of the Diocese. It is not the role of this Review to commend or challenge that decision – we have sought simply to review the Course and its outcomes as it is.


**Strengths**

We particularly note the following areas of strength.

- A constant commitment to serve the needs of the parishes of the Diocese.

- A process of continuous review based on student feedback.

- The locating of Readers within the broader world of lay ministry.

- A warm, enriching, communal life.

- A significant number of teachers teaching from their current experience of ministry.

- Processes for reporting which are well integrated into Diocesan processes for selection and licensing.

- Being fully embedded with the DBF removes significant burden from the Course for financial management, HR and other regulatory burdens.

**Areas for attention**

We note the following areas for attention.

- The curriculum is too much driven by practical considerations, such as staffing and the split between Exploring Christianity and the Formation Years, rather than having a theological and educational rationale, which gives trainee readers a progressive and developing experience of growth.

- The training days within the Formation Years are insufficiently linked together, and to the ongoing experience and development of the course participants in their parishes.

- Processes for assessment at times lacked rigour and reliability, and did not make sufficient use of the national guidelines and learning outcomes for Reader Ministry.

- The teaching on the Course is predominantly by Visiting Teachers and tutors teaching Exploring Christianity small groups. This gives significant challenges for quality assurance and staff development.

- There is no clear body with responsibility for the oversight of the Course. This oversight is dispersed within the Diocesan structures, but this leads to a lack of challenge to the Core Staff and no place in which both external experts and course participants can contribute to decision making.

# FULL REPORT

## SECTION ONE: AIMS AND KEY RELATIONS

### A    Aims and objectives

*Reviewers will consider whether the institution's aims are appropriate, clearly articulated and understood.*

*A.i    Its aims, objectives and policies should be appropriate to the preparation of students for ordained/lay public ministry within the breadth of the traditions of the sponsoring church(es).*

1.    Reader Training within the Diocese of Bath and Wells is deeply embedded within the structures of the diocese: the Director of Reader Studies is a residentiary canon, and Director of Learning Communities within the School of Formation; the assistant Director of Reader Studies also has broader responsibilities within the School of Formation. The Director of Reader Studies is managed by the Suffragan Bishop; the Warden of Readers is an Archdeacon.  This brings considerable strength in ensuring that Reader Training is in step with the wider Diocese and that there is no gap between the vision for Reader Ministry within the training course and that held within the diocese which it serves. In our conversations with training course staff and senior staff within the diocese, there was consistency of vision and understanding which could be summarised in the words of the Periodic External Review narrative document 'we have a passion for a well-educated laity among which Readers form a model and example' and in the Handbook for Reader Ministry which describes a reader as 'A trained lay theologian who holds a Bishop's licence to lead worship and preach in the pastoral context of the Church and who is a messenger of the Word of God to the world'.

2.    Reader training in Bath and Wells has evolved considerably over the last twenty-five years, but has retained throughout a commitment to be part of a broader lay training and formation agenda, rather than being separated off, or aligned to ordination training. It is by no means unique in the Church of England in doing this, and while this approach may give rise to some weaknesses detailed later in this report, it is certainly an appropriate aim in preparing candidates for lay public ministry and has notable advantages, such as stimulating vocations for Reader ministry.

3. The close relationship between Reader Training and the rest of the diocese in general, and broader lay training in particular, makes a significant contribution to ensuring that Reader Training reflects the breadth and variety of the Church within the Diocese.

4. However, the Diocese is at a point of significant change, with three apparent drivers. 1. Changes in senior personnel – the Diocesan Bishop and Diocesan Secretary have both been in post for just a year. The Suffragan bishop post is currently vacant. 2. The development of a new diocesan strategy and a focus on numerical growth 3. Changes in the context of ministry across the parishes of the diocese, such as the increasing age-profile of worshippers and decline in church attendance.

5. We heard considerable variation in views of what role Reader Ministry should play in the emerging Diocesan strategy and of how they would sit alongside other lay ministries. Readers were sometimes referred to as 'lay theologians', as the 'foremost' lay ministers, and having a role in supporting other lay ministries. At other times, they were seen as having a distinctive ministry of preaching and teaching in a pastoral context. Alongside this there was enthusiasm for readers as pioneers, and talk of Pioneer Readers, but also talk of other distinct ministries which might emerge, such as evangelist and catechist, with different opinions as to how these would be recognised and the degree of common training with Readers. There was an expressed desire for readers to be far more missional, to move beyond preaching and teaching in church, to engage in the work-place, to have roles in chaplaincies, and to have a far younger age-profile than at present. There was also acknowledgement that 'on the ground' some readers were very much involved in the leading of parishes, and in initiatives such as messy church and ministry in nursing homes.

6. These are all very important questions and we recognise that this external review just happens to have come at a time when the questions are up in the air, and diocesan strategy and policy hasn't yet been formulated. However it seems clear to us that some of these options are in tension with others. There is also a danger that 'Reader' could become a ministry which has different visions of the future of the church projected onto it, or takes on new dimensions purely in order to maintain a sense of being the foremost lay ministry, and in the process loses any internal logic or theological rationale. More importantly for this review, different future understandings of the role of a Reader would require significantly different

Reader Training. Already we observed signs of tension, with some students expressing frustration that the training at times was at odds with their sense of the Reader ministry they felt they were called and selected for, and we heard of tensions within selection over the idea of reader pioneers. This was acknowledged in the 2013-2014 self assessment report, 'this last year the need for different forms of Reader ministry has emerged … the question of whether Reader ministry is able to sustain such a change or not is becoming apparent.'

7. Much of this is actively being addressed by the diocese in the formulation of new strategic themes, and we note that the Director of Reader Training is fully involved in this. Therefore we express no criticism of the state of flux we found within the vision for Reader ministry in the diocese and its knock-on effect on the aims and objectives of Reader Training. However **we urge** the course, once the diocesan strategy for Readers is decided, to undertake a thorough review of Reader Training, so that it meets that new strategic vision for Reader ministry.

*A.ii    They should be consistent with the current published policy statements of the sponsoring church(es).*

8. The aims, objectives and policies of the course are consistent with the requirements set out in *Shaping the Future* and are in line with the South Central Regional Training Partnership provision for reader training. The action plan outlined in the 2014-15 self-evaluation report notes the need to match the course to the new 2014 selection and formation guidelines for readers in time for the 2015 intake.

9. However, these national guidelines are not apparent within the course documentation and particularly not within information provided to students. We understand that this is partly as a result of the diocesan emphasis on Reader training being flexible and responsive to the parishes. Furthermore it is clear that the course staff are engaged with wider regional and national discussions and policies regarding Readers. However, we believe that students would benefit from being made more aware of the national recognition of Reader ministry, and gain confidence from realising that their training is not simply decided locally but sits within a nationally determined framework. Particularly given that Reader training in Bath and Wells is a diocesan programme, where students do not mix with reader candidates from other dioceses, and within which almost all the teaching is done by people within the diocese, there would be value in those being

licensed having the confidence that their training has not solely been a 'local matter'.

*A.iii   The institution should show that it has built on earlier learning, including through action in response to previous PER, curriculum approval and follow-up reports; other external bodies' evaluation; and self-evaluations.*

10.   This Periodic External Review is the first which the Bath and Wells Reader Training Course has undergone. Furthermore, because the course has not been validated by a university, or been linked to ordination training, it has not been caught up in Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education reviews or been through processes of curriculum approval. Therefore there have not been formal reviews of the course in recent years to which the course could have responded.

11.   The Course has produced clear self-evaluation reports in 2012-13 and 2013-14. These show an appropriate self-critical approach, and it is clear that in general the action points highlighted in these reports are taken forward.

12.   The Course demonstrates a clear commitment to reviewing itself and changing in response to student feedback.

> **The review team has confidence with regard to Criterion A, Aims, Objectives and Achievements of the Institution.**


## B      Relationships with other institutions

*Reviewers will look at how well the institution engages with partners:*

*B.i   There should be evidence of the institution's commitment to partnership with the other providers of theological education in the region.*

13.   The Diocese of Bath and Wells joined the South Central Regional Training Partnership (SCRTP) in 2012. Within SCRTP there are now seven partners – The Chair of the Southampton Methodist District and the Bishops of Bath and Wells, Guildford, Oxford, Portsmouth, Salisbury and Winchester. Theological institutions within the regional area join as members. Its co-chairs are the Rt Revd Dr Jonathan Frost, the Bishop of Southampton and the Revd Canon Dr Hazel Whitehead, the Director of Ministerial Training in the Diocese of Guildford.

14. The SCRTP defines its aim as 'to meet the developing training needs of the churches by: responding to and promoting existing work by the churches and other educational institutions; and identifying and promoting new initiatives. It proposes to achieve this aim through: collaborative networking and action on common tasks via development groups; and the development of a range of Frameworks, within which appropriate educational programmes can be devised, validated and managed. The SCRTP does not, of itself, run programmes for Reader Training, but seeks to support the work of its partners. This is particularly successful in areas such as Reader Training since the partners are not in competition with each other, and hence can both be supportive but also critical friends.

15. The Diocese of Bath and Wells runs its own Reader Training programme, within the frameworks established by the SCRTP and drawing on the strength which arises from the collaboration fostered by the Training Partnership. Its choice not to have university accreditation for its programme puts it in a different category from the other partners as far as Reader Training is concerned, and hence it is a less integrated partner in this area.

16. Within the diocese we encountered much warmth towards the SCRTP, and a desire to both learn from it and contribute to it. This takes place at a far broader level than just Reader Training, but certainly includes the Reader Training team. Students themselves are not directly included in any interactions with the SCRTP.

17. The *Exploring Christianity* Course, which as well as being a general lay discipleship course, forms the first two years of Reader Training, was produced in Bath and Wells but is now also used by the Dioceses of Monmouth, Llandaff, Bristol, Exeter and Portsmouth, and the Methodist District of Plymouth and Exeter. This forms a broad partnership of mutual support, which is further supported by Trinity College, Bristol.

18. The core staff of the Reader Training Course are also full participants in the 'Buckfast Group' – the South West Lay Training Group which is an ecumenical group of lay trainers which meets termly at Buckfast Abbey for mutual learning and encouragement.

*B.ii    The institution should draw fully on the resources of universities in teaching, quality assessment, staff development and the promotion of research.*

19. A staff member at Trinity College Bristol acts as the external moderator for the academic assignments submitted as part of the *Exploring Christianity* Course. This provides an appropriate external voice in the marking of these assignments (though concerns about the moderation process are raised in section Jiv below).

20. The Director of Reader Studies is currently working on a Doctorate in Theology and Ministry with Durham University.

21. We could identify no involvement of universities in teaching, staff development or promotion of research beyond the Director's doctoral studies. We recognise that two aspects of the Course's current structures make it difficult to further involve universities in these areas – the fact that the biblical and theological materials are primarily covered in the dispersed delivery *Exploring Christianity* part of Reader training; and the fact that the vast majority of the teaching is undertaken by non-core staff, teaching voluntarily and/or for a one-off session. This does, however, deprive the Course and its students of valuable resource and exposure to wider thinking.

**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.**

*B.iii    It should engage effectively with local churches, other faith communities and secular organisations so as to enhance formation for public ministry.*

22. The prime way in which the Course engages with local churches is through the training incumbents in the parishes and teams in which the students minister. In the 'incumbent's guide' this is described as 'an important role and not one to be taken lightly' and an induction evening for Training Incumbents and students is arranged as the beginning of *Formation Year* 1. The incumbents we met were highly committed to this role and spoke positively of the Course's communication with them, and the openness and support of the core staff.

23. However, the Course does not appear to take responsibility for ensuring the quality of training provided by the Training Incumbents. There is no

clear schedule of what training opportunities should be provided, merely general statements such as 'give opportunities to preach'. Similarly there are no structures for how feedback should be given to the students (e.g. on preaching or worship leading) such that this feedback can form part of the Course's assessment of the student. This is particularly important in the area of preaching and leading worship since the Course itself does not give opportunities for students to take part in either of these crucial activities, but leaves them to be undertaken in the parishes. For this to be effective, the Course will need to be far clearer as to what opportunities the students should be given, and the feedback/assessment from these opportunities need to form a core part of the Course's assessment and reporting on the students.

24. Some training incumbents also noted that they had a far more significant role in relation to their curates than their readers in training, for example a training incumbent will teach a curate how to conduct funerals, but cannot do the same for their Reader. We recognise that these are not parallel situations – a training incumbent for a curate is specially chosen, while in general the incumbent of a parish where a reader enters training will automatically become the training incumbent, and curates have already had several years of college/course training in which the role of placement supervisor was more limited.  However, we believe that a more integrated programme in which training incumbents are seen as key to delivery and assessment of the Course's work with students could deliver great benefits. Such integration is far more easily achieved in a small Diocesan course such as Bath & Wells' than in a larger cross-diocesan course, and we recommend that the Course maximizes on this potential.

25. We could identify no other involvement of local churches, other faith communities or secular organizations in the training programme, other than a visit to the Cathedral where the Director of Reader Studies is a residentiary canon. While recognizing the pressure on the timetable, this is unfortunate for two reasons. Firstly, the programme could be enriched by drawing on the expertise of other faith communities and secular organizations (such as Relate, or hospice staff). Secondly, it is important to communicate to future Readers that there is much expertise and wisdom outside of the Anglican church which they should draw on in their ministries, and that there is much to be gained through partnerships with other faith communities and secular organizations.

**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.**

**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.**

**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 team has confidence with qualifications with regard to Criterion B, Relationships with other institutions** |

# SECTION TWO: CURRICULUM FOR FORMATION AND EDUCATION

**C      Curriculum for formation and education**

*Reviewers will consider the curriculum's design and content.*

*C.i      There should be a theological, formational and educational rationale for the institution's approach to mission and to formation for ministry and discipleship.*

26.      Reader training normally stretches over five years. The Reader Training Policy document dated 2014 makes reference to the report *Shaping the Future* (2006) as the guiding document in devising the programme. The approach to Reader training is based on the understanding of Readers as 'trained lay theologians who hold a Bishop's licence to lead worship and preach in the pastoral context of the Church and who are messengers of the Word of God to the world.' The skills and competencies of Reader ministry are developed through a programme which combines both theological and practical components. The theological component is achieved by means of the *Exploring Christianity* course, and the practical components are addressed in following *Formation Years* 1 through 3. Licensing happens at the end of *Formation Year* 1.

27.      The theological and formational rationale is based on the concept of formation into the likeness of Christ. Readers as part of the leadership of the church 'are required to first and foremost be disciples who demonstrate an ability and desire to lead in this service of other disciples'. Formation requires that course participants be open to acquiring both knowledge and skills, and be able to reflect on their own development. The educational philosophy underpinning the training programme leads to a move from initial small group learning with all lay learners seeking to deepen their discipleship, to a discrete focused group training to be licensed as Readers. This explains why the training scheme has been set up as it is, with an emphasis on ministry. Very little is said about mission but it is encouraging that the Reader Action Plan 2014/15 includes the aim of integrating mission into Reader training for the following academic year (beginning September 2015).

28. The first two years follow the *Exploring Christianity* course, shared with those who are studying without any intention of offering themselves for Reader training. It is taught in small local groups, typically with a membership of 5-10 people. Assessment of prior learning, distance learning and courses at local colleges can replace *Exploring Christianity*, but it is seen as the most cost-effective option. The educational rationale for using *Exploring Christianity* is that because this was locally produced it is responsive to the needs of the diocese and of the parishes, and modules are updated on a rolling timetable. There is evidence that vocations to Reader ministry emerge while taking the course.

29. In the following three years of training, known as *Formation Years* 1-3, course participants are treated as a discrete group. *Formation Year* 1 focuses on preaching and *Formation Year* 2 on liturgy and on the pastoral context of Reader ministry. Licensing of Readers takes place at the end of *Formation Year* 1. In *Formation Years* 1-3, training is provided on Sundays or as a weekend residential. A 4-6 week placement is also encouraged and should take place within three years of licensing. In *Formation Year 3*, the group meets only three times and at least one session is on a topic selected by the course participants (currently Preaching and Personality). The other two are selected by the Reader training team.

30. From discussions with staff it is apparent that in practice staffing drives the curriculum; the position of units within the curriculum depends on who is available to teach them. While course participants were aware of the basic shape of *Formation Year* 1 (Preaching)/*Formation Year* 2 (Pastoral/Liturgical Formation), it was evident that they were not always aware of why a topic was placed where it was in their syllabus. 'Learning how to learn' is currently in *Formation Year* 2 between sessions on worship and funerals, and is presented as being about running a course for adults; however the skills involved are those which the course participants should themselves be applying to their own learning, from the beginning of their training. Similarly, personality theory is taught in *Formation Year* 3, when it would be a useful tool for reflection at the beginning of training. This year, we were told by the course team, course participants look at 'Anecdote to Evidence' and why weekday attendance at cathedrals is growing in *Formation Year* 1, Unit 5. However a session on this also featured for this year's *Formation Year* 2 course participants at the end of their year, in Unit 15, as observed by the team. This suggests that the curriculum has not developed from a clear vision of what should

be taught when. We respect and applaud the desire to be flexible and responsive to the parishes and to feedback from previous years, but question whether this approach leads to a coherent curriculum. There is a need for a curriculum which has a clear theological and formational rationale which is designed to meet the learning outcomes for Readers and the diocese's strategic needs. There is not currently an appropriate balance between these two, with far too much weight being given to flexibility and responsiveness to feedback from course participants.

[These issues relating to C.i. are taken up in recommendations 5 and 6 which follow section C.ii.]

*C.ii    The institution should offer, and periodically review, a set of programmes that will enable candidates to be prepared for their ministries and/or meet their learning needs.*

31.    The *Exploring Christianity* course has been well received not only in the diocese but by other dioceses who have adopted it as an entry level course for interested lay learners who may or may not then go on to study for ministry. It consists of six modules: Spirituality and Prayer, Exploring the Bible –New Testament, Questions of Faith, Reshaping the Church, Exploring the Bible – Old Testament and Challenging Choices (Ethics). The question of whether *Exploring Christianity* is fit for purpose as the theological part of a Reader training programme needs to be addressed further, especially as Readers are described as 'trained lay theologians'. Rewriting of the six sections of the course takes place as required – for example, the Reshaping the Church module is currently being updated to reflect recent changes within the Church of England – but there was no evidence that the structure of the programme as a whole was fully reviewed. The weekly staff meeting of those involved in lay training also keeps a watching brief on developments in resources and good practice.

32.    The Reviewers' Guide supplied by the diocese makes the claim that 'Readers are trained to a standard appropriate to their calling', i.e. level 4/4+ in FHEQ terms. Whilst this is acknowledged to be a minimum standard, a number of dioceses have opted for a Foundation Degree (HE level 5) and differing levels could make transfer between dioceses problematic. Some elements of *Formation Years* 1-3 are clearly at the higher standard, but because the foundation modules of the course are part of *Exploring Christianity*, most course participants will only study the Old and New Testaments and Christian doctrine at the lower level. It is

questioned whether this is adequate preparation for people who will become preachers and teachers, and lay theologians in a wide variety of settings.

33. The sessions provided in the formation years are enjoyed by the students and they appreciate the fact that the course is responsive to student feedback. However, we were concerned about suggestions from some students that it was not always preparing people for the ministries they were going to fulfil, for example they were not being adequately taught to lead informal or all-age worship, they needed more in-depth biblical study, and the worship was too church-focused. Also, with the new diocesan focus on mission, more needs to be done to embed this into the curriculum at all levels, whereas the mapping of the course on to the national requirements for reader ministry suggests that 'Skills to enable learning, communication and mission' are only addressed in a single unit, unit 13 in *Formation Year 2*.

34. A review of the programme against the actual ministries of Readers, including the requirement to develop a more missional approach, might also help to highlight the potential advantages of joining the Common Awards scheme, such as the wide range of modules available and the flexibility with which they can be built into a coherent programme. There is also the possibility of creating individual learning paths for those candidates who have accredited prior experience or learning. A further advantage is that students would be trained to a national standard and so could move between dioceses without difficulty.

**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).**

**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.**

C.iii   *The academic and formational assessment methods should enable the institution to advise church leaders on the suitability of candidates for their ministry.*

35.   Assignments are set as part of *Exploring Christianity* at differing levels depending on whether or not the course participant wishes to go on to Reader ministry. Those who do are directed to undertake the academic assignments which are then assessed against the mark grid shown in the *Assignment Toolkit* leaflet. This is discussed further in section G.v below. If a candidate decides at some point during the *Exploring Christianity* course, or even after they have completed it, that they wish to be considered for Reader ministry, they are required to complete the academic assignments if they have not already done so. During *Formation Year* 1 the candidate prepares a portfolio which is a personal record of learning as well as a document which contributes to the assessment of readiness for licensing at the end of *Formation Year* 1. After each of the training days and weekends attended in *Formation Year* 1 the candidate is asked to write a brief reflection and also to undertake a congregational study. These are all recorded and filed in the portfolio, as is the certificate from the *Exploring Christianity* course.

36.   In order to assess whether the candidate is ready to be licensed reports are received from the incumbent and churchwarden, with a statement by the candidate. Each candidate is reviewed by the Warden of Readers, Archdeaconry Wardens and Assistant Director of Reader Studies referring to these reports and the portfolio. A report on each candidate's progress in the light of the criteria for licensing is then passed to the Readers Council for approval. These criteria are: attendance, engagement with the group, engagement with the course, reflective ability, integrity, maturity, spirituality and competence. These are assessed on the basis of evidence where possible, such as attendance, which is monitored, but others are more subjective, e.g. integrity. This is all clearly stated in the booklet *Becoming a Reader: Formation Year 1.* However, the criteria used are not those specified by Ministry Division (May 2014) which include clearly

stated formational standards which the candidate should be able to demonstrate at the time of licensing, and which are intended to ensure nationally that all Reader candidates have reached a certain level of formation by the time of licensing. There are also plans to involve a panel in the assessment process at this stage, which is a move we would encourage.

37. A further review takes place at the end of *Formation Year* 2, when there is a confidential meeting with a reviewer which includes comments from the incumbent, the updated portfolio from Formation Year 1, and a reflective self-assessment by the Reader. The outcome of the discussion is confidential and no records are kept, but the incumbent may receive an agreed statement. The review is not an assessment as such, but is an opportunity for the Reader to reflect on the first year of licensed ministry in a supportive atmosphere. It is intended that the Reader would benefit by gaining additional insight into the experiences of the preceding year, and so be an important part of the formational process.

**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 review team has confidence with qualifications with regard to Criterion C, Curriculum for formation and education.**

# SECTION THREE: MINISTERIAL DEVELOPMENT

**D      Community and Corporate Life**

*Reviewers will consider the institution's quality of common life. Is it a good place in which to live, work and study? How is community built across local training contexts and in 'dispersed' mode?*

*D.i      The institution should offer a clear statement of how it understands corporate life, reflected in its training for ministry and the working relationships between members.*

38.     The institution's approach to corporate life, as reflected in its training for ministry and the working relationships between members is demonstrated by the ethos of the overall programme, and supported by its policies on inclusion (gender, ethnicity and disability) and other matters of natural justice. The course participants' sense of community and corporate life was evident in the residential training event at Abbey House, where participants gathered and joined together in worship with obvious enthusiasm for the event and for one another. The opening prayers were relevant and helpful, as were the introductory comments from the Director of Reader Studies regarding the context of the particular unit within the overall programme.

39.     It is accepted that there are problems with developing a corporate life when the course participants come from such a dispersed population but there are steps which could be taken to mitigate the potential and actual sense of isolation which Readers can experience. For example, despite pressures on their time, some course participants expressed a willingness to gather on a Friday evening rather than Saturday morning for training events, and would value the opportunity to spend more time together in a retreat context. Other benefits could flow from this – see Section E below. Also, reference is made in the 2013-2014 self-evaluation report to the possible introduction of social media as an additional curriculum resource, and this could also benefit the development of community and corporate life amongst the student body. Attempts to use Moodle were not successful, but the upgraded version of CAVLE might be worth investigating. Thirdly, as course participants reported that they very rarely prayed together, more opportunities could be created for course participants to do this or to gather in support groups as part of their residential programme.

**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.**


*D.ii     There should be a clear statement of its understanding of issues of gender, ethnic grouping and disability and other matters of natural justice; its training, governance and community life should reflect this (see also I.v and J.ii).*

40.     There are clear policies on issues of gender, ethnic grouping and disability and other matters of natural justice; its training, governance and community life reflect this, although there are issues regarding accommodation – see Section P.

*D.iii    Does the institution have clear and well-managed policies for the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults?*

41.     The institution has clear and well-managed policies for the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, as specified and agreed by the diocese.

> **The review team has confidence with qualifications with regard to Criterion D, Community and corporate life.**

**E       Worship and training in public worship**

*Reviewers will look at whether the arrangements for common worship and the policies underlying them are satisfactory.*

*E.i      The institution's policy and practice in corporate worship should reflect the tradition and liturgical inheritance of the wider church.*

42.     The policy on worship makes it clear that the worship component of the Reader training programme aims to give course participants experience of a variety of styles and viewpoints relating to Christian worship. This is done by exploring some of the main traditions of liturgy in the Anglican Church both in theory and in practice. The fact that only some of the main traditions are explored means, however, that the breadth of Anglicanism is not fully reflected. The need for greater breadth is noted in the self-evaluation for 2013-2014 but is not included in the action plan.

*E.ii    There should be a policy on, and provision for, a balance of worship, including authorised and innovative forms, which recognises and equips candidates to work within the variety of practice within the sponsoring church.*

43.    The policy on worship indicates that all levels of the training programme include a worship component. In the *Exploring Christianity* home study groups there is expected to be a short closing act of worship which students are often encouraged to lead. Course participants attending training events and residential units experience Eucharistic worship and are encouraged to take part by preparing and leading intercessions and reading lessons. We were told, but did not see, that on occasion they are also involved in more imaginative ways of exploring the readings. From the experience of worship observed by the inspection team, it does not appear that there is adequate balance of worship, which recognises and equips course participants to work within the variety of practice within the Church of England. The worship we observed, and heard about from students, was generally of the same tone and tradition, and while this might be described as 'middle of the road' the lack of variety in tone/tradition means that it does not represent the practice within the Diocese. In particular, nothing currently appears to meet the needs of course participants from charismatic churches.

44.    Course participants commented that corporate worship is all clergy-led and very traditional, in many cases contrasting with what is their norm in their home parish. They would like to see different worship styles. The pattern of meeting on Sundays makes it more likely that the worship is a service of Holy Communion, but if it were to be a service of the Word there would be more opportunity for lay people to lead it. Even within the Communion services, however, an opportunity is being missed for course participants to preach and thus to observe and comment on others' styles. On the Saturday evening there was an informal service of Compline led by the Assistant Director of Reader Studies in the garden of Abbey House. While the use of an informal and more contemporary style of worship was appreciated by the course participants and involved some of them in leading, it would have been an opportunity to allow the participants to plan, prepare and lead the worship themselves.

[These issues relating to E.ii. are taken up in recommendation 9 which follow section E.iii.]

*E.iii    Ministerial candidates should be effectively trained to plan, prepare and conduct public worship as appropriate for their ministry (lay or ordained), and they should receive critical and constructive comment from staff and peers.*

45.    The majority of the course participants' experience and training to plan, prepare and lead worship takes place in their parishes where the training incumbent plays a vital role. Students report that generally this works well, although there can be problems, for example, if there is an interregnum part way through a course participant's training, a new incumbent is appointed who has a different approach, or the incumbent does not have skills in training. As reviewers, we are also concerned about the way in which this work carried out by training incumbents is overseen and supported by the course, as discussed in Section B above. We could not find any structures by which students received comment from staff or their peers.

**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.**

E.iv    *The liturgical space should be adequate for its purpose.*

46.    Worship at the Old Deanery was held in a large meeting room appropriately arranged for a Eucharist. At Abbey House the Sunday Eucharist took place in one of the two chapels. These were adequate for the purpose of worship. The service of Compline held in the garden of Abbey House worked well.

---

**The review team has confidence with qualifications with regard to Criterion E, Worship and training in public worship.**

---

**F       Ministerial, personal and spiritual formation**

*Reviewers will consider how well the institution helps learners in their ministerial, personal and spiritual formation and self-awareness, and in their understanding of the specific lay or ordained ministry to which they are called .*

*F.i       The institution should enable candidates to be immersed in the traditions of their own church denomination and to gain an empathetic understanding of church and faith traditions other than their own.*

47.    Throughout training in years *Formation Year* 1 through 3 course participants are ministering within the traditions of their own church, and developing their ministerial skills and knowledge. By mixing with people from other traditions they are also able to gain an empathetic understanding of church and faith traditions other than their own. In addition, within three years of being licensed course participants are required to undertake a placement of 4 to 6 weeks, preferably in a church of a different tradition of the one with which the course participant is familiar. The experience gained in this way helps to develop the participant's understanding of other traditions within the Anglican Church (see section E above). The process, including the rationale and practical issues, is fully described in the documentation (*Beginning Reader Ministry*). The requirement to complete a written reflection on the experience is also documented, with a clear explanation as to how this should be done. In 2014 placement supervisors were introduced: this is a welcome and necessary addition to the placement scheme.

*F.ii      It should offer corporate and individual guidance for learners, including encouragement to seek confidential spiritual counsel and to maintain a regular private prayer life.*

48.    Guidance on competency and personal development issues is available throughout training from a number of sources. Corporate guidance is given via the handbooks which are given to all course participants, and which are updated regularly. Individual guidance is available from the Assistant Director of Reader Studies and from the Reader Training Assistant. Pastoral support is also offered by the Assistant Director of Reader Studies and the Training Assistant, as well as by the training incumbents. Course participants are encouraged to seek on-going spiritual support and direction, but it is not a requirement. They should also be encouraged to develop their own personal rule of life as appropriate to their tradition and needs.

**Recommendation 10**

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

F.iii   *Its common life and the guidance offered should enable students to grow in Christian discipleship, in readiness to share their faith, and as theologically reflective practitioners, with a view to exercising a public role in ministry and engaging with the world.*

49.   The common life of the course together with the guidance and training received in *Exploring Christianity* home groups and in training events during *Formation Years* 1-3, as well as the parish-based training is what enables course participants to grow in Christian discipleship. This can also create a readiness to share their faith, as theologically reflective practitioners, with a view to exercising a public role in ministry and engaging with the world. Theological reflection is an important part of the assessment process prior to licensing and continues through *Formation Year* 2 and 3. However the reflections are very short (250-300 words): this is not adequate for a proper reflection on a whole unit of training – 1000 – 1500 words might be more appropriate. Further, these reflections are not formally assessed so the course participants do not appear to be receiving the feedback necessary to enable them to develop their reflective skills.

**Recommendation 11**

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

F.iv   *The teaching and ministerial staff should model an appropriate pattern of spirituality, continued learning and reflection on practice.*

50.   It is encouraging to see that the Director of Reader Studies is currently engaged in further study. However, due to the dispersed nature of the whole training team (*Exploring Christianity* and the programme for *Formation Years* 1-3) it has been difficult to engender an ethos where continued study is the norm. Where people are teaching this is essential in order to maintain a high level of engagement with the subject being taught and energy and enthusiasm for the task of teaching. This was particularly well modelled by the teaching observed in Unit 15 – Worship III – the session on rural ministry, where the Visiting Teacher has just written a book on the subject.

51.     The staff are very committed to the task of delivering the course, including offering a high level of care to the course participants in their charge. This is evidenced by the weekly staff meeting which keeps a watching brief on developments in resources and good practice. It is also clear that they reflect carefully on the content of the programme.

**The review team has confidence with qualifications with regard to Criterion F, Ministerial, personal and spiritual formation.**

# SECTION FOUR: EDUCATION AND TRAINING

**G      Teaching and learning: content, method and resources**

*Reviewers will consider the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning activities, methods and resources.*

*G.i      The units of teaching and learning should be well structured, with clear and appropriate aims.*

52.    Members of the team were able to read the course outlines compiled by the Director of Reader Studies and Assistant Director of Reader Studies, and to observe sessions for *Exploring Christianity* and for individual *Formation Years* units. One *Exploring Christianity* session was observed, which was led by an experienced tutor who was very skilled at making links between the course material and people's experience. She clearly understood group members' anxieties about learning difficult material and was very supportive. The team was also able to discuss the course with groups of students formally and informally.

53.    The *Exploring Christianity* part of Reader training is clearly structured with each module having clear aims. These are phrased appropriately in general terms rather than being specific to Reader ministry, because the course is for 'every Christian'.

54.    The Reader Training Assessment Policy (March 2015) states that 'The *Formation Years* course outlines contain sections on both learning outcomes and skills and attitudes'. Yet aims and learning outcomes of sessions are rarely stated in the handbooks provided to course participants in the *Formation Years*, and it is up to individual lecturers as to whether they describe them at the beginning of a teaching session. On one evaluation form seen, for Unit 18, two learning outcomes were given at the top of the proforma for student feedback. However, the sample evaluation form in Appendix 3 of the *Formation Year* 1 guide does not suggest that learning outcomes are normally given on the evaluation proforma. Although the course outlines for each unit give some aims and objectives, these are not directed at students and are written by the Assistant Director of Reader Studies and Director of Reader Studies rather than by those actually delivering the units.

**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.**

*G.ii    There should be a proper balance between the academic, formational and practical aspects of training.*

55.    The course contains a mixture of academic, formational and practical aspects of training. However, the academic component – complete with assessment – currently lies almost entirely within *Exploring Christianity*.

56.    The sessions provided in the formation years generally engaged students' interest well, and were positively received as individual sessions. The course staff are committed to adjusting these sessions in response to feedback. However, they do not seem to always meet their practical learning needs. A number of students expressed the paradoxical opinion of appreciating the sessions while also stating that there wasn't actually much in them in practice for their context, and that they didn't feel fully trained as speakers and preachers.

57.    The final unit before licensing is presented as 'a day to link theory to practice' (course outline and student handbook) but the content consists of a morning on feedback from the congregational study and an afternoon on the practical arrangements for the licensing service, so it is not clear where the input from theory lies here.

**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.**

*G.iii    Learning programmes should be varied in format and method, with use of student experience, courses, seminars, tutorials, one-to-one, groups, placements and private study.*

58.    The team watched sessions for individual units led by teachers across the spectrum from those new to the course, to those who were very

experienced in it. They also saw the core staff, who were clearly aware of the specific situations of individual students, leading sessions. The best teaching involved a range of methods within a single unit, from full group to small group work, with clear tasks to perform, and combined presentation, discussion and exercises. It was evident that individual units vary in quality of presentation and delivery. Some were supported by PowerPoint and/or handouts, and were interactive throughout: others were not. In the teaching sessions we observed, some staff did not show awareness of methods for teaching adults and gave something more like a formal lecture which did not engage the students.

59. Individual student experience was not integrated as an important part of learning; because much teaching is delivered in one-off sessions, there is no chance for the teacher to become aware of the wealth of experience, often from the secular world, which students could bring to the table.

60. Where aims are provided, they are not always met. For example, in the sessions observed in Glastonbury, the stated aim of exploring worship in the cathedral and monastic traditions was not met because the tour of the Abbey ruins did not discuss monastic patterns of worship and the service at the Cathedral was not a standard Evensong.

61. There was no evidence that *Formation Year* students were expected to do any private study in preparation for the scheduled sessions, although students said they would find guidance on this helpful. The course outline (not circulated to students) for *Formation Year* 1 Unit 2 mentions a short piece of reading which is in the *Formation Year* 1 student handbook but this is not mentioned in the notes of the email sent to students in advance. The course outline for *Formation Year* 1 Unit 3 says there is 'Pre-session material' but not what it is and there is no suggestion in the *Formation Year* 1 student handbook that there is any advance reading at all. At the end of *Formation Year* 2 Unit 10, there is a practical task set to be completed before Unit 11, but no reading. In *Formation Year* 2 for Units 11 and 14 there is a list of over 30 books for further reading, but only a note in the course outline that for the next year consideration could be given to setting a specific chapter as pre-reading.

**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.**

*G.iv    There should be an appropriate learning environment, with adequate resources including library and information and communications technology.*

62.    Resources are available in the *Exploring Christianity* 'book boxes'. In addition the *Exploring Christianity* tutors have access to some publications on adult education. There is no course website with guidance on the many online resources which would be more easily available to students than books. It would be possible to set this up and to include in it some key resources which would be useful to tutors and students, and which would also allow Visiting Teachers to see what is already in use. Another possibility would be to use the VLE at Durham.

63.    As students come from across a wide geographical area, opportunities for online discussion forums need to be explored so that students can help each other, including sharing resources.

**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.**

*G.v    Staff should provide students with constructive formal and informal feedback assessment, against published assessment criteria, in terms of both academic progress and preparation for beginning public ministry.*

64.    The assessed assignments in *Exploring Christianity* offer a range of different possibilities beyond the traditional essay as an opportunity to deepen study. This is appropriate for a student body which will include those who have not written essays for many years.

65.    However, we observed some weaknesses in the marking of the 'academic' options which those going on to Reader training must submit. There is insufficient guidance provided to tutors on how to help course participants construct essay titles, so that moderators are left uncertain what particular essays are really about. Beyond the simple grid in the Assignment Toolkit, there are no 'published assessment criteria' provided. Anecdotal evidence from students indicates that individual tutors do not mark to the same standard. This results in a lack of consistency in the academic standard

reached by Reader candidates on the *Exploring Christianity* course. Tutors also vary in the way in which they comment on work and give feedback. Some give extensive comments: others do not. Some simply write on essays: others return the work with a sheet clearly indicating how the assignment has been assessed against the marking grid.

66. The Reader Training Policy (2014) states that *Exploring Christianity* assignments 'are assessed in line with contemporary validation processes', but the course team stated that they do not always consider modern universities' practices to be relevant, because they aim to meet the needs of those in the diocese more broadly. The mark given by the tutor is the one the student receives even if the moderator gives a different mark. A further layer of external moderation is provided by Trinity College Bristol, but again the tutor's mark would stand. This is not a standard definition of moderation. In addition, there was evidence that not all assignments of those in Reader training were sent for moderation.

67. Plagiarism detection software is not currently used. Advice on plagiarism in the Assignment Toolkit is confusing and there is no evidence that tutors are given more precise guidance, beyond the Toolkit, to help them assist students with avoiding it.

68. Although, as we note at paragraph 49, students receive peer and tutor feedback on their written reflections after each training session in the Formation Years, no work is formally assessed after the two *Exploring Christianity* years. We believe there is scope during the *Formation Years* programme for formational assessment which prepares Readers as they enter their public ministry, for example by submitting a sermon and reflection.

**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.**

**Recommendation 17**

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

> **The review team has confidence with qualifications with regard to Criterion G, Teaching and learning, content, method and resources.**

**H      Practical and pastoral theology**

*H.i      The institution's learning structures and formational activity should integrate theory and practice and enable students to grow as theologically reflective practitioners in the context of the developing and diverse society in which they will minister.*

69.      The overall training programme has two clearly separated components, *Exploring Christianity* and *Formation Years* 1 – 3, which are studied consecutively, not in parallel. The *Exploring Christianity* course is mainly theoretical although there are some practical elements such as presenting work in group tutorials. In *Formation Years* 1-3 students are offered training in practical and pastoral subjects aimed at equipping them for ministry within and beyond the church.

70.      From the documentation received and the teaching observed, it is clear that there should be a more coherent approach to the integration of theory and practice within the Reader training programme. Because of the separation of the academic from the practical, opportunities to build on the material studied in *Exploring Christianity* are not maximised. A spiral curriculum in which each succeeding year builds on work done in previous years would ensure that the separation of academic and practical work is reduced. This already happens to some extent: for example in the teaching of Unit 14 Preaching at Funerals reference was made to various biblical passages which could be used at funerals, with a discussion of which would be more relevant depending on the circumstances. It is also evidence from talking with course participants, as discussed at C.ii above, that they would value further biblical studies at a higher level than in *Exploring Christianity*.

71. The curriculum mapping exercise referred to in section G.ii above would greatly assist in assuring a proper integration of theory and practice across the whole training programme.

**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.**

> **The review team has confidence with qualifications with regard to Criterion H, Practical and pastoral theology.**

# SECTION FIVE: STAFF AND STUDENTS

*Reviewers will consider the recruitment, expertise, resourcing, appraisal and development of staff.*

**I      Teaching Staff**

*I.i      The gender, lay/ordained and denominational balance of ministerial and teaching staff should model appropriate patterns of learning and of ministry and comply with denominational guidelines.*

72.     The two members of Core teaching staff are the Director of Reader Studies and the Assistant Director of Reader Studies. Both are ordained Anglican priests; one male, one female. Both engage in ministerial roles outside outside of their work in Reader Training. The Director holds an MA in Adult Education with Theological Reflection and a PhD in Ecclesiology and is currently studying for a DThM. 25% of his time is spent on the DRS role. The Assistant Director holds a Certificate in Adult Education and an MBA. The prime roles of the Reader Training Assistant, a female licensed Reader, are organisational and pastoral, but she also shares in some teaching.

73.     From the Staffing Policy and from the course handbooks it is clear that, in addition to the work of core staff, much *Formation Years* teaching is delivered by Visiting Teachers, and while the small core staff shows a balanced gender profile with lay involvement from the Reader Training Assistant, the overall structure of the teaching staff is less balanced.

74.     From the documents supplied, it is not easy to analyse the balance of those teaching Readers. The format of the Staffing list supplied, which includes both *Exploring Christianity* tutors and Visiting Teachers for 2014/15, ranges from a one-line description to a first-person paragraph of biography. It appears that the CVs for Visiting Teachers are not kept on file. The staffing is weighted towards men (23 male, 9 female). As the women teaching on the course include a number of clergy, this means that very few teachers are lay women. Since the majority of Readers are female, this is not an appropriate model.

**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.**

> **The review team has confidence with qualifications in regard to Criterion I, teaching staff.**

## J     All staff

75. Because so much of the teaching contact time for students in their Reader Training is with non-core staff, throughout this section we will look at the wider group of those who teach on the course in addition to the Core staff. Many of these are volunteers, who receive minimal if any remuneration for their work for the course, seeing it as part of their Christian ministry.

*J.i     Staff recruitment and selection procedures should be transparent, fair and consonant with the policies of the relevant partner bodies.*

76. Specialist knowledge, experience of teaching adults and 'teaching potential' are described as equally desirable characteristics in selection. Exploring Christianity tutors are recruited from names supplied by senior Diocesan staff, and then there is a conversation with the Director or Assistant Director 'to ascertain suitability and motivation'. Posts as Visiting Teachers are not advertised and the Staffing document supplied to the review team states that they are 'hand picked' by the Director and Assistant Director. Most appointments thus rely heavily on the knowledge of these two people, supplemented by recommendations from the Bishop's staff or advisors. Selection procedures consist of a conversation with the Director or Assistant Director; no Reader takes part in the conversation, or comments on the application letter. While they have different amounts of experience, not all who are teaching the Formation Years have been trained in teaching adults.

77. Recruitment procedures for Visiting Teachers in the Formation Years are thus not transparent, and nor are selection procedures. This does not necessarily damage the student learning experience; in one case an excellent session for *Formation Year* 3 was taken by a lecturer who had written in offering his services. However, there are issues around fair

selection and quality assurance here. In addition, the procedures mean that the pool of possible teachers outside the Diocese is not considered.

**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.**

*J.ii     Job descriptions, terms of service and reporting lines should be clear at the time of appointment and reviewed at regular intervals.*

78.    The job descriptions and other terms for the Director of Reader Studies, Assistant Director of Reader Studies and Reader Training Assistant are all clear and appropriate. They fall within the frameworks established and monitored by the Diocesan Board of Finance and, specifically, alongside other School of Formation staff.

79.    The role of Volunteer Reader Training Assistant – a Reader who makes herself available in a support role on training days, does some teaching and is present to provide pastoral support – is to be commended. This was an organic development from the former role of Reader Training Host. The team did not see any job description for the roles of *Exploring Christianity* tutor or Visiting Teacher.

**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.**

*J.iii     There should be an effective programme for the continuing professional development of staff, including annual appraisals for all staff.*

80.    Outside the core staff, there is little opportunity provided for staff development. *Exploring Christianity* tutors are invited to training sessions. The team observed one of these which was a mixture of free discussion and a taught session on learner autonomy; it was not clear why that topic had been chosen. No agenda was circulated in advance and we were told that it is set at the meeting. The tutors did not all feel confident in their role

as markers of student work. While a range of suggestions were made – from asking another tutor to look at the work, to asking the Assistant Director to comment on it – there was no written guidance available beyond the 'Assignment Toolkit' which is aimed at both tutors and students and which contains very basic marking criteria. The team was told that there is an annual meeting in the autumn at which tutors can mark a selection of essays and discuss the issues this raises. This is good practice.

81. There is no formal induction or support for *Formation Years* Visiting Teachers, so they do not have the opportunity to share good practice. The Visiting Teacher who had approached the core staff to offer his services had not been given a chance to see sample handouts or teaching materials used at this level. A member of core staff sits in on a session by a new Visiting Teacher but it was not clear that there was any formal feedback given. After the session, returning Visiting Teachers are given full copies of the feedback sheets completed by students, but for new Visiting Teachers this information is simply summarised. This has implications for both quality control and quality enhancement.

**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.**

*J.iv    Staff should be sufficient in number and expertise, and resourced to fulfil their role adequately for the institution's and students' needs.*

82. Staffing of the *Formation Years* is ad hoc and when individuals leave then the curriculum is adjusted to accommodate different individuals. The reliance on Visiting Teachers to deliver a large proportion of the units represents a potential risk to the quality of the student learning experience. They are not able to relate parts of the course to each other, which has implications for both quality control and quality enhancement.

83. As 'How we learn is sometimes as important as what we learn' (Course details, *Formation Year* 2), more needs to be done to ensure that the students are treated as instructors as well as learners. The students felt that their own backgrounds and expertise – whether as spiritual directors or as funeral directors – could be acknowledged and drawn upon more.

Visiting Teachers, unfamiliar with the student cohort, tend to assume that nobody else in the room has relevant knowledge.

84. The Course has adopted the South Central Regional Training Partnership staffing policy. That policy states that Visiting Teachers should not account for more than 35% of the face-to-face time for any module. This is not currently the case for the teaching within the *Formation Years*. It also describes the role of 'associate staff' – a teacher who while not a Core Staff member, has a more substantive ongoing role than a Visiting Teacher. The course has no such associate staff. If the 35% limit were observed, and a number of associate staff appointed, this would significantly strengthen the Course and ease quality assurance issues.

**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.**

> **The review team has confidence with qualifications with regard to Criterion J, All staff.**

## K    Students

*Reviewers will examine procedures for student admission, welfare and support, appraisal and discipline.*

*K.i    Policies on students' admission, welfare, complaints, discipline, assessment, reporting to sponsoring churches and arrangements for first appointments should be publicly available; and there should be evidence that they are applied.*

85. Appropriate policies were made available to the team. Students were aware of the complaints procedure.

86. Reader selection processes appeared to be solid and there was evidence that *Exploring Christianity* fosters vocations. However, the Self-Evaluation Report for 2013-14 notes that the age profile currently shows a large gap in the under 65s. Age may not be the only factor needing to be addressed in advertising and recruiting to the course; the educational and class

background of Readers in training also appeared to the team to be a uniform one. Tutors on *Exploring Christianity* stated that their groups were socially diverse, but cited a mix of 'social workers and teachers' as evidence of diversity. The tutors felt that the numbers going on to Reader ministry were an index of the course's success. However, if *Exploring Christianity* comes to be too closely identified with Reader ministry then this could be counter-productive. Furthermore, in attracting those interested in exploring a vocation to the ministry of Reader the first step of a course with six modules may not always be appropriate. Some tutors use the course more flexibly, for example using the material from a different module as an introduction.

87. Students also commented that the traditional architecture of the venues used for training can foster a sense of being 'special' and thus can be exclusive. They asked why some events could not be in church halls.

**Recommendation 24**

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

*K.ii    The institution's decision-making structure should enable students to take an appropriate part in its governance.*

88. The governance of the course is dispersed within diocesan structures, as described in Section L below. There is no student participation in the Readers Council nor in the Ministry Forum (nor naturally in the Bishop's Staff). Therefore there has not been any student participation (whether from the *Exploring Christianity* part or from the *Formation Years*) in the governance of the course, nor are students are involved in the discussions of evaluations which can affect the staffing of the following year.

89. A recent development since January 2015 is the appointment of a 'student rep' to represent *Formation Years* 1-3. At the time of our review, not all students asked knew that there was such a representative, but there is no reason it should not bed in well.

90. However, the formal place of engagement for the rep is the newly formed Reader Training Advisory Group. Its name suggests that this will be an advisory body. It is not appropriate that the student body – via a rep - only

links with an *advisory* group. Nor is the need for student involvement in decision making satisfied by the role of the Readers' Council, since many of those on it will have finished training many years before. Therefore we recommend that the Course reconsiders the role of students in decision making. If recommendation 26 is followed, the student rep should be part of that formal oversight body.

**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.**

**The review team has confidence with qualifications with regard to Criterion K, Students.**

# SECTION SIX: GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT AND FINANCE

*The Bath and Wells Reader Course is an integral part of the Diocese Board of Finance. It is not a legal entity in its own right. As such many of the issues covered within Section Six are not directly applicable to the Course itself, and it is not appropriate for the this review to expand into a general review of the DBF.*

## L      Organisation and governance

*Reviewers will examine the effectiveness of the institution's governance structures and processes, recognising that these will be proportionate to the scale of the institution and will not apply identically to, say, a college and a diocesan course.*

*L.i      The institution should have clear financial, administrative and management structures and an up-to-date governing document, and the governing body should be constituted in line with it.*

91.    The Course has clear financial and administrative processes. The Assistant Director of Reader Studies oversees the organisational aspects of the course supported by an administrative officer within the School of Formation. We saw evidence of clear planning, effective record keeping and good communication. The financial aspects of the course are handled through the DBF, with the course being allocated a budget within the School of Formation within the DBF. The systems for spending and monitoring this budget are clear and robust.

92.    The Management structures for the Course are appropriate. The Director of Reader Studies is a Residentiary Canon accountable for his diocesan work to the Bishop of Taunton (the Suffragan Bishop; post currently vacant) and reports more regularly to the Warden of Readers, an Archdeacon. Theoretically this could cause complications since the Reader Course operates within the DBF and hence under the oversight of the Diocesan Secretary. However, we found no evidence of any tension between the reporting to the Bishop / Archdeacon, the legal operation within the DBF structures and the Director's Cathedral role. The Assistant Director of Reader Studies is a DBF employee managed by the Director, and herself manages the volunteer Reading Training Assistant.

93. There is no legally constituted governing body for the Course.

*L.ii* *There should be evidence that the governing body recognises and discharges its role and legal duties in respect of stewardship of the assets; setting and safeguarding the vision, values, reputation and effectiveness of the institution; operational and staff oversight and support.*

Lii and Liii are taken together, below.

*L.iii* *It should have the mix of skills and experience appropriate to its role; there should be a clear understanding of the respective roles of trustees and staff, with job descriptions for key officers and induction for new trustees; and ongoing training needs should be met.*

94. There is no governing body for the Course. Instead, there are a range of different bodies and individuals which have a role in the oversight of the Course. The Diocesan Bishop has ultimate oversight of Reader Ministry in the Diocese and hence of the Reader Training Course. The Director of Reader Studies is accountable to the Suffragan Bishop who chairs the Ministry Forum, an elected body accountable to the Diocesan Synod. The Director of Reader Studies reports to the Warden of Readers, an Archdeacon, who is the Chair of the Readers' Council which engages significantly with Reader Training. A Reader Training Advisory Group has just been established comprising the Director and Assistant Director of Readers Studies, a student rep., an *Exploring Christianity* tutor, a member of the Readers' Council and a member of the Ministry Forum.

95. We recognise that a Diocesan Course will be fully embedded in the overlapping structures of Bishop, Synod and DBF. However, the structures for governance and oversight are so complicated that it was apparent that there was no body or individual which saw itself as being responsible for the Reader Course, and which took upon itself the role of holding the staff to account and driving up standards. In addition, those we spoke to on these bodies seemed to have such a respect for the Director of Reader Studies and his expertise that it was not clear from where any challenge would come.

96. This is not a healthy situation for a Reader Training Course. Long-term, the quality of training and formation will be enhanced if there is a single body which takes on clear responsibility in practice for governing the course, even if it is not legally a governing body. Such a body would need

also to assess the skills and experience of its members and bring in appropriate figures from outside the diocese with sufficient expertise and experience in adult education and Reader training that they can offer robust challenge, potentially from the SCRTP and, perhaps, a university.

**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.**

*L.iv    There should be evidence of a structured contribution made by all community members - teaching staff, ancillary staff, the student body and individuals - so that they play an effective role in decision-making.*

97.    The Core staff is a small team, and hence works in a relational fashion. The overall style of the Course Management is relaxed and yet clear. The Assistant Director of Reader Studies and the Reader Training Assistant are appropriately involved in the decision-making. There is no structured involvement of the Visiting Teachers  and Exploring Christianity tutors in the decision-making of the course, though they are clearly listened to.

98.    There is a lack of involvement in decision making by students, as detailed in section Kii above.

*L.v    The institution's audited annual reports should be produced in good time and filed with the Charity Commission/Companies House as appropriate.*

Not applicable.

---

**The review team has confidence with qualifications with regard to Criterion L Organisation and governance.**

---

**M      Business planning and risk management**

*Reviewers will look at evidence for the existence and implementation of the institution's strategic policies. Subject to considerations of scale, as at section L:*

Mi, Mii and Miii are taken together, below.

*M.i      There should be a regularly-updated long-term strategy document agreed by the trustees and, in line with it, a business plan covering 3-5 years which identifies short and medium term aims and objectives and identifies how the institution intends to meet them.*

*M. ii     Annual budgets should be prepared in line with the business plan.*

*M.iii     There should be an effective risk assessment, review and management process, which should include physical (e.g. health & safety and fire), financial, business and reputational risks.*

99.     In general business planning and risk management with regard to the Bath and Wells Course are the responsibility of the Diocesan Board of Finance of which it is an integral part. While it is not the role of this review to inspect the Diocesan Board of Finance, we saw evidence of appropriate business planning and risk management, although as noted above [criterion Ai] a new diocesan strategic plan is currently being developed.

100.    The Diocesan Board of Finance sets the budget for the Reader Training Course, within the School of Formation, in response to the expressed needs of the course. This process appeared to work well. We were pleased to note the willingness and financial ability of the Diocesan Board of Finance to consider increasing investment in Reader Training if the emerging diocesan strategic plan required this. We **urge** the Course to be realistic with the Diocesan Board of Finance as to the resources it needs to train the high quality Readers which the diocese's mission requires.

101.    The majority of the Diocesan Board of Finance's income comes from the parishes, and therefore the key risk is a dropping off in parish share collection rates. We recognise that the Reader Training Course indirectly contributes to parish share collection, in as much as having a Reader in training is one way in which parishes connect with 'the centre'. Therefore, we recognise that the reputation of the Reader Training Course as 'close

to' and 'responsive to' the parishes is important to the Diocesan Board of Finance and contributes to the financial security of the Course itself.

102.   We recognise the great strength in areas such as business planning and risk management which comes to the Reader Training Course from being an integral part of the Diocese of Bath and Wells. This removes a great burden of work from the Core Staff, which allows them to focus on student learning and support.

> **The review team has confidence with regard to Criterion M, Business planning and risk management.**

## N       Financial policies

*Reviewers will consider the effectiveness of day-to-day operating processes:*

Ni, Nii, Niii and Miv are taken together, below.

*N.i        The institution should have policies to control and manage investments, expenditure and borrowing, and the annual report and accounts should contain an appropriate reserves policy.*

*N.ii       Management accounts showing performance against budget should be produced at least quarterly and reviewed regularly by the trustees.*

*N.iii      The institution should consider its sources of income and have strategies to identify and raise the funds it needs.*

*N.iv      The institution should have adequate financial controls aimed at minimising waste and loss, and should be appropriately advised on tax-efficiency.*

103.   In general financial policies with regard to the Bath and Wells Course are the responsibility of the Diocesan Board of Finance of which it is an integral part. While it is not the role of this review to inspect the Diocesan Board of Finance, we saw evidence of appropriate financial policies. Within the Course itself the Assistant Director of Reader Studies manages the budget and there are appropriate systems of monthly review.

> **The review team has confidence with regard to Criterion N, Financial policies.**

## O    Statutory and operating policies

Oi, and Oii are taken together, below.

*O.i    Proper books of account should be kept, with computerised data regularly backed up and stored offsite.*

*O.ii    Bank mandates should be up to date, with appropriate authority levels.*

104.    All such matters with regard to the Bath and Wells Course are the responsibility of the Diocesan Board of Finance of which it is an integral part. These were not considered by the reviewers, though we note the positive judgement on such matters by the DBF auditors.

> **The review team has confidence with regard to Criterion O, Statutory and operating policies.**

## P    Accommodation

*P.i    The i) public, ii) teaching and iii) provided private living accommodation should be fit for purpose and suited to students' needs, with an ongoing maintenance programme and forward planning for future needs.*

105.    The public and teaching rooms used by the Course fall into three categories. (a) The locations used for the *Exploring Christianity* course teaching groups, generally people's homes, vicarages and other local church spaces. While we were not able to inspect many of these, we anticipate these being appropriate for the style of small group teaching involved, and there is no evidence of any concerns raised by students about this accommodation.

106.    (b) The Old Deanery in Wells Cathedral site is the location for study days and other meetings. The Old Deanery is also where the Diocesan Board of Finance offices are located, and is managed and maintained by the Diocesan Board of Finance. A range of rooms are available here for the Course's use. These are well equipped for teaching, with appropriate technology and circulation and kitchen space. Parking is available and there is attractive green space for use during breaks. The overall experience of study day in the Old Deanery was positive and conducive for learning.

107. (c) Abbey House in Glastonbury is used for residentials. This is an attractive location next to the grounds of Glastonbury Abbey, and the facilities for teaching and communal life are very good. Its primary role as a retreat house means it is particularly appropriate for the residentials. The accommodation provided for students only includes a very small number of *en suite* rooms. Nevertheless, the overall standard of accommodation at Abbey House is high.

108. A concern was raised with us from several different sources that the style of teaching accommodation – the Old Deanery and Abbey House - was very 'traditional' and 'upper class', and that this was off-putting to potential students from more deprived parts of the diocese, and reinforced an image of the Church as located in the past and concerned with the wealthy. It is very difficult to assess whether in practice this does have an impact, though it is certainly credible. If the emerging diocesan strategy does seek to broaden the demographic of Readers, attention will need to be given to this issue.

**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.**

*P.ii    There should be adequate provision for the needs of disabled students.*

109. The Course staff are alert to the needs of disabled students. We observed them very efficiently reorganising a training day in the Old Deanery to accommodate the needs of a student who, temporarily, had mobility restrictions. A portable loop system is available.

110. However, the Old Deanery is not appropriately designed for students with disabilities. Many of the teaching rooms and circulation spaces would be inaccessible for those with mobility problems, and unwelcoming to those with visual impairment. We recognise that these issues with the building are beyond the Course's immediate responsibility and control, and we note that the Diocese is more generally reviewing the ongoing use of the Old Deanery. Nevertheless, the Course does need to consider carefully

the impact its continuing use of the Old Deanery may have on the emergence of vocations for Reader ministry among those with disabilities.

**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.**

> **The review team has confidence with qualifications with regard to Criterion P, Accommodation.**

**CONCLUSION**

> **Overall outcome: The review team has confidence with qualifications in the Bath and Wells Diocesan Reader Training Course for preparing candidates for licensed ministry.**

**LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

**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.**

**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.**

**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.**

**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.**

**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).**

**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.**

**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.**

**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.**

**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.**

**Recommendation 10**

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

**Recommendation 11**

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

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**Recommendation 17**

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

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**Recommendation 24**

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

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.