

Ministry Council: Periodic External Review Follow-up Report

Birmingham Diocesan Reader Training Course

July 2017

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Senior Reviewer's Follow-up Report to the November 2015 - January 2016 Periodic External Review

July 2017

On 4th July I met with Liz Howlett, the Bishop of Birmingham's Advisor for Lay Adult Education and Training, Bishop Anne Hollingsworth, the Bishop of Aston who is the co-chair of the Readers Matters Group, and Canon Mark Pryce, the Diocesan Director of Ministry, who is the other co-chair. We considered the updated action plan prepared in response to the Periodic Review of Readers Training. I was assured that the Course had found the Periodic Review a constructive process - it was their first one - and overall it seems they have responded and developed in positive ways as outlined in their introduction to the Updated Action Plan.

Recommendation 1

We recommend that the Course and Diocese reflect carefully on the standard of understanding and knowledge required at the end of the Course. Given that a Reader qualification is potentially transferable across Dioceses, that reflection should include the implications regarding comparable standards across the Church of England.

The recommendation that reflection should happen on the standard of understanding and knowledge required by the end of the Course had provoked considerable discussion, and while the Diocesan Bishop continues to believe that the Course should continue primarily to enable those from a less academic background for Reader ministry in the Diocese some consideration had been given to how the course, and particularly the 'Next' dimension of the Course, could be used to develop a more 'bespoke' path for Readers, including for those with a more academic background. The question of finding a standard that might enable those who qualified as Readers to transfer to another Diocese is recognised as an issue, and the development of a more 'bespoke' path, particularly for anyone who might transfer to another Diocese, may be part of the solution.

This recommendation is being considered by the Course; no further action

Recommendation 2

We recommend that the Course considers how to build relationships with the University of Birmingham, Newman University and the Queen's Foundation to use some of their resources both for staff and students.

The recommendation that the Course develop closer relationships with other academic institutions in Birmingham had resulted in new external input into taught sessions and other developments with some individuals, in particular with a Methodist tutor involved with the Queens' Foundation, and with Newman University but most particularly with the Teaching and Learning Academy that serves those engaged in training for the whole of the West Midlands. This latter is clearly a particularly fruitful development.

This recommendation has been acted upon; no further action

Recommendation 3

We recommend that the Course reflects further on how those on the course engage with

- i) other faith communities, and**
- ii) secular organisations**

by using some of those clergy in the Diocese who have good contacts with them.

Engagement with other faith communities and with secular institutions had been fostered by a research associate with the University of Birmingham and with the Diocesan Inter-Faith officer, while a hospital chaplain was now delivering the listening skills weekend. Other relevant new sessions are being developed in Initial Training, and placements have been introduced (see Recommendation 9). The Course is clearly acting positively on this recommendation.

This recommendation has been acted upon; no further action.

Recommendation 4

We recommend that

- i) the 3D and NEXT courses should be seen more as a cohesive whole with Initial Reader Training, and**
- ii) where appropriate, work done on the NEXT course should be clearly assessed and marked.**

The links with the 3D Course have been formalised, with a selection process for those going on the Readers Course who had completed the 3D Course over five years previously, while the Next Course is a formal requirement for Readers who had completed the main years training. As a result of the recommendation elements of it, including an assessment of the leading of worship and preaching in a church other than the student's own, are now included.

This recommendation has been acted upon; no further action.

Recommendation 5

We recommend that the Course should reflect further on how to ensure that the balance and depth of theological study and reflection is sufficient and is properly assessed for the training of effective lay theological educators. In particular we recommend that all portfolios and all sermons are assessed and commented upon, in the case of sermons post-delivery, and that written exercises of theological reflection are lengthened to between 1000 and 1250 words and formally assessed.

All portfolios and sermons are now formally assessed, and the written theological reflection has now been extended to 1000 - 1250 words.

This recommendation has been acted upon; no further action.

Recommendation 6

We recommend that the staff consults carefully with others in the Diocese experienced in multicultural settings and reflects carefully on

- i) what is necessary for effective ministry in such a context and**
- ii) what educational provision, if any, should be made for those whose command of English is limited.**

A parish priest with extensive experience of multicultural contexts for ministry is now involved with the Readers Ministry Group and work is being done on the potentially sensitive area of working with those for whom English is not their first language, with some educational funding available to assist with it. The fact that the issue is regularly on the agenda of the Readers Matters Group shows that the Course is taking the matter seriously and positively. On a broader front the Diocese has also now appointed an Intercultural Mission Enabler.

This recommendation has been acted upon; no further action.

Recommendation 7

We recommend that, given the existence of the two integrities in the Church of England regarding the ordination of women, the Course give some thought to how it can observe the five guiding principles for the two different integrities in its worship.

The five guiding principles are formally introduced to the new intake in the selection papers and as part of the Exploring Theology Day. This has certainly brought the issue to the fore as the reviewers wished. Appropriate provision is now made, where necessary, to ensure that Holy Communion is available to those of both positions.

This recommendation has been acted upon; no further action.

Recommendation 8

We recommend that the Course should review the feedback provided on worship conducted by students to ensure that a high standard of feedback is consistently provided.

Feedback on worship conducted by students is now included in the Portfolios and the first series of assessments will take place this coming September.

This recommendation has been acted upon; no further action.

Recommendation 9

We recommend that the Course reflect further on how students can be given a wider impression of the breadth of the church both in terms of churchmanship and the church's involvement in secular institutions. This might be addressed through a placement either in a church of another tradition, or in a chaplaincy to a secular institution exercised from the basis of another tradition. This should happen in the Initial Training Scheme prior to licensing.

The decision to introduce placements as part of the initial training has now been taken and it will be implemented with the next cohort.

This recommendation has been acted upon; no further action.

Recommendation 10

We recommend that stronger encouragement be given to students to find someone whom they would trust to have conversations about their own spirituality (who need not be ordained).

For the 2015-16 intake, offers were made to all students with assistance in finding spiritual companions although some already have someone in that position, with a view to first meetings in autumn 2016. A number of these took place. A similar process has been put in place for the 2016-17 intake.

This recommendation has been acted upon; no further action.

Recommendation 11

We recommend that the Course consider how to ensure that the best teaching style applies to all teaching. This might be achieved through more peer observation and sharing of good practice, with the brief for other staff to be more explicitly complimentary or critical.

The involvement of the Teaching and Learning Academy has been constructive in helping the Course to look at how to develop teaching styles amongst the tutor team and share good practice, and the matter of peer assessment is now regularly on the agenda for meetings.

This recommendation has been acted upon; no further action.

Recommendation 12

We recommend that

- i) the library at Colmore Row is updated to contain a wider variety of books, including more on biblical interpretation and theological studies in general, and that**
- ii) the Course considers the setting up of a course website or virtual learning environment e.g. Moodle / DropBox.**

Books have been added to the library at Colmore Row, and there are continuing discussions with the Queens Foundation about the use of their library, although Queens clearly have a huge demand on their library facilities. A dropbox facility is now available and used regularly.

This recommendation has been acted upon; no further action.

Recommendation 13

We recommend that the Course carefully considers how the academic aspects of training may be enhanced, developed and assessed. In particular a review of mark schemes should happen which will include clear assessment criteria that will help to standardise marking.

New marking schemes with clear assessment criteria have been developed and the involvement of new staff on that has led to some very positive conversations.

This recommendation has been acted upon; no further action.

Recommendation 14

That the Course reflects on the expertise needed at the time of recruiting staff and considers whether open recruiting may not be a better way of finding tutors. Subsequent methods of appraisal should ensure that all staff are developed in such a way that high standards of teaching apply at all teaching events.

The Course has carefully considered the methods of recruiting, and have decided that a small group working with the Director of Reader Training remains the best way of recruiting. This may well be an appropriate decision for this course. The established process of annual appraisals and termly supervision sessions for tutors will continue, with a clear aim of developing best practice in teaching within the training course.

This recommendation has been acted upon; no further action.

Recommendation 15

We recommend that

- i) the Readers Matters Committee extend its brief to be a formal forum for deeper reflection on the Course. This should include**
 - a. members of the RMG sometimes observing teaching events**
 - b. monitoring the issue of those whose command of English is limited**
 - c. undertaking some 'risk assessment' of the Course**
 - d. considering student representation at least for their discussions on matters relating to the Course**
- ii) when a new Chairman of the Committee is appointed we believe the Principal should be accountable to that Chairman, and the appointment be made with regard to that line of accountability.**

The Readers Matters Group considered that this would be a helpful development and it is now being implemented. The appointment of Bishop Anne Hollingsworth, the Bishop of Aston, as co-chair with Canon Mark Pryce, the Director of Ministry, as co-chair has been a positive development.

This recommendation has been acted upon; no further action.

Recommendation 16

We recommend that the Course and the Readers Matters Committee reflect on whether a long-term strategy development plan is needed. If so, they should consider what it should be and whether it needs a detailed business plan.

This has been incorporated into a wider discussion about the development of both clergy and lay discipleship and ministry, and it will be considered in the Autumn of this year once a new Warden of Readers has been appointed.

This recommendation is being considered; no further action.

The Revd Canon Dr Bob Reiss, Senior Reviewer
July 2017