



THE CHURCH
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Ministry Council

Follow-up Inspection Report

Lincoln School of Theology

July 2014

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Senior Inspector's follow-up Report on the Response of the Lincoln School of Theology to the Recommendations of the May 2013 Report of the Inspectors

July 2014

INTRODUCTION

The follow-up took the form of a discussion between the Principal and the Senior Inspector in Lincoln on 7th July 2014, based on the report of the Inspection, the Action Plan dated 11/11/13 and extracts from relevant items in the minutes of the Governing Council, the Management Committee, Worship and Community Life Sub-Committee, Academic Sub-Committee, Staff/Student Forum and the Tutors' Afternoons.

The specific recommendations of the Inspection Report are noted in **bold**, the response of the School in *italics*, followed by the comments of the Senior Inspector.

BACKGROUND DEVELOPMENTS

Prior to the inspection, there were changes to the status of the School as it became independent from the partnership it had with the Lincoln Diocese, the Cathedral, Lincoln University and Bishop Grosseteste University. Three major areas of change and uncertainty were evident at the time of the inspection, which have all been satisfactorily addressed in the last year.

A. Revised governance arrangements were introduced just prior to the inspection and are now operating satisfactorily. The Governing Council will now be reconstituted to meet the demands of Durham University as the School introduces the Common Awards programme.

B. The University of Lincoln decision to stop enrolling School of Theology students after 2012 and the registration of the 2012 and 2013 cohorts for a Certificate in Christian Theology validated by Anglia Ruskin University and ending at Christmas 2013, resulted in the School offering an unaccredited programme in Lent and Trinity terms 2014. The programme was that formerly used in meeting the requirements of the University of Lincoln and was assessed and administered in accordance with the requirements of that University, with an Examination Board and marking regulations. In validating the School, Durham University have accredited the results of these arrangements, accepting them as prior learning for the Common Awards programme. There are now no formal links with either the University of Lincoln or Anglia Ruskin University.

C. The library and administration were formerly based in a building leased by the University of Lincoln which was unavailable to the School from the

Michaelmas term 2013. At the time of the inspection there was an agreement in principle with Bishop Grosseteste University that it would be the base for the School, but after further discussion the University was after all, unable to offer the office or library space that the School needs. The library and administration is now sited in the east end of a former church on the site of Church House, near the weekend teaching accommodation. The new arrangement offers adequate space for teaching, the library and staff offices.

The diocese is currently in the process of re-evaluating its accommodation and there are plans to relocate Church House offices and personnel within the city of Lincoln, in the next year or so. The School of Theology is part of the vision for this central diocesan resource which will provide room for offices and dedicated teaching and library space.

Recommendation 1

We recommend that due to the importance of the negotiations regarding the move to Bishop Grosseteste University, the Governing Council be represented in the negotiations.

In September 2013, the Governing Council agreed that the Diocesan Secretary should be its representative on the team involved in any future negotiations with Bishop Grosseteste University.

Although the move to the University has not taken place, the School met our recommendation before the proposed link with the University was abandoned.

Recommendation 2

We recommend that more consideration be given to ways in which liturgical principles may be expressed, particularly in the innovative worship of the community.

In response to this recommendation, the School has taken several steps, as follows.

It has developed a seasonal timetable of staff-led worship, modelling good practice in creativity and liturgical tradition. The timetable of worship at seminar days was adjusted accordingly in 2013-14, and a new timetable (incorporating the revised principles) has been developed for the academic year 2014-15. Given the importance attached to the strategy, the process was been overseen by the Principal and our two Directors of Formation.

Because liturgical principles are expressed not only at seminar days in Lincoln, but also in the tutor group work around the diocese, the focus has also been on liturgy in small groups. A refresher teaching session on the use of liturgy in small

groups was provided at the School for Local Group Tutors at the regular Tutors' Afternoon meeting in January 2014. This session was appreciated by the tutors, who shared good practice in discussion, and then took ideas back to their local groups to enhance the worship and liturgy there.

Following a valuable Consultation Group meeting about worship convened by the School in November 2013, the Worship Sub-Committee worked on the preparation of guidelines for student-led worship to encourage creativity and innovation. Once the report of the diocesan review of ministry training became available, and the future direction of the School was clarified, the Principal was in a position to allocate the task of oversight of worship to a named individual. Over the summer 2014, a significant amount of work has been undertaken by the LST Director of Ordinand Formation in this respect, in consultation with the LST Director of Reader Formation, and the Principal. The programme for worship, and guidelines for students and staff, will be issued at the start of the academic year 2014-15.

As part of the development of the community's worship and liturgy, a revised feedback system has been trialled and subsequently further developed. After the piloting of a pro-forma for written feedback, the decision was taken to provide oral feedback in a supportive and safe environment to those leading worship at seminar days. With effect from the start of the 2014-15 academic year, feedback will be given to the relevant individuals/groups during the afternoon tea-break: responsibility for co-ordinating this lies with the LST Director of Ordinand Formation, who will attend on each occasion, along with a Chaplain. A group of volunteer students will be recruited to be involved in each feedback session, ensuring that peer review is at the heart of the new scheme.

The planned reconfiguring of the School's premises over the summer of 2014 is due to provide enhanced space for the storage of worship and liturgy resources (including worship books, other paper resources, musical instruments, and an archive of service sheets for worship led at the School). The School also plans to use its site within the Common Awards Virtual Learning Environment (CAVLE) to store and make available resources. In addition to uploading its own resources, the School will provide links on its CAVLE site to external websites on which students can draw to develop traditional and innovative worship. One important aspect of the new programme for community worship at the School is the variety of styles it encompasses; and the individual styles have been allocated to groups of students who will not necessarily be familiar with them, meaning that research, enquiry and exploration become important components of the group-work and preparation.

This recommendation has been fully implemented and the detail involved recognises the concerns of the inspectors.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that the School consider the appointment of one or more members of staff, existing or new, to take responsibility for all aspects of training in the preparation and conduct of public worship, for issuing appropriate guidelines for preaching and the conduct of worship and developing consistent mechanisms for feedback.

This recommendation was discussed by the Governing Council at its meeting in September 2013, and optimum staff numbers and roles were subsequently developed by the (then) Acting Principal. Job descriptions and person specifications were drafted. The eventual decision about staff changes was deferred until the report of the internal review of ministry training was received by the Governing Council in March 2014. Appointments were subsequently made to two new half-time roles, and the individuals concerned (one of whom was on the existing staff and the other new to the core staff) took up their posts at the beginning of July 2014. Training in the preparation and conduct of public worship and preaching is at the heart of the job descriptions for both the LST Director of Ordinand Formation and the LST Director of Reader Formation.

As reported above [see recommendation 2], a consistent mechanism for feedback has been trialled and further developed; and the new scheme is ready for launch at the start of the academic year 2014-15.

Ideally, rethinking the programme of liturgical training would have included the input of the new appointments, but it is understandable that the decision was taken to go ahead with rethinking the programme before the outcome of the internal diocesan review was known. The decision to appoint two new half-time roles is welcomed and should raise the profile of liturgical studies and practice within the programme.

Recommendation 4

We recommend that the practice of encouraging OLM and Reader candidates to establish Local Formation Groups be extended to candidates for Stipendiary and Non-Stipendiary ministry.

The initial response of the School to this recommendation was to re-write the relevant section of the Student Handbook to include Local Formation Groups (LFGs) for all students. All students demonstrated their awareness of LFGs and their value in supporting developing ministries at their first one-to-one sessions with staff of the School in 2013-14. All students have now been encouraged to establish LFGs, and the Directors of Formation have followed up the requests and are supporting new groups.

This is a very satisfactory response to our recommendation.

Recommendation 5

We recommend that the academic sub-committee implement procedures to ensure that student work is normally returned within a suitable time.

Written procedures on the marking, moderation and return of student work were drawn up by the Registrar, in consultation with the Principal. Before each assignment is submitted by students, a draft schedule for its marking and return is prepared by the Registrar and scrutinized by the Principal. The agreed schedule is then circulated to relevant staff (including those with responsibility for first marking, second marking and moderation). During the marking period, progress against agreed dates is monitored closely by the Registrar.

On each occasion during the academic year 2013-14, student work was marked and returned within a suitable time. This meant that work was typically returned (with written comments and provisional marks, subject to approval by the External Examiner) within three weeks. The new scheme ensured that students were able to draw on the feedback on their last assignment to inform and enhance work on their subsequent assignment. The scheme is working satisfactorily and no complaints have been received.

There has been a thorough review of the situation and there is no apparent reason why the inspectors' concern should not be met.

Recommendation 6

We recommend that Local Group Tutors receive copies of student marks and any comments on their work.

Through the relevant section of the Student Handbook issued at the start of the academic year 2013-14, all students were notified about plans to circulate comments on their assignments and (provisional) marks to their Local Group Tutor. The Handbook invited students to opt out of this system, if they were not content that their marks/comments be shared in this way. No student subsequently opted out of the system. With effect from the first assignment of 2013-14, the Registrar sent each Local Group Tutor (in confidence) the markers' comments and marks for his/her group of students. The School understands that this additional information has been of great benefit to Tutors (in both an academic and pastoral context), as they support students through their training.

The 'SOAP' (Student on a Page) system, implemented part way through the academic year 2013-14, now ensures that marks and progress of students in each Local Tutor Group are monitored in detail by the Academic Sub-Committee (under reserved business) and reports made to the Management Committee. Assuring quality in this manner, through the new SOAP system, will alert the School to any unexpected discrepancies and potential concerns. The Principal

would take remedial action, as necessary, through the normal channels; and appropriate strategies would be put in place through regular staff development procedures.

The School anticipates that the student progress data available through Durham University and CAVLE will enable such monitoring to continue; but, at least in the short- to medium-term, the School will persevere with SOAP to facilitate appropriate monitoring by the Academic Sub-Committee and Management Committee.

This recommendation has been implemented fully.

Recommendation 7

We recommend that where appropriate, more opportunities for open and honest discourse are encouraged.

The mechanisms through which students contribute to dialogue within the School have been greatly enhanced since the Inspection Team visited in May 2013. In particular, the whole learning community meets to consider matters of common interest during the lunch-break on each Saturday seminar day. The first half of the 30-minute Community Meeting is conducted by the Elected Student Representatives with no staff members present; and the Principal and other staff then join the meeting to respond to points raised and to answer questions. This system is working extremely well, and staff have been able to respond promptly to matters that the students have put forward (either during the meeting, or immediately afterwards by correspondence). In addition, students have been appointed to serve on the three sub-committees of the Management Committee; and staff have welcomed the valuable contributions made by the individuals concerned. From 2014-15, under the terms of the Durham University validation contract, the Elected Student Representatives will serve on the TEI Management Committee; and School staff and other committee members look forward to their input in this new context.

In addition, lecturing staff are to be briefed at the start of the academic year 2014-15 about suitable mechanisms to engender a culture of critical engagement by the students within teaching sessions.

The new system of student members on the three sub-committees has been well received by the Management Committee and Governing Council and it has worked well. The final paragraph of the School's response to this recommendation is particularly welcome and it is hoped that it will result in a more actively critical learning process.

Recommendation 8

We recommend that the training and experience of the staff be reviewed to identify any areas where the theological credentials of the School might, over time, need to be increased.

As part of the ongoing staff development process (rooted in regular one-to-one meetings, and peer review), the Principal has reviewed the training and experience of the core staff, occasional lecturers and volunteer staff, in order to identify where the overall profile of the School might be enhanced. Action upon this review was contingent upon the outcome of the diocesan internal review of ministry training (October 2013 – March 2014) and the validation by Durham University / Ministry Division in relation to the Common Awards (April 2014). Once the School had negotiated these hurdles successfully and its future was secure, new lecturers were recruited for 2014. Recruitment has focused on increasing the overall calibre of staff who contribute directly to teaching contact hours; and all new occasional staff possess a doctorate in their field of expertise.

In response to one of the recommendations arising from the Durham University Validation Event, the School has opened discussions with St John's College Nottingham to determine whether there might be sharing of one or more Common Awards Level 6 options to mutual benefit. Moreover, when the School prepares its paperwork for validation of a Common Awards MA, contacts will be explored with other neighbouring TElS in order to secure the widest possible range of Level 7 options so that the eventual programme suits the ministerial and missional context of the Diocese of Lincoln going forward.

As the recommendation implied, in our view the School needed to look at potential staffing needs in both the present and the future. This has been reflected in the recognition of the need to increase the staff and continue to monitor their quality. This meets the potential needs of the School as identified in the inspection.

Recommendation 9

We recommend that the student handbook be revised and expanded so that the rationale and content outline of programmes is set out and policies on differences, welfare, complaints, discipline, assessment and reporting are included.

In consultation with the Principal, the Registrar revised the Student Handbook for 2013-14, as requested. Current students were signposted to the academic and other policies of the University of Lincoln or Anglia Ruskin University (as appropriate, according to their registration). This handbook was issued in hard copy, circulated electronically and uploaded to Moodle (the School's VLE).

Subsequently, work started on revising the Student Handbook in readiness for the Durham Common Awards programmes, but in the early summer of 2014 the School's work was delayed while it awaited certain information, templates and policy approval by Durham University. Nonetheless, the School anticipated that the Handbook (and associated academic policies) would be available in good time for the start of the new academic year.

The recommendation has been implemented fully, and has been available on the Internet.

Recommendation 10

We recommend that the student handbook makes clear in what capacity a member of staff is offering counselling in relation to formation for ministry.

The Student Handbook was revised accordingly. However, at its meeting in September 2013, the Governing Council reviewed the situation. Upon the advice of external members, the Council decided that counselling in relation to formation for ministry by a member of the School staff should be halted with immediate effect and alternative arrangements (external to the School) made should the need arise in future.

The decision of the Council is welcomed. No further action in relation to the recommendation is therefore warranted.

Recommendation 11

We recommend that a more rigorous procedure be established for the gathering of written reports from staff, local tutors and incumbents to feed into end-of-year reports, and that the reports are agreed by the core staff.

During Michaelmas Term 2013, the Principal developed a suitable procedure (including timetable) for obtaining written reports from appropriate School staff, Local Group Tutors and incumbents to feed into the end-of-year reporting process. There followed consultation with relevant parties about the procedure and schedule. The revised arrangements (including appropriate forms for completion by those reporting on candidates) were trialled successfully in the Spring of 2014, with core staff involved in agreeing the substance of reports (through the regular weekly Core Staff Meetings, and also through membership of the Academic Sub-Committee). The changes were thus implemented in time for reports prior to ordination / licensing in 2014.

This recommendation has been implemented in full and successfully trialled before full implementation.

CONCLUSION

As is evidenced in the written response to the Inspection, the School has responded positively to the recommendations with the same attention to detail and the same concern to develop the course that the inspectors found during the inspection. All the recommendations have been given thorough attention, the staff has been developed, there is a vision for the future and the various major challenges it faced in 2013 and 2014 have been faced and uncertainties constructively resolved.

The report claimed that at the time of the inspection, the School was 'a work in progress'. The developments in the past year show that work to have been progressed, resulting in the School being very well-placed to develop as a major provider of ministerial training in the region and become an outstanding training course.

Dr Colin Brown, Senior Inspector
10 October 2014