

# Ministry Council: Periodic External Review Follow-up Report

## Oak Hill College

September 2017

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## Senior Reviewer's Follow-up Report to the April 2016 Periodic External Review

### Introduction

In the 17 months since my first visit to Oak Hill, the College has been through testing times after the sad and untimely death of its Principal, Revd Dr Mike Ovey in January this year. The whole Review Team offered its sincere condolences to the community when we received the news and continue to pray for them.

The search for a new Principal took many months and the College were kind enough to seek my views in their development of the search criteria. In August it was announced that the Revd Jonathan Jukes, currently Rector of Kirk Ella and Willerby in Hull and a long-time member of the College Council, was to be appointed as the new College President, with effect from January 2018. During my follow-up visit I was able to speak with Jonathan and with the Chair of the College Council, as well as with the Acting Principal; their passion and vision for Oak Hill remains undaunted. Necessarily, because of his very different background, Jonathan will occupy a different role in College to Mike but there is a very strong and capable team to work with, giving complete confidence that the academic and formational life of the College will be as strong as ever.

As always, I was made very welcome on my follow-up visit, particularly by the Acting Principal Dan Strange and by their Quality Assurance and Assessment Manager, Anne Andrews, who made my job so much easier. The staff and students at the College are a pleasure to spend time with and I offer them my thanks for their attention and engagement in the process.

### The Recommendations and Continued Observation

The ethos of the College is very distinctive – staff and students are hard-working and focused, and there is a strong emphasis on didactic teaching in worship as well as in academic life. They are in the business of training pastor-theologians, ideally able to read the text in the original Greek and Hebrew and to interpret it faithfully in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Theologically and liturgically, they are distinctively evangelical. It would not suit everyone but all aspects of college life are internally consistent and harmonious. Oak Hill does what it does very well indeed.

A few key themes became apparent during the follow-up visit, both as a result of the work on the Recommendations but also in response to the changing times and personnel at the College:

- A renewed desire to equip men and women for a flexible and changing ministry. The College has heard the challenge to it to ensure that Oak Hill ordinands are deployable, able to adapt to a changing church and to oversee multiple places of worship of varying worship styles.
- An increased emphasis on developing 'teachability', a characteristic being increasingly modelled by the Faculty
- A greater sensitivity to diversity and difference
- Renewed attention to collaboration and mutual feedback and resourcing

Each of these themes is to be commended as adding breadth to the Oak Hill offering. Without losing their distinctiveness, future Oak Hill graduates will have a wider range of tools in the ministerial toolbox.

## **Recommendation 1**

**We recommend that the College engages with Ministry Division and the House of Bishops to agree a plan which ensures the flourishing of the College in the context of the Five Guiding Principles.**

The College has been working on this area both internally and externally. Internally, the Five Guiding Principles already formed part of the curriculum for Anglican Ministry II (second-year module); in light of the PER Report, the Director of Anglican Ministry Training added a segment into Anglican Ministry I as well, asking ordinands to familiarise themselves with the Principles during their very first week of study to inform class discussions during the year. At the same time, he has initiated a series of evening seminars (approximately once a term) which are intended to provide ordinands with a forum in which to discuss matters of importance in the contemporary Anglican Church: the first of these (March 2017) focused on the Five Guiding Principles.

At the same time, both the Chair of the College Council and the Director of Anglican Ministry Training have had discussions with the Bishop of Peterborough about how best to communicate the College's desire to work fruitfully with the wider Church on this issue. Over the last eighteen months, the College has been delighted to receive visits from a number of Bishops and DDOs from around the country, and has been especially pleased to welcome representatives from dioceses with whom the College has had little contact in recent years. By the same token, part of the remit for the Director of Anglican Ministry Training during 2017-18 will be a more ambassadorial role, which will include visits to dioceses around the UK; from January 2018, the College's new President will also have a significant part to play in this work.

*Recommendation fully implemented, no further action*

## **Recommendation 2**

**We recommend that the College work with Ministry Division and Durham University to ensure that it is consistent with the Church of England's current policy on Common Awards as soon as is practically possible.**

This was a sphere in which the College's Principal played an especially active role such that, inevitably, work on the project was particularly impacted by his sudden death in January 2017. Nevertheless, discussions have continued with the Ministry Division in particular, led by the Chairman of the College Council and the Acting Principal. During the summer term of 2016-17, a member of the College's Faculty (who has a particular responsibility for learning architecture) was given a leave of absence from her teaching responsibilities to undertake a project mapping the College's programmes onto the Common Awards Scheme, encompassing both undergraduate and postgraduate study. She has now submitted her report to the Leadership Team and discussions will continue over the coming weeks, drawing in the College's new President in January 2018.

Given the above, it would seem sensible to delay a final decision on this subject until the early part of 2018. However, the thrust of the recommendation stands: the current situation needs to be addressed and ideally before the College embarks on the work required for its re-validation with Middlesex University in 2019/20. One important issue appears to be the amount of time given to the study of biblical languages at Oak Hill compared to that prescribed in Common Awards and certainly we found that the quality of teaching in this area and the related area of biblical studies was exceptional when we visited last year. It may be that this is a fruitful area for the College to explore with Ministry Division and with Durham, asking the question whether

the College might be able to offer a particular learning resource to the wider Church which may or may not fit within Common Awards.

*Recommendation not yet implemented – further decisive action is required within the next 12 months*

### **Recommendation 3**

**We recommend that more members of the Faculty take up the opportunities offered by their validating university to reflect on their teaching and to learn about practice within the HE sector more broadly.**

Over the last year, the College has been looking carefully at the area of continuing professional development for Faculty: this has included changes to the Annual Appraisal system, to the process for peer review (see Recommendation 12 below) and to the sharing of best practice at regular staff meetings; in so doing, the College has drawn on expertise from within its validating University in a number of ways.

The Annual Appraisal system has been re-shaped to further strengthen its developmental aspect and is now supplemented by termly follow-up meetings with the Acting Academic Dean to review progress and areas in which further support may be required: part of this includes an encouragement to take up training opportunities offered both by Middlesex University and by the Higher Education Academy. The College's University Link Tutor and the Centre for Academic Partnerships have been particularly helpful in this regard, for example furnishing information about possible courses to share at regular staff meetings. At the same time, University Away Days and meetings of the Partner Institution Forum have recently placed a strong emphasis on pedagogy and sector best practice, and a number of teaching and support staff have benefitted from these sessions.

*Recommendation fully implemented, no further action*

### **Recommendation 4a**

**We recommend that the same broad equality and diversity statement in the Kingham Hill Trust's Handbook be used in all policy documents and publications.**

Given the importance of this issue, and the fact that there is a wide ethnic diversity across the staff, the College had already been working for some months on an Equality and Diversity Policy covering a number of key areas. Following a number of reviews, including a legal review, the draft policy is to be presented to the College Council at its November meeting and, if approved, sent on to the Trust for final approval. In the meantime, College and Council have agreed a revised statement for its handbooks and other literature, to the effect that "Oak Hill College is fully committed to treating all members of its community with fairness, dignity, and respect. We support diversity and promote equality for all of our staff and students, in a manner consistent with the College's Christian ethos and mission." This statement has been posted on the College's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and will be followed by the policy in full once it has been approved.

The thrust of our original recommendation was that the Policy statement should be clear and unambiguous. Once the full Policy has been agreed and published, we would hope that any potential ambiguity which might arise as a result of different interpretations of the phrase 'in a manner consistent with the College's Christian ethos and mission' would be laid to rest.

*Recommendation not yet fully implemented, plans in place – no further action*

#### **Recommendation 4b**

**We recommend that the particular experiences and gifts of ethnic minorities are more actively encouraged and integrated into College life.**

Alongside the work outlined above with respect to the formal policy, the College has also been looking at ways in which attitudes and perceptions can fruitfully be challenged within the College community for example:

- meetings between the Acting Principal and students with protected characteristics, seeking their advice on how the College can foster greater diversity within the student population, for example, the possible appointment of a Diversity Rep;
- guided discussions in Fellowship Groups on issues related to ethnicity with feedback to subsequent staff meetings;
- encouragement to visiting speakers in Chapel to share insights from their own ethnic traditions/backgrounds (as appropriate);
- the organisation of Prayer Meetings, drawing on styles of prayer from (for example) Africa, China and Latin America with the intention that aspects of this will be folded into the main College prayer meetings during 2017-18.

*Recommendation fully implemented, no further action*

#### **Recommendation 5a**

**We recommend that use is made of experimental liturgies from more meditative traditions to enhance the breadth and variety of worship.**

The College is trying some alternative styles of worship in its occasional services, for example its monthly Compline. An explicit encouragement is given to students to explore and make use of alternative liturgies and to share these with the Chaplain for inclusion within subsequent briefings given to students: this is done, for example, in the Chapel Handbook and through a list of possible resources (printed and online) which is included on each Chapel Rota/Lectioary. The College has also made an effort to ensure that appropriate space is allowed for contemplation and meditation within services (for example, incorporating periods of quiet both before and at the end of worship to encourage a reflective, prayerful response).

Whilst some progress has been made since last year, the style of worship is still very wordy and intense – the underlying culture of those who make up the community at Oak Hill is firmly shaped in a conservative evangelical tradition and this would be hard to change in any meaningful way. The (relatively new) Chaplain has a good understanding of ‘space’ both in terms of physical space (see below) and liturgical space and will continue to stretch the community to develop more of an appreciation of this area where possible.

*Recommendation not yet fully implemented, action continues.*

#### **Recommendation 5b**

**We recommend that the projection screen above the chancel area be relocated to give a sense of spaciousness in worship and to restore the visual focus of the full-length hanging behind the Lord’s Table.**

Initially, the College hoped that it might be possible simply to stow the projection screen during services. Unfortunately, it quickly became apparent that the mechanism has deteriorated over time and that stowing the current screen would be both noisy and distracting. Various other options are being considered as part of a wider upgrade of the audio-visual system in chapel and funds are already being set aside.

In the meantime, it is now more common for the chairs within Chapel to be moved to enable more of a sense of spaciousness to reflect the style of worship in any particular service. This has happened in consultation with the College's worshipping community and has been well received.

During the follow-up meeting, it was possible to clarify with the Chaplain the underlying intention behind this recommendation: that more thought be put into the visual aesthetics of the worship space in the Chapel. There was a good acceptance that the current situation is not ideal and a clear commitment made to reflect more carefully and more imaginatively on how the space might be used to enhance visual as well as aural aspects of worship.

*Recommendation not yet implemented – to be carried forward to the next Review*

### **Recommendation 6a**

**We recommend that a list of local spiritual directors from various traditions be drawn up for the use of tutors as they help students find a suitable person to accompany them on their journey in a confidential setting outside of the college and that they explore ways of preparing students to avail themselves of this support in their future ministries.**

A set of guidelines for potential spiritual directors has been drawn up (linked to the College's Safeguarding Policy) and the Director of Anglican Ministry Training and the Director of College Placements have prepared a list of potential directors from a range of traditions, drawing on the College's pool of placement supervisors. Potential directors have been contacted and the intention is that in October each year, once the ordinands have had a few weeks to settle into College life, their personal tutors will discuss spiritual direction with them (in particular where this has been recommended by their DDO or Bishops' Advisory Panel) and will then begin the process of matching them with an appropriate local minister. The process will be reviewed at the end of the academic year and the College will then begin preparations for 2018-19.

*Recommendation fully implemented, no further action*

### **Recommendation 6b**

**We recommend that, when further appointments are made the College consider including expertise in the traditions of Christian spirituality as part of the job description.**

The College has noted this recommendation and will ensure that it is taken into account as relevant academic appointments are made. In the meantime, a particular focus for teaching on this subject is provided by the Gospel-Driven Leadership module, the first term of which is devoted to the spirituality of the minister, for example: the development of a rich and varied prayer life, including meditation and contemplation; the development of spiritual disciplines; the importance of Sabbath rest and of 'being' before 'doing'; the sacraments; worship; retreat; and readings from spiritual writers throughout church history. The students are also encouraged to keep a spiritual journal throughout the module, to enable them to reflect and process spiritual truths more thoughtfully.

*Recommendation not yet fully implemented, plans in place – no further action*

## Recommendation 7

**We recommend that the College reviews the Anglican Ministry modules to ensure that the taught material and assessments are given appropriate weight within the curriculum.**

Because Anglican Ministry I and Anglican Ministry II are compulsory modules for the FdA and BA (Hons) awards, it was not possible to undertake an immediate review of their weighting within the curriculum without triggering a full programme review. However, planning for the next Undergraduate Programmes Review will begin early in the autumn term, and this recommendation will form a significant part of the College's deliberations. Furthermore, Oak Hill's incoming President has had many years of parish experience and will undoubtedly want to help the College to shape its ongoing provision in this area.

Meanwhile, the Anglican and Independent Ministry modules have been kept under regular review to ensure that they continue to prepare candidates well for their future ministries: for example in 2016-17, in response to a request from students in their module feedback, the tutors taught a larger number of sessions together in order to help students gain a deeper understanding of the differences between Anglicans and Independents on a number of key ecclesiological and theological issues. At the same time, as mentioned above, new material on the Five Guiding Principles has been added to Anglican Ministry I.

*Recommendation not yet fully implemented, plans in place – no further action*

## Recommendation 8a

**We recommend that the important issues around the pastoral implications of life cycle events are explored in relation to men's lives as well as women's, for example by having a module on the role of gender in the pastoral care of both women and men.**

As a first step, the College discussed this recommendation with current module tutors to see where existing provision could be further developed, for example within modules on Pastoral Care & Theology and on the Pastoral Epistles. The College then moved on to look at the possibility of adding new material. In discussion with Faculty, proposals were fleshed out for two new ten-credit elective modules: first, an expansion of the current Women's Ministry course into a module on *Ministry to Men & Women*; and secondly an extension of the existing course on Place & Culture into a module on *Place, Time & Culture*, drawing in ministry to the elderly and with an awareness of age and generations that is both theologically controlled and sociologically informed. Module Narratives for both of these modules are now in preparation ahead of the January 2018 Academic Board. If the proposals are accepted, the plan is to offer the modules for the first time in the academic year 2018-19 and to include them as part of the Undergraduate Programmes Review (either as electives or as compulsory modules, depending on how the programme proposals develop).

*Recommendation not yet fully implemented, plans in place – no further action*

## Recommendation 8b

**We recommend that the College carries out a mapping exercise to discover where the ministry of women is considered across the curriculum as a whole.**

The curriculum mapping exercise was carried out during the autumn term of 2016-17 across all four years of study. The information gathered through this exercise was collated by the Quality Assurance & Enhancement Manager, and will form part of the Undergraduate Programmes Review this year.



*Recommendation fully implemented, no further action*

### **Recommendation 9**

**We recommend that the College seeks to merge more modules and to reduce the number of assessment components for each module.**

As noted with respect to Recommendation 7 above, it was not possible to take action on this immediately without triggering a full programme review; instead, it was agreed that this recommendation should form part of the discussions pertaining to the next scheduled review. In the meantime, the College has undertaken some research amongst students asking them to estimate the number of hours spent each week on each module and comparing this with the QAA Quality Code guideline of ten hours per credit point. A key finding was that, while the College's overall provision is well within the QAA guideline (i.e. 1200 hours for a full-time student taking 120 credits-worth of modules), students are spending proportionately more time on the smaller units of study. The College will use this data to inform changes to the programme.

For 2017-18, the College has re-shaped its academic year structure, adding more reading/revision/consolidation weeks and inserting an extra examination period at the end of Term 2 to ease the load at the end of Term 3. This is to be reviewed in Summer 2018 to see how successful it has been in terms of reducing perceived pressure at key points during the academic year.

The ethos of the College is hard-working and didactic, a distinctive feature of the wider constituency it serves. To change this culture would take significant effort (and there is little appetite to do so) although there was some acceptance that this culture could shape a future ministry that was 'driven', with the attendant risks to well-being that this can bring. The College does, however, take seriously the care and welfare of its students and is trying to ensure that students are not given impossible academic burdens and are given the tools of self-care which enable them to flourish during their time at College and beyond. The students interviewed during the follow-up meeting appeared to be stretched but not stressed.

*Recommendation not yet fully implemented, plans in place – no further action*

### **Recommendation 10**

**We recommend that the College takes steps to improve the induction of all markers so that they use the set criteria.**

In terms of induction for new teaching staff/markers, this has been further developed since the Review in a number of respects. In particular, new staff now spend more time with the Academic Dean and Academic Administration Team in their first few weeks, looking at the College's particular approach to learning, teaching and assessment; more broadly, the Marking Guidelines for teaching staff and the Faculty Handbook have both been updated with a view to guiding all staff more easily through the marking process and to stress the importance of key requirements, such as use of the standard marking criteria.

More widely, over the course of the last year the College has undertaken a number of other assessment-related projects. To begin with, the Learning Teaching & Assessment Strategy has been fully updated and the College has developed a new Assessment Policy: both documents were approved by the Academic Board in July 2017. During 2016-17, a number of CPD sessions were devoted to assessment, for example a workshop on marking against the standard criteria led by the Acting Academic Dean. At the same time, steps have been taken to standardise much of the assessment-related paperwork with a view to providing transparent and consistently-presented information for students. In 2016-17, the College introduced new Assessment



Feedback Sheets, which required markers to provide: an indication of which TLOs have been met by each task; details of which marking criteria have been used and how the student has fared against them; and formative and summative comments on each piece of work. Following on from this, at the start of 2017-18, the College introduced a standard assessment package template, setting out the required information (submission dates, feedback dates, TLOs, reading lists etc.) in a consistent and transparent manner.

*Recommendation fully implemented, no further action*

## **Recommendation 11**

**We recommend that the College continues to strive toward a more gender-balanced Faculty as and when vacancies occur; and continues to build capacity for the future through encouragement and engagement with potential theological educators.**

As with Recommendation 6b above, the College is keen to act on this as Faculty positions become available. In recent months, the HR Manager has been systematically reviewing advertisements and role descriptions for all College vacancies with a view to countering any unintentional bias. In the meantime, the College has continued to invite ordained women to participate in College life in various ways, for example by preaching in chapel, by participating in the teaching programme, and by offering one-off lectures (for example through the regular Postgraduate Seminars); a female (ordained) member of the College Council is also regularly invited to provide a female perspective on College matters (both in Council meetings and at other times) and was part of the Selection Committee which appointed the new President.

Looking to the future, the College is committed to working with female ordinands who are identified as potential theological educators, as well as with women from other church backgrounds who are pursuing their vocation in theological education. In terms of policy, the College has presented a strategy paper to the Finance & General Purposes Committee (F&GP) setting out its Developing Theological Educators initiative, and hopes to further develop this work over the next few academic years; at a practical level, the Acting Principal is currently in conversation with a female potential theological educator about ways in which the College can support her during her PhD studies, and can also make use of her expertise within the College's programmes.

*Recommendation not yet fully implemented, plans in place – no further action*

## **Recommendation 12**

**We recommend that the College reviews processes for induction support and Peer Review to ensure that they are always undertaken by colleagues with appropriate subject knowledge.**

As noted under Recommendation 10, the induction process for new teaching staff has been further developed this year, with a focus on equipping new staff with an understanding of the College's approach to pedagogy as well as with the practical information they need to comply with the College's procedures. At the same time, new members of staff are now assigned a mentor from the same subject area (wherever possible) who can help to guide them at least through their first academic cycle.

With respect to Peer Review, the former system was built upon tutor twinning: teaching staff were paired up at the beginning of the academic year and were asked to sit in on each other's classes and provide constructive written comments. Following a benchmarking exercise and attendance at a University event on peer review in November 2016, the College took the decision to replace the tutor twin system with a new

process built around tutor triplets: within the bounds of what is possible in the teaching timetable, each triplet contains two staff from the same academic discipline and a third member from a different discipline (re-shuffled year on year). Before each observation, the staff member being observed will set out their goals for the class and the areas on which they would particularly welcome feedback; follow-up then focuses on the extent to which their goals were met; examples of best practice which could be shared; and areas on which the staff member could work further. At the end of the process, the paperwork is shared with the Acting Academic Dean, and informs both Annual Appraisal and the selection of members of staff to lead a continuing professional development session during the next academic year.

*Recommendation fully implemented, no further action*

### **Recommendation 13**

**We recommend that the College and Council strive to build creative, strategic partnerships with the local Diocese(s) with regard to developing new patterns of training which fit with the College's ethos but are more financially sustainable for the Church.**

As with Recommendation 2, this was an area in which the College's Principal was particularly involved, with the result that work was paused for a time following his death in January. The new College President will pick up aspects of this work in 2018 and the College intends to consult with local dioceses about what kinds of provision would be most valuable to them as part of the forthcoming Undergraduate Programmes Review. The College is also looking at other ways of serving local dioceses outside the formal programme structure, for example through intensive courses and other forms of continuing professional development (e.g. through the postgraduate programmes).

*Recommendation not yet fully implemented, plans in place – no further action*

The Venerable Sam Rushton  
Senior Reviewer  
October 2017