

Ministry Council: Periodic External Review Report

St Albans Reader Ministry Training Programme

May – June 2017

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GLOSSARY

ASE	Annual Self-Evaluation
CfDM	Council for Discipleship and Ministry
CTF	Cambridge Theological Federation
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service
ERMC	Eastern Region Ministry Course
MMDR	Mission and Ministry Development Review
Moodle	Virtual learning environment
RMO	Reader Ministry Officer
RMTP	Reader Ministry Training Programme
SED	Self-evaluation document

LIST OF REVIEWERS

Revd Professor Jane de Gay Professor in English Literature, Leeds Trinity University, and Associate Priest, St Martin's Potternewton, Leeds. Senior Reviewer.

Canon Christine McMullen Former Vice-Principal of the Yorkshire Ministry Course, Tutor on the Derby Diocese Reader training course, Reader, and Chair of Derby Diocesan House of Laity.

Professor David Wilson, formerly Deputy Vice Chancellor and Dean of Business and Law, De Montfort University; currently Reader at Rothley Parish Church, Chair of Leicester Diocesan House of Laity, and a canon of Leicester Cathedral.

THE PERIODIC EXTERNAL REVIEW FRAMEWORK

For ministerial training institutions that offer the church's Durham University-validated Common Awards programmes (as most do), Periodic External Review is a joint process that meets the quality assurance needs both of the sponsoring churches and of Durham University, and enables the church to conduct an external quality check of each TEI against national standards and expectations for ministerial training and formation.

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.

For Durham University, the PER process is the university's mechanism for gathering and evaluating information from multiple sources in order to inform decision-making on: (i) renewal of the Common Awards partnerships with approved Theological Education Institutions (TEIs); (ii) revalidation of Common Awards programmes that have been approved for delivery within TEIs.

Review teams are appointed both by Ministry Division from a pool of reviewers nominated by bishops and TEIs and by Durham University's Common Awards office. The latter will take lead responsibility for PER criteria E and F covering teaching and learning infrastructure and delivery. In effect, this part of the review represents academic revalidation by Durham as the church's partner university. But evidence-gathering is shared and judgements are owned by the review team as a whole.

Recommendations and Commendations

PER reports will include **Recommendations** which may either be developmental, naming issues that the reviewers consider the TEI needs to address, or they may urge the enhance of practice that is already good. They will also include **Commendations**, naming instances of good practice that the reviewers specially wish to highlight. The reviewers' assessment of the TEI is expressed as much through the balance of Recommendations and Commendations in their report as through its criterion-based judgements.

Criteria-based judgements

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

Confidence

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

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

Confidence with qualifications

Overall outcome: likely to include commendations as well as 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.

Criterion 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.

Criterion 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.

In respect of Sections E–F, university validation does not currently apply a hierarchy of quality judgements. Instead, the practice is to grant continuing approval subject to the fulfilment of conditions expressed in the reviewers' recommendations. Thus, where Common Awards programmes are part of the PER, the reviewers' shared judgements under these two sections will normally be expressed as 'Confidence, subject to the implementation of the recommendations in this section'.

The Common Awards team's findings will be part of the joint PER report, but will also be included in a stand-alone report prepared for the university's governance bodies, and which can be made available to the TEI under review if wished.

*For training institutions that do **not** offer the Durham-validated Common Awards programmes, PER will be undertaken entirely by Ministry Division-appointed reviewers, applying criteria A-F but with appropriate adaptation in the case of E and F. Some diocesan Reader training schemes, for example, will fall into this category.*

REPORT OF THE PERIODIC EXTERNAL REVIEW OF THE ST ALBANS READER MINISTRY TRAINING PROGRAMME

May - June 2017

SUMMARY

Introduction

Reader training in the St Albans Diocese is currently located within the Council for Discipleship and Ministry (CfDM) and specifically within the work of the Ministry Development Team. Reader training is based on an informal partnership between St Albans Reader Ministry Training Programme (St Albans RMTP) and the Eastern Region Ministry Course (ERMC). ERMC is in turn part of the Cambridge Theological Federation (CTF), and both the CTF and ERMC offer the Common Awards programme of theological study validated by Durham University. Students have been taking the programme on a not-for-credit basis, but the current first years have been funded to take the programme for credit.

The current system for Reader training in the diocese dates back to 2009. Prior to this, there had been a student-led programme with no clear timetable or deadline for completion, overseen by a volunteer, a parish priest, with loose oversight from the diocese. This scheme had, not surprisingly, been found lacking in external reviews. In 2008, the diocese made a decision to bring Reader training back to the centre and created the role of RMO, with the remit of regularizing Reader training. The current RMO was appointed from this process and she set about developing a new programme. A decision was made in 2009 to go into partnership with ERMC, and the first programme devised by this partnership began that year. It took a few years to get all the Readers in training who had started on the old scheme to finish their training, although some agreed to join the new programme. With the launch of Common Awards in 2013, the partnership decided to adopt this framework and the programme was accordingly reworked to produce the system that is in operation today.

Programme structure

The programme has a three-part structure:

- (a) Students undertake an academically rigorous course of study. This element mainly comprises modules written by ERMC, validated by Durham within the Common Awards framework, and delivered by St Albans teaching staff in classes where Readers-in-training study alongside ordinands. Other modules are written and delivered by the St Albans RMTP team.
- (b) Students develop ministerial skills through involvement in their local parish/benefice and a placement, supported by supervision in both contexts.
- (c) Students have opportunities for spiritual formation, including an annual residential.

The Review

This Review took place primarily over two visits held at the St Albans Diocesan Offices at Holywell Hill, St Albans, which is the teaching venue for the programme, on 23 May 2017 and 6-7 June 2017. We conducted interviews with the RMO, the Director of Ministry, the CfDM Board Chair, students, graduates, tutors, pastoral and placement supervisors, and the Quality Nominee, as well as having the opportunity to learn more about the student experience through informal conversations. We also interviewed the Bishop of Hertford who is Warden of Readers for the diocese and two key members of staff from the Eastern Region Ministry Course (ERMC): the Director of Studies and the Principal. We also witnessed two evening teaching sessions: the primary mode of delivery of the programme. We were also supplied with a comprehensive set of documents for the course, including: the Programme Handbook for 2016-17, the ERMC Handbook for 2016-17, Self-Evaluation Reports, policy documents, minutes of management meetings, publicity materials, worship guidelines, sample assignments, and comments from students. We were also given access to the ERMC Moodle virtual learning environment (known as Hedwig): this includes learning and teaching materials, module descriptors, and documents related to governance and quality assurance. We are grateful to the RMO and her colleagues for their cheerful and efficient help throughout the process.

At the time of the review, there were 22 students on the programme, 8 in the first year, 4 in the second and 10 in the third.

Summary of outcomes

The Report is written in relation to the PER Criteria outlined in the September 2016 edition of the *Quality Assurance and Enhancement in Ministerial Formation Handbook*.

CRITERIA	OUTCOME
A Formational aims	Confidence
B Formational context	Confidence with qualifications
C Leadership and management	Confidence with qualifications
D Student outcomes	Confidence
E Partnership with university	Confidence
F Taught programmes	Confidence
Overall Outcome	Confidence

General Observations

The Report is written in relation to the PER Criteria outlined in the September 2016 edition of the *Quality Assurance and Enhancement in Ministerial Formation Handbook*.

STRENGTHS

- The strong sense of community among staff, students and graduates
- The quality of the teaching and of the learning and teaching materials
- The strength of Diocesan support for the programme and for Reader ministry more generally, and the integration of Reader ministry into the Diocese as a whole
- The provision of a Residential Retreat, Residential Conference and Study Tour.
- Strong and effective structures for the pastoral support of students
- The quality of the teaching accommodation

AREAS FOR ATTENTION

- There is need for a formal agreement with ERMIC and further discussions with Durham University and CTF.
- Safeguarding policies need to be clear and publicized.
- Risk management policies need to be in place.
- There is a need for a more formal understanding of the role of Quality Nominee.

FULL REPORT

SECTION A: FORMATIONAL AIMS

A1 The TEI's formational aims are clearly stated, understood and owned within the TEI.

1. The mission statement of the St Albans RMTP is set out most clearly in the SED:

'At the heart of our formation is Readers who are equipped for ministry in a variety of settings, both church-based and in the wider community, workplaces and schools. In St Albans diocese we do not have a catalogue range of authorised ministers (evangelists, youth, pastoral assistants) but we expect that each Reader will grow in Christ's ministry. Each Reader will become, by the end of training, a competent preacher, teacher and worship leader, but beyond that, their ministry might grow in a myriad of ways. Each Reader will, we hope, be able to talk about their faith and about Jesus in ways that attract people to want to know more; each Reader will, we hope, live out their faith in ways that show the face of God to those whom they meet.'

2. It would be helpful if this vision statement could be used more widely, for example in the Programme Handbook and online and that there could be a clearer statement of how the St Albans RMTP aimed to equip students to become Readers. We **recommend** that the section of the Handbook be reworded to reflect this.

Recommendation 1: We recommend that a vision statement is added to the Programme Handbook.

3. That said, St Albans Diocese provides some excellent public-facing materials on vocations and on Reader ministry in particular. The diocesan website includes an engaging introduction to what Reader ministry is, an enthusiastic and informative audio broadcast, and a photo gallery. We were given an informative leaflet on 'So what do Readers really do?' that included profiles of current Readers and their varied ministries, and a leaflet with an outline of the programme.
4. The aims, objectives and policies of the programme are consistent with the published guidelines for Readers at the stage of licensing as set out in 'Selection and Formation Guidelines for Readers' (Church of England Ministry Council, May 2014). The Programme Handbook uses these criteria to set out the role of Reader.

A2. The TEI's foundational aims are appropriate to the ministerial training requirements of its sponsoring churches.

5. St Albans Diocese, and the RMTP more specifically, are highly responsive to Church of England policies and initiatives. We found evidence that changes to the programme had been made in the light of *Renewal and Reform* (Church of England Archbishops' Council, 2010): for example, as the SED notes, a module on Adult Learning was added to the programme in response to this report. We were also impressed at

the willingness of staff to discuss the new report 'Setting God's People Free' (Church of England Archbishops' Council, 2017).

6. Reader Ministry is part of the Diocesan initiative 'Living God's Love', which responds to wider church policies, in that it 'encourages and challenges all people to explore ways of going deeper into God, transforming communities and making new disciples. Equipping God's People includes [Continuing Ministerial Development](#) for Clergy and Readers, [Lay Training](#) for all and courses run by the [Schools Team](#).'
7. As can be seen from these examples, there is strong evidence that the course's formational aims are subject to a regular review process: indeed, the development of the Reader Training Programme since the appointment of the current RMO is a case in point.

A3 The TEI's aims, activity and achievement are understood and supported by wider church audiences.

8. The excellent online publicity material (discussed at A1 above) and printed documentation give evidence of a desire to communicate the values of the Programme to the public. The diocesan website also gives evidence of effective use of opportunities for publicity, including a news item on a licensing service and a radio broadcast.
9. From the SED we learned that the Programme is well supported by Diocese: the three Bishops and senior staff are all supportive of Reader ministry. This was confirmed in our meeting with the Bishop of Hertfordshire who is Warden of Readers. Reader ministry is fully integrated into the work of the diocese: Readers are fully included in IME2 and CMD programmes and from 2017 they will also have an MMDR. The RMO has an office in the Diocesan Office. Reader ministry is also on the agenda for the Diocesan Vocations Team, and the RMO meets with the team twice a year. The CfDM Board Chair engages with Readers regularly: an aide memoire of its business over the past year demonstrates that Reader issues are regularly discussed.
10. From our interviews with the RMO, the Director of Ministry and the CfDM Board Chair, we learned that the programme is well funded. Examples of financial provision included the funding of an annual residential or trip and we were impressed that the 2017 event was a tour of the Holy Land. The diocese has also provided equipment on occasion for students facing financial hardship.
11. From statistics provided by the RMO on the gender and ethnicity of the student body, we noted that although women are well-represented, only 2 out of 22 students are from BAME. This is surprising, given that the diocese incorporates the ethnically-diverse areas of Luton and Bedford. More work needs to be done in this area, and the Director of Ministry and the CfDM Board Chair admitted in interview that not much thought had been given to this yet. The RMO intends to visit Luton Deanery to reach out to BAME groups but has not done so yet. We **recommend** that work is done to develop stronger networks through which Reader ministry might be promoted to these groups.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that the Programme team grow stronger networks for promotion of Reader ministry among ethnic minorities.

12. The team also admitted on the SED that further work is needed in order to encourage Reader vocations among young people. This could involve more work to define Reader ministry from other roles such as Pioneer Ministers that operate in several dioceses and often attract younger leaders. However, we note that work is being done in this area, and the Director of Ministry told us that the diocese has held some successful vocations days with contributions from existing Readers. We **encourage** the team to keep this under review.

The review team has Confidence with regard to Criterion A: Formational Aims.

SECTION B: FORMATIONAL CONTEXT

B1 The TEI draws on partnership with theological educators in the region and local faith community organizations to enhance training and formational opportunities for students.

13. The St Albans RMTP makes extensive use of the resources of ERMC, as most of the modules on the Programme have been written by ERMC staff and regional partners (and accredited by Durham under Common Awards). ERMC and diocesan staff prepare learning and teaching materials, including reading-lists and preparation tasks, which are posted on Moodle and used by tutors in each of the dioceses to deliver the modules. ERMC staff set and moderate online forum debates, which is a way of facilitating discussions among a disparate group of students: from interviews with students, this was clearly appreciated. ERMC plans delivery patterns and timetables and it administers assessment through an arrangement whereby local tutors mark randomly-allocated scripts from across the region, with ERMC moderating and approving the marks.
14. This system has great potential, but from our interviews with the RMO, tutors, past students and current students, we note that this can be a source of frustration. St Albans staff can feel that they are not kept up to date on arrangements for delivery patterns and timetables and on the progress of marking. Our interviews with past students and students in their second and third-year cohorts revealed that late return of marks and feedback had caused considerable consternation. However we heard from the Director of Studies at the ERMC that work has been done to streamline the marking process and the present first-year students reported that they were satisfied with the speed of feedback, so this issue, at least appears to have been resolved.
15. Frustration was also expressed at the speed at which material is made available on Moodle: we were told that sometimes preparation tasks were not issued until the day before a tutorial, which can be a major problem for students whose domestic or work commitments mean they are studying within tight timetables. In our interview with ERMC staff, we were told that this element should improve as the implementation of Moodle has also been a huge undertaking but once all the module areas have been fully populated it will be much easier to keep them up to date.
16. From meeting tutors and observing sessions, we saw good evidence of co-operation among tutors from the different dioceses who deliver modules in their respective local settings. For example, they shared good practice, ideas and learning materials with their counterparts. From our interview with the RMO, we learned that she meets ERMC every 2 months, mostly for practical business. More work needs to be done in this area, however, and, as we discuss in C1 below, more work to be done to put the arrangements on a more formal basis.
17. From our meetings with students, it would seem that students do not have a detailed understanding of the relationship of ERMC. Some students were aware that it provided an opportunity for networking at occasional teaching sessions and online, but many students regarded ERMC as a remote body and a source of frustration. We **recommend** that the St Albans RMTP does more to communicate to students how processes for marking and uploading material operate, in order for them to better understand what ERMC can provide, and why some processes can take time.

Recommendation 3: We recommend better communication with students regarding the operation of the wider network. (See also Recommendations 4 and 11.)

18. ERMIC is also part of the Cambridge Theological Federation (CTF), but this body is remote for the St Albans course, and there has only been one joint meeting so far. The Annual Self-Evaluation report (ASE) highlighted ambiguities in the relationship of the St Albans RMTP with both the CTF and Durham University: 'We need to feel less invisible to the Cambridge Federation and to Durham, which don't always seem to understand adult and distance/dispersed learning.' We nonetheless **recommend** further discussions in order that the various parties are better able to understand each other and that trainee Readers benefit from a more fruitful partnership.

Recommendation 4: We recommend that the Programme team seeks opportunities for further discussions with the Cambridge Theological Foundation and Durham University with the view to developing a more fruitful partnership.

19. The St Albans RMTP liaises with churches to enable students to get ministerial experience. Students gain experience in their local benefice or church, and their local incumbent is normally appointed as a pastoral supervisor. If this is not possible, such as in cases of illness or vacancy, arrangements are made by drawing on networks of clergy who have had involvement with Reader training. Students go to another church for their placement, and again are allocated a supervisor. Students come from a range of traditions, and from our interviews with both pastoral supervisors and placement supervisors, it is clear that they also represent a range of traditions.
20. The programme does not draw on ecumenical partnerships, but due to the specific nature of the Readers' role, it is appropriate that their ministerial training should be focused on the Anglican context.
21. The main vehicle for partnerships with other faiths is the Multi-Faith Awareness module which includes visits to places of worship and also a Faith Walk. We also heard of more informal ways in which students can engage with people of other faiths: for example, one of the churches regularly used for placements is in a street with five mosques.
22. From our interview with the RMO, we learned that some students have undertaken placements in hospitals, prisons and workplaces. We also heard examples of some informal links with community activities: students have often been involved in local initiatives before starting training, but are encouraged to give these up while taking the course, and from the leaflet 'What do Readers really do?', we learn that some go on to engage with food banks and the business community after licensing.

B2 There are well understood and embedded practices of corporate life, so as to enhance the process of students' formation.

23. St Albans RMTP does not have its own set of policies in relation to welfare, equality and conduct, but it is bound by those of ERMIC, which are published in a 43-page Booklet of Policies. These include statements against direct and indirect discrimination (on the grounds of grounds of 'race, colour, national or ethnic origins, sex, sexual orientation or perceived sexuality, marital status, disability, membership or non-membership of a Trade Union, "spent convictions" of ex-offenders, class, age, politics, religion

or belief, bullying and harassment, race discrimination and discrimination against people with disabilities'). It would be helpful if the St Albans RMTP could own these policies by referring to them in the Programme Handbook, and we **suggest** that this change is made for the next edition. (Certain policies are more important and need to be given greater priority by St Albans RMTP: see Recommendation 7.)

24. In terms of staff profile, St Albans RMTP was not able to provide us with CVs for its teaching staff, and they do not appear to conduct analyses of the profile of the staff in terms of gender, age or ethnicity. From our meetings with a number of tutors, placement supervisors, and pastoral supervisors, we observed that while there was a balance of male and female teaching staff, and a reasonable mix of ages, none were BAME. We therefore **recommend** that the course team attends to equal opportunities further by collecting and analysing data on the gender, ethnicity and age profile of staff.

Recommendation 5: We recommend that the Programme team collects and analyses data on the gender, ethnicity and age profile of its teaching staff.

25. We also noted the predominance of clergy: 6 of the 8 tutors we met were ordained, as were all of Pastoral and Placement Supervisors were ordained. While it was good to see 2 Readers on the tutorial staff, it would be beneficial for the students to have more Readers as role-models. We **encourage** the course team to keep this under review.
26. In order to explore how the mix of staff might have come about, we asked the RMO to describe the appointment process for tutors and we were told that this was done primarily through calling upon people known to the Programme team. This may be a factor leading to a narrower demographic range being represented and so we **recommend** that the programme team be more proactive in advertising teaching opportunities.

Recommendation 6: We recommend that the programme team be more proactive in advertising teaching opportunities.

27. The diocese has robust policies and procedures for safeguarding, which are detailed on the Diocesan website, and it has taken on board the need for Readers to have received Safeguarding training before licensing. As the Quality Nominee for the Programme observed in the cover-letter to the ASE (November 2016): 'there is a strong emphasis on safeguarding and recognition that Readers undergo necessary training before licensing.' The first in-course session was run by the Diocesan Training Officer in May 2016 and this continues to be timetabled into the syllabus. In addition, 'catch up' sessions have been organised for all Readers who are already licensed to ensure that they have completed Safeguarding training. ERMIC has a policy on Child and Vulnerable Adult Safeguarding Policy, which is included in its Booklet of Policies. However, it is vital for the St Albans RMTP to own this policy and disseminate it and it is surprising, given the central importance of this topic, that there is nothing in the Programme Handbook. This is a major omission. We **recommend** that there is a full statement about both policy and training in the next published edition of the handbook. It is far too important a subject for there to be any ambiguities about precisely what is required of Readers both in initial and post initial training.

Recommendation 7: Safeguarding policy statements should be made available in the Programme Handbook.

28. The Programme is impressive in the extent to which it generates a sense of community life and mutual support. We observed community development at the evening sessions we attended, which included a free, cooked evening meal, followed by worship, plus a coffee break.
29. Current and past students valued the sense of community and testified to the strength of supportive relationships built up over the programme, encouraged by staff: we heard evidence that one cohort of past students were continuing to meet for mutual support years after completing the programme. Pastoral supervisors affirmed this, noting strengths of friendship and collegiality – they were also a good example of a support network, and they were well integrated into the course. The RMO is particularly effective in building the sense of community, and this was affirmed in interviews with students, supervisors, and tutors. One of tutors noted that the effectiveness of this sense of community for individual development by noting that it provided a ‘safe environment for exploration.’
30. Students have opportunities to grow in fellowship with others from across the region through 4-6 Saturday sessions a year. These days are aimed at creating ‘a community which learns, prays, worships, eats and socialises together’ across the ERM (St Albans RMTTP Programme Handbook 2016-17). A discussion forum on Moodle also gives students opportunities to build a virtual community: although this does not appeal to everyone, some students told us that they found it extremely valuable.

Commendation 1: We commend the strong sense of community among staff, students and graduates.

31. Provision for spouses and families is less relevant for a programme of this kind, where students generally only meet once a week. However, we **suggest** that an opportunity may be found for an event, perhaps once a year, to which families/spouses are invited.

B3 The provision of public and social accommodation is satisfactory.

32. St Albans RMTTP is accommodated in the St Albans Diocesan Office, where it has the use of a wide range of rooms, including two meeting rooms (one large and one small) a vestibule area for mingling, and a kitchen. Meetings with students and with pastoral supervisors confirmed that accommodation is regarded as very good and that it provides a useful, flexible space, to accommodate groups and facilitate social engagement.
33. The Diocesan Office has excellent facilities for disabled users: there is a ramp at the entrance, disabled toilets and a loop system in the main meeting room. (However, the reviewers had some concerns for provision for students with unseen disabilities: see Recommendation 18.)
34. The worship we saw – Evening Prayer – took place in a meeting room, which was adequate for the purpose. We did not witness a Saturday day school, but we understand that there are facilities for worship and prayer in the venues used by ERM, and that the annual residential provides good opportunities to worship in other spaces. The course does not have a chaplain or an identified quiet

space for private prayer and reflection and we **recommend** that consideration may be given to providing these at St Albans. The former might, for instance, be simply a matter of saying in the Handbook that students are welcome to use the chapel if they need a quiet space.

Recommendation 8: We recommend that the Programme team considers creating a prayer space and appointing a chaplain.

35. Provision for the maintenance and development of accommodation is not applicable to the course, as this responsibility rests with the diocese. However, the RMO assured us that alternative facilities could easily be found if there were ever problems with the Diocesan Office.

B 4 The TEI's corporate worship and liturgy are balanced in range and tradition, including authorized and innovative rites.

36. Regular corporate worship consists of an act of worship led by students before each of the weekly teaching sessions. We witnessed two of these. The first was a straightforward Common Worship Evening Prayer which, we understand, is a form of worship that is new to some students. The second was an order of service from the Melanesian Brothers and included some singing. Both were well planned and carefully led by students. The RMO offers informal feedback.

37. From interviews with staff, we were told that in addition to the Common Worship service that we observed, Book of Common Prayer Evening Prayer is sometimes used for the Tuesday act of worship. We also learned that Eucharistic practice and informal prayer groups are included in residential events, though we did not observe these and so cannot make specific comment.

38. From our interviews with students, tutors and supervisors, we learned that a wide range of theological traditions are represented. This is generally regarded as a positive attribute of the course, but in two of our interviews, the point was made that more needed to be done to help students understand the range of Anglican traditions, including their language and theology. For example, one student who identified herself as coming from an Evangelical tradition noted that she felt uncomfortable about having to ask for explanations of unfamiliar liturgical terms. We **recommend** the course team add a session on these matters early in the course, along with providing a glossary of relevant terms. We also note that there is no guidance in the Programme Handbook, or in the ERMC Policies Handbook on matters of conscience over women's ordained ministry, and we **recommend** that the programme team liaise with ERMC about the possibility of including a statement in the Policies Booklet.

Recommendation 9: We recommend that the Programme team provides a taught session on Anglican traditions early in the course and that students are provided with a glossary of terms.

Recommendation 10: We recommend that the Programme team liaise with ERMC about including a Worship Policy in the Policies Booklet with a statement on inclusivity and matters of conscience for longer training days and retreats.

B5 Staff model appropriate patterns of spirituality, continued learning and reflection on practice.

39. We observed and participated in good interaction among students and between staff and students at the two evening sessions we attended. The meal before weekly worship and teaching was very helpful in creating a sense of the corporate among the staff and students although one student expressed sadness for a colleague who could not leave work early enough to join in the meal.
40. The tutorials we observed were conducted in a way that created a safe space for students to engage in debate and discussion. Students were treated with respect and the tutors valued their experience and input.
41. The staff modelled a good pattern of work and enjoyment of life outside work. They all appeared lively in discussion and interacted well with people around. In group interviews, tutors, placement supervisors and pastoral tutors indicated by their conversation that they had a healthy and living spirituality as well as representing a variety of ecclesiological traditions and demonstrating a recognition of the role of Readers.

The review team has Confidence with Qualifications with regard to Criterion B: Formational Context.

SECTION C: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

C1. The TEI has clear and effective governance structures.

42. Reader training in the St Albans Diocese is currently located within the Council for Discipleship and Ministry (CfDM) and specifically within the work of the Ministry Development Team. The RMO works closely with the Director of Ministry and the Warden of Readers as required in decision-making about training and finances; the final programme and the budget for Reader Ministry are discussed and approved by the CfDM.
43. While management, administrative and financial structures within the diocesan structures are clear, there are some ambiguities associated with partnership working. Reader training in the Diocese is currently based on an informal partnership with the Eastern Region Ministry Course (ERMC) and its regional partners. ERMC is in turn part of the Cambridge Theological Federation (CTF), and both the CTF and ERMC are part of the wider Common Awards Programme validated by Durham University. This multi-layered structure is not without its challenges in terms of clear lines of accountability and communication. As the Self-Evaluation Document (SED) observes: 'we value working as partners with ERMC and gain much from this (but) the diocese needs to consider how to make decisions that are best for St Albans but which might be out of step with our partners.' Despite generally good relationships with ERMC, there remain a number of frustrations with the current arrangements (see B1 above). In the light of this we **recommend** the introduction of a formal agreement between St Albans RMTP and ERMC to produce greater certainty for both staff and students about governance.

Recommendation 11: We recommend the introduction of a formal agreement between St Albans Reader Ministry Training Programme and ERMC to produce greater certainty for both staff and students about governance.

44. Additionally, as noted in B1 above, there are ambiguities in the relationships between St Albans Reader Training Programme and both the CTF and Durham University, and we **recommend** further discussions in order to forge better understanding between the partners (see Recommendation 4).

C2. The TEI has effective leadership.

45. The CfDM is the diocesan body which currently oversees Reader ministry; the RMO consults directly with the Council about major decisions (e.g. joining Common Awards) and attends Council meetings as and when required. There are good levels of communication about Reader Ministry within the Ministry Development Team, and during our various interviews we discerned that consultation with a wide range of stakeholders (e.g. pastoral supervisors; placement tutors; tutorial staff) regularly takes place. Day-to-day decision-making about Reader training rests largely with the RMO who has oversight of all IMEI training for Readers, including appointing and training pastoral supervisors, liaising with ERMC, occasionally setting up modules and nominating tutors, and providing pastoral care and support for students. All parties we interviewed agreed that the RMO does an excellent job of managing these responsibilities, but as the SED notes, this 'could be an area of vulnerability' should there be a change of RMO. This vulnerability is created partly by the fact that a lot of the work is undertaken by the RMO and, as discussed below, we **recommend** more formal involvement of the Quality Nominee in order

to involve tutors and other colleagues in the decision-making and reporting processes (see Recommendation 13). We noted that the Director of Ministry, the CfDM Chair and the Warden of Readers all showed appropriate awareness of this vulnerability, and that they would be able to initiate succession planning, but we nonetheless strongly **encourage** the CfDM to continue to keep this important issue under review.

Commendation 2: We commend the RMO's insightful leadership of the course, and her attention to detail.

46. CfDM serves as the formal governance body for St Albans RMTP. While this Council has a wide brief, issues relating to Reader Ministry are regularly considered. The annual budget for Reader Ministry provision is an ongoing item, and the minutes of the Council indicate that over the last four years issues such as Reader vocations and the role of Readers within the broad spectrum of lay ministries have been discussed on a number of occasions.
47. At its meeting in February 2017 the CfDM discussed the issue of the governance of Readers in the light of the introduction of Periodic External Review (PER) by Church of England's Ministry Division. A paper by the Chair of CfDM proposed the following: 'The Reader Training Programme is clearly linked into the Vocations Team and, from time to time, Bishop's Staff Meeting, but it has not historically been on the governance agenda, save for the Common Awards discussions. Might there be a case for a small group of Council members with relevant experience (working with members of the Readers Association committee) being tasked with *ad hoc* review and governance responsibilities?' This was followed up in May 2017 by a meeting of the Readers Deanery Advisers' Group, a group which currently sits alongside a more generic Readers Association Committee. There was support for the creation of one single committee, composed of Deanery Advisers, with a standing committee and a group to oversee the governance of Reader training. We support this initiative as a welcome rationalisation of the current situation. We **recommend** that a constitution and terms of reference of this proposed new body, once drawn up, are approved by both CfDM and Bishop's Council and that the newly constituted body has a direct report line to Bishop's Council.

Recommendation 12: We recommend that the constitution and terms of reference of the proposed Readers Association Committee body, once drawn up, are approved by both CfDM and Bishop's Council and that the newly constituted body has a direct reporting line to Bishop's Council.

48. The September 2016 version of the Church of England's *Quality Assurance and Enhancement in Ministerial Formation* handbook emphasises the importance of the Quality Nominee as the lead person in quality assurance. It is the task of the Quality Nominee (in the context of completing the ASE return) to obtain input from relevant teaching staff and to ensure that conversations and input to inform the report take place to an agreed year-round timetable, building in key events such as staff meetings and tutorial interviews. These tasks are not currently seen as part of the responsibility of the course's Quality Nominee. This is an area that needs to be formalized and we **recommend** that 'completing the ASE return' section of the handbook, cited at the outset of this paragraph, is acted upon with a view to producing a more robust outcome in this important area of activity.

Recommendation 13: We recommend that the role of the Quality Nominee should be formalized, including clarification of his/her role in completion of the ASE return.

49. There is a clear vision for excellence on the part of stakeholders. A great strength of Reader ministry and training in the Diocese is that it is very well supported. As the SED notes, 'the three bishops and senior staff of the diocese value Reader ministry, support it practically (e.g. agreeing to fund counselling, occasionally teaching some sessions, meeting with Readers) and financially.' They supported the introduction of Reader MMDR in 2017, and Readers are fully included in IME2 and CMD programmes.
50. Reader training is certainly not marginalised within the diocese and the students we saw at various points during our visit were highly positive about the quality of teaching they received. In the June 2015 student feedback, for example, one student commented: 'The diocese has a good, high quality support team in place and the lecturers we have had from within the diocese have been superb. Tutorials informative and stimulating.' However, we also noted a perception among Readers that they are 'second class' to their ordained colleagues, as one student observed in feedback written in 2015. This perception can sometimes arise from joint sessions with ordinands which, though beneficial in many ways, can lead Readers-in-training to become aware of potential inequalities in experience. As another student observed: 'very useful learning with ordinands though I have noticed a gap developing this year in our ability to look at things and in depth of comments as we have less study/residential time.' We **encourage** the Programme team to keep potential inequalities under review.

C3. Trustees are appropriately recruited, supported and developed.

51. CfDM membership reflects its broad strategic role. It includes diocesan representation at an appropriate level, with the Council having the overall 'trustee' role in respect to Reader training. It meets four times a year and also has a small Executive group which meets between full Councils to review progress and plan agendas. The Chair is appointed by the Bishop and the Vice-Chair is nominated by the Bishop's Council. There are nine elected members, three co-opted members plus the three team leaders: Ministry Development; Parish Development; Director of Ordinands. The Ministry Development Team includes the RMO. There is an appropriate administrative infrastructure for the Ministry Development Team; the Director of Ministry also teaches some elements of the course.
52. The minutes of the CfDM indicate active interest in the training and work of Readers. The Council was fully involved in the Common Awards decision in 2013, in wider discussions of different forms of Lay ministry in the diocese (local Lay Preachers and Lay Leaders of Worship) and the implications for Reader Ministry. Funding for Reader ministry, plus Reader vocations, have also been discussed by the CfDM Board in recent years.

C4. The TEI has effective business planning and fundraising.

53. The budget for Reader training in the diocese is incorporated into the strategic planning process. CfDM is the location of the detailed discussions. The responsibility for identifying and bidding for resources resides with the Director of Ministry, who liaises closely with the RMO. The evidence we have seen indicates that this task is carried out very effectively. The central importance of Readers in the discipleship agenda in the diocese has hitherto meant that requests for funding have been viewed in a positive light and even in times of financial constraint the share of finance for Readers has been protected.

C5. The TEI has sound financial and risk management and reporting.

54. Reader training and development is integrated into the Diocesan financial structure and within this the Director of Ministry is the budget holder. The budget for Reader ministry is agreed annually by CfDM. As the SED observes: 'our diocesan budget is sufficient for our training programme. This year (2016) it was guarded against wider diocesan budget cuts in order to enable the higher fees for students to be registered as accredited students at Durham.' It is important for the continuing health of Reader training that the resources allocated by the diocese remain appropriate to the needs of the course. We **encourage** the RMO and the Director of Ministry to continue to monitor this closely.

55. In the SED, the RMO admits that no risk management review has been conducted, and the question 'What actions are planned following any review of operating systems in the year?' was answered with 'not applicable.' We find this concerning. The course meets for much of its time on property that belongs to, or is run by, the diocese and hence there is a reasonable expectation that appropriate standards are being met. Yet there are placements, retreats, study tours, visits and other excursions which are integral parts of Reader training and should have appropriate risk assessments as a matter of course. In addition to the above, there are different kinds of risks associated with matters such as succession planning, online resources, and IT. There is no material on risk assessment in the 'Handbook for Reader Training, 2016/2017.' We **recommend** that the St Albans RMTP takes appropriate responsibility for risk management.

Recommendation 14: We recommend that St Albans Reader Ministry Training Programme conducts a risk management review.

The review team has Confidence with Qualifications with regard to Criterion C: Leadership and Management.

SECTION D: STUDENT OUTCOMES

D1. Students are growing in their understanding of Christian tradition, faith and life.

56. At the tutorials we attended, students demonstrated appropriate levels of critical engagement with biblical texts: in the Old Testament classes, for example, on specific selected passages relating to a particular period of the people of God. The essays we reviewed also invariably incorporated appropriate critical engagement. Likewise, in the Ethics class on 'Transgender' there was positive engagement with both biblical material and a range of other sources. The same applied to the session we observed on sermon preparation. Throughout, we were impressed by the thoroughness of the students' preparations for these teaching sessions and their ability to apply their learning to their ministerial contexts and practical experience of ministry.
57. The Programme Handbook notes that students come from 'Evangelical, Catholic, Liberal and Charismatic traditions of the Church and these rich differences are gladly and humbly respected.' Our experience was that the above generally holds true. Nevertheless, a number of students we spoke to expressed a desire to have some early teaching sessions on the breadth of Anglicanism, as a number of them expressed a complete lack of knowledge about terminology relating to traditions other than their own (see B4 and Recommendation 9). We also noted the benefits of Readers-in-training studying alongside ordinands. As the SED observes: 'About 60% of the modules are integrated with ordination training, and the fellowship between Readers and future priests will, we believe, stand the diocese in good stead in future years for collaborative ministry.' We endorse this viewpoint. However, as we noted in C2 above, the course team need to be vigilant about potential differences between Readers-in-training and ordinands and to ensure that both groups feel valued.
58. In terms of the development of reflective practice, the St Albans RMTP only has one residential weekend a year, hence there is not a lot of time and space for theological reflection with their peers, although we heard about informal groupings and virtual forums being established by some cohorts. The course has a three-year cycle: Residential Retreat, Residential Conference and Study Tour. As the SED comments: 'Each of these is excellent - again, we benefit from superb leadership and teaching in the residentials, and have had two very good study tours - but once a year is not often.' We **encourage** the course team to consider creative ways to enable students to meet together more often and more informally than in teaching sessions and so provide more opportunities for further theological reflection.
59. As well as the above, students have opportunities for theological reflection in their meetings with their pastoral supervisor. While there is a day of training organised for pastoral supervisors in which the importance of theological reflection is stressed, the impact of such meetings was, the RMO recognised, difficult to monitor. Our discussions saw most students and supervisors emphasising the positive elements of the current arrangements, but we would nonetheless **encourage** the RMO to keep this under review given its importance in ministerial formation.

D2. Students have a desire and ability to share in mission, evangelism and discipleship.

60. The SED emphasised the importance of keeping mission on the agenda. While the formal Mission module has come off the syllabus, the course now has a residential weekend on Mission that includes

biblical background, information on diocesan initiatives and challenging sessions on mission.

Students are encouraged and challenged to think seriously about mission in their own contexts and how to engage with local communities and groups; placements play a key role in honing tools for mission, evangelism and discipleship. The content of this residential is appreciated by students; the social dimension was also seen in highly positive terms.

61. Readers come from a diversity of occupations and backgrounds to serve God in a wide variety of situations and as such they are a bridge between the day-to-day life of the world and the church. The diocesan publication 'So what do Readers really do?' provides four profiles of recently-licensed Readers and provides evidence of the ways in which mission and evangelism permeate their Reader Ministry. The enthusiasm and commitment of these four Readers shines through in the very different contexts in which they operate. Our interviews with students, past and present, indicated similar commitment to sharing the good news of the gospel and to teaching and learning the faith.
62. The aim of the Programme, as stated in the SED, is that each Reader will become, by the end of training, a competent preacher, teacher and worship leader, but also that 'Each Reader will, we hope, be able to talk about their faith and about Jesus in ways that attract people to want to know more; each Reader will, we hope, live out their faith in ways that show the face of God to those whom they meet.' From the sessions we observed, students were keen to relate their learning to their personal and ministerial experiences: for example, students' discussion in an Old Testament session showed a willingness to draw upon their biblical knowledge for teaching others; while in a discussion on gender ethics, students demonstrated a real willingness to listen respectfully and learn from one another.
63. In terms of equipping students to nurture the vocation of others, this takes place primarily in the parish and other local settings within which students operate as readers-in-training but there is also frequently wider community involvement which can, quite naturally, provide opportunities for nurturing a variety of vocations amongst the people with whom they come into contact. For example, one recently-licensed Reader is involved with his local food bank, Christmas Lantern Parade, Business and Community Partnership, Summer Sounds Concert, Street Pastors, to name but a few. Contexts for Reader Ministry are many and varied, but St Albans RMTP, through its various practical and theological strands, provides a range of appropriate insights into what Ministry at the coal face is all about and thereby enables Readers to be in a position to provide both guidance and support for people exploring a wide variety of vocations to Christian life and ministry. Our discussions with both past and present students indicated that this role is one that they invariably enthusiastically embrace.

D3. Students are growing in personal spirituality and engagement with public worship.

64. We looked at evidence for the development of students' practical skills in preparing and leading worship. The ASE states that students value the joint Reader/Ordinands worship session which takes place immediately after supper and before evening tutorial classes begin; our discussions with both past and present students confirmed this. The worship we attended was diligently prepared and executed; all elements were clearly audible. We were assured that worship styles vary a good deal (including, on occasions, material from the Book of Common Prayer) and we believe that this is important in providing students with experience of different ways of worshipping God. The same ASE document recognised

that more guidance needed to be given to students in the planning of this evening worship and that there should be greater consistency in offering feedback. The RMO has produced a very helpful handout, 'Thinking Through Tuesday Worship.' Appendices 2 and 3 of the Programme Handbook contain concise pro formas for both Assessment of Intercessions and Assessment of Worship Leading; these could, we believe, be helpful resources for feedback on the weekly early evening worship. We **recommend** that systematic feedback to worship leaders is introduced for Tuesday evening worship.

Recommendation 15: We recommend that systematic feedback to worship leaders is introduced for Tuesday evening worship.

65. Students are also involved in leading public worship as part of their training and development within the context of their own parish/benefice. Although we did not witness this first-hand, interviews with students and the pastoral supervisors, who provide support on this aspect of training, confirmed that students are enabled to practise a variety of worship activities within a supportive and encouraging setting and to get feedback. We also noted from the assessed portfolios (which students compile from their work in the parish), that students are offered a range of different experiences and also are able to reflect critically and theologically on acts of worship they have prepared and led.
66. The course emphasises the personal spirituality and prayer life of students. Students are encouraged to have a Spiritual Director and there is a helpful introductory note in the Programme Handbook entitled 'What is Spiritual Direction? Some thoughts about what to expect.' This sets out the central importance of spiritual direction. The reality is that students take on a Spiritual Director at different points in the course (or even at the end of the course) according to their personal situations. Pastoral supervisors focus very much on the centrality of prayer; all students have this form of support throughout the course. We regard this as a particularly robust element of the course. In addition to formal provision, there are often a range of other support mechanisms available locally. For example, one recently-licensed Reader wrote: 'There were two very experienced retired clergy in our parish who were always available for advice and mentoring. They continue to fulfil that role for me now and if there is anything I am not sure of they are always there to help me.'
67. In our meetings with students it became clear that the sessions with their Pastoral Supervisors and, for some, their Spiritual Directors, were much valued and served to strengthen and add both vitality and depth to their prayer life – something which energises the extent and nature of their engagement with the world beyond church.

D4. Students' personality, character and relationships.

68. We considered how the course seeks to help students develop personal resilience and stability and to manage its demands. Students spoke highly of the quality of the support provided by programme staff and our conclusion, after speaking with a variety of past and present students, is that good pastoral care is a real strength of the programme (see also E2).
69. Some students have had ongoing issues with using technology for online submission and to access materials. Others have experienced broader workload pressures. As the SED observes, some of this anxiety is because of the students' own diligence and desire 'not to miss anything out.' Despite the best

efforts of the RMO and tutors, who repeatedly emphasise that 4 to 6 hours a week should be sufficient, some students are not willing or able to keep to this recommendation. It would be helpful if there were greater clarity in both the recruitment literature and the Programme Handbook about workload expectations. The RMO reported an 'uneasy feeling' that perceptions about the amount of work involved in training prevents some people from considering Reader ministry; this was emphasised in the SED, which observed: 'The study involved in becoming licensed seems to be off-putting to some people, so we have a challenge of communicating something of the excitement and fulfilment that comes both with training alongside others and with growing service after licensing.'

70. However, in one session, we witnessed good practice in a tutor taking time at the end of a session to talk through the preparation for the next time, including setting priorities and dividing up tasks among the group. We **encourage** tutors and course leaders to consider this and other creative ways of helping students manage their workloads without sacrificing the overall academic rigour of the classes.
71. Students also spoke of the challenges associated with part-time study. Some had never written essays before, or not for many years. A number reported an initial anxiety and lack of confidence – often fuelled by uncertainty over how much time to allocate to the course vis-à-vis work and family. Transitioning is not straightforward and we therefore recommend that the course considers ways of enhancing support given on transition to learning and embedding study skills throughout the programme; and ways of helping students understand the pattern of ongoing learning on the course.

Recommendation 16: We recommend that the Programme team considers ways of enhancing support given on transition to learning and embedding study skills throughout the programme; and ways of helping students understand the pattern of ongoing learning on the course.

72. In terms of learning from and relating to one another, the course reflects the breadth of traditions within the Church of England in its content and culture. The students we spoke with came from a wide range of church traditions and backgrounds and there was no evidence of overt tension between them, although a number said that the first few months were particularly challenging as they related to colleagues on the course who came from traditions about which they knew little or nothing. In the various teaching sessions we observed there was genuine respect for different perspectives and an openness to learn from others with different views.
73. This course offers part-time training which enables students to make their own communities, their existing jobs and their local church the contextual focus for their preparation for ministry. The role of the pastoral supervisor is invaluable in helping students to sustain healthy relationships both inside and outside the church, and to pay due regard to their own well-being. The pastoral supervisor journeys together with the student in exploring the nature and challenge of Christian ministry. The regular sessions with their pastoral supervisor (every 6 to 8 weeks) are seen as an invaluable way of dealing with church, community and personal issues.
74. Work-life balance is crucially important and clear boundaries need to be established at the outset of ministry. Burn-out is all too frequent in both lay and ordained Christian work. Having spoken with a variety of stakeholders, it is clear that the course faces up to this issue in a realistic way although, despite best efforts, some students still do not find it easy to take this point on board.

75. As to professional boundaries, we have referred above (B2) to the need for the course to own its Safeguarding Policy explicitly. See Recommendation 7.
76. Issues relating to professional boundaries can emerge in a number of taught modules and in placement experiences but the focus of learning is the year three module, Pastoral Care. St Albans RMTP students come from a variety of backgrounds; some come from social work or other professional contexts where the issue of 'boundaries' is of central importance. Others come from sectors where this is less of a major issue and hence their needs can be very different. Nothing we heard from either students or staff about the ways in which boundary issues are dealt with raised concerns for the reviewers.

D5. Students are developing in the dispositions and skills of leadership, collaboration and ability to work in community

77. According to *Renewal and Reform*, dioceses 'are looking for a cohort of candidates from a range of backgrounds and particularly those who are younger, more diverse and display the qualities of being adaptable, collaborative and missional.' The St Albans course encourages Readers to be adaptable, collaborative (modelled in its teaching) and missional (integrated in its teaching) and therefore provides opportunities for modelling both leadership and collaboration.
78. The course has a strong collaborative element, most notably the partnership with ERMIC, and the fact that Readers-in-training study alongside ordinands increasingly models leadership in local settings. The Programme provides students with an understanding of the theological foundations for discipleship, leadership and collaborative ministry. It also enables Readers-in-training to facilitate the participation and learning of others for the ministry and mission of the church (as can be seen in the ERMIC Handbook).
79. Readers are called by God to licensed lay ministry in the Church of England and accept the authority of the diocesan bishop. Theory and practice equate in St Albans, a diocese where all three bishops are strong supporters of Reader Ministry. One of them, the Bishop of Hertford, is Warden of Readers and, along with the Director of Ministry, represents their interests on Bishop's Senior Staff. From our observations in interviews, collaboration within the St Albans Ministry Division appears, to be based on mutual respect rather than formal power structures.

D6. Students show a calling to a ministry within the traditions of the sponsoring church denomination

80. There is a robust and well-structured selection process for Readers, run by one of the two Reader Secretaries. He has a team of selectors who volunteer their time, a mixed group of clergy and Readers. The calling of applicants to Reader Ministry is carefully explored in the selection process.
81. While students are frequently rooted in specific traditions, we found no evidence that they were unwilling to minister across the broad spectrum which comprises the Church of England. The Programme enables students to experience something of the diversity of Anglicanism, for example,

through collective worship. The taught material, the placement experience and the diversity of the cohort and its interaction all play their part in helping students to understand the breadth and diversity of views across the Church of England.

82. The students we engaged with understood the opportunities for Christian ministry in a range of public settings, agencies and faith communities, including schools. Local contexts clearly differ but it was exciting to hear from students about the nature of such involvement. The recruitment publication, 'So what do Readers really do?' provides profiles which provide a variety of evidence of such activity. One Reader who was licensed in 2005 observed: 'Being a Reader opens up so many opportunities. Yes it can be hard -- but I wouldn't change it for the world.'

[Criterion D7, Pioneer Ministry Training, does not apply]

D8 The TEI has clear and robust procedures for end of training assessment of students' knowledge, skills and dispositions, and reporting on students' achievement.

83. We saw clear evidence of robust reporting on students' achievements in the marked assignments, with clear and helpful feedback. Students hand in regular reflections on placements and written-up end-of-year reflections, and we saw high-quality examples of these. Clearly some good on-going reporting happens but we could not find documented any final year report, nor a letter to the Bishop recommending each student for licensing.
84. We are sure this process happens verbally, but we recommend that this final piece of the reporting jigsaw is put in place at least with a formal letter to the Diocesan bishop recommending each student to be licensed.

Recommendation 17: We recommend that the course provides a brief final report on each student for the Diocesan bishop to consider before licensing.

D9 The student has during and at the end of initial training, a personal learning plan or other clear basis from which to learn and grow further in ministry and discipleship.

85. We heard evidence from students of their goals and achievements being tracked and developed across the course, and staff reinforcing this understanding.
86. When we spoke to the former students, they were very clear that the excitement of theological learning was transmitted to them in such a way that some of the former students had set up 'cell groups' which were still meeting. Interviews with former students also revealed at least one group who had been so enthused by theological learning on the Programme that a small group of them meet regularly still to discuss theological issues.
87. Within a month of licensing, students meet up with the IME2 Officer, the Director of Training and the Warden of Readers to hear about the IME2 programme, in which they are expected to participate. At

the end of the three years there is a final review of their IME2 and they are then invited to, and expected to attend, the same CMD programme as the clergy.

88. The Warden of Readers assured us that there is in place a good system for Reader Ministerial Development Review.
89. We commend this system and the rigour with which it is monitored.

Commendation 3: We commend the system for transition to IME2 and continuing Reader Mission and Ministry Development Review, and the rigour with which it is monitored.

D10 The TEI learns from the pattern of its students' ministerial and formational achievement and acts on areas of particular need.

90. We heard from the RMO and the Warden of Readers that there is good liaison between them and other relevant diocesan departments when placing newly licensed Readers and when, occasionally, a Reader does not flourish in a particular setting. The placement supervisors spoke of rare instances when a Reader had to be transferred for good reason and they felt part of the discussion on the matter. In conversation with the RMO and the CME Officer, we heard of instances when post licensing needs had been listened to and catered for.
91. Current students spoke well of the support given on the course both in times of illness and when extra help with study skills or organizing the work load were needed. Conversations with recently licensed and more experienced Readers revealed that their experiences had been sought and listened to from time to time, both when things had gone wrong but also when the direction of their interests had broadened and they needed extra training.

Commendation 4: We commend the effective interaction between the RMO and the Diocesan Officers and between the RMO and the past and current students.

The review team has **Confidence** with regard to **Criterion D: Student Outcomes**.

SECTION E: PARTNERSHIP WITH UNIVERSITY

[Not all the PER criteria under Sections E and F apply as they would if the St Albans course were a TEI and a partner with Durham University in Common Awards in its own right. The reviewers have commented where appropriate.]

E2. The overall provision for academic and pastoral support and guidance is adequate.

92. Students spoke highly of the quality of the support provided by programme staff. For example, students who need extra help with writing or study skills can be provided with a personal tutor and the SED gave examples of support through a wide range of personal crises: cancer, bereavement, job loss, family illness etc. From interviews with a variety of past and present students, we conclude that good pastoral care is a real strength of the programme.
93. Our meetings with groups of pastoral supervisors, module tutors, and with placement supervisors revealed lively and encouraging groups of people from a variety of churches who enjoyed working with the Readers and Ordinands and enjoyed sharing their work experiences with the students. The RMO also offers pastoral support to students and this invitation is prominently featured in the Programme Handbook, along with her contact details.
94. All students on this programme are part-time and the majority of them are mature students and the three-year timescale for the programme takes account of this. As has already been noted (see D4), this programme is challenging and we have recommended that thought be given to supporting them (Recommendation I6).
95. The need for support from a Spiritual Director often during, and certainly after, licensing was carefully encouraged and monitored by the RMO.
96. Each module is supported by a page on Moodle, which includes a clear and detailed module handbook setting out module aims and objectives, a schedule of sessions, details of assessment tasks, and suggested further reading. Additionally, the Moodle page includes preparation tasks and extensive links to further resources. As noted in D4 above, some students can feel overwhelmed by the resources and care needs to be taken to help them make best use of these (see Recommendation I6). Some students also struggle to access online resources, though we learned from interviews that pastoral supervisors can be very supportive with this.
97. We saw examples of detailed and informative feedback on students' work that acknowledges and affirms good work and identifies areas for improvement. Coursework for modules assessed by ERMIC is marked anonymously by a range of tutors and so it lacks an element of personal development, though we learned from interviews with students and pastoral supervisors that students are welcome to discuss their marked work in supervision sessions. As has been noted above (B1), there have been problems with delays in feedback, but we understand that these have now been resolved.
98. There is a detailed policy on the complaints procedure in the ERMIC Policies Booklet and in the Programme Handbook. However, we did not hear of any examples when this had been invoked in the relation to the St Albans RMTP, and we attribute this to the detailed attention paid to students' welfare by tutors and particularly by the RMO, whereby issues can be resolved before they reach the level of a formal complaints procedure.

99. From our discussions with students, those with specific needs appeared to be well catered for. In our interview with students, one spoke of being allowed to catch up on lectures via podcasts while recuperating from a serious illness. We were assured that reasonable adjustments are made to meet the needs of students with disabilities when they are needed. We saw that Holywell House is up to date with its facilities for people with disabilities. Teaching staff, including the study skills tutor, seemed to be very willing to offer telephone time or extra electronic assistance in these cases.
100. From discussions with the RMO, we learned that students who come to the programme with identified learning needs or disabilities are given personal attention and adjustments are made. However, one pastoral supervisor expressed some concern for accommodation of needs of students with mental health problems, and we also found that tutors were not necessarily aware of how to spot symptoms of dyslexia in coursework. We therefore **encourage** tutors to look out for unseen disabilities such as dyslexia evident in coursework and point students to appropriate sources of support, and we **recommend** that the Programme team raises the profile of support offered to students with unseen disabilities, including promoting awareness of support for dyslexia.

Recommendation 18: We recommend that the Programme team raises the profile of support offered to students with unseen disabilities, including promoting awareness of support for dyslexia.

E3. The overall learning support and infrastructure in relation to the ability to meet requirements for awards are adequate.

101. There is a library in Holywell House, mostly offering materials for working with children. We understand however, that there is a more extensive library in the nearby Abbey which is available for students. The RMO keeps the librarian up to date each term with the booklists given to the students. There is a generous book grant available, from a bequest to the diocese, to which students can apply for book grants.
102. Students have access to IT resources and we heard that in a case of financial hardship, the Diocese helped with the purchase of a laptop. There are spaces in Holywell House where students can sit with their i-pads, but most of studying is done at home.
103. Teaching rooms are well equipped with AV equipment, good lighting, and movable furniture.
104. We did not hear of any examples of concerns being raised by students and, from what we have seen, teaching accommodation was adequate and fit for purpose.

E4. The overall staffing (academic and support) in relation to the ability to meet requirements for awards is adequate.

104. Within the staff, there was a good range of academic learning and a reasonable mix of practical hands-on experience of being clergy/Readers. It is good that two staff members are Readers, though it would be beneficial to see more (see Recommendation 6).
105. St Albans RMTP does not have its own staff development programme, but this is not out of line with other small programmes. Staff training is given when necessary by ERMIC on practical things like marking systems. The course also benefits from tutors' training via continuing ministerial development in their roles as clergy or Readers.
106. No support staff are employed directly by the Programme, though the RMO has an administrative assistant who is employed and trained by the diocese.

The review team has Confidence with regard to Criterion E: Formational aims.

SECTION F: TAUGHT PROGRAMMES

F1 The programme is viable in terms of market and likely number of entrants.

107. The number of students on the programme is modest (8 in the first year, 4 in the second and 10 in the third), but it is generally viable, especially since students take 60% of their modules alongside ordinands. However, the current first-year group is healthy and we have also been told by the RMO that she has already interviewed a number of students intending to start in September 2017.
108. The team is aware of the need to keep the numbers under review, and they acknowledge in their SED that ‘we have not met our desired targets of increasing numbers.’
109. The SED makes it clear that St Albans RMTP is aware of the difficulties in recruiting Readers, and especially of recruiting younger Readers, and it is actively involved initiatives to recruit. As has been noted (A1 above) there is some excellent publicity material online. We are told that the team plan to find opportunities to involve current Readers in recruitment, by inviting them to speak at vocations events, and we **encourage** this.

F2 The structure and design of the curriculum are appropriate to the aims and learning outcomes, and to the target student body.

110. The programme has an effective design, and here we reiterate its three-part structure:
- (a) Students undertake an academically rigorous course of study. This element mainly comprises written by ERMIC, validated by Durham University within the Common Awards framework, and delivered by St Albans teaching staff in classes where Readers-in-training study alongside ordinands. Other modules are written and delivered by the St Albans RMTP team.
 - (b) Students develop ministerial skills through involvement in their local parish/benefice and a placement, supported by supervision in both contexts.
 - (c) Students have opportunities for spiritual formation, including either a residential study weekend, an optional study trip or a residential retreat (one per year).
111. Our commentary in this section of the report mainly concentrates on element (a), but it should be noted that the module ‘Foundation for Ministry and Mission’ is potentially helpful for supporting (b).
112. Overall, the Programme fulfils the aims set out in its mission statement (see A1 above): the taught modules provide students with the necessary theological knowledge to become ‘competent preachers and teachers’, also giving them the knowledge and communication skills to ‘be able to talk about their faith and about Jesus in ways that attract people to want to know more.’ Students’ work in their parish/benefice helps them to become ‘competent worship leaders’. The spirituality element helps students reflect on how to ‘live out their faith in ways that show the face of God to those whom they meet.’

- I13. The module portfolio is appropriate, covering a suitable range of topics to equip students for a ministry of informed preaching and teaching. The course begins with a summer induction course, introducing key study skills. The first year comprises modules on the New Testament, Old Testament, Church History, and Ministry and Worship. The second year covers Multi-Faith Awareness, Helping Adults Learn, Spirituality and Discipleship, Doctrine, and Ethics. In the final year, students take an ERMC module on Pastoral Care and an in-house module 'Bridging the Gap', designed to prepare them for licensing. They also undergo their placement in this year.
- I14. Students also take a module on 'Foundation for Ministry and Worship', which was intended to run across the duration of the course, concurrently with other modules, enabling students to reflect theologically on their development and issues they had encountered, supported by periodic face-to-face tutorials, usually as part of the Saturday day schools. This pattern has been confusing for students, as it is difficult for them to keep this module in view alongside modules that are taught more intensively, and portfolio tasks can therefore take them by surprise, causing stress. However, we note with approval that the course team have kept this under review (for example, in the SED), and we **encourage** them in their plans to deliver this module more intensively over a shorter time-period.
- I15. The module descriptors available in the programme catalogue on Moodle all clearly indicate how each module is designed to develop subject knowledge, subject skills and key skills. The latter include study skills such as researching and evaluating information, using IT, and communication skills. The majority of modules taught are at undergraduate Level 1, and so there is no expectation of specialization in selected topics or of progression in academic skills, but this is appropriate given that the RMTP is at Foundation degree level.
- I16. The programme begins with an induction course on Study Skills, including time-management and library use, designed especially for students who are new to learning or who have been out of education for some time. From our interviews with tutors, this was effective, though it was felt that study skills needed to be embedded further across the course (see Recommendation I6). From the SED, we learned that one-to-one support available for students with specific difficulties. From interviews with pastoral supervisors, we learned that effective use is made of this system for helping students progress.
- I17. There is limited opportunity for the involvement of St Albans students in the design and development of programmes, as the modules are written by ERMC. From interviews with current and past students, there seems to be limited interest in engagement with formal processes for feedback, review and improvement of courses. Our discussions with these students also revealed that they were able to discuss the programme with the RMO, who has some opportunity to engage in course development with ERMC (see BI, CI and Recommendation I1 above.) However, it would be useful if there were better channels of communication through which students could give feedback to ERMC and we **recommend** that suitable opportunities are created.

Recommendation I9: We recommend that enhanced opportunities are created for students on St Albans Reader Ministry Training Programme to be involved in giving feedback to ERMC.

F3 The programme employs teaching, learning and assessment methods that will enable the learning outcomes to be achieved by typical students and that achievement to be measured.

- I18. From the programme catalogue on Moodle, we can see that the Programme makes use of a range of methods of learning, teaching, and assessment. The latter is discussed below. Methods of learning and teaching include presentations from tutors, which are helpful for explaining topics and setting out key ideas, and seminar discussions, which enable students to articulate concepts and apply them. Certain modules, such as the 'Multi-Faith Awareness', include field trips. Teaching and learning also takes place on Moodle Forums, and this is appreciated by many students.
- I19. From our observation of taught sessions, it was clear that the tutors aimed to be inclusive, by drawing all students into discussion, by valuing students' contributions and their ministerial experience, and by ensuring fair and respectful discussion. From our meeting with pastoral supervisors, we learned that the Programme is regarded as both interesting and suitably challenging.
- I20. From our observations of taught sessions, Moodle sites and assessed work, the Programme is delivered within the parameters of the module outlines.
- I21. The modules for the first two years of the programme are mostly at Level 4, so a progressive balance of teaching and learning over their duration is less obvious and, as has been stated, this is appropriate for the level of the qualification. However, the third year, comprising just one academic module, plus a placement and the more practical module 'Bridging the Gap' provide the opportunity for more practical and reflective approach appropriate for students approaching licensing.
- I22. Formative assessment takes place through students' engagement in Forums via Moodle and also through their participation in class discussions. Given the constraints on students' time, this is a reasonable method of formative assessment.
- I23. The Programme offers a commendable range of summative assessment methods including, for example, academic essays, portfolios, resources for others, reflective commentaries, and journals. This means that it meets the needs of students with a range of different skills and aptitudes. Essay questions are effective in encouraging students to engage rigorously with academic material, while also considering how to apply their learning to their preaching and teaching.
- I24. The contact hours are within the parameters. Typically, these consist of 10 x 2-hour sessions for a module taught at weekly evening classes, or 8 sessions of 1½ hours plus 8 sessions of 1 hour for modules taught in Saturday day-schools.
- I25. We saw some excellent examples of feedback on students' written work. As noted above, concerns about slow return of feedback have been resolved by streamlining the process.

F4 There are appropriate arrangements for placements.

126. Placements are highly valued and are very well understood by the former students and current students we met. The RMO is responsible for monitoring the quality of places where students are sent on placement and whilst there is no formal learning agreement, the expectations are managed through the module handbook. On rare occasions when there are issues with a placement, the RMO and pastoral supervisors have systems in place to remedy the situation. As well as placement supervisors, who give ongoing support and guidance in situ, the pastoral supervisors are there to help the students review and reflect on what they have learned. When we spoke to them, they clearly took these tasks seriously.
127. Placements are assessed in a Portfolio of the work done and learning achieved, and the ones we saw were detailed, carefully written up and reflective.
128. Students discuss their placements in advance with the RMO. Expectations for the placement are managed through the module handbook, which sets out aims and intended learning outcomes. Students also make Working Agreements with their Placement Supervisors, but we **encourage** the Programme Team to provide more detailed guidance on this process in the module handbook. *[Former Rec 20 deleted.]*
129. As we discussed at C5, the Programme does not conduct a risk assessment for placements and there is a need to take this element more seriously (see Recommendation 14). DBS checks are conducted by the Diocese before training commences, but as we discussed at B2, there needs to be great visibility of the Programme's safeguarding procedure and practice, hence Recommendation 7 above.
130. Although we did not hear of any specific examples of adjustments made to placements for students with disabilities or specific needs, we noted the willingness of the RMO to explore special needs and make reasonable adjustments for students, so we trust that this would apply to the placements also.

F6 The programme is subject to appropriate processes for curriculum review, including mechanisms for student representation and engagement.

131. From interviews with current and past students, there seems to be limited interest in engagement with formal processes for feedback, review and improvement of courses. Students currently discuss the RMO, who has some opportunity to engage in course development with ERM. However, we **recommend** that mechanisms are put in place to enable student representation and engagement (see Recommendation 19).
132. From our interviews with current students, many seemed unaware of the module evaluation process: the questionnaires (which are issued by the ERM) tend to be released via Moodle without adequate publicity. We did not see any evidence that the Programme team is analysing this data or reporting back to students on any adjustments that might have been made in the light of comments received.
133. There is no Programme evaluation questionnaire, although the RMO compiles a list of comments on students' evaluations of the course extracted from their annual self-assessment reports. While these

comments are no doubt helpful, they are unlikely to be objective as these are not anonymous and students will be aware that these documents are part of their own assessment. We therefore **recommend** that a course evaluation is conducted and its findings analysed and acted upon.

Recommendation 20: We recommend that the Programme team takes module and course evaluation more seriously, by making students aware of the module questionnaires, by conducting a course evaluation, by producing written module reviews and by providing feedback to students on actions taken.

134. We saw some examples of programme development in response to social changes and experience of teaching modules. For example, 'Multi-faith Awareness' and 'Helping Adults Learn' have been added in recent years in order to highlight practical aspects of ministry in which Readers might take a real leadership role, including training or teaching others. In a similar vein, the course has added extra preaching sessions (one of which we observed).

The review team has Confidence with regard to Criterion F: Taught Programmes.

CONCLUSION

Overall outcome:

The review team has Confidence in St Albans Reader Ministry Training Programme for preparing candidates for licensed lay ministry.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

We recommend that a vision statement is added to the Programme Handbook. [A1]

Recommendation 2

We recommend that the Programme team grow stronger networks for promotion of Reader ministry among ethnic minorities. [A3]

Recommendation 3

We recommend better communication with students regarding the operation of the wider network. [B1]

Recommendation 4

We recommend that the Programme team seeks opportunities for further discussions with the Cambridge Theological Foundation and Durham University with the view to developing a more fruitful partnership. [B1]

Recommendation 5

We recommend that the Programme team collects and analyses data on the gender, ethnicity and age profile of its teaching staff. [B2]

Recommendation 6

We recommend that the programme team be more proactive in advertising teaching opportunities. [B2]

Recommendation 7

Safeguarding policy statements should be made available in the Programme Handbook. [B2]

Recommendation 8

We recommend that the Programme team considers creating a prayer space and appointing a chaplain. [B3]

Recommendation 9

We recommend that the Programme team provides a taught session on Anglican traditions early in the course and that students are provided with a glossary of terms. [B4]

Recommendation 10

We recommend that the Programme team liaise with ERMC about including a Worship Policy in the Policies Booklet with a statement on inclusivity and matters of conscience for longer training days and retreats. [B4]

Recommendation 11

We recommend the introduction of a formal agreement between St Albans Reader Training Programme and ERMC to produce greater certainty for both staff and students about governance. [C1]

Recommendation 12

We recommend that the constitution and terms of reference of the proposed Readers Association Committee body, once drawn up, are approved by both CfDM and Bishop's Council and that the newly constituted body has a direct reporting line to Bishop's Council. [C2]

Recommendation 13

We recommend that the role of the Quality Nominee should be formalized, including clarification of his/her role in completion of the ASE return. [C2]

Recommendation 14

We recommend that St Albans Reader Ministry Training Programme conducts a risk management review. [C5]

Recommendation 15

We recommend that systematic feedback to worship leaders is introduced for Tuesday evening worship. [D3]

Recommendation 16

We recommend that the Programme team considers ways of enhancing support given on transition to learning and embedding study skills throughout the programme; and ways of helping students understand the pattern of ongoing learning on the course. [D4]

Recommendation 17

We recommend that the course provides a brief final report on each student for the Diocesan bishop to consider before licensing. [D8]

Recommendation 18

We recommend that the Programme team raises the profile of support offered to students with unseen disabilities, including promoting awareness of support for dyslexia. [E2]

Recommendation 19

We recommend that enhanced opportunities are created for students on St Albans Reader Ministry Training Programme to be involved in giving feedback to ERM. [F2]

Recommendation 20

We recommend that the Programme team takes module and course evaluation more seriously, by making students aware of the module questionnaires, by conducting a course evaluation, by producing written module reviews and by providing feedback to students on actions taken. [F6]

LIST OF COMMENDATIONS

Commendation 1

We commend the strong sense of community among staff, students and graduates [B2]

Commendation 2

We commend the RMO's insightful leadership of the course, and her attention to detail. [C2]

Commendation 3

We commend the system for transition to IME2 and continuing Reader Mission and Ministry Development Review, and the rigour with which it is monitored. [D9]

Commendation 4

We commend the effective interaction between the RMO and the Diocesan Officers and between the RMO and the past and current students. [D10]