



THE CHURCH
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Ministry Council

Follow-up Inspection Report

South West Ministry
Training Course

March 2014

**Ministry Division
Church House
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3AZ
Tel: 020 7898 1413
Fax: 020 7898 1421**

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South West Ministry Training Course

Senior Inspector's follow-up Report on the Response by the South West Ministry Training Course to the Recommendations of the March 2013 Report of the Inspectors

April 2014

INTRODUCTION

As the Senior Inspector I visited the Course on 19 March 2014 and met with the Principal, Dr Christopher Southgate to review the progress that had been made by the Course in implementing the Recommendations of the Report. I am grateful to Dr Southgate for a full and frank briefing on developments since the Inspection was completed early in 2013.

During the past year several significant changes have taken place in the structure and staffing of the Course.

In terms of structure, the SWMTC was unsuccessful in its appeal to be exempted from the arrangements for Common Awards and to retain the close links with the University of Exeter that had been built up over many years and were working well. The Course is now building a new relationship with the University of Durham and is committed to making all the changes that will be required under the new scheme. However, this has meant a weakening of the practical, everyday connection with the Department of Theology and Religion of the University of Exeter. The Course has relocated its library and offices to the St Luke's Campus, still within the University, but some distance from the Department.

The Course has been adapting its programmes to the common curriculum and has now received validation both from the Ministry Division and from the University of Durham.

There have also been a number of significant staffing changes. The Acting Principal at the time of the Inspection, Dr Christopher Southgate, was appointed Principal after an open process of selection. The Revd Dr David Nixon has been appointed Dean of Studies in succession to Dr Southgate and his appointment reflects guidance given in the Inspection Report with regard to the balance of churchmanship. The Revd Dr James Theodosius, previously the Director of Reader Training, was appointed as the Lazenby Chaplain of the University, and Dr Tim Gibson, already on the staff of the SWMTC, has taken over as Director of Reader Training. SWMTC is now responsible for Reader Training 4-7 for the Diocese of Exeter and this is in the portfolio of the new Staff Tutor (Reader Training), the Revd Patrick Parkes. The Truro end of the SWMTC has also seen a change of personnel, with Dr Jonathan Rowe being appointed to run a new

scheme of ministerial development and review for that Diocese and the appointment of the Revd Dr Lucy Larkin in his place (part time).

The administrative staff remains unchanged.

Turning to the specific recommendations of the Inspection Report, which follow in **bold**, the Course has tackled, or is in the process of tackling, all of the matters raised by the Inspectors and the substance of its formal response follows each recommendation in *italics* and takes into account the recent briefing by the Principal. The comments of the Senior Inspector, in Roman, follow for each recommendation and response.

Recommendation 1

We recommend that the Course review its use of external speakers and presenters with a view to improving the quality of input and drawing on the wealth of artistic, literary and musical talent to be found in the South West, subject always to a clear sense of the desirable outcomes, detailed briefing of such persons, and disciplined timekeeping.

There has already been a greater use of creative writers and innovative worship resources. Each staff tutor will invite a relevant artist to enter into conversation with their group on the interface between the artist's work and spirituality. We have also invited some visiting speakers with a view to addressing recommendation 6 (q.v.). Further, we are bidding for funding, in cooperation with the University of Exeter Department of Theology and Religion and Exeter Cathedral, to bring nationally important theologians to the region, to engage our students more fully in theological reflection.

This recommendation is being implemented with enthusiasm and enterprise. The plans currently being worked out will not be significantly affected by the transfer of validation from Exeter to Durham.

Recommendation 2

We recommend that the SWMTC seek to make the overall theological and missiological framework of the course more explicit and position such a rationale in a strategic place in its documentation and on its website.

A core statement, mainly bringing together existing excellent SWMTC material on this theme, has been placed on the website, with more extensive material on the internal learning platform.

This recommendation has been implemented fully.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that the Course review the issue of failure, in relation both to specific pieces of work and overall, and take steps to ensure that no perception that the SWMTC is a 'non-fail' Course could arise in the minds of staff, students and stakeholders.

The Course has logged the failure rate over the past ten years, and compared it with two other courses. We see no evidence, talking with students and DDOs, that such a 'non-fail' perception currently exists. We conclude that withdrawal, non-recommendation, and failure in individual modules are at appropriate levels, given that our intake of ministry students have all met criteria related to 'Quality of Mind'. However, the wording in the Student Guides for 2014-15 has been altered to remind ministry students that they are recommended in the first instance only for training.

The Course has satisfied itself and the Senior Inspector on the question whether students and others might be tempted to assume that they will always get through. The amendment to the Student Guides is helpful. However, ongoing alertness on the part of staff is needed.

Recommendation 4

We recommend that enhanced special provision be made for candidates preparing for the Distinctive Diaconate.

The Principal will attend meetings of the Diocesan group that is developing a vision for the diaconate. The Course will ensure that trainees come into contact with distinctive deacons in ministry and are able to share their twice-yearly meetings. The Principal will liaise with the Principal of STETS with regard to sharing sessions at Easter School 2015.

Considering the small number of ordinands recommended for the distinctive diaconate, the Course is making proper and sensible provision for them. It is important that, from the beginning of the selection process, through training to ordination, the diaconate is seen by all concerned as 'a full and equal order' of ministry.

Recommendation 5

We recommend that the Course prepare a statement of how it understands its corporate life and how in practical terms it aims to fulfil these aspirations and that this statement should become part of the Student Handbooks.

A core statement, mainly bringing together existing excellent SWMTC material on this theme, has been placed on the website, with more extensive material on the internal learning platform.

This recommendation has been implemented fully.

Recommendation 6

We recommend that the Course devise strategies to enable it to avoid blandness and lack of challenge in theological exploration and to add spice and stimulus to teaching and discussion.

A peer review system is already in place to help to keep colleagues' teaching sharp. The Dean of Studies has commissioned a staff development session on the latest best-practice in teaching. Staff will participate in training provided by the University's School of Education. In order to help us to explore contentious issues while holding the community together, we have invited additional visiting speakers to represent polar positions in key debates. A new course from Year 1 will cover this ground. As previously mentioned, we are also bidding for funding to bring nationally-important theologians to the region, which should contribute significantly to the quality of the students' engagement.

This is an excellent response to the recommendation. I would encourage staff to let their passion for their subject come across and strike sparks in the minds of their students, but without becoming tendentious.

Recommendation 7

We recommend that, at the point when all students are Anglican, the Anglican identity of the Course be made more prominent and that explicit attention be given in teaching to the Anglican theological tradition.

The staff will consider what is feasible within what is still, at the present time, an ecumenical course. The Director of Reader training has reviewed the provision for Reader candidates on the basis of a new policy document. Provision for meeting this recommendation in ordination training for Years 1-3 from 2015 onwards, when the Methodist Church will have finally withdrawn from the Course, will be considered in 1-3 planning.

The Course is moving steadily in the right direction in implementing this recommendation. The Inspection Report also referred to striking local examples of Anglican ministry and intellectual creativity in the history of the South West of England: does the Course intend to follow up this suggestion? The policy document for Reader training is thoughtful and persuasive, but does not represent the whole Anglican picture. The staff generally might consider taking the question, 'What does it mean to be catholic and reformed in the twenty-first

century Church of England?', as a possible rubric for exploring the roots of Anglican theology in the pre-Reformation western Church and in the Reformation tradition, both of which continue to be living elements in contemporary Anglicanism.

Recommendation 8

We recommend that staff give careful consideration to practical ways in which the corporately and continuously prayerful character of the Course could be enhanced.

The staff will consult Chaplains on building up corporate spiritual life. Prayer has been introduced into staff review sessions. A staff-led Bible study has been introduced on the Saturday morning of residentials. A new chaplain to ordinands is about to be appointed, and this recommendation will be central to her brief.

The Inspectors were aware that the staff of the SWMTC were people of prayer and wanted them to model more overtly the Pauline injunction, 'Pray without ceasing', in the life of the Course. This, it seems is now happening; the recommendation is being implemented as various opportunities open up.

Recommendation 9

We recommend that the staff reconsider the balance of input and discussion and, while ensuring that input is substantial and clear, endeavour to make discussion more brisk and economical.

The staff are to consider holding a staff development workshop with University help. The Dean of Studies is to commission a staff development session on latest best-practice in teaching. A focused opportunity for students to speak about the challenges of their workaday lives has been introduced.

The Inspectors recognise the importance of student involvement and input in teaching sessions, but are concerned that this should be focused, not diffuse, and should not unduly erode the time for direct teaching input. The skills that the staff need to manage the balance should be helped by professional advice that can be bought in and by mutual support.

Recommendation 10

We recommend that all voluntary staff should have a formal agreement with the Course regarding their role.

Already in place as of February 2013.

This final recommendation has been fully implemented. New voluntary staff, whose contribution will enrich the Course, have been taken on.

CONCLUSION

The SWMTC has responded positively to the recommendations of the Inspectors' report. The recommendations have either been implemented already or are in the process of being implemented. Some recommendations refer to ongoing challenges, especially with regard to teaching styles. I am confident that the Course has the capacity and resources to rise to this challenge.

PAUL AVIS

The Revd Canon Professor Paul Avis, Senior Inspector
7 April 2014