



THE CHURCH
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Ministry Council

Follow-up Inspection Report

Trinity College, Bristol

November 2013

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Trinity College, Bristol

Senior Inspector's follow-up Report on the Response by the College to the Recommendations of the October 2012 Report of the Inspectors

January 2014

INTRODUCTION

1. On 28 November 2013 I visited the College to meet formally with the Chair of Governors (Tony Miles) and the Acting Principal (Revd Dr Paul Roberts) and also had the opportunity to talk with Faculty, support staff and students about developments since the time of the Inspection. In January 2014 I had a further conversation with the Acting Principal to hear the results of various crucial meetings that were to be held during December and early January. I am grateful indeed for the genuinely appreciative way in which the College both received and responded to the Inspection Report, and the full and frank way in which everyone in the College so helpfully answered my various queries on this follow-up visit.

OVERVIEW

2. Since the Inspection Trinity has experienced a great deal of activity, not only in dealing with the Recommendations of our Report, or in managing the wholesale re-validation of its programmes through Durham University in the 'Common Awards' scheme (in itself an enormous and challenging task), but also in responding to the yet more significant challenges and opportunities that arose from the resignation of its Principal, Revd Canon George Kovoor, only a few months after the publication of the Inspection Report.
3. In particular, the Chair of Governors, the Acting Principal and the Executive Director (Andrew Lucas) deserve special mention for the way in which they managed the 'inter-regnum' and dealt with the significant institutional agenda which faced the College. They did not allow 'planning blight' to set in by waiting until a new Principal had been appointed before taking any significant decisions; rather, quite the opposite was the case - they tackled all the relevant issues with considerable zeal and fortitude and to very good effect. The result is that the new Principal, Revd Dr Emma Ineson, who takes up her post from 14 April 2014, can build confidently on the foundations that have been so well laid by her new colleagues during the inter-regnum .

4. The Inspection Team had rated the outcome of thirteen of the assessment criteria as 'confidence' and identified six major strengths of the College: its relationships with churches and many other organisations both locally and internationally; its long-established and effective relationship with Bristol Baptist College; its educational and formational programmes, and the way in which mission, prayerfully and theologically rooted, is at the heart of every aspect of its life; its prayerful community whose corporate worship is excellent; its committed, dedicated, caring and well qualified staff; and its innovative programme of 'context-based' learning.
5. However, the Team had also identified five 'areas for attention': the composition of its Council; its administrative and management structures which were deemed to be neither sufficiently clear nor robust; the need for a new 'rolling' strategic plan; recent problems in recruiting students; and the need to establish a strategy for dealing with the College's financial deficit, overdraft and future financing. As a result, the outcome of three of the assessment criteria (L – Governance, management, constitution and organisation; M –Business planning and risk management; and N – Financial policies and cost-effectiveness) was 'confidence with qualifications'.
6. Because of the crucial significance of the three criteria that had 'qualified' assessments, and the five areas that had been identified as needing attention, the overall outcome of the Inspection could only be one of 'Confidence with Qualifications' - despite the Inspectors having been impressed with so much of the College's activities and the overwhelming majority of the assessment criteria having been rated 'confidence'.

THE COLLEGE'S RESPONSES

7. Each of the 15 recommendations of the Inspection Report is shown below in **bold** print. The College's responses, showing what it has done about them since the report was published are shown in *italics*, and are followed by my comments on them as Senior Inspector.

Recommendation 1

The agreement that the Principals of both Colleges should attend each other's Council meetings should be given higher priority, especially during forthcoming discussions of a possible closer partnership.

It has been explicitly stated and agreed that the Principals of each college either attend the other Council in person or send an appointee in the event of his/her absence. In the case of Trinity, the appointee may be another member of Trinity Council or Faculty; in the case of the Baptist College, another member of its Faculty will be the appointee.

In addition, the frequency of Joint Faculty and Joint SMT meetings has been increased from the start of the academic year 2013-14. This will avoid duplication of business for those matters which are of common concern (for example, staff appointments and academic matters) and will further enhance procedural convergence between the two colleges.(see also Recommendation 15).

Allowing an appointed 'alternate' to attend the Council meetings and increasing the frequency of the joint SMT and Faculty meetings makes it abundantly clear that this recommendation has been fully heeded.

Recommendation 2

The College should undertake a survey of 'commuting' students to assess their needs, listen to their suggestions and make appropriate changes to enable them to feel less peripheral to College life.

An action plan has now been fully implemented. Current and future commuting students were polled and over the summer of 2013 their concerns were incorporated into a new policy specifically designed for commuting students. Key to this is the more effective use of home churches as 'Attachment Parishes', with appropriate induction and training given to their supervisors. A separate Handbook has been produced for commuting students and their supervisors. Commuting students can elect to incorporate their home parish involvement into an assessed portfolio of ministerial practice instead of taking a separate placement elsewhere.

This is precisely what the Inspectors had hoped might happen and it should lead to the commuting students feeling more at the heart of the College way of life.

Recommendation 3

As well as modelling their own good practice, the College staff should be advocates for creative and participative learning methodologies across all courses in the partnership.

A new Academic Staff Development Policy has been produced and adopted. It includes integrated provision for Peer Observations of teaching/learning activity, which is now happening in a systematic way. All teaching Faculty are observed annually, and feedback given and discussed at a date subsequent to the supervision session.

The Teaching and Learning Committee now also monitors peer observations and the outcomes feed into a programme of Teaching and Learning Workshops. In the academic year 2013-14 these Workshops (the first of which will be held in January 2014) will provide training in how various teaching modes interact with various learning styles of students.

These developments are excellent and wholly to be welcomed. They are certainly in line with the kind of arrangements the Inspectors thought would be needed.

Recommendation 4

The College should review its provision of IT in consultation with all staff, and draw up appropriate development plans so that strategies are agreed and staff development issues identified and addressed.

In April 2013 two members of SMT (including the Executive Director) met with the IT support technician to identify immediate opportunities and investment, review the development of the IT strategy and draw up a prioritised IT budget for the 2013-14 budget.

Initial IT training needs were also incorporated into a training day for support staff in July 2013, when they were polled regarding their future training needs. It was well-received and has served to enhance familiarity with newly-adopted word processing software. A similar day will be held in 2014, following identification of emerging needs appropriate for the time.

The practice of an annual meeting to review IT strategy and its budgetary requirements will be continued in future years, and implications for IT strategy beyond 2013-14 will emerge as a part of the overall Strategic Plan addressed in Recommendation 11.

No-one could have asked for, or expected, more than this excellent response. It shows how seriously the College takes its responsibilities for the development of use of its IT facilities.

Recommendation 5.

The SMT should explore with all teaching staff what needs to be done in order to meet consistently the University's timescales for returning marked work.

An integrated process to ensure marking is completed and returned within a three to five week period has been established since the Inspection. This process is explained in a 'Marking Process' document that has been disseminated among faculty and is available to students through handbooks and information on the VLE (Moodle). Training was provided to markers during the autumn term 2013 to ensure that the process is fully understood and implemented.

The marking turnaround has improved significantly since the last Inspection, due in part to the above procedures, clarification of expectations (to students and faculty) and the policy of flagging up problems markers may be facing, in sufficient time for emergency action to be taken. Faculty understand the procedures and appear to be using them effectively.

Excellent. This was a matter of great student concern at the time of the Inspection, and it would be difficult to think of any better action that could have been taken to remedy the situation so effectively. Even so, with time-pressures on both staff and students increasing this will need to be kept under active review.

Recommendation 6

The College should undertake a formal review of the context-based programme to assess its training benefits and look for ways of adopting such learning in the college-based programmes (both full- and part-time).

In addition to the ways context-based benefits have influenced our provision for commuters, a thorough review of the practical training of College based students has now taken place. It is now possible for college-based students to be assigned to a 'parish attachment' (from a list of approved parishes/benefices which can offer appropriate supervision). The supervisors (incumbents) have agreed to this option and have been trained accordingly. The attachments will enable college-based students to complete annual, assessed portfolios of ministerial practice, similar to those submitted by context-based students. The church attachments replace the older model of parish-placement and preaching terms, which is being phased out over the next two years. The new attachment-based pathway is available in the new Common Awards framework.

Having reviewed both commuting students and the practical ministerial opportunities for college-based students, the College is now in a better position for a formal review of its context-based training. As this has implications for, and

is affected by, future business strategy, this awaits the appointment and arrival of the new Principal. The proposed date of September 2014 is still realistic, but the parameters of the review will need to be clarified early in 2014. This is taking place at the time of writing.

That so much has been done in such a short time, especially when so much had to be done in connection with the move to 'Common Awards' is frankly remarkable. This is of the utmost significance for the development of the College's future since it is at the very heart of its academic and theological rationale. It will surely be one of the first priorities for the new Principal, but the work that has been done so far should mean that the target date of September 2014 will be met.

Recommendation 7

That all overdue appraisals now take place without further delay and that in future, they are clearly linked to the implementation of the Strategic Plan for the College.

All outstanding appraisals have been carried out, with appraisals of SMT members conducted in July 2013 by the Vice Chair of Trustees. The appraisals, in terms of goals, were specifically linked to the College's strategic priorities. Excellent – just as required.

Recommendation 8

The Council should review its organisational structure, including the role and composition of the SMT, the role of the Vice Principal and the provision of leadership and management training, in order to ensure greater clarity and accountability, and to be in line with its strategic and operational plans and its ability to deliver them.

Council held meetings in June 2013 involving SMT, Faculty and support staff to explore the five issues identified by the Inspection. Trustees also took the opportunity presented by these meetings, and others with students, for input into the person specification and job description of the new Principal.

The results were distilled into a paper that was presented to Council at its meeting in December 2013. The college expects that final decisions about the revised structure of governance and increased clarity about the role of senior management will be made at Council's residential meeting in March 2014. At this meeting, the College's new Principal will be in attendance and so be able to contribute to decision making on this matter.

This is a matter which concerned the Inspectors greatly and so I am pleased to see that good progress is being made towards doing what was suggested.

Clearly, the resignation of the Principal early in 2013 meant that it would have been unwise, if not impossible, to implement any new organisational structure until a new Principal had been appointed. It is good to hear that she will be able to attend the March Council meeting even though it is a month before she formally takes up her appointment. This shows not only just how seriously the Council has taken this vital matter, but it also bodes well for the future.

Recommendation 9

Council should establish a set of performance measures that include both on-going key performance indicators and progress against implementation targets that are specific, measurable and realistic, with clear timescales and personal accountabilities

In the first instance, individual performance objectives that are linked to the College's mission and strategy were discussed with each member of SMT at their annual review. They were then drafted into a cohesive plan with appropriate development needs noted and implemented.

Once the new Strategic Plan has been drawn up (see response to Recommendation 11) and following Council's residential meeting in March 2014, a revised implementation plan will be drafted with action plans relating to each of the key objectives. The action plans will build on the work the council did for the last strategic plan in identifying lead persons, success criteria, and means of monitoring and evaluating. These will include key performance indicators relevant to the objective, such as, in the area of ordinands recruitment, spread of sponsoring dioceses, age profile, balance of men and women, balance of singles and married etc., or, in the area of student recruitment generally, admissions of students in the different categories against the budget. The college and council will continue to monitor expenditure against budget (in particular through the work of the council's Standing Committee) and income generation against agreed targets.

The Council meeting in March will clearly be decisive and, again, it is impressive that so much progress has been made on this in such a short time. The Inspectors could not have expected more.

Recommendation 10

Consideration should be given to the possibility of having directly elected staff and student representatives on Council, with full voting rights.

The question of staff and student representation and involvement was considered as part of Council's review of governance (see Recommendation 8). At their meeting in March 2014 the Trustees are to consider a newly-formed wider Council, incorporating Trustees, staff and students. Members of the SMT

and the Student President have, of course, currently been given attendance rights at Council meetings.

The Inspectors felt very strongly about this matter. What is now being proposed (and what I heard more about in detail during my follow-up visit to the college) meets our concerns head-on.

Recommendation 11

Council should draw up a new Rolling Strategic Plan, including an environmental and SWOT analysis, consulting widely within the College and externally (especially with sending Dioceses) before finalising it, and communicating its implementation and development to staff and students annually.

Council began a high level strategic review at its meeting in March 2013, recognising the need for a more rigorous, coherent rolling Strategic Plan.

In May 2013, Council adopted a revised financial plan, structured in relation to the College's overall strategy and aimed at making a substantial adjustment to the college's operating budget (see also Recommendation 12).

A SWOT analysis and other feedback formed part of the consultations and conversations with regard to a new Principal. All students, staff, DDOs, and local and sending Dioceses were consulted during the summer of 2013.

Council is due to give over a significant part of its two day residential meeting in March 2014 to revision of its strategic plan and identification of key priorities. An environmental and SWOT analysis will form part of the process.

Again, the progress that has been made on these issues is most impressive and is very much in line with what we had recommended.

Recommendation 12

Council should continue with urgency to address its financial situation and develop a strategy for sustainable financing linked to its Strategic and Business Plans.

The college has acted with urgency on the matter of a sustainable financial plan to address the College's accumulated deficits. A draft plan, linked to the College's Strategic Plan, was put to Council in May 2013 and was formally adopted. It aims to achieve break even during the academic year 2013-14.

Very significant progress was made during the summer of 2013 in restructuring the support staff, giving new emphasis to strengthening community and

teamwork, generating income from premises, and developing partnerships to create new synergies, at the same time as re-focusing the activity of Faculty. More work has yet to be done in some of these areas as well as a focus on fundraising through trusts. The council believes that the progress made towards a substantial financial adjustment has been remarkable.

By any standards, this is much more than 'remarkable'! The financial situation at the time of the Inspection was serious and the outlook appeared quite bleak. However, the sheer tenacity, determination and vision of the SMT, and of the Executive Director in particular, has been both amazing and exemplary. It is an outstanding achievement.

Recommendation 13

The procedure for the backing up of computerised data should be documented; it should include details of the validation of backups should they be needed for restoration and it should be tested periodically.

In February 2013 a document was created which fully describes the College's extensive backup procedures including multiple systems for business critical data. The document is held in printed form within the IT room, and in digital form on a file server accessible to authorised staff. Recording of automated nightly backups is reported by email reports and monitored by the IT Manager.

While real-world experience of data restoration indicates that the backup processes are effective, a suitable regime for periodic restoration testing has taken place, using a manual system. An automatic restoration testing system is currently under development.

This is precisely what was needed and the recommendation is thus fully implemented.

Recommendation 14

A check should be made on the number and location of power points in the lecture rooms and appropriate action taken to ensure the safety of students connecting laptops to the power supply.

A notice went out at the beginning of the 2013-14 academic year to charge laptops prior to lectures in order to avoid trailing cables. The response to this and the current usage does not lead the college management at this point to think that the need for extra floor cable protectors is now so pressing.

In comparison to the other recommendations this may have seemed relatively trivial and 'nit-picking'. However, it was a serious matter with significant

implications for 'Health & Safety' and I pleased to see that appropriate action has now been taken.

Recommendation 15

The College should now begin the process of working jointly with the Bristol Baptist College to identify an appropriate, jointly agreed, accommodation strategy as part of the planning for the medium to long term future of both Colleges.

Since September 2013 the Colleges have instituted more frequent and regular meetings of the joint Senior Management Team, and of the joint Faculty, to address higher level matters in common rather than separately (including Common Awards, Bristol University validation, Faculty appointments strategy, and colleges convergence).

The Baptist College Council held a special meeting in October 2013 to consider convergence at which the Chair of Trinity Trustees, a Trustee member of the Standing committee, and the Executive Director were present.

A meeting of representative trustees from both colleges is to be arranged for February 2014 at which trustee level issues will be further explored. A joint company, representing both Colleges is to be formed to enable both colleges to contract jointly with external bodies as regards validation (with Durham University and Common Awards), and the wider regulatory framework (including HEFCE and the QAA).

'Convergence' of two historic institutions is inevitably a sensitive, difficult and lengthy matter and the Inspectors understood that full well. Talks about the joint future of the two Colleges have continued, albeit perhaps more slowly than some might have anticipated or hoped. The establishment of the 'joint company' is a major development, however, and shows that progress is being made where and when it is needed. Self-evidently, the longer-term shape and organisation of the two Colleges will take longer to identify and will be subject to many quite fundamental challenges. Everything I have seen on this visit indicates that 'convergence' is still very much 'business in progress' and it will be something to which, inevitably, the new Principal will need to give close attention over the next few years.

CONCLUSION

8. The College is to be commended for the way in which it has responded to the Inspection Report. It is abundantly clear that all of its recommendations have been acted on in a timely and effective manner; furthermore, it is especially pleasing that those most directly relating to its 'core business' (college-based and context-based learning –

Recommendations 2 and 6) have led to an even better, more integrated system being introduced for its students.

9. At the end of the Inspection, the Inspection Team had concluded that the College had 'reached another critical and defining moment in its development' and said that 'we believe that, given its track record since the last inspection, it will rise to the several challenges it now faces, respond positively to our fifteen recommendations and be an excellent organisation' (Report page 16). Everything I have seen and heard in my follow-up visit, confirms that positive view of the College's future. Trinity has indeed taken heed of our concerns, noted the areas we identified 'for attention', and responded positively to our recommendations. It is now in an enviably strong position to build further on its strengths with confidence.

Professor Peter Toyne, Senior Inspector
24 January 2014