

PREFACE

to the Common Awards in Theology, Ministry and Mission

This preface describes the art of education for ministry and mission to which the Common Awards in Theology, Ministry and Mission aspire. It attempts to articulate and affirm the inherently transformational and creative nature of such an undertaking that ultimately reflects the love, wisdom and grace of God in Christ who is both the source and the goal of this endeavour. The preface is written for the staff and students of the many and varied institutions that participate in the Common Awards, as well as for individuals within the wider church who are involved and interested in the calling and education of the people of God.

The Common Awards bring under one umbrella the educational programmes of over 20 theological and ministerial educational institutions that were previously validated by 19 universities. While the creation of a suite of Common Awards in Theology, Ministry and Mission arose out of a necessity to respond to the recent far-reaching changes to the funding of higher education nationally, this necessity has acted as a catalyst for embarking on a process of developing education for the churches that is responsive to the rapidly changing context for mission. The Common Awards offer an opportunity to steward the resources of ministerial education more effectively and to simplify infrastructure in order to release energy for the core tasks of formation and education in creative and collaborative ways. They are the culmination of a remarkable and demanding journey on the part of the participating institutions and churches, as individually and together they have forged the path leading to the creation of the Awards.

Akin to a village 'common', the Common Awards offer a spacious place where the richness of the diverse traditions and emphases represented by participating institutions can flourish and where unity among the participating churches and institutions can be expressed through creative collaboration. The Common Awards embody a balance between the teaching and learning that preparing for different vocations and ministries in a variety of contexts and traditions necessitates, and teaching and learning that engages with, and embraces, this diversity for the sake of the *missio Dei*.

Education through the Common Awards looking glass

The Christian roots of higher education in Western Europe reach back to the very beginnings of university education when learning flourished in monastic and cathedral schools. Succeeding centuries have witnessed a lively conversation between Christian faith and the nature of learning, scholarship and research that has continued to the present. In line with this heritage, the Common Awards welcome the benefits of a strong partnership with a university: these include the exchange of ideas that being part of a vibrant, interdisciplinary community of scholars offers, and the breadth

and depth of experience in the development and administration of higher education that a university embodies.

However, there is a recognition that the Common Awards are both 'in the world' of contemporary higher education but not 'of that world'. This means that while they fulfil the requirements of current higher education infrastructure and quality assurance processes genuinely and assiduously, they are not defined or confined by them. The epistemology of current higher education can appear dualist, comprising two categories of knowledge, namely theory and practical skills. In a functional understanding of higher education as a means of employment, there is an emphasis on the acquisition of subject-specific and transferable skills, so that students are flexible enough to adapt to a rapidly changing economic environment. A wider and deeper epistemology that also embraces affective knowledge underpins the Common Awards. Such knowledge shapes the emotions, hones virtue and fuels passion after the pattern of Christ. It is not acquired simply by putting theory into practice but is generated by the very process of learning, whether practice from theory, or, indeed, theory from practice and experience, as well as the environment in which it takes place. The methodologies of theological reflection are an important - and developing - facet of this kind of learning and therefore feature extensively in the Common Awards. The Common Awards offer education that (re-)asserts the necessary unity of faith and learning, of knowledge and divine revelation, of the pursuit of truth and the nurturing of virtue, and so must reach beyond the aims of prevailing models of higher education and, in some sense, return to its Christian roots. The frameworks and systems within which the Common Awards must now operate will form a backdrop that neither predominates nor determines the culture of teaching and learning in the participating institutions.

The particularity of revelation was not called into question but, rather, taken for granted and acted upon as the very presupposition of the intellectual enquiry, without it becoming immune from critical reflection.

Gavin D'Costa

Instead, the Common Awards adhere to an understanding of Christian education that is holistic, shaping intellect, spirit, affections, relationships and bodily life. It is more akin to the classical Greek conception of education - *paideia* - that was adopted and adapted by the early church, and within which attention is given to the formational dimensions of the pursuit of knowledge and the acquisition of skills. Formation relates to the transformation of learners into the likeness of Christ and into ways of being, knowing and doing that inhabit the kingdom of God and reflect the God-given callings for which learners are being prepared. It involves the cultivation of virtues, spiritual disciplines, self-mastery and self-awareness, but, above all, seeing the knowledge, love and worship of God as the only and ultimate goal of learning from which all other learning flows. Growth in such wisdom requires humble, vulnerable and selfless engagement with reality, with 'the other', with the Christian community, with self and with God. Filled with risk and uncertainty, such an adventure of learning draws learners deeper into the mysterious reality of divine love.

What, do you wish to know your Lord's meaning in this thing? Know it well, love was his meaning. Who reveals it to you? Love. What did he reveal to you? Love. Why does he reveal it to you? For love. Remain in this, and you will know more of the same. But you will never know different, without end. So I was taught that love is our Lord's meaning.

Julian of Norwich

Education and its environment

Such a *paideia* has implications for the environment in which teaching and learning takes place. Naturally, participating institutions will need to be able to demonstrate their compliance with the quality assurance criteria stipulated by higher education authorities relating to the provision of an adequate learning environment for the acquisition of knowledge, understanding, skills and competencies. Such criteria include suitable library and teaching facilities, appropriately qualified teaching staff and clarity about expectations for the successful completion of programmes of study.

For the Common Awards, however, education as *paideia* makes additional demands of a different order. Institutions will offer teaching and learning in the contexts of a communal life of prayer and worship which draws teachers and learners alike back to the source and purpose of all learning, namely to 'know God and enjoy him forever'. There will be an expectancy that worship and prayer will shape learning and that learning will shape worship and prayer: space is created for liminal and transcendent possibilities. As such learning communities - be they local churches or institutions - gather in the presence of the divine Teacher, there will be an acknowledgement that while there are indeed teachers and learners, ultimately all are learners in the kingdom of God.

Genuinely open sacred space and time are in short supply. If main-line religion [...] ceases to offer and benignly to interpret such space and time as opportunity for encounter freed in certain respects from universal performance appraisal and the seamlessness of managerial and commodified capitalism, then it is little wonder that the 'sacred' is lost.

Richard H. Roberts

The patterns of communal life of participating institutions will reflect the Trinitarian community of the Godhead: teachers and learners will engage with one another in relationships of self-giving love expressed in service and mutual vulnerability that, in turn, will shape and form the characters of both learners and teachers into the image of Christ. The communal and collaborative nature of wisdom will be lived out in such communities: learners are confronted with the provisionality of human articulations of truth when others' interpretation of it differ from their own. Institutions will encourage learners to be inspired by such experiences, seeing them as prompts to become better listeners to the Spirit and to the 'other', to become lifelong learners as an expression of abundant living, and to embrace surprise and uncertainty as manifestations of divine grace.

According to the precepts of paideia, the process of education itself is assumed to possess intrinsic value, the meaningfulness and truthfulness inherent in the object of study impacting directly on the life-world of the learning community.

Andrew Walker &
Andrew Wright

For students of the Common Awards the community of learning extends beyond the institution: learning will take place in contexts of authentic and sustained engagement with the reality of local churches and the communities they serve. Moreover, students will be encouraged to relate to and reflect upon the wider church in other cultures and nations. Those who are learning to minister in and through the church to God's world, thereby participating in the *missio Dei*, do so according to

the pattern of Christ himself, namely through incarnational engagement. Reflective and reflexive involvement with the realities of the church and the world will be a hallmark of teaching and learning within the Common Awards that encourages a continuous and critical conversation between knowledge and experience through which God's revelation is sought.

Teachers of law can humble their students when the students try to put on airs about their learning, because they have a court and get practical experience. On the other hand, we can't humble our students because we have no practical exercises. Yet experience alone makes a theologian.

Martin Luther

Education and its content

The development of a theological *habitus* for participating in God's mission in the world is at the heart of the content of the Common Awards. This involves learning that is shaped by - and shapes - engagement with God's world. It will involve the study of the Bible, of Christian doctrine and of Christian worship. In addition, students will be immersed in the study and practice of their own tradition while learning how this relates to those of others and to the changing shape and growth of the church today. Such learning will be suffused with the quest to see the self-giving, redeeming love of God transforming the world, and so will have a strong outward facing element of reading the world in order to offer an appropriate apologetic for the Christian faith and to explore and to exercise what it means to be salt and light in the public square.

Students of the Common Awards will learn about the nature and practice of collaborative servant leadership that is marked by a genuine willingness to decrease so that others may increase (Jn 3:30). In the context of the church they will rejoice in enabling the gifts and ministries of others to flourish. In the context of the communities that churches serve, they will learn to detect the movement of the Spirit and fan into flame the sparks of kingdom life.

Many of the students who participate in the Common Awards will have responded to a calling to a specific ministry in one of the participating churches. The churches have defined these ministries by articulating competencies or outcomes that describe the roles, skills, knowledge and character that a person prepared for such a ministry will embody. Such frameworks are helpful for individuals' discernment of their calling, the churches' understanding of their role and for identifying the educators' task in preparing them for such ministry. The Common Awards draw from these descriptions outcomes that are common to all who embark on the Common Awards, as well as articulating additional outcomes for learning pathways that prepare individuals for specific ministries. In being prepared for these ministries, students will be encouraged to deepen the roots of their own tradition while welcoming and relating generously with those of others.

However, the Common Awards will shape teaching and learning in such a way as to resist the fragmentation and illusion of 'arrival' to which such an 'outcomes based' process so easily gives rise. Interdisciplinary approaches will permeate the Common Awards, thwarting the fragmentation

of learning into disciplines and encouraging learners to think critically and theologically across subject areas. Integration of cognitive learning with self-discovery, practice, experience and creativity will disarm any temptations to deify academic achievement at the expense of wisdom and will serve to remind learners of the open-endedness and inherent riskiness of learning.

I have said that all branches of knowledge are connected together, because the subject-matter of knowledge is intimately united in itself, as being the acts and the work of the Creator.

John Henry Newman

Education and its assessment

Assessment within the Common Awards is first and foremost a means of deepening the learning experience. Assessment should result in learners desiring to learn more and in taking greater responsibility for their own learning. There will be a recognition that true learning requires an openness to being judged, or assessed, which, in turn, requires a vulnerability and selflessness that are open to uncertainty as well as to correction. Such an approach to assessment encourages learners - as individuals and within the learning community - to spend time reflecting on, and being attentive to, their learning.

[...] good learning requires a particular kind of environment - one in which it is safe to make oneself vulnerable [...] in which it is acceptable to change one's mind, to get things wrong, to get a negative result, to reach an unpopular conclusion. It requires an environment in which one's welcome is not worn out if one tries and fails.

Mike Higton

Learning is assessed both summatively and formatively. Summative assessments offer students the opportunity to demonstrate that they have achieved the learning outcomes stipulated by a particular module. Summative assessments are marked and the mark contributes to the final mark of an award. Formative assessment, on the other hand, sits outside the formal marking framework and has a different purpose. It offers both the learner and the teacher an opportunity to reflect on and respond to the teaching and learning that is taking place during the course of the module. It encourages students to become self-regulating in their learning and to engage with both their peers and their teacher in this process. Within the Common Awards, formative assessment will involve making connections between the learning of a particular module with that of another discipline or with experience in a given context, such as a placement or employment. The ability to make such connections appropriately and meaningfully is a means of evaluating how deeply learning has been assimilated and of encouraging students to develop the habit and skills of integrating their learning across disciplines or with the reality of experience. This, in turn, involves being prepared to take risks and seeing learning as a lifelong activity.

When theological educators strive to make integration a goal, a process, and a strategy [...], we are essentially seeking to form and educate a person with integrity.

Kathleen A Cahalan

Higher education infrastructure requires learners to be assessed against learning outcomes in order to gauge whether a student has acquired the knowledge, understanding and skills articulated

by them. The Common Awards will seek creative ways of also assessing *formational* learning but will do so in the recognition and anticipation that such learning is neither defined nor confined by articulated learning outcomes, and that such learning takes place in the 'hidden curriculum' of relating with mentors and tutors, of participating in the life of the community, including its communal patterns of worship, eating and socialising, in the disciplines of personal study, solitude, silence and prayer, as well as in reflexive engagement with the world. While formation may in part be *measured* through assessment, it is as much *discerned* within a relational and mentoring approach to teaching and learning that the Common Awards will embody.

The university and the churches have different but complementary roles in assessing students' learning: the churches will combine discernment and assessment of formational development with assessment of academic progress to determine the preparedness of students for the ministries to which they are called. The university will have a more limited remit of assessing the knowledge, understanding and skills that have been stipulated as learning outcomes for the programme in order to determine the successful achievement of an award.

Education and calling

Learners embarking upon the Common Awards do so primarily as a response to a calling. The authenticity and shape of this calling is not only the gateway to the Common Awards, but is also the dynamic within which learning takes place. The Common Awards will encourage continued exploration of the nature of this calling in relation to each individual's role in the *missio Dei* within the particularities of their unique mix of gifts and experiences. Some ministries to which students are called are well articulated by the churches, primarily through statements of competencies and learning outcomes. While these will guide the shape of learning pathways for these ministries, they will be applied in the context of a lifelong journey of learning that is open to the dynamic work of the Spirit.

Let us consider this process [...] as a trek, or a voyage, to our homeland; though progress towards the one who is ever present is not made through space, but through integrity of purpose and character.

Augustine of Hippo