

Ministry Council: Periodic External Review Follow-up Report

Cranmer Hall

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Senior Reviewer's Follow-up Report to the March 2018 Periodic External Review

Introduction

The Periodic External Review of Cranmer Hall, St John's College, Durham, took place on 26 and 27 February (Ministry Division team) and on 6 March (with Durham University team) 2018. The initial response of the TEI with an Action Plan was received on 8 August 2018 and approved. In sending the initial response and Action Plan, the Warden noted that the PER report had been discussed in the following places: Cranmer Hall Officers, Cranmer Staff Meeting, St John's College Council, Cranmer Committee and also with the Cranmer Common Room President and Vice-Presidents. The Action Plan had been drawn up by the Cranmer Hall Officers and agreed with both the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Cranmer Committee.

The formal response of the TEI to the review team's recommendations, with the Action Plan and the addition of a progress report, was received on 14 January 2019. The senior reviewer made a follow-up visit to Cranmer Hall on 7 and 8 February 2019, meeting first with the Warden privately and subsequently with the Warden, the Deputy Warden, the Director of Postgraduate Studies, the Director of Undergraduate Studies and the Operations Manager.

The formal response of the TEI to the review team's recommendations, with an Action Plan and progress report, together with the senior reviewer's commentary, follows below. This report sets out the original recommendations in **bold**, the actions identified in the Action Plan in *italics* and the inspectors' comments in Roman (normal) type.

Recommendation 1

In its recruitment strategy, Cranmer should pro-actively seek to reach potential students who would be attracted to a very good college and a first-class university theology department.

Action taken

The Cranmer Hall Website has been amended to provide a more detailed description of the Department of Theology BA pathway which now includes a full and positive commendation from a current ordinand. The MATM and the DThM information has also been amended and enhanced. This information is further reinforced in interview processes with the Warden/Deputy Warden and Academic Dean / Directors of Studies. The Director of the MA Programme has strengthened the culture of postgraduate research through the introduction of an annual MA Research Symposium at Cranmer Hall. Some of this MA research will be introduced by students to DDOs on the annual DDO day in February.

The TEI has responded well to this recommendation, taking initiatives in the two areas of (a) publicity and marketing and (b) enhancing the research culture throughout the institution where it already existed and fostering it where it did not. These improvements have already resulted in a rise in general interest and in recruitment to the DThM in particular.

Recommendation 2

We recommend that, within its evangelical framework and ethos, the TEI should review the opportunities for students to be exposed to the catholic Anglican tradition, especially in ecclesiology, including the theology of ordination and the sacraments.

Action taken

The Director of Undergraduate Studies has conducted a review of current teaching on the catholic Anglican tradition. He identified a number of ways in which catholic Anglican tradition is introduced to students which may not have been highlighted to the PER team at the time of their visit, including in the module on Christian Spirituality, and the annual Ascension Day service at St Chad's College.

Since the PER visit we have introduced a number of new lectures: on the Anglo Catholic movement as a historic feature of Anglicanism; on the breadth of Anglican ecclesiology; on the nature of sacraments within the Anglican tradition (both the latter lectures form part of the Christian Doctrine module).

Further reflection has resulted in a proposal that we offer a new lecture in the next academic year on a theological understanding of orders, which will involve significant insight from the catholic Anglican tradition.

Furthermore, conversations have been opened up with St Antony's Priory Durham, which under new leadership is being established as a residential community within a catholic Anglican tradition. It is hoped that this will provide ordinands with an opportunity to experience the catholic Anglican tradition in a living and vibrant way.

This recommendation has been thoroughly considered by the institution and suitable steps have already been taken to broaden students' understanding and experience of the richness and diversity of the Anglican tradition. It is commendable that ordinands are required to engage with some key official documents of the Church of England, especially the Ordinal, the Canons, 'Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the

Clergy', and the Five Guiding Principles. It is clear that the theology of the sacraments and of the ordained ministry are being taken seriously.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that staff-student consultation take place to work out the best way of providing structured opportunities for the discussion of sensitive issues on which student opinion is divided.

Action taken

This consultation took place and as a result, and with the support of the CHO team, the Cranmer Common Room launched 'Elephant Conversations' which are student-led spaces for discussing sensitive issues within community. These have been greatly valued and will take place twice a term.

The Warden has also introduced a twice-termly 'Community Hour' in which the student community meet with the Warden and Deputy Warden to address questions about community life. This has provided an opportunity to address some sensitive issues and has also clarified that further work is appropriate in this area. The Warden will continue this conversation with the CCR leadership in 2019.

This was a gap in formational provision that was noticed by the Review team and mentioned by students. The gap has now begun to be filled in sensible and sensitive ways that allow the students themselves to take some responsibility, yet also involve staff in modelling to ordinands a path of non-anxious leadership and guidance. There is often more than one 'elephant in the room', so the new arrangements will help to defuse any tensions and at the same time provide some stepping stones to the desired meeting of hearts and minds.

Recommendation 4

We recommend that facilities for amplification be used consistently in large teaching spaces to assist audibility of both teaching and discussion.

Action taken

We addressed this at our Teachers' Meeting on 18 September and again at a staff meeting on 12 December, giving practical training in the use of microphones in the Leech Hall. Staff are committed to using these facilities in a consistent way, although there is a recognition that the reliability of the equipment is such that a uniform level of student experience cannot be guaranteed. The Leech Hall is due a substantial upgrade in summer 2020. Also, the LRC will be open in spring 2019 and will become from then the main lecture space, with the latest amplification technology.

This basic but necessary practical matter is being addressed as swiftly as possible in two ways: the planned upgrade of the Leech Hall next year and the imminent opening of the Learning Resource Centre which will have the necessary technological equipment.

Recommendation 5

We recommend that Cranmer Hall teaching staff normally be granted a term's study leave not less than every three years, subject to the normal processes of approval and review of study projects.

Action taken

A new study leave policy has been agreed by College Officers to the effect that full-time teaching staff will normally have a term's study leave every three years. This will be implemented for the academic year 2019-2020.

This recommendation, which is intended to enhance the research culture and ethos of the institution, together with the academic prowess of individual teaching staff, has been carefully considered in its various ramifications and is being fully implemented forthwith.

Recommendation 6

We recommend that a review and restructuring of the administrative support for Cranmer Hall be undertaken and that consideration should be given to establishing a senior post with overarching executive responsibilities for Cranmer, such as a chief operating officer or equivalent.

Action taken

This review has been undertaken and a new structure created, including the new post of Operations Manager. Chris Courtman started in this role at the beginning of January 2019.

Human Resources advice and guidance was sought with regard to the managing of the recommended changes. They have been implemented as smoothly as possible. In particular, an Operations Manager is now in place. The new arrangements should reduce the amount of day-to-day administrative detail coming across the Warden's desk, enabling the Warden to devote time and energy to core leadership tasks, with the ongoing support of a PA, while the Operations Manager will ensure the smooth running of the overall enterprise and the efficient implementation of executive decisions.

Recommendation 7

We recommend that the theological study of non-Christian faiths and of the dynamics of inter-faith dialogue be strengthened, alongside practical opportunities to experience the worship and traditions of other faiths.

Action taken

This recommendation has been addressed in part by a very successful Mission Study Block to the Holy Land, during which the study of non-Christian faiths was pursued. It is intended that this is part of the annual programme offered to all students. Furthermore, since the PER visit we had a week of block teaching on Christianity and Other Faiths, majoring on Islam, and this received very good feedback from students (significantly better than in previous years). We will be building on this in this academic year through engaging a guest lecturer who has recently completed a Durham PhD in Islamic Studies.

The presence of other faith traditions, with their beliefs, ceremonies and mores, is a given factor in many areas of parochial or sector ministry. The theological understanding of other faiths and how to relate to them in practice locally is probably an area of some anxiety for many ordinands. What was previously a weaker area of coverage in theological education and ministerial formation at Cranmer Hall has now been strengthened in imaginative ways. The developments referred to in the Action Plan will need to be consolidated in structured and consistent ways.

Recommendation 8

We recommend that the TEI should consider how the views of students on the 'Durham Pathway' are best represented.

Action taken

The 'Durham Pathway' students have representation via the Department of Theology and Religion SSCC and the BA/MATM reps on the Cranmer SSCC. To enhance their representation and address any issues specific to this pathway, the Academic Dean and Director of Undergraduate Studies have a meeting with 'Durham Pathway' students once a term. The first of these meetings has already taken place.

While it is right that all those studying at a TEI should be stretched intellectually as well as spiritually, so that their capacity for ministerial work and theological reflection is enlarged, this group of students was feeling under particular pressure. The termly meeting mentioned in the response seems a suitable safety valve. The combination of academic pressure and tutorial support is likely to attract the best motivated and most able students. But see also under the next recommendation.

Recommendation 9

The review team recommend reviewing the workload of students on the Durham pathway.

Action taken

The Director of Undergraduate Studies and Academic Dean have met with 'Durham Pathway' students from the 2017/18 cohort to review their experience and workload. There are a number of recommendations regarding induction, placements and assessments and CHOs are taking these forward for the current cohort. For example, the changes in formative assessments implemented this academic year (see response to Recommendation 16) were seen by the 2017/2018 cohort as a positive step in beginning to address the workload for these students. Furthermore, we have now implemented a policy of allocating the same tutor to all 'Durham Pathway' students which will improve staff awareness of any specific issues related to the pathway.

The regular termly meeting (see response to Recommendation 8) also provides an opportunity for close monitoring of the workload for this pathway.

The steps mentioned in this response, together with the actions being taken in response to recommendations 8 and 16, should prove helpful both in gently alleviating the pressure of commitments and also in making such pressure as will inevitably remain more manageable.

Recommendation 10

The review team recommends that the TEI consult with its students on the effectiveness of the induction processes and on possibilities for its development. The team recommends in particular that the TEI discuss ways of providing clearer information about individual student pathways and about workload, and explore means of strengthening the preparation provided to students to help them manage their workload.

Action taken

This consultation took place with leaving and continuing students in summer 2018 and resulted in a substantially amended induction programme for the cohort arriving in autumn 2018. This included greater time for discussion about expectations re workload, and strategies for time-management; these discussions were felt by students to be helpful. More space was given for exploration of academic processes and study skills. Feedback on the induction programme was very positive, and further areas for improvement have been identified for the 2019 programme.

A sound and substantial induction programme is the foundation of a successful training and requires a considerable input of personnel and time. It should begin as soon as a student has accepted an offer of a place, in the form of a welcome pack (inviting, not intimidating), partly tailored to the particular pathway that the student will follow. For example, students are now expected to learn the Greek alphabet before they arrive. At the beginning of their first term, many students will come with anxieties, misconceptions and probably misdirected energies. Even though a comprehensive handbook will be provided, there is no substitute for patiently talking these issues through in the induction period. The cultivation of appropriate study skills is a key area and can save much time for tutors and students later. Another sensitive point is advice and practical support with regard to SENDA issues. The changes and improvements that are now in progress, in both the formative and the academic areas, will pay dividends in a more rewarding experience of training. The formal schedule or timeframe for the communication of information to students, that is now being put in place, will underpin an effective induction process.

Recommendation 11

The reviewers recommend that the TEI should look for ways of communicating more clearly and directly to students the nature of the complaints process, and of reassuring students of the confidentiality of the process and its separation from the assessment of their formation.

Action taken

This recommendation was addressed through the substantially redesigned induction process (see Recommendation 10) and students were talked through the complaints process as outlined in the Community Handbook and on the Cranmer Hall website.

It belongs to the nature of student life, especially in the case of mature students who have previously held down demanding jobs and careers, that there will always be something to grumble about. The initiatives outlined elsewhere in the response will help to reduce the quantity of grumbles and to defuse those that remain. Formal complaints will be rare or non-existent, but it helps students to feel secure when they are clear about how to proceed if something should, in their view, go seriously wrong at college. It is a fact of human nature that to put procedures in a book or online is not enough to achieve this: many students will need to hear it for themselves from those with the ultimate responsibility for their welfare.

Recommendation 12

The review team recommends that the TEI consider how to monitor the clarity and consistency of the materials provided on DUO across all its modules, and consider establishing a more demanding baseline for such provision.

Action taken

This has already been discussed within the Academic Team and has been addressed at the Teachers' Meeting on 18 September, both through training and the dissemination of clear guidance in terms of the use of DUO. We have already received positive feedback about improved use of DUO by staff at the SSCC in the Michaelmas term as part of the ASE review process. As of the end of 2018 all DUO modules overseen by Cranmer teaching staff comply with the guidance given by the Academic Dean.

It is clear that a thorough review of staff use of DUO has already taken place and has brought benefits. In terms of 'a more demanding baseline', the University's checklist for consistency in usage has been adopted as a higher benchmark by staff.

Recommendation 13

The review team recommends that Cranmer consider how best to identify, share, and build upon best practice in the use of the 1 hr 45 minute teaching blocks, in order to support student attention and engagement.

Action taken

As part of the Annual Review, the Cranmer Hall teaching staff met to identify and share best practice in this area. This was a very productive meeting; the findings have been shared and will form the basis both for a termly review as a staff team and as part of peer assessment.

The standard 1 hour 45 minute (double) teaching sessions provide an excellent pedagogic opportunity if used well. They can also model teaching skills and good stewardship of time for students' future ministry. If not used well, they can involve some waste of time and can induce student ennui and frustration. It is clear that the TEI has grappled with the issues and is embracing best practice. One way in which the changes are put to the test is in staff peer review.

Recommendation 14

The review team recommends that the TEI review the ways in which it explains and presents mixed-level teaching to students, in order to ensure that the differentiation in Learning Outcomes and assessments is clearly and directly communicated to them (directly, as well as in handbooks), and that the reinforcement of this distinction by the provision of differentiated activities oriented to those Learning Outcomes and assessments is clearly explained.

Action taken

Both mixed-level modules (Mission & Evangelism and Preaching) have new staff leading them in 2018/2019 and have been revised accordingly. Students have been informed verbally, as well as via the handbooks, about the difference in learning outcomes, and this has been reinforced by certain level-specific forms of in-class formative assessments and online discussion forums. Within Mission & Evangelism there are completely different summative assessment titles; in Preaching a similar portfolio format is used but different learning outcomes clearly identified.

These modules will continue to be monitored closely through the MEQ process and the Academic Dean/Directors of Studies will consult further with the SSCC on this matter.

Mixed-level teaching brings economies of scale and perhaps some benefits in terms of honing inter-personal skills and one's awareness of group dynamics. But the methodology needs careful handling if some students, working at a different academic level to their peers, are not to be disadvantaged. Employing differentiated assessment criteria is more than half the battle. Cranmer Hall has taken steps to avoid dysfunctionality in this rather sophisticated form of pedagogy and to monitor future developments.

Recommendation I5

The review team recommends that a thorough review of the modes, purpose and volume of formative and summative assessment is undertaken by Cranmer in consultation with the student body. Consideration should be given to scaling back the overall volume of formative assessment. The review should distinguish clearly between the purpose of summative assessment (which measures students' achievement of module Learning Outcomes) and formative assessment (which helps students develop the skills needed to complete summative assessment successfully), and should avoid seeing formative assessment as a means of covering aspects of the Learning Outcomes not covered in summative assessment.

Action taken

As part of the Annual Review, the teaching staff conducted a thorough review along the lines recommended, and concluded that the scaling back of formative assessment was both necessary and possible. All lecturers were asked to review and submit their formative assessments; the Academic Team reviewed this and welcomed the fact that there has been a significant increase in the number of in-class formative assessments which enable students to develop skills which are necessary for the successful completion of the summative assessment. All learning outcomes are assessed via summative assessments.

The TEI has tackled the reform of assessment in both its formative and summative modes, clarifying the distinction (and connection) between them, reducing the quantity of formative assignments and making greater use of in-class activities to reduce the burden of assigned formative work for students. It will probably be necessary to keep an annual watching brief on the balance between the two in classroom practice.

Recommendation I6

The review team recommends that the TEI should review its policy on turnaround times for assessment feedback, and take a more robust approach to monitoring the return of feedback to ensure that, wherever reasonably possible, turnaround times are met.

Action taken

The Academic Team reviewed the current policy and a new policy has been agreed by the Cranmer Hall teaching staff and accepted by the Board of Studies. It is being implemented for this academic year and will be the subject of regular review within the Board of Studies, who will receive a written report at every meeting on the turnaround times for individual modules.

The institution has taken a robust approach to implementing a more rigorous timetable for assessment feedback, including the formal monitoring of staff performance in this area. This information will be inserted into the relevant handbooks at the next revision of their content.

Conclusion

The PER report concluded that, once the recommendations had been fully implemented, Cranmer Hall would have the potential to achieve excellence in every area of its life and work. In the report, Cranmer's strengths were noted and existing good practice was commended, while certain areas were highlighted for attention and action. The institution's very positive response – with its Action Plan and recent update on practical implementation – shows that the recommendations have been willingly and energetically implemented. Cranmer's existing strengths are being consolidated, while certain areas that were under-developed have now been addressed. In these areas, relevant systems and protocols have been – or are being – put in place that we believe will confirm and enhance Cranmer Hall's standing in the world of theological education and ministerial formation. Continual vigilance – and procedures to facilitate this – will be required as changes in staff, in the make up of the student body, in curriculum development and in pedagogy come about. Continual scrutiny and resulting reforms will be all the more important as new initiatives in theological training at or through Cranmer Hall, that could not come under the purview of the PER in early 2018, come on stream.

The Rev'd Prof Paul Avis, Senior Reviewer
22nd February 2019