

# **Ministry Council: Periodic External Review Follow-up Report**

## **Trinity College Bristol**

### **(academic provision only) Bristol Baptist College**

**January 2021**

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## Senior Reviewer's Follow-up Report to the December 2018 - March 2019 Periodic External Review

### Introduction

The Periodic External Review (PER) of Trinity College Bristol, and of the academic provision that it shares with Bristol Baptist College, took place in two stages: via a single day visit on 3 December 2018 led by colleagues in Durham University's Common Awards team and looking at taught programmes, followed by a further visit on 5-7 March 2019 led by reviewers representing the national church and looking at formation more broadly.

The Follow-up Review took place early in 2021. On January 12<sup>th</sup> I met with the new Principal of Trinity College, the Rev'd Dr Sean Doherty, the Vice Principal and former Acting Principal, the Rev'd Dr Howard Worsley and Canon Andrew Lucas, the Executive Director. Covid restrictions meant that this meeting was conducted in a Zoom conference. As Senior Reviewer, I am grateful to the members of staff listed for their time, enabling us to undertake this final section of the review and to Sophie Davis (Executive Assistant to the Principal and Executive Director) for both facilitating our meeting and searching out pieces of information that I required.

It is clear from the response to the PER and the most recent Annual Self Evaluation (ASE) that staff have worked really hard to enable the continued positive development of the college, including fulfilling the recommendations of the PER. The arrival of the new Principal necessitated extra work as he settled in, but an unexpected extra workload was added by the COVID-19 epidemic. Staff are to be commended for their approach to fulfilling the PER recommendations in the face of all the changed ways of working necessitated by the pandemic. The healthy state of Trinity Bristol is borne out in:

- the student numbers. Current numbers for 2020 - 21 [with 2019 in brackets] are 198 [188] students currently studying on accredited pathways, of which 109 [87] are male and 89 [101] female. Of the gathered community 52 [54] are female and 58 [51] are male. Of these students, 83 [87] are ordinands on the gathered pathway, 10 [10] on the part-time pathway and 22 [12] on the dispersed learning pathway (formerly known as the full-time context-based pathway).
- the college Covid-19 response, outlined for students in the on-line college blog. A marquee on the lawn, with sides that could be rolled up enabled a socially distanced Welcome Week for new students in September 2020. Provision was put in place to enable socially distanced teaching, including the use of a perspex screen for the lecturer and social distancing of student desks. Worship was kept safe for the on-site community by limiting tutor group numbers in chapel to 2 and providing streamed worship for the remainder of the community in the dining hall, thus allowing social distancing. As the dining room could not accommodate the college community in a socially distanced manner, arrangements were made for pre-ordering of meals which were delivered in re-usable containers. Social events were provided as allowed, within the government guidelines by the Student Executive, including an online event at Christmas incorporating edible treats for all sections of the student community. Online Open Days have been provided for potential new students. The ASE return (part B) further shows that the response was continually reviewed, arrangements were made for blended learning, IT changes made in the previous year were built on to accommodate new needs and there was substantial

investment in online library provision. The response was commended by the External Examiner and was ongoing at the time of writing (January 2021).

- the appointment of the new Principal in 2019, just prior to the PER visit, who began work at the college in the summer vacation. The process began with a statement of needs drawn up by the trustees in 2018 and culminated in the appointment of the Rev'd Dr Sean Doherty in January 2019, at a second round of interviews. Students took part in a 48-hour period of prayer for the appointment and the student president took a full (albeit non-voting) part in the interviews alongside the trustees.
- the selection of a winner for the design competition for the new on-site student accommodation in December 2020, following the consultative drawing up of the outline specification. Reviewers had commended the continuous review of the maintenance and development of college premises and were pleased to note the introduction of the annual feedback summary and moves towards a new strategy for the college to achieve zero carbon emissions.
- the robust response to falling numbers on the part-time course, involving current consultative planning for a new shape for the course and the appointment of a new member of staff with the development of this pathway and section of the Trinity Bristol community as a major part of her job description.
- the further enhancement of the catering provision with a 'new vision', 'prioritising issues of justice, sustainability, environment and community as well as reflecting the church calendar' (ASE part A). Reviewers had commended the catering provision (commendations 2 and 9)
- the drafting of a new staff development policy (ASE part A)

The overall outcome of the 2019 PER report was the statement that:

*Trinity College, Bristol continues to provide an appropriate environment for ministerial formation in its gathered community, its full-time dispersed learning and in its part-time learning. Trinity College, Bristol is fit for purpose for preparing candidates for ordained and licensed ministry within the Church of England.*

In relation to the House of Bishops' PER criteria, the overall outcome of the PER was a rating of 'confidence with qualifications'. Many strengths were noted including 'the consistency of Trinity College's formational aims and practice and their match with the Church of England's formation criteria', the 'excellent formational context' including the outworking of the 'live like the kingdom is near' vision of the college and the commitment to 'engaging in mission in all its forms'. Strengths were identified in the 'leadership and management of Trinity Bristol' with particular reference to collaboration and consultation in relation to the early stages of plans for re-development of the site. Staff were commended for the way in which the 'college faculty models continued learning and personal formation' and in relation to 'effective assessment reporting and feedback'.

Areas for development, that would enhance current provision, and, where required in limited areas, bring it up to expected standards, included attention to the way of being community within Trinity Bristol including 'ensuring parity of significance and experience' across the different pathways with special reference to the allocation of staff and chaplaincy responsibilities. Attention was recommended to the School of Leadership, the range and breadth of placement contexts and their oversight and to diversity among staff, supervisors, and those who are invited to preach and lead worship. 'Clarity and back-up for the roles carried by the Executive Director', a periodic review of council effectiveness, some phasing of trustees' terms of office to ensure

business continuity and resilience, 'the establishment of an audit and risk committee with independent chair' and 'development of more effective communication across the whole student body' were recommended.

Overall the PER reviewers made 16 commendations of good practice and 13 recommendations for enhancement. Prior to this follow up report the reviewers received the Trinity Bristol Action Plan (March 2020) from the Governing Body and responded with comments. Prior to the online meeting of 12<sup>th</sup> January 2021 on which the current report is based, the senior reviewer received the most recent ASE for the college and notes of the oral presentation of the External Examiner's report to the Trustees.

The usual PER timetable was disturbed partly by internal pre-publication delays and partly by the pressure on workload occasioned by the response to Covid-19 in following up the PER action plan agreed in March 2020. The current report pays attention to the recommendations made by the national church review team and the action taken by Trinity College Bristol in response. The University of Durham follow their own process for review of their recommendations and this will be documented separately.

The recommendations are listed below in **bold**, the college response, drawn from the PER Action plan is printed in *italics*, and these are followed in regular type by my comments, based on the ASE and the 12<sup>th</sup> January 2021 Zoom meeting.

In summary, the Review team believes that Trinity's responses reflect thorough consideration and positive action with every recommendation, and that the steps that have been taken or are in hand are commendable and will serve Trinity and its learning community well for the future.

**The Rev'd Lesley Bentley, Senior Reviewer**  
**January 2021**

## Recommendation 1

**We recommend that the staff, students and governors give attention to the way of being of the Trinity Bristol community and to issues of ensuring parity of significance and experience between the pathways despite differences in visibility on campus, so that prospective students of all pathways are seen to be equally valued and that none is second class and so that Trinity Bristol models the collaborative approach that is valued in the Church of England.**

*Actions undertaken:* New Distance Learning (DL) video for the website. Increased information on DL at Open Days. Whole staff meeting input on communications about different pathways. Increased faculty teaching on DL courses. Increased DL representation on TLC, FC etc. Student Executive initiatives for GL/DL social events.

*The following have not yet been completed (but see below). Revise information in prospectus as part of wider revision of prospectus. Revise information in prospectus as part of wider revision of prospectus*

I was pleased to view new video presentations on the website on both 'gathered; and 'dispersed' learning and to see the first section of a power point presentation given by the Rev'd Dr Helen Collins for an online Open Day, which described all three parts of the college community. I note that the part-time course is under review, to enable larger numbers to participate (see ASE 2020) and this will be taken forward to its next stage following the appointment of the new Co-Vice Principal and Director of Formation. The reviewers look forward to seeing a video describing this part of the Trinity provision. The prospectus has yet to be revised but the revision is planned this term and will describe Trinity more consciously as a single entity with three learning pathways. The community experience of gathered and dispersed learning students (FT residential and non-residential) has been further enhanced through integration of block weeks. A pilot combining DL with Gathered Learning (GL) for blended, week-by-week teaching has taken place. DL representation on academic, formational and student committees has been strengthened. Timetable changes have led to a greater level of core staff teaching on the DL pathway.

## Recommendation 2

**We recommend that Trinity should continue actively to seek out appropriate primary placement contexts from currently under-represented traditions to ensure the widest possible student experience of the breadth of the Church of England.**

*Actions undertaken:* Ongoing meetings with the Diocese to discuss diversity of incumbents in context churches. Ongoing involvement of more curates and associate ministers in student supervision to increase diversity of traditions and ministers. Update of context handbook, which shows we have more central and Anglo-Catholic contexts than broadly evangelical contexts as primary placements. Developing new summer placement contexts to ensure an even split of summer placements across the traditions.

I was pleased to note that the meetings between the Principal, the Ministry Team of the Diocese and the Placement Director will continue, thus enabling a wide diversity of traditions and supervising ministers to be available to students for placements.

### Recommendation 3

**We recommend that Trinity reviews the oversight of placements, and the level of support for placement supervisors and the opportunities provided to them to engage with the life of the College, with a view to ensuring consistency across the different learning pathways.**

*Actions undertaken:* Joint supervisor training session for all pathways. All non-residential supervisors were visited in their contexts in the Autumn term of 2019 with a view to offering 1:1 support and this pattern has been and will be continued. Regular information relating to the DL pathway, is sent to all supervisors before each block week.

I was pleased to see the wider range of placements available and the planned pilot of online supervisor briefings. The Principal is of the opinion that the training offered plus the annual visit to the placement context and contact with the college through the student's tutor was offering a good link into Trinity. The use of more curates and associate ministers in supervision was also helping with diversity of placement experience as are the new summer placements.

### Recommendation 4

**We recommend that the College reviews and seeks to develop the diversity of its staff team and placement supervisors.**

*Actions undertaken:* The co-option of two new trustees from BAME heritage. Appointment process for new tutor used diversity as a tie-break to differentiate between otherwise equally well-qualified candidates.

From the ASE, and outside of our specific recommendations but consistent with them, the reviewers welcome the appointment of 2 BAME governors and an additional female on the trustee body. It is sad that the pandemic prevented the BAME Open Day. I took note that presence in Bristol, with all the difficulties of its heritage, was an important part of the planning of the Open Day that could not be replicated online, hence the cancellation. I note from ASE (part A) that a management review of recruitment statistics had identified under-representation by BAME students and that Trinity College is seeing the growth of student diversity as a priority. A recognition that women were under-represented in faculty had led to targeted advertising and the appointment of the Co Vice-Principal and Director of Formation. I noted from the ASE that diversity and unconscious bias training have been delivered to all staff. The Principal plans to develop a systematic strategy on diversity and inclusion later this year. As we note under Recommendation 7, it will be important that this strategy also includes those with disabilities.

### Recommendation 5

**We recommend that Trinity develops structured ways to help the community engage in discussion of difficult topics in the life of the contemporary Church.**

*Actions undertaken:* Visit of Awesome rep. Annual Diversity Week to provide students with the opportunity to engage with topics of racism, disability, gender, sexuality and domestic abuse. The introductory session will include ground rules to ensure that the discussions are conducted safely and sensitively. Principal and Student President collaborating to provide responsive forums for discussion of difficult topics (e.g. recently one with respect to the BBC documentary about Peter Ball).

I was pleased to note from the 2020 ASE (part A) that a responsive forum was held to help the community engage in one difficult topic and that Black History Month and BLM were to be marked, and that it is planned that this enhanced approach will continue.

### **Recommendation 6**

**We recommend:**

- i. that consideration is given to expanding the number of core staff who teach on the dispersed learning and part-time programmes, given the high quality of core staff scholarship, to maximise the quality of student experience in that programme;**
- ii. that Trinity should develop its chaplaincy support for all students, and review its pastoral care provision for students on non-residential and part-time pathways.**

*Actions undertaken:* (i) In 2018-19, 40 credits of L4 DL were taught by core faculty. This was increased to 80 in 2019-20. In 2019-20, L5 DL teaching was launched with 80 credits taught by core faculty. It is intended to achieve a greater proportion of core teachers at all levels going forward. (ii.a) All non-residential students have an allocated chaplain in their local context for pastoral support as from September 2019. (ii.b) Provision is being made for part time students to access a chaplain when they are in college. This was written into the part time ordinand's learning agreement in September 2019.

I welcome the increased provision of chaplaincy for both dispersed learning and part-time students, meaning that a chaplain is available when the students are in college and the current suitably modified provision to enable access during the COVID epidemic. I welcome the more equitable use of core staff across all pathways.

### **Recommendation 7**

**We recommend that Trinity should actively seek to broaden the diversity of visitors invited to preside and preach in corporate worship on campus.**

*Actions undertaken and planned:* Preachers are now 50/50 women and men. At least one BAME preacher per term. Approach to allocating eucharistic presidents adjusted so that women tutors preside more frequently, and women chaplains are invited to preside as well. Invite a more diverse range of School of Leadership speakers

I note from the 2020 ASE that a greater diversity of preachers has been invited to weekly communion. It is important that such diversity needs to include those who are disabled as well. I welcome the review of the School of Leadership and the student consultation that enables a range of external speakers each year.

### **Recommendation 8**

**We recommend that consideration be given to:**

- i. a clearer statement of the distinctive roles carried at present by the Executive Director, ensuring that there is a named backup for each of the responsibilities carried by him and facilitating a future management structure review given the vulnerabilities of the present system; and**
- ii. the role of Safeguarding lead and whether a woman might also be appointed to this role.**

*Actions undertaken and planned:* (i.a) All staff have job descriptions which are reviewed annually as part of the standard appraisal process. Job descriptions of the Executive Director and other colleagues within the team to be reviewed at next appraisal, identifying critical functions and including considering whether it is necessary to designate a backup with respect to such functions. (i.b) Increase capacity in the Executive Director's office through the appointment of an Executive Assistant [done]. (i.c) Succession planning for Executive Director. Management structure review including agreement of Terms of Reference for the Management Team. (ii) Review role of Safeguarding lead in the light of best practice.

I was pleased to note that consideration will be given to terms of reference for the management team in the context of a forthcoming strategy review, and that the current mode of team working already includes a new, more hands-on role for the Principal in relation to finance and operations. This, along with the appointment of the Executive Assistant has effectively led to management and operations being more extensively shared across the senior management team in a way that means there is an effective back up for the functions of the Executive Director. The appointment of the new Co-Vice Principal, who will be part of the senior management team will further enhance this. The Executive Director regards himself as acting as midwife for new areas of work, which he then hands on to others, IT and data protection were listed as such areas, thus going some way to enable succession.

The new Co-Vice Principal will also have safeguarding responsibilities meaning that a female will be part of this team at senior management level.

## **Recommendation 9**

### **We recommend:**

- i. that consideration be given to establishing a regular review of Council effectiveness (at, say, four or five year intervals);**
- ii. a semi-annual meeting between the Senior Management Team and all support staff;**
- iii. some re-phasing of Trustees' terms of office in order to avoid a sudden and simultaneous less of institutional memory and expertise, in order to ensure business continuity.**

### *Actions undertaken and planned:*

- (i) *In light of good practice in the charitable and HE sector, the Council will explore a quinquennial review of its practices and effectiveness, starting in 2021.*
- (ii) *Meetings for all staff have been instituted since September 2019 and are booked into the college calendar at the beginning of the academic year to happen four times a year. [Regular meetings of operational staff with Principal and ED already take place.]*
- (iii) *The trustees are content that the spread of prospective appointments is satisfactory. The terms of office of the six (not 5, as quoted) elected members are governed by the Articles of Association. A term is four years. In light of early withdrawals from office, prospective elections are already spread over three years. Members may normally serve for two terms and a maximum of three. Current members have served for different numbers of terms. Co-options can happen at different intervals. There are two representatives of partner organisations whose term of office is not limited. We have not experienced to date unfortunate*



*lacunae in the membership. The trustees pay attention to the depth of experience of the trustee body at any one time and make adjustments as necessary. For example, one longer serving trustee was recently co-opted for an additional year in order to retain particular experience and ensure a smooth transition at the time of a change in Principal.*

I was pleased to learn that:

- (i) a focused review of the Council was planned for this year although the mode had not yet been discussed at the time of writing. An independent facilitator has been engaged to lead a process of developing a strategic vision for Trinity Bristol and, as noted in the ASE (part A), a management structure review will take place alongside this.
- (ii) meetings have been put in the diary four times per year for all staff to meet with the Senior Management Team.
- (iii) a scheme that was in its infancy at the time of the PER for trustees to hold portfolios and relate to particular staff members is now fully operational, along with a new Trustee handbook. The moves in strategic planning described above and intentionally collaborative leadership lead the Council to confidence about the low risk of discontinuity of institutional memory and appropriate expertise in the governing body or among staff.

#### **Recommendation 10**

**We recommend that:**

- i. a separate Audit and Risk Committee of Council be established, with an independent Chair;**
- ii. there be regular review of external Auditors to refresh the process;**
- iii. an Internal Audit be conducted every five-six years; and**
- iv. clear minutes be kept of business completed and actions required for all meetings to provide audit trails.**

Actions undertaken and planned:

- (i) *The trustees will look at best practice elsewhere in comparable organisations and consider establishing a separate audit and risk committee. The committee would receive reports from the external auditors in regard to the financial systems. It would scrutinise the risk register on an annual basis and report to the trustees. We will consider whether it might have a wider brief in relation to other compliance matters.*
- (ii) *The college has appointed new auditors in the last year following a review. The appointment will be subject to review after the first year and after that we are content to review it every six years.*
- (iii) *In respect of the accounting and financial functions and controls, the trustees do not consider that an internal audit is necessary for the size of organisation, in view of the annual checks undertaken and audit report on controls issued by the new auditors. The college will, however, check this reading against good practice in comparable organisations.*

- (iv) We consider that the matter referred to in the report concerning 'the apparent lack of action and audit trail... on key updates to the risk register over summer 2018' was actioned and indeed led to a new risk management methodology being proposed and adopted. We consider that the omission in the minutes was an isolated incident. Nevertheless, we have instituted an action table at the end of Council and standing committee minutes, which are followed up at each subsequent meeting. We do not consider the minutes to be insufficiently clear and full.

As to (i), the reviewers note the comments on the above and, from the ASE, that the terms of reference of the Standing Committee (SC) have been revised to include an audit function. The reviewers were originally unhappy that the SC held the functions of SC, finance committee and audit/risk committee. At the final review more information was requested about good practice for theological colleges in relation to instating a separate audit and risk committee with an independent chair. The matter is to be considered by Council in February 2021. On (ii), we welcome the appointment of new auditors as an instance of good practice.

(We note the comments above with regard to points (iii) and (iv) and that, in addition to the argument in the action plan, the senior management team is now seeing the management accounts with greater frequency.

### **Recommendation 11**

**We recommend that Trinity seeks to widen students' awareness of and participation in opportunities to experience and engage with other faith communities.**

*Actions undertaken and planned:* Engage with local multi-faith chaplains during summer school session. Engage with local multi-faith chaplains during summer school session. Promote opportunities provided by Bristol Diverse Doors Open Day.

I note from the ASE (part A) that greater emphasis has been given to engaging with other faiths and schools' ministry in the Summer School curriculum (which is undertaken by students for formation purposes between years 1 and 2 of training) and I welcome this alongside the invitation to the Bristol Diverse Open Day, which took place on-line because of COVID restrictions.

### **Recommendation 12**

**In order that the student experience may be enhanced, we recommend:**

- i. **that Trinity proactively seeks to develop more effective communication across the whole student body, particularly with those on the dispersed learning and part-time pathways.**
- ii. **that a joint communion service with part-time students is held more frequently – possibly termly.**
- iii. **that pastoral groups increase the inclusion of discussion of key and contentious issues within their programmes.**

*Actions undertaken and planned:* In relation to (iii), this already exists within the structure of supervision and CTRs – discussion of key issues is exactly what those are for. An additional line of guidance to be given in the handbook to inform student, supervisors and tutors to capitalise on these opportunities. Tutor briefing at faculty meeting for tutors

*to take more of a lead in guiding supervision discussions Introduction of regular news email for whole student body. Introduction of regular news email for whole student body.*

I am pleased to note that:

- (i) communication with the student body has been considerably enhanced since the appointment of the new Executive Assistant to the Principal and the Executive Director. In addition, the provision of a Trinity intranet, with college email addresses for all students, has drawn communications together effectively and improved the provision.
- (ii) because of the Covid situation all worship (morning prayers and weekly communion services) now happens online and is made available for later catch-up. Details are deliberately circulated to dispersed and part-time students as well that they may be included where able and some of them join for online 'community coffee' afterwards sometimes too.
- (iii) The college response is noted.

### **Recommendation 13**

**The reviewers recommend that, in line with the Mapping Document reference, the college reviews its input on ministry in schools.**

*Actions undertaken: Bristol Schools Connection coming into Summer School to do a whole afternoon session on working with schools. Develop additional community placements and summer placements working with schools.*

I welcome the provision of extra input on schools in the summer school and the additional community placements.