Ministry Council: Periodic External Review Report

Church of England Birmingham Reader Training Programme

Conducted onsite and online, October 2022

Contents

Glossary

ALS	Action Learning Set
ASE	Annual Self Evaluation
IME1/2	Initial Ministerial Education Phase 1/2
Moodle	Online learning platform
PER	Periodic External Review
RiT	Reader(s) in Training – Reader trainees in IME1
TEI	Theological Education Institution
TOR	Terms of Reference

Reviewers

Dr Sally Buck, Senior Reviewer; former Warden of Lay Ministry for Lincoln Diocese

Mrs Debby de Haes, Director, Renew Consultancy, specialising in governance and organisational development; Peterborough Diocese

Revd Dr Stephen Laird, Anglican Chaplain, University of Kent; Vicar, Blean; New Testament Tutor, St Augustine's College; Southwark Diocese.

Mrs Ade Osunsanmi, Sanctuary Housing Association, Environmental Lead and Assistant Procurement Manager; Gloucester Diocese.

The Periodic External Review Framework

Periodic External Review (PER) is part of the Church of England's quality assurance for its ministerial training institutions ('Theological Education Institutions' or TEIs), whereby the church conducts an external quality check of each TEI against national standards and expectations for ministerial training and formation.

On behalf of the church, review teams are asked to assess the TEI's fitness for purpose in preparing candidates for ordained and licensed ministry and to make recommendations for the enhancement of its life and work. The reviewers' report is made to the House of Bishops acting through the Ministry Council.

Church PER teams are appointed by the national Ministry Development Team from a pool of reviewers nominated by bishops and TEIs.

For TEIs that offer Durham-validated Common Awards programmes, representatives of Durham University's Common Awards team will sometimes carry out their own academic quality assurance review in parallel with the church's PER, to inform the university's decision-making on: (i) renewal of the Common Awards partnerships with approved TEIs; and (ii) revalidation of Common Awards programmes that have been approved for delivery within TEIs.

Recommendations and Commendations

PER reports include Recommendations which are either developmental, naming issues that the reviewers consider the TEI needs to address, or encourage the enhancement of practice that is already good. They also include Commendations, naming instances of good practice that the reviewers wish to highlight. The reviewers' assessment of the TEI is expressed as much through the balance of Recommendations and Commendations in their report as through its criterion-based judgements.

Criterion-based judgements

Reviewers use the following outcomes with regard to the overall report and individual criteria A-E:

Confidence

Overall outcome: commendations and a number of recommendations, none of which question the generally high standards found in the review.

Criterion level: aspects of an institution's life which show good or best practice.

Confidence with qualifications

Overall outcome: likely to include commendations as well as a number of recommendations, including one or more of substance that questions the generally acceptable standards found in the review and which can be rectified or substantially addressed by the institution in the coming 12 months.

Criterion level: aspects of an institution's life which show either (a) at least satisfactory practice but with some parts which are not satisfactory or (b) some unsatisfactory practice but where the institution has the capacity to address the issues within 12 months.

No confidence

Overall outcome: A number of recommendations, including one or more of substance which raises significant questions about the standards found in the review and the capacity of the institution to rectify or substantially address these in the coming 12 months.

Criterion level: aspects of an institution's life which show either (a) generally not satisfactory practice or (b) some unsatisfactory practice where it is not evident that the institution can rectify the issues within the coming 12 months.

Review of Church of England Birmingham Reader Training Programme

Introduction

Church of England Birmingham serves the city and suburbs of Birmingham and also Solihull, parts of Sandwell, North Warwickshire and Worcestershire. Some deaneries contain rural areas and others are places where Christianity is the minority religion. The city itself has been defined as a super diverse city for a number of years. It is within this super diversity that women and men are trained for ministries within the Church of England.

Reader training is intrinsically part of a large number of training programmes offered by Church of England Birmingham, making good use of the diocese's bespoke Moodle site, Pathways. Reader training is overseen by the Head of Ministry Formation, Revd Paul Hinton (among whose roles is that of Director of Reader Training) with a team of able and enthusiastic volunteer tutors and a steering group consisting of those from within and outside of the diocese who offer the reflective and critical voices as well as being 'friends' of the programme. There is no external validation of the academic or formational aspects of training as the intention is (as the handbooks and website make clear) to make Reader ministry accessible to as wide a range of people within this super diverse community as possible.

Those offering for Reader ministry are expected to complete the Way of Discipleship programme or an equivalent level of study before undertaking IME1. Reader IME1 takes place after selection for training, the selection process being overseen by the Warden of Readers, and lasts just over a year. The current model of training is that candidates are admitted and licensed as Readers at this stage. IME2 then takes the form of an eighteen month compulsory continuation of training in context, this phase of training being reflective and practice-focused and lighter in terms of taught contact hours. The current IME1 cohort (2022) consists of 5 students, termed 'Readers in Training' (RiT) – although we make the point that both phases of the programme, IME1 and IME2 together, should be viewed as training, albeit licensing precedes IME2. Numbers in this cohort are lower than in previous years; a fact that is attributed at least in part to the effects of the past two years of covid pandemic. There are also 15 Readers from the 2020 and 2021 completing their training in IME2.

Church of England Birmingham is engaged in a programme of significant structural and cultural change over the past few years. This review visit came at a time when Church of England Birmingham's vision for mission and ministry – *People and Places* – was beginning to imagine and put into practice new collaborative, adaptive and relational approaches between parishes and across deaneries. It is with these changes as a backdrop, and at a time when the training team was preparing to take two terms to reflect on, and potentially make significant changes to, its Reader training programme, that the review team offers this report in the hope and expectation that it will inform discussion and enable relevant changes to be made for the enhancement of Reader ministry over the next five years. We consider the programme team's openness to an external view at this stage to be commendable.

Commendation 1

The review team commends the team for the dedicated way they are approaching the next few months' time out of the normal training cycle to review practice, and for the positive way the PER team was received as part of that review process.

The review team wishes to thank Paul Hinton and the team at Church of England Birmingham for the care with which material was gathered in advance of the review visit and for the welcome extended to the team during the two-day visit. The care with which rooms were prepared, drinks and biscuits were constantly available and materials were sourced as the visit progressed significantly aided the review team in its execution of a tight timetable.

Due to the nature of training in Church of England Birmingham which requires prospective Readers to complete an approved foundation course i.e. a diocesan discipleship programme such as Way of Discipleship and IME2 as part of their Reader training the review team has commented on all three phases of what many other dioceses or TEIs would consider to be IME1.

As a result, the review team has one overarching question to ask of the training team which is whether the terms IME1 and IME2 are accurately reflected in the ability of Birmingham-trained Readers to transfer their licences to other dioceses if they move in the IME2 phase of their training. The review team felt that these two phases of training could more accurately be described as IME1 pre- and IME1 post-licensing. Having had some misgivings about the rationale to license after one year of training, the review team were helped to see the value to the newly licensed Reader; greater responsibility and leadership opportunities being afforded to a Reader in many parishes compared to those shared with Readers in Training.

Nonetheless, as is evident from the recommendations that follow, the review team believes that considering Reader training to be a 2 year IME1 programme punctuated by licensing but with some shared teaching days, further developmental material available on Pathways for the more academically able students, continued ongoing assessment with the help of the new formation grids and some reference to Common Awards academic marking standards would enhance training and create a greater confidence in the deployability and transferability of Church of England Birmingham trained Readers.

PER Process

The review visit took place over two days in October 2022 with the addition of some meetings before and after in person and on Zoom and one of the reviewers being present at two teaching sessions on Zoom prior to the visit. The reviewers were able to gather information from:

- attending a Reader Training Steering Group meeting (referred to throughout the report as Steering Group)
- meeting with the lead bishop for the diocese's Reader discernment and training
- Individual interviews with key programme and diocesan staff: the Director of Reader Training, the Diocesan Director of Ministry, Diocesan Secretary and Director of Finance, Pathways Learning

Engagement Officer, IME2 co-ordinator and IME1 tutor, External and Internal Quality Nominees, and Warden of Readers

- meeting with Readers in Training
- meeting with current Readers who were trained on the programme
- conversations with incumbents and placement supervisors
- conversations at shared mealtimes on both days of the visit
- observing teaching sessions being delivered both online and in person

They were also able to have access to a variety of paperwork and information including:

- Previous Ministry Division PER report
- Pathways material (the diocese's Moodle site)
- Diocesan website
- Many documents helpfully uploaded to Dropbox both prior to and after the PER visit

Summary of Outcomes

This report is written in relation to the PER Criteria in force for 2022-23 and available via the Ministry Development Team's quality assurance pages on the Church of England website.

CRITERION	OUTCOME
A Formational Aims	Confidence with Qualifications
B Formational Context and Community	Confidence with Qualifications
C Leadership and Management	Confidence with Qualifications
D Teaching and Learning	Confidence with Qualifications
E Ministerial Formation	Confidence with Qualifications
Overall Outcome	**Confidence with Qualifications**

The review team regards Church of England Birmingham's Reader Training Programme as fit for purpose for preparing candidates for Reader ministry.

Section A: Formational Aims

A1   The TEI's formational aims are clearly stated, understood and owned within the TEI.

1.   Throughout the documentation, particularly in the scene-setting document and the 2018 ASE, as well as on the website and in the Reader Training Handbook, there is emphasis on the formation of Readers being in line with the national definition of Readers as 'teachers of the faith, enablers of mission and leaders in church and society'. There is also reference to working in line with the new selection and formation grids which offer criteria based around qualities for selection and training.

2.   In addition, the Reader Training Handbook states clearly that the aim of the programme is to 'enable Readers in Training to be able to think theologically…, think strategically as members of the leadership team…, reflect upon their ministry…, work collaboratively…, encourage and enable the ministry of others and remain watchful and alert to what God is doing in and through others.' These aims are congruent with the definition above.

3.   It was noted that the ASE of 2018 also stated that the curriculum focused on 'what are identified as the core components of Reader Ministry of preaching, teaching and leading worship in a pastoral context.'

4.   Observation of a meeting of the Steering Committee and conversations with those involved in delivery and promotion of the programme at all levels of diocesan life suggest to the review team that these aims are both communicated and owned by all concerned.

5.   The reviewers recognise the commitment of all involved to the stated aims. The impression gained by the review team throughout the visit is of strength and shared dedication to one another and to those for whom training is offered, and the reviewers want to commend this. Everyone involved in the programme spoke with enthusiasm and evident dedication to the stated aims of the programme and to their commitment to Reader ministry in Church of England Birmingham's unfolding future.

6.   Nonetheless, the reviewers would question whether the stated aims of the programme now are sufficiently reflected in the way the programme has developed since this was written. Reference is made to specific concerns in recommendations in sections A2, B, D and E but at this stage of the report, the review team would suggest that this year of reflection and planning offers an opportunity to address this question honestly and creatively. There is evidence aplenty that this team can engage in this kind of reflective process in the way the past 5 years' ASE documents are carefully and constructively worded so the review team trust that a positive response to these recommendations will be possible.

Commendation 2

The reviewers commend the evident commitment and dedication of those they met to the stated aims of the programme and to Reader ministry in Church of England Birmingham's future.

A2   The TEI's formational aims are appropriate to the ministerial training requirements of its sponsoring church denominations.

7.   The national picture relating to Licensed Lay Ministries is rapidly developing and changing. Church of England Birmingham's stated aims of Reader formation being to develop lay ministers who are teachers of the faith, enablers of mission and leaders in church and society is consistent with the expressed aims of Central Readers Council and the national church.

8.   Recent changes to the national church's discernment, selection and formation criteria have been noted and the mapping document, discussion at the Steering Committee meeting and conversation with those involved in initial and ongoing training of Readers indicates that these documents are being used to inform changes in both selection and training for Reader ministry.

9.   Time is limited in IME1 as the programme is currently configured and so, in order to maintain focus on the stated aims and not to overly emphasise the preaching aspect of Reader ministry it is essential that a clear individual pathway from selection through Ways of Discipleship, IME1 and IME2 is drawn up for each trainee to enable assessment against the stated aims as they relate to the wider national church picture.

10.   How the missional and leadership aspects of training are carried out and communicated with those who oversee Reader ministry post-licensing is crucial to the perception of this ministry across the diocese and how well Readers will be able to integrate into the leadership roles being spoken of in plans for this ministry within the diocese's *People and Places* strategy.

11.   Accessibility is a stated aim; particularly academic accessibility. This is clearly articulated and experienced in reality. However, there are questions about whether the programme's outworking of its aim to be accessible is congruent with the level of training needed for a nationally transferable ministry. This issue is considered in more detail in section D of this report.

12.   The reviewers consider, therefore, that time needs to be given to reflect on the aims of the programme and whether the weighting of formational input to students at both IME1 and IME2 level is congruent with these aims. A clear plan of how to get from where the programme is now, with the weighting of training being on the ministry of preaching, to where it needs to be to fully reflect its aims and the enabling of qualities identified in the formation grids through its teaching should be produced.

Recommendation 1

The reviewers recommend reflection on the aims of the programme and its weighting of formational input to students at both IME1 and IME2 level, and that a plan be produced for moving towards a fuller enabling of the qualities identified in the formation grids through its teaching across IME1-2.

A3   The TEI's aims, activity and achievement are understood and supported by wider church audiences.

13.   As stated in the introduction to this report, the review team was able to meet with a wide range of people including current and past students, placement supervisors, Bishop Anne, Warden of Readers and members of the Steering Group. It was clear that all of the people we spoke to were well informed of the aims of the programme and the way in which it seeks to enable lay ministry to flourish.

14.   The programme seeks to be inclusive in many ways. Diocesan website pages, the PER summary document and the Reader Training Handbook make it clear that access to the programme is extremely important.

15.   Much of the ethos of the programme and the communication with the wider church is, as was reflected in a conversation after the Steering Committee meeting attended by the review team, based on good relationships across C of E Birmingham and on trust in those involved in training. Review team members were aware that there was a risk that this relational way of being was inadvertently excluding some voices from the conversations. Formalising information in written documents which can be circulated to those who may otherwise not come into contact with those who hold the vision for Reader training and ministry would ensure a wider range of views and greater scope for development of this ministry across the diocese.

Recommendation 2

In order to make the programme information and aims more accessible and more widely understood across C of E Birmingham, ways of communicating to those clergy and Readers not currently involved in training should be formalised.

> **The review team has Confidence with Qualifications with regard to Criterion A: Formational Aims.**

Section B: Formational Context and Community

B1   **The TEI draws on partnership with theological educators in the region and local faith and community organisations to enhance formational opportunities for students.**

16.   Birmingham's Reader Training Programme is not subject to ongoing external moderation and validation arrangements. As such it does not require formal administrative or academic links with universities, Common Awards, the Queen's Foundation or a Regional Training Partnership. In some cases individual tutors have strong current or previous associations with Birmingham University and/or the Foundation.

17.   The programme's principal partnership is with local churches, notably in connection with the IME 1 placement component but also through the trainees themselves (who are supported in their initial training and, especially, beyond by their 'home churches'); local church leaders and many of the tutors who are active in various ministry positions as clergy or Readers**.** A range of church traditions from within the Church of England is reflected within the programme's student and staff community. The four-week IME 1 placement is used to expose trainees to a church and ministry tradition with which they are less familiar, and the review team was pleased to hear them speaking of this formative experience enthusiastically and reflectively.

18.   In the Birmingham setting the presence of other faith communities is clearly a stimulus and a challenge and introductory teaching about a range of non-Christian faiths features towards the end of the IME 1 programme (trainees have an option to explore further relevant material on the Pathways platform). A mosque visit is arranged for IME 2 Readers, along with a further session on interfaith matters. Given the small size of the programme it is sensible to build on the established relationships between Church of England Birmingham and its Interfaith Director and local faith communities rather than trying to develop its own. The Diocesan website lists and describes interfaith initiatives supported by Church of England Birmingham.

19.   Similarly, students may, and do, witness relationships with civic and community organisations through the life of the Diocese as a whole and through exposure to local ministry: trainees spoke of their experiences of seeing, whilst on placement, churches linked to community cafes and foodbanks. First-hand insights from hospital, prison and workplace chaplaincies usually feature on the Pastoral Weekend (residential) of the IME 1 programme. The reviewers considered that intentional engagement with work in schools would be a useful addition to these good opportunities for exploring and experiencing ministry in varying contexts.

20.   Birmingham also offers great opportunity for students to experience a variety of engagement with other Christian communities enabling them to experience the nature of Christian diversity across Birmingham (age and race being the main aspects). While recognising that time is limited in IME1, the reviewers believe that aspects of the Programme addressing ecumenical issues and experiences need to be developed across IME1 and 2, and they would like to encourage further

exploration of opportunities to engage with independent Black Majority Churches given their increasing prominence in urban community settings.

Commendation 3

The reviewers commend the good use of an evolving web of relationships between the programme and local churches, including its training relationships, enriched by the diverse staff community drawn from those active in ministry, including Reader ministry.

Recommendation 3

More prominence should be given to schools, including Church schools, as part of the development of placement experiences and of the input representing wider community settings.

Recommendation 4

The reviewers urge reflection on the possibilities of appropriate further engagement with Christian diversity across Birmingham learning during IME1 and IME2.

B2   There are well understood and embedded practices of corporate life so as to enhance students' formation.

21.   In Section B of the IME 1 handbook a range of appropriate policies and procedures relating to pastoral care and welfare is set out and students were uniformly appreciative of the support they received from lead tutors and other tutors in IME 1 and from their placement supervisors and were confident that the programme environment was fair and safe.

22.   The review team noticed that the IME 2 handbook does not include a section on Pastoral Care, and when this point was pursued it emerged that formal provision of pastoral support from programme leaders ends with the completion of IME 1: this was one of a number of 'disconnects ' between the IME 1 and IME 2 noticed by the review team. The programme recognises that pastoral oversight of IME 2 learners is provided by incumbents/local church leaders but lacks provision for ongoing pastoral support into IME2 on a par with IME1. Evidence from trainees, incumbents, tutors and the IME2 handbook reinforces this. In discussion with the incumbents of IME 2 students, the point emerged that although pastoral provision by incumbents/church leaders may work well in many instances it is generally good practice to ensure a degree of separation between professional relationships and pastoral relationships, especially where there is a power dynamic involved. At the same time, reviewers heard that some IME 2 trainees can feel isolated and dispirited as a result of the transfer of pastoral oversight away from trusted IME 1 programme leaders and tutors.

23.   Post-licensing, the IME 1 cohort is expected to meet during IME 2 as a self-facilitated group (or groups) applying Action Learning Set (ALS) theory and practice. These meetings may be scheduled to occur in the gaps of weeks (and sometimes months) between some of the scheduled IME 2 teaching sessions. Whilst the review team welcomes the introduction of ALS style sessions

during the IME 2 phase as a way of supporting cohorts who had developed together during IME 1, there should also be a seamless continuation of programme-tutor pastoral oversight from the start of IME 1 until the end of IME 2.

24. Review team members were pleased to note that staff descriptions and in-person encounters revealed a full range of theological sympathies, backgrounds and approaches to ministry. Trainees spoke well of the tutors 'responsiveness to particular study needs and the presence of lead tutors at sessions when a visiting tutor was delivering the teaching. Whilst predominantly white, the staff team displays a very good range of gender, ethnicity and experience of ministry settings (with regard to the latter, in the majority of cases ongoing). The review team was satisfied that the trainees felt genuinely exposed to the teaching ministry of the tutor team in all its breadth.

25. The programme itself is under the oversight and scrutiny of the Bishop's Safeguarding Management Group and is part of the safeguarding regime of Birmingham Diocesan Board of Finance. Before starting training students are required to have completed the following national courses: *Basic Awareness*, *Foundations*, *Leadership*, and *Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse*. Three months after licensing, Readers continuing in IME2 have to complete *Safe Practice in Pastoral Ministry*. The review team was impressed by the fact that candidates showed a detailed awareness of courses they had taken, and the further course requirement pre-licensing. Safeguarding procedures, training and practice are in place, in line with national requirements and taken seriously by the programme and the candidates.

26. Online Teaching sessions observed by a member of the review team began with 30 minutes of scheduled gathering time, followed by approximately 20 minutes of worship. This accords with a stated aim of the programme, 'we are not just a training group consisting of individuals when we meet - we are part of the body of Christ. The pattern of training provides an opportunity for us to share intensively in the Gospel by being the church within the confines of a relatively small group - praying, reflecting and ministering together'. This was seen by a review team member in a session structured to facilitate reflection on the students 'recent IME 1 placement experiences which was notable for the warmth and intimacy among trainees and tutors alike. The review team also witnessed an in-person teaching session at which the trainees seemed relaxed in one another's company and with their tutors, and were eager to take part in a group exercise.

27. The review team was, however, surprised that the overall structure of the training programme did not enable the community to flow between successive annual cohorts, and students were clearly missing out on aspects of progression, group learning and pastoral care which might have been experienced across a larger and more differentiated student community. This would exist if more segments of the programme (online, in person or both) were facilitated for the whole group. The issue seemed particularly pressing as the IME 1 cohort which the review team observed consisted of just 5 trainees.

28. The reviewers believe that teaching and training sessions (for example, themed teaching days or residentials) attended by both IME 1 and IME 2 trainees should become part of the programme. This would lead to the consolidation of the programme's overall sense of community whilst promoting progression both in terms of the licensed Readers' support of the IME 1 trainees; and in terms of the IME 1 trainees' inculturation with those already licensed. The arrangements could also lead to an enrichment of the experience and leadership of worship across the cohorts.

29. The close relationship between students and lead tutors enables a constant flow of informal feedback, which is invited, and which candidates described as being addressed immediately and helpfully. More formal types of feedback are also collected, with a Reader in Training serving as a sitting member of the Reader Training Steering Group. Readers in Training are invited to give written feedback termly and there is a more detailed Programme Evaluation at the end of the training programme.

30. The review team sensed from the candidates that the role their spouses and partners played in supporting them through training was acknowledged by the programme and its tutors, although the end of summer 4-week IME 1 placement had the potential to impinge upon family time during the school holidays.

Commendation 4

The reviewers commend the diversity of the programme's staff team, members of which are fully engaged in a range of ministries.

Commendation 5

The reviewers commend the good awareness of the importance of Safeguarding training shown by students, along with an understanding of the need for this training to be ongoing and of a level appropriate for those engaged in ministry.

Recommendation 5

There should be a seamless continuation of Programme-tutor pastoral support from the start of IME 1 until the end of IME 2.

Recommendation 6

The Birmingham team should explore building into the programme teaching days or residentials for shared attendance by IME 1 and IME 2 cohorts.

B3   The provision of public social and private living accommodation is satisfactory.

31. In the 2022 instance of the IME 1 programme, about half of the scheduled sessions were held online and half were held in local churches (appropriately, the latter usually involving some aspect of training for preaching). A residential weekend took place over two days on the premises of the

Queen's Foundation, with tutors and students speaking highly of the space and facilities there. The review team witnessed online sessions and found the Zoom platform accessible and capable of serving the needs of 'remote 'teaching and worship adequately.

32. Coinciding with the visit of the review team, new premises had come onstream at Church of England Birmingham's suites at *The Citadel*, 190 Corporation Street in the centre of the city. Here there are excellent social and teaching spaces including kitchen facilities, a comfortably furnished lobby area and some rooms which are suitable for break-out groups. Once fully fitted out, the ground floor of the building will also contain a conference hall which Church of England Birmingham can choose to hire for large scale events. There are public car parks in the vicinity although the use of bicycles or public transport to reach *The Citadel* is strongly encouraged. The review team members were impressed by the spaciousness and stunning contemporary design of the ground floor suite.

33. The ground floor accommodation is accessible to wheelchair users and those with limited mobility for whom some onsite parking is available. There is also a lift to other parts of the building, with adapted toilet facilities on all floors and suitably located fire-escapes.

34. The suite of rooms used by the programme does not include dedicated chapel space. The review team attended the trainee-led evening service which took place in the same room as the subsequent teaching session and although the space was large enough and the acoustics were good there was no obvious way to establish a visual focus for worship which may involve candles, icons etc: it is important that furniture and furniture-coverings etc are available to allow these items - and the truths which they are intended to express and symbolise - the fullest possible dignity and visibility.

35. The arrangement of furniture, which had been laid out for the teaching session, was not optimal for small-group worship. Further consideration should be given to the best arrangement of furniture for the pre-session worship, and to the option of holding the worship in a space other than the one which has been prepared for teaching. Candidates should be encouraged to experiment with the layout of the room (or rooms).

36. The review team understands that the new premises are subject to a 10-year leasehold arrangement, with building costs and maintenance works the responsibility of a management company.

37. The building had been designed to be operationally net zero carbon and powered by 100% green electricity. The building also boasts electric car charging stations and cycle storage spaces. There is LED lighting and VRF air conditioning: it is often the case that the latter requires a back-up heating system and this need became apparent to the review team who, present at the first evening teaching session to be held in the new premises, found that the room grew uncomfortably cold as the evening progressed. Students were wearing coats all day, the reviewers noticed. Clearly the temperature of the communal spaces needs to be monitored in order to ascertain

whether additional heating systems need to be put in place and used during the colder months, and we are encouraged to hear that the Steering Group already has this action in hand.

Commendation 6

The programme's mainly comfortable, adaptable and eco-friendly premises with excellent access and ancillary facilities are to be commended.

Recommendation 7

Consideration should be given to alternative furniture arrangement for pre-session worship and room layouts, and the option of a worship space other than that prepared for teaching.

B4 The TEI's corporate worship and liturgy are balanced in range and tradition, including authorised and innovative rites.

38.   IME 1 Wednesday and Saturday teaching sessions begin with corporate worship and the programme handbook carries the reminder that 'our worship is real worship'. This is tutor-led at the outset of the IME 1 programme but is subsequently prepared and led by a trainee or tutor group and with the programme director and group tutors present. A 20-minute slot is available for this. Corporate reflection and feedback sessions occur following the tutor group-led Saturday worship after Easter in the IME 1 year.

39.   The review team observed an IME 1 cohort participating in evening worship on three occasions (twice online, and once in person). Trainees leading online worship displayed carefully prepared slides and added musical elements. The candidate who led the in-person worship at *The Citadel* distributed attractive and accurately presented printed orders of service. The trainees who led worship seemed comfortable with what they were offering and were publicly thanked and praised by staff at the conclusion although the reviewers noted that in each case there were small but potentially significant issues relating to delivery which would have needed to be addressed through personal appraisal and feedback. Even where there seems to be no major issue, the close supervision of trainees in the tutorial environment provides unique opportunities to tackle the small things which, in another context, might be allowed to get through unchallenged.

40.   The review team noted that, in the case of the online Wednesday worship sessions which they observed, participants did not routinely mute during the congregational prayers and responses: the resulting cacophony of voices made it hard to maintain a prayerful atmosphere. The IME 1 handbook does not contain specific advice about the conduct of online worship.

41.   Given the importance for Reader ministry of the leadership of worship and its position as a Formational Aim of the training, the reviewers consider that the whole system of feedback and appraisal (including how advice is recorded and acted upon) and the detailed guidelines for the 'hosting' and conduct of student-led worship (for example in the IME 1 student handbook) within the tutorial environment and in church, post-licensing, should be reappraised.

42. Trainees are encouraged, in the IME 1 handbook, to offer worship from within their own spirituality and church tradition or to try something new and this reflects the Programme's aim to achieve a balance between authorised and innovative forms of worship and to reflect different expressions within the Anglican church. At least one act of worship is based on the Book of Common Prayer and followed by reflection on its usage. According to the programme mapping documentation, the Book of Common Prayer also features in the first IME 1 session in the programme's liturgy strand (Worship 1: Principles, Formation and Liturgy Development).

43. The IME 1 cohort observed by the review team was small but very diverse, with the diversity reflected in the presenters and in the presentation of worship. The review team, however, felt that occasionally combining the IME 1 and IME 2 cohorts in worship could significantly enhance individual and community development and allow a wider range of styles of leadership and worship to be exhibited. It would be a benefit for the IME 1 students to join the IME 2 students who are 'further on' in leading worship, perhaps at the beginning of joint study evenings or days, as part of a wider programme of bringing the IME 1 and IME 2 cohorts together.

Commendation 7

The reviewers commend the student-led worship which had been planned thoughtfully and accurately.

Recommendation 8

Opportunities should be created for the two cohorts to worship online or in-person as a single community.

Recommendation 9

Individual tutor appraisal and feedback relating to candidate-led worship at programme events, perhaps by telephone or email on the following day, along with the candidate's own reflection on their performance, should take place as a matter of routine.

Recommendation 10

The reviewers urge reappraisal of the programme's guidelines, feedback and appraisal system for candidate-led worship within the tutorial environment and in church, post-licensing.

B5   Staff model an appropriate pattern of spirituality, continued learning and reflection on practice.

44. The good relationships between the Director of Reader Training, lead tutors, visiting tutors and trainees is a strength of the programme, with the level of warmth and intimacy encouraged by the small size of the IME 1 cohort. The review team was impressed by the way the programme tutors sit in on the sessions led by visiting tutors, effectively making themselves contributing members of

the community of learning alongside the trainees - this, and their commitment to the Programme's worship and social time, was something the trainees clearly appreciated.

45. There are current and recent instances of staff studying for higher degrees or qualifications reflecting development or experience in the teaching of adults.

Commendation 8

The reviewers commend the close social and pastoral relationships which exist between staff and students, and the commitment to ministry, teaching and learning which modelled by the tutors.

> **The review team has Confidence with Qualifications with regard to Criterion B: Formational Context and Community.**

Section C: Leadership and Management

C1   The TEI has clear and effective governance structures.

46.   As reported in the 2016 review, the Reader Training programme remains an integral part of the Ministry Formation Team in the Diocese of Birmingham, with the Steering Group providing strategic leadership and 'steering' the direction of the programme. There is a Director of Reader Training, responsible for the day-to-day administration and management of the programme. The Warden of Readers, who is responsible for Readers in their ministries, is a member of the Steering Group. The Steering Group is chaired by the Director of Ministry, which ensures Reader ministry is clearly understood in its wider ministerial context. This structure is well understood by everyone involved and, within some limitations noted below, works well.

47.   The Director of Ministry, (the chair of the Steering Group), is in attendance at Bishop's Council (and is also a member of the Bishop's Staff Meeting), and the Warden of Readers is a member of the Council. This means the programme has strong connections with Bishop's Council and can ensure the voice of Readers, and the priorities associated with the Programme, can be heard at the highest level.

48.   The review team was concerned that the role of the Steering Group in 'steering' the work of Readers' training is hampered by the lack of separation of Reader training from the rest of diocesan training. Salaries, accommodation, facilities (including library), website and online (eg, Moodle) costs, are all included in overall diocesan budgets and not identified separately for Reader training. There is therefore no opportunity for the Steering Group to monitor these costs, nor to divert budgets to different areas. This makes it difficult for the management of the programme and the Steering Group in its oversight role to provide the traditional financial oversight and control. Hence Recommendation 13 below urges a clear strategic and budgeting role for the Steering Group.

49.   However, the review team found that relationships with the central finance team are good, and the costs of Reader training are tiny in relation to overall diocesan expenditure, so requests for additional expenditure are usually approved if the case is made. There is also no appetite in the central finance team to introduce expensive systems to support full allocation of central costs. The Review team supports this view. However, in our view, there needs to be a clearer process for requesting additional expenditure to enhance the quality and depth of Reader training (eg, library facilities, increased residential opportunities), and for the Steering Group to prioritise and monitor the effectiveness of such investment.

50.   As mentioned above, the financial structures for the programme are embedded within the diocesan training and development budget. This is allocated yearly for Reader training, with the budget being determined jointly by the Director of Reader Training, the Finance Manager and the Director of Finance, with some input from the Director of Ministry. The Director of Reader Training

and the Finance Manager also get together once in a term to review ongoing expenditure, whilst the Steering Group reviews the small, specific budgets (such as grants). It also reviews the risk register at every meeting to ensure it is up to date and relevant.

51.   From review team members' discussions with the Director of Finance, Diocesan Secretary, Warden of Readers, and Director of Reader training, it is evident that relationships are strong, with good collaboration, good sense of accountability, infectious enthusiasm, and openness. Much of the success of the programme stems from its small nature and the strong relationships within this central core.

52.   The Steering Group includes external stakeholders, with a representative from another diocese, as well as student representatives, which is good. However, the Steering Group's current Terms of Reference should be further enhanced to include (amongst other things): the Group's role and purpose, its composition, the scope of its powers and responsibilities, frequency of meeting, quoracy, the groups to which it reports and those which report into it. The TOR should also consider the length of tenure of its members, and how new members might be selected and appointed. The TOR should be reviewed at least every 2 years to ensure they remain relevant.

53.   The Review team felt that whilst student representation on the Steering Group was helpful and positive, it was noted that finding volunteers to take on this role can prove difficult, particularly for Readers pursuing IME2. Their workload both within the training programme and in their work lives and family life, meant that finding time to prepare for, attend and follow up on meetings was challenging. The Review team felt that this gap could usefully be filled by additional efforts to obtain feedback from the wider student body, for example by the use of focus groups, questionnaires, invitation events, web chats or any other means which might encourage suggestion and comment. As individuals have different personality types and learning styles, the greater the variety of mechanisms the better.

Recommendation 11

The Steering Group should develop Terms of Reference including guidance on membership, selection and appointment, tenure, and clear responsibilities.

Recommendation 12

The Director of Reader Training, Steering Group and senior diocesan staff need to agree the desired future shape and direction of Reader training and the extent to which this can be supported by resource planning and monitoring; they should explore the scope for the Steering Group to have more information about, and influence over, the development of budgets and monitoring of expenditure to implement the agreed strategic direction.

Recommendation 13

The programme team should be clear on its approach to ensuring the team and its governance processes are representative of the community of Readers/ Diocese, for example through greater use of feedback mechanisms to ensure the Steering Group benefits from student input.

C2   The TEI has effective team leadership.

54.   The diocese has a clearly stated vision: 'People and Places', which has been in place for several years and is well and widely understood. The role of Readers in this vision is clear; lay ministry has an increasingly important part to play in the delivery of the restructured management of parishes and deaneries. All those in senior positions within Reader training, as well as the Steering Group, clearly understand this vision and the role of Readers within its delivery.

55.   The review team found the Director of Reader Training and team colleagues to be both directive and collaborative, with key people having strong leadership qualities. They appeared to be sensitive to the needs of students and to listen and respond to feedback appropriately. They had a clear sense of the bigger picture for lay training in the diocese and how their programme contributed to this, and all had a genuine sense of enthusiasm for the development of this important ministry and in support of the students undertaking it.

56.   Colleagues are clear about the direction of the training in ensuring readers are equipped as 'skilled teacher', 'mission enabler 'and 'leader in church and in society'. The review team commends the fact that core tutors are actively involved in the design, enhancement and delivery of the programme. Being a small team, they benefit from good communication, and provide significant one-to-one support for students. There is a small budget for the use of core tutors to pursue their own learning, but this is rarely taken up. The Review team considers that core tutors should be more actively encouraged to use this budget and further their own learning.

57.   The review team observed one meeting of the Steering Group and considered that it operated reasonably well. Some minor enhancements would help its operation – for example the review team recommends introducing an Action Log to accompany the minutes, including actions from previous meetings as well as those from that meeting, so that actions are not forgotten.

58.   The Review team also noted that administrative support for the Steering Group was provided by either the Director of Reader Training or the Warden of Readers, both of whom have very busy roles, including elements beyond Reader training. The review team recommends a new part-time role of Administrative Support to the Steering Group should be introduced as soon as possible. This would allow specialist knowledge to be built up by this person, and also free up valuable time of others.

Commendation 9

The review team commends the programme on its shared vision and sense of purpose.

Commendation 10

The review team commends the fact that core tutors are actively involved in the design, enhancement and delivery of the programme.

Recommendation 14

An Action Log should be introduced to accompany the minutes, including actions from previous meetings as well as those from that meeting.

Recommendation 15

A new part-time role of Administrative Support to the Steering Group should be introduced as soon as possible.

C3   Trustees are appropriately recruited, supported and developed.

59. This programme does not exist as a separate entity and so does not have Trustees as such. The review team has looked at members of the Steering Group when considering this section.

60. The Steering Group has a strong membership with appropriate, highly qualified and skilled individuals contributing to its work. There is a high level of attendance at meetings and the discussion observed was of a high level and with a good degree of challenge.

61. The review team noted that the disruption of Covid had limited opportunities for Steering Group members to attend Reader events, both training provided and seeing Readers in their situations and talking to their incumbents. It is important for Steering Group members not to have only one source of information (from senior management of the programme) but to be able to triangulate that information in other ways.

62. The review team also noted that induction was non-existent or considered not to be relevant. This should be reviewed and introduced for new Steering Group members in future. Existing Steering Group members could pilot (and comment on) the induction when developed, which would also give them a chance to experience elements they may not have covered on joining. A buddying system for new members could be introduced with the 'buddies' (existing Steering Group members) attending the induction with new members, which would enhance the richness of debate.

Recommendation 16

An induction programme for new Steering Group members be introduced and piloted with existing Steering Group members; the introduction of a buddying system for new members could also be considered.

Recommendation 17

Steering Group members should be encouraged to attend occasional Reader training sessions and occasionally visit Readers in their parish situations and report back to the Steering Group on their findings.

C4   The TEI has effective business planning, fundraising, risk management and reporting.

63.   As noted above, the Reader programme is not a separate entity and does not have its own resourcing plan. It is difficult therefore for the review team to comment meaningfully on this section. The business and strategic plan is held within larger diocesan budgets, and therefore financial management, budgeting and monitoring for the specific Reader programme are severely limited and not particularly helpful.

64.   The review team did consider and discuss with senior management whether such a separation would be helpful, but concluded that the effort required to do this would not be justified. The team has therefore applied a degree of proportionality to its comments in this section (see also the comments under C1 above).

65.   The programme is heavily dependent on the gift economy, with the diocese providing funds when required and if supported by robust business cases. All premises are managed by the diocese, which also provides ICT support and hardware, and support services (eg, HR, finance, recruitment, other specialisms, key posts). Budgeting and financial management in the traditional sense are therefore difficult to achieve in this situation. The review team did recognise that this is also a strength of the programme, in that it does not have to concern itself directly with the provision of IT security, building security, premises costs, facilities management or many other such areas. This allows more time and energy to be devoted by management to the provision of the actual programme itself.

66.   The review team considered that some performance measures could, however, be introduced and monitored, particularly around non-financial areas such as recruitment, retention, attendance, satisfaction ratings, complaints.

67.   The programme management and Steering Group have good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the programme, with a documented risk register to monitor their risks and set out their approach to mitigation. The review team considered there could be greater awareness of the risk of having so much of the programme delivered as a 'gift economy' - for example, all academic and core tutors are volunteers, as are members of the Steering Group. The Risk register is good but further consideration needs to be given to how the identified risks could be mitigated to reduce either their likelihood or impact. The effectiveness of these mitigations should then be monitored by the Steering Group and mitigations changed if they are not being effective.

Commendation 11

The review team commends the strong relationships with the diocesan central team, which provides all support services in an effective and efficient manner, allowing the programme to focus on its core purpose of training Readers.

Recommendation 18

The risk register needs to include consideration of the risk of running the programme on a gifted economy.

Recommendation 19

Further consideration should be given to outlining proposed mitigations to identified risks in the risk register, and then monitoring the effectiveness of these at Steering Group meetings.

> **The review team has Confidence with Qualifications with regard to Criterion C: Leadership and Management.**

Section D: Teaching and Learning

D1   The TEI offers programmes appropriate to the sponsoring church's ministerial training needs.

68.   Although the review team was principally focused on the Church of England Birmingham Reader training programme up to the point of licensing, the IME 1 component is only one section of what is currently a 3-stage journey. The success or otherwise of IME 1 is largely determined by the strengths of the other two elements trainees experience, namely *3D/Way of Discipleship* and, post-licensing, IME 2/*Next*.

69.   The internally approved Birmingham Reader Training programme at IME 1 and IME 2/*Next* boasts a varied, meticulously designed and conscientiously delivered curriculum which covers a range of biblical, theological and ministry topics. It sets out to be practice-focused and is notable for its emphasis on developing knowledge and skills to support preaching (trainees have been required to offer 5 sermons during IME 1, one of which is in the placement context), ministry (with a significant emphasis on the IME 1 placement), and the aim of encouraging personal development and reflection on all aspects of Reader ministry, increasingly at IME 2/*Next*.

70.   It is clear from conversations with the Director of Reader Training and programme tutors that the programme's accessibility to trainees from the widest possible range of backgrounds, including the non-academic, is a far more critical consideration for this Programme than working towards a set of externally determined, objective standards expressed as a 'Level 'of training or study. Meanwhile, church leaders seemed broadly happy with the performance of the recently licensed Readers (IME 2/*Next* and beyond) with whom they shared their ministries.

71.   The programme can be said to be world-engaging with 7 of the of 32 programme sessions of IME 1 addressing issues in society (work, interfaith, etc) where, in addition, relevant opportunities for the trainees 'growth through engagement may be encountered during church placements. At IME 2/*Next*, apart from the mosque visit, any extension of trainees 'world-engagement (beyond activities associated with their home church which, admittedly, could be significant in this regard) would be largely dependent on an individual's personal pathway, meaning that there is a risk that no societal issue is covered in any real depth which is surprising given Birmingham's complex multicultural character. We would urge that all trainees should have the opportunity for in-depth world engagement (e.g. the world of work, interfaith, health and social care, the contemporary relevance of a book or theme from the Bible) by the introduction of a substantial project-style assignment as part of IME 2/*Next* either relating to a ministry reality in their own situation or something for which they have developed a particular passion.

72.   In recent years almost all of the Reader ministry trainees would have completed the introductory *3D* course before embarking on the IME 1 programme: the main elements of the *3D* programme were orientation around the Bible and biblical themes and group discussion (the *3D* course has

now been replaced by *Way of Discipleship*, and some of the many strengths of this new programme, which promotes gritty engagement with a wide range of theological themes, may have significant positive implications for student learning and progression in future instances of IME 1 and IME 2/*Next*).

73.   Samples of students 'sermons and written work seen by reviewers, together with the experiences of student discussions at IME 1 lacked evidence of the knowledge, creativity and reflection which derives from deeper critical textual and doctrinal engagements. The lively insight and engagement which comes from reading books for inspiration (and not just for information) and in-depth conversation with practitioners was not evident. Review team members were not confident that *3D* programme had been a sufficiently firm and broad basis for progression into formal Reader training at IME 1, with the students still appearing to be working at an introductory level. Although broadly true to its current aims, and perhaps because of that, at IME 1 there is a lack of appropriate depth of study. To say this, on the evidence observed by reviewers, is not to argue for formal validation but simply for parity of standards in what is a nationally recognised and transferable ministry. The move to the new foundational material in *Way of Discipleship* is a promising step in this direction. Specifically, *Way of Discipleship* consistently extends biblical themes into the world of theological thought from church history and culture, connects leaders and participants to resources for self-directed learning, and encourages thoughtful exploration of the necessary engagement between faith and life.

74.   We believe the standard and depth of learning within the programme should be improved and many detailed suggestions as to how this could be achieved are found in the Recommendations elsewhere in this report. In relation to D1, much would be achieved by fully exploiting the opportunities for increasing depth and promoting progression from the excellent new material in *Way of Discipleship* to IME 1 and on to IME 2/*Next*; and by building into the programme culture an aspiration that many trainees (benefiting from some additional reading, some self-directed learning, more detailed assessment criteria promoting progression; some in-depth project work at IME 2/Next, and - above all - by the 'can do 'discourse among the tutors) may find that they can be supported towards and work at a standard equivalent to Level 4, which is the national church's minimum aspiration for the appropriate academic level of Reader/LLM formation, whether or not the programme is academically validated.

Commendation 12

We commend the way the programme is embedded in the ministry of the diocese and its diverse communities, and its accessibility to candidates with a broad range of backgrounds.

Recommendation 20

The Birmingham team should give further attention to the programme's level and depth of learning, including with regard to progression, learning resources, assignments and assessment, aiming for a standard equivalent to HE Level 4.

Recommendation 21

We recommend the programme should ensure that all candidates have the opportunity for in-depth world engagement by the introduction of a substantial project-style assignment as part of IME 2/*Next*.

D2   The TEI's taught programmes are appropriately resourced, developed and quality assured.

75.   The Director of Reader Training, formation group tutors (both Readers) and visiting tutors are very well qualified academically and the team boasts a lively range of specialist interests which reflect the ethos and breadth of the programme. At present the different subject specialisms and disciplines seem well served by the team. The extent of their commitment is demonstrated by the fact that tutors offer their time and talents voluntarily and unpaid for this work, granted that many serve in stipendiary ministry. Clergy CMD and grants are also available from Reader CME funds. The programme director and group tutors usually sit in on sessions led by the visiting tutors, which means there is good communication and ample opportunity for informal appraisal and feedback relating to teaching styles and content. Visiting tutors are not able, in the administrative context of the programme, to apply for book grants or resources for the funding of training opportunities. Church of England Birmingham, the review team was informed, has a great wealth of ministers who hold, or are working towards, higher degrees including PhDs. Although a PhD is not a teaching qualification this is still an indication that the programme has rich local resources to draw upon.

76.   The Moodle-style Pathways learning platform within Church on England Birmingham's website offers a discussion forum, tutor biographies, the IME 1 Handbook and full details of the course programme. Each session of the programme has its own web page and session powerpoints, handouts, pre-reading and other resources may be posted here. Among the session sections there are some excellent examples (e.g. interfaith topics) which encourage exploration and self-directed learning far beyond the immediate scope of the week's in-session teaching. There are other instances where materials are sparse or relate only to elements of the planned session programme. IME 2/*Next* has a separate handbook, but no online platform. The use of this platform should be developed further to promote a busy and attractive environment of resources and self-directed learning tools etc, as well as intra-cohort communication, and trainees be encouraged to develop a positive and inquisitive attitude towards it.

77.   A library of books and pamphlets is available to Reader trainees at *The Citadel*, and instructions and advice about borrowing and photocopying together with a list of some of the (mainly Biblical studies) volumes available are found in the IME 1 handbook. The review team was concerned to note that the library is currently located in a meeting room, meaning that student access to the books could be inconveniently restricted at certain times. This should be monitored as use of these new premises develops. Online resources are available via the Common Awards hub and the

'Living with the Bible 'course at Sarum College. Trainees found that the resources they needed were generally accessible although the temptation to resort to uncurated internet resources was an issue.

78.   In spite of the availability of a wide range of reading resources, the review team was concerned that trainees were 'reading for information' (also implied by the booklists in the IME 1 handbook) rather than 'reading for inspiration' and that tutors were not in the habit of identifying and recommending key, 'hard-to-put-down' books as programme favourites which were sufficiently stimulating and memorable to inspire the trainees' lifelong reading habits; or of offering short, judiciously selected and genuinely lively topical reading lists which trainees would grow to trust and become eager to seek out.

79.   The curriculum is put under regular review, and student feedback has been an important element in its evolution in recent years. A student representative is a member of the Reader Training Steering Group. The warm relationship between students and tutors, and the small teaching groups, mean that students feel confident about giving feedback at or after weekly sessions (this could be in relation to an individual trainee's particular learning needs, perhaps related to a disability) and there is further opportunity for detailed programme evaluation at the end of the training programme. The review team was provided with evidence of recent instances where changes had been made to the programme in response to student feedback, and were pleased to learn how things were actively evolving.

80.   The programme is reviewed annually by the Reader Training Steering Group annually and is also the subject of PER reviews.

Commendation 13

The review team commends the IME 1, and IME 2/Next and Placement handbooks, which provide clear information about the purpose and progress of each element of training, and the expectations of students.

Commendation 14

The reviewers commend the use of small tutor groups (3 or 4 students) which mean that - after feedback to teaching tutors - adaptations to the learning styles of individuals can be made swiftly and students enjoy a pastorally supportive learning environment.

Recommendation 22

The programme should maximise the value of the Pathways Moodle platform to promote attractive resources and intra-cohort communication, and encourage candidates to engage well with it.

Recommendation 23

The programme should promote background and topical reading by identifying good, often short, academic books which are known to captivate and inspire and not just inform, and ensure that these are prominent and accessible among the library resources at *The Citadel*.

Recommendation 24

The programme should explore the detailed, objective Common Awards assessment criteria for assignments at Level 4 and consider how aspects of these could be deployed in order to enhance quality and promote progression.

Recommendation 25

The programme should audit and celebrate the education and training qualifications and professional experience held within the tutor team (and Church of England Birmingham) and ensure good practice is shared and disseminated.

D3   There is a good mix of teaching and learning styles and assessment methods, and students are engaged.

81.   At the sessions they attended both online and in person the review team witnessed a range of approaches to teaching and learning. There was a lecture-based session with powerpoint input interspersed with discussion and reference to selected bible passages; another evening involved tutor-guided reflection on the trainees' recent placement experiences; and one focused on the teaching of coaching skills using Action Learning Sets with tutor input (including a demonstration with a student volunteer) and then a trial of the method in small groups. This combination, witnessed over a 4-week period, is indicative of the varied feel of the IME 1 programme as a whole and it is clearly appreciated by the trainees.

82.   Both online and in-person teaching sessions are supported by materials and exercises which are available on the Pathways platform, although there was little evidence to suggest that the concept of 'flipping a session' was commonly embraced where it would serve the needs of the students well: the review team thought that a Biblical studies session they observed was 'content-heavy', with the students getting overloaded at the end: much of the standard introductory material could have been covered in pre-reading so as to allow more session time for detailed exploration of important texts and interesting critical questions.

83.   Assessment and feedback methods and templates are carefully tailored to fit the session/task styles involved and are published at the end of the IME 1 handbook. Students found the feedback they received (examples of which the reviewers saw) encouraging and timely and were comfortable with the fact that it was usually provided by tutors with whom they had supportive personal and pastoral relationships. Portfolio assessment is used throughout the programme: at the end of the IME 1 phase, for the placement, and across IME 2/*Next*.

84. The review team was impressed by the design and coherence of the IME 1 programme with its emphasis on preaching and the placement experience, features which the students clearly related to. Questions about the capability of IME 1, at least in isolation, leading to the fulfilment of formational aims for Readers are raised elsewhere, but students revealed to the review team that they would have appreciated more input around the area of spirituality and worship, something which the reviewer team understands is being explored in the current review of IME 1 and IME2 which is aimed at addressing the new Formational Aims for Reader training. Those with non-academic backgrounds appreciated the relatively 'light touch' assessment methods which focus on encouragement towards improvement rather than measuring to detailed objective standards.

85. All of that being said, we believe that the current programme review should look at further harmonising the whole area of assessment across IME 1 and IME 2/*Next*. With the same kinds of tasks (e.g. sermons which, the reviewers understand may in future feature as assessed components in IME 2/*Next*) it would be good to use the same detailed assessment criteria in order to give students an objective picture of their development and make them aware of the areas most in need of improvement. It would also be good to tighten and expand the assessment criteria used across IME 1 and IME 2/*Next* so that it begins to look more like detailed Level 4 criteria, and to consider awarding marks for key assessed IME 2/*Next* assignments, in the hope that pieces of work which may have reached a level 4 standard are revealed. Marking to detailed, objective assessment criteria and standards also makes it easier for the tutors once they have been trained in the technique.

Commendation 15

The reviewers commend the Programme's use of a full range of teaching and learning styles in sessions and through assignment tasks.

Recommendation 26

In teaching more use should be made of the Pathways platform: there should be a more consistent offering of materials enabling flipping of sessions or/and further study and self-directed learning.

Recommendation 27

The programme should, as part of its current review, explore harmonising assessment tasks and methods across IME1/2 and *Next*, and developing assessment criteria and methods in line with HE Level 4 criteria.

D4   There is provision for students' progression and development over the course of the learning programmes.

86. The review team members who had familarised themselves with the contents and aims of the new *Way of Discipleship* materials and talked with the creator were pleased that it has been introduced,

as it will inevitably raise the standard of skills and knowledge attained by Reader ministry candidates as they progress to IME 1.

87.   The review team was clear that at present the formational aims for Reader candidates which include 'Skilled Teacher of Faith', 'Enabler of Mission' and 'Leader in Church and Society' are not being achieved by the end of IME 1, which means that the scope of IME 1 is insufficient. It was noted that in the IME 1 handbook the first of these aims is referred to on a single occasion, in relation to preaching. In the IME 2/*Next* handbook these aims do not appear, and there is no note of how the 7 units offered at IME 2/*Next* seek to address them.

88.   The review team was seeking a sense of the security of the route of progression through IME 1 to the end of IME 2/*Next*, noting that serious consideration is being given to tightening the assessment and progression routes between the two stages by, amongst other things, moving some assessed sermon exercises to IME 2/*Next*, thus putting a spotlight on trainee progression since IME 1 – as para 85 above seeks to encourage.

89.   With regard to specialisation and depth of study, the place to look would be IME 2/*Next* but this part of the training is mainly practice-based, with an emphasis on personal and skills-development in ministry. There is very limited scope for the study of a topic in greater depth, with Unit 4 of IME 2 ('Apologetics') only requiring a 500-word piece of written work and a Unit 7 in IME 2/*Next* assessment option taking the form of a 1000-1250 word essay (with a bibliography, but optional referencing)

90.   The way IME 2/*Next* is designed, with fewer tutor-convened sessions and more scope for documented reflection on ministry experience reflects some kind of *progression* from IME 1. It is harder to assess how successfully this format encourages study skills, critical thinking and research skills. Progress in relation to these elements in IME 2/*Next* would, in the future, be dependent on an increase in standards, including standards of assessment, at IME 1 and could also be boosted by the introduction of a project assignment to IME 2/*Next*.

Recommendation 28

Across the IME 1 and IME 2/*Next* curricula, the programme should give close attention to all three stated formational aims of Reader training and show the students where and how they are being addressed.

Recommendation 29

The assessment relationship between IME 1 and IME 2/*Next* should be redesigned so as to enable students to trace their development using feedback for similar tasks (e.g. sermon assignments and ministry exercises) across both levels.

Recommendation 30

A project assignment should be added to IME 2/*Next*, capable of being assessed against Level 4 criteria.

Recommendation 31

The IME 1 and IME 2/*Next* cohorts should be brought together for study days in order to encourage progression and experience participation in, and insights from, a broader and larger group.

D5   Students are helped to integrate their academic learning and ministerial development.

91.   A clear strength of the IME 1 and IME 2/*Next* programme is the built-in integration between classroom learning and ministerial development in live situations. This integration is expressed, amongst other things, through sermon assignments, the placement experience (IME 1) and the whole of the post-licensing (IME 2/*Next*) period. It is further strengthened by the fact that the teaching and guidance comes from experienced ministers, grounded in church life as well as the challenging diversity and varied experiences of the student cohort. The whole programme leans towards practical ministry, especially the ministry of the word.

92.   Portfolio work and journaling, with reflection, features in IME 1 in relation to the placement and throughout IME 2/*Next*. Theological reflection is encouraged and expected, although the review team sensed that at IME 1 in both written work and in student discussions in an evening session avowedly focused on theological reflection it was apparent that these skills were in need of considerable further development: there was an obvious need for students to get used to bringing abstracted theological concepts (Trinity; Incarnation; Sacramental Theology etc) to bear on their experiences, sometimes critically and creatively, as well as Bible verses and narratives.

93.   Theological reflection is not the same as personal or even devotional reflection and programme tutors need to be uncompromising in their demand for good theological reflection from students, doing all they can to challenge and support students as they learn this particular language. It may be that the mindset students need to adopt would be developed in further conversation with practitioners, along with reading of authors who encourage and inspire the adoption of the 'language' of theological reflection.

94.   The IME 1 placement has already been cited as a significant strength of the programme. Detailed guidance and indications of expectations (including journaling methods) are given in a dedicated IME 1 placement handbook which also includes forms for supervisors, self evaluation and congregation feedback after preaching. The students were highly stimulated by their placement experiences and in agreement that this was a highlight of their training.

Commendation 16

The reviewers commend the IME 1 placement as a well organised and highly successful element of the programme where self-awareness and reflection are promoted and ministry skills are discovered and developed.

Recommendation 32

The programme should give further attention to developing students' theological reflection skills and practice, doing all they can to challenge and support students as they learn this particular language.

> **The review team has Confidence with Qualifications with regard to Criterion D: Teaching and Learning.**

Section E: Ministerial Formation

E1   Students are enabled to grow in their love for God.

95.   This section of the report tracks the Church of England's new (from 2022-23) formation criteria for lay ministry so it may be helpful to explain some of what is looked for. Criterion E1 seeks evidence that students are helped to grow in a Christian faith that is life-transforming, rooted in scripture, worship and the church's living tradition, and is world-engaging.

96.   Placements, as highlighted in the Placement Handbook and evidenced in review team members' conversations with students, ex-students and placement supervisors, offer a significant opportunity for students to experience different expressions of faith and to grow in understanding of their own tradition.

97.   In order to build on this experience as the programme looks to adopt the new criteria fully, an emphasis on students' own relationship with God and how that is enhanced by placement experiences will create a more clearly articulated goal for placements beyond the knowledge and skills gained.

E2   Students are enabled to grow in their calling to ministry.

98.   The reviewers are asked to look for evidence that Reader/LLM students' sense of calling reflects a growing understanding of lay distinctives and their ministry's public representative nature, a commitment to discipleship and service, and that their calling is realistic.

99.   Selection for Reader training was described by the Warden of Readers and is thorough. Candidates have identified a distinct sense of calling to Reader Mistry before training begins. Both current Readers in Training and past students spoken to by members of the review team had a strong sense of their calling to a lay ministry and were able to clearly express ways in which participation in IME1 and IME2 had enabled this sense of calling to grow.

100.   The tutor system enables contact with Readers who are clear about their own calling and maturing in their ministries. This way of being together was described in the Reader Training Handbook, the overview document and by current and past students in a way that enabled the reviewers to be confident that students are continually growing in their sense of vocation to this Reader ministry in particular and to service of the Church and the community in particular.

101.   This contact with Reader tutors ends with licensing and Readers in IME2 have more supervision from ordained leaders within the church. The *Next* programme handbook states that regular meetings are with the ordained coordinators of the programme and with the incumbent of the parish (or the anchor minister where a parish is in vacancy). While the review team heard some very encouraging evidence of supervision and guidance from past students and parish clergy, this is very much on a one-to-one basis rather than with a continued, identified, tutored cohort. As

recommended in Section D, the review team suggests that further integration between those in training pre- and post-licensing with continued support from the IME1 tutors in the post-licensing phase of training would enable a deepening of vocational identity guided by those in lay ministries.

Commendation 17

The reviewers commend the strong identification that students have with licensed lay ministry, which the review team believes is due at least in part to the respect afforded this ministry by those leading the programme and the appointment of Readers as tutors to those in training.

Recommendation 33

The reviewers recommend that continuation of contact with Reader tutors and with the whole training cohort (IME1 and IME2 gathered from time to time) would enhance students' sense of identification with a ministry exemplified by those further into training and active ministry.

E3   Students are equipped to grow in their love for people.

102.   This criterion looks at how well students are equipped to welcome Christ in others, care for all, and build collaborative and enabling relationships. It addresses boundaries, self-care and safeguarding; and commitment to racial justice and to mission, peace and reconciliation.

103.   There is more evidence of seeking to meet these aspirations in the *Next* programme handbook through the sessions on team building, apologetic and mentoring than in the IME1 programme. Given that *Next* is technically IME2 it is difficult to say that Reader training at IME1 sufficiently addresses these qualities. This again is due to the nature of the divisions of the phases of training. More clearly integrating pre- and post-licensing training would enable these elements to be more robustly assessed and reported upon.

104.   The 2022 criteria ask for a depth of personal awareness that reviewers did not yet find to be an aspect of the programme that was clearly expressed by students, past or present. While the review team did meet people of integrity and with an ability to be reflexive, these qualities were more often related to professional training than to aspects of the programme. The reflective journals of IME2 offer an ideal opportunity for guiding students in understanding the aspects of this criterion in its new form with reference to the need, in addition to reflecting on their own learning, to develop gifts of leadership and collaboration, to relate their social context to the Five Marks of Mission and to have integrity, self-awareness, respond well to feedback and acknowledge their vulnerabilities.

105.   The 2022 criteria include the expectation that students will understand best safeguarding practice, be aware of issues of self-care and the need for good relationships with members of their families and with friends. These criteria also expect there to be a desire for change in the church with an awareness of racism and other prejudices within the church. In order for these qualities to be

taken into account for future cohorts, greater coordination of training between stages and between the programme and sponsoring church will be required.

Recommendation 34

The reflective journals which make up the assessed elements of post-licensing training would benefit from a clear expectation that they correlate to the selection and training formation criteria grids. This would enable clearer, bespoke, formation pathways to be developed both pre- and post-licensing and shared with students' parishes.

E4   Students are helped to grow in wisdom.

106.   This criterion seeks evidence that students are enabled to reflect on their experience and learning, respond well to feedback, and are developing in gifts of leadership and collaboration.

107.   The review team's experience of Reader training in Birmingham leads us to consider that students are very much encouraged in these qualities as far as they relate to preaching. However, there is little time in a one-year part time programme to develop in a broader sense. Feedback from students and evidence gathered from the mapping document and ASE reports lead the review team to conclude that a deeper engagement with mission and collaborative leadership would benefit from an extension of taught content into the year that, at present, is identified as IME2. This would allow for greater engagement with one another as students and for additional placement experiences (maybe as small groups of students with corporate theological reflection being part of the assessment process? The Common Awards Corporate Engagement modules may provide a guideline for such a project).

Recommendation 35

The reviewers recommend that an extended taught programme into the current IME2 year with some overlap of sessions online or in person or both with IME1 students would allow for a deeper engagement with theological reflection and topics relating to mission and collaborative leadership.

E5   Students are helped to grow in the quality of fruitfulness.

108.   The reviewers are asked for evidence of students' capacity to engage with difference, communicate and encourage faith in diverse audiences, and plan and lead worship well.

109.   Within the scope of a one-year programme, this quality is most clearly seen in engagement with placements and the leading of worship on study days and in parish. Observation of, and conversation with, current students gave reviewers some evidence of the qualities referred to in the older criteria. However, stake-holder conversations did identify a limited amount of teaching and understanding of 'those forms of service which are authorised or allowed by canon' (from the declarations made by each Reader before admission). More teaching on Common Worship, Times and Seasons and other available material would give students greater confidence in their ability

and authority to be leading creating and leading public worship and thus allow more scope for the development of other aspects of their own faith journeys which will then be reflected in their confidence in engagement with public worship.

110.   The aspects of fruitfulness referred to in the new criteria relate to students speaking of their faith journey and that of their discipleship, reflecting on their learning in mission and evangelism and encouraging other in their everyday faith as well as showing resilience and developing rhythms of life. While students did speak of these aspects of their own walk with God in conversations with reviewers, a more clearly defined method for mapping growth and enabling contact with wider, more diverse Christian groups through both IME1 and IME2 will be required.

Recommendation 36

Creating environments in which students are given opportunities to speak of their faith, to plan and lead worship with help to navigate Common Worship resources and to engage with wider age ranges of worshippers will be necessary to broaden from engagement with public worship and preaching to the more expansive aspects of the new criteria.

E6   Students are equipped to continue to develop their potential.

111.   This criterion looks for evidence that students are open to development, ready to enable the church's mission and evangelism in both traditional and new contexts, and can integrate their discipleship and ministry, work and personal life. Our comments and recommendation under E5 relate, as the aspects of fruitfulness and development of potential significantly overlap.

112.   The main evidence gathered by reviewers in relation to the aspects of this criterion that refer to support of traditional and new Christian communities and working with opportunities for change, as well as discerning the presence of God in different contexts are mainly situated in the documentation and conversations about placements. Placement supervisors and students spoke of opportunities for development with enthusiasm and care. However, placement supervisors are not as involved in the planning and delivery of the programme as may be beneficial. With greater understanding of the formational aims of training, the review team believes the placements could be even more beneficial to students.

Recommendation 37

Reviewers recommend that opportunities are created for greater involvement of placement supervisors in the formational aspects of Reader training enabling them to more clearly plan activities to meet the formational goals of individual students so that they might develop their potential.

E7   **Students are able to demonstrate trustworthiness.**

113.   The criterion looks for evidence of students' development of a pattern of life grounded in prayer, scripture and reflection, and of their readiness to work to the church's accountability frameworks including best safeguarding practice.

114.   Conversations with placement supervisors and parish incumbents as well as with students themselves suggested that students are very aware of the representational role of their ministry and the need to understand the corporate values of the diocese. Safeguarding training is robust and all students were aware of the levels of training necessary as well as reasons for the training.

E8   **The TEI has sound procedures for the interim and end-of-training assessment of students' knowledge, skills and dispositions, reporting on their achievement and identifying further learning needs for the next stages of training and ministry.**

115.   In conversation with the Warden of Readers it was clear to reviewers that the end of IME1 reports are comprehensive and relate to the current formation criteria in some depth. The IME1 report goes to the diocesan bishop as the basis for recommendation for admission and licensing. If consideration is given to a more clearly charted IME1 training process which lasts for 2 years, there is already a healthy reporting pattern which can be incorporated into any changes that are made. Year 2 will be overseen by a different tutor from year 1 and so the end of year 1 report should continue to be written but may be considered an interim report creating a personal development plan for year 2 of IME1. A further, end of year 2 report based on the 2022 formation criteria would form the handover report to the Warden of Readers with the potential to lead to an ongoing learning/development plan for the initial years of Reader ministry.

116.   In order to develop Reader training into the future, greater emphasis on the wider aspects of Reader ministry, in particular mission, leadership and personal development will be required. The review team recommends that this development is clearly linked with the selection and training formation grids and that all students and tutors (including placement supervisors and home parish incumbents) are aware of the formational aims of the programme and can be part of the assessment team for each student as they embark on a personalised pathway through training (pre- and post-licensing).

Recommendation 38

The reviewers recommend that the good practice of end of IME1 reports is developed and informs a new reporting process which allows for interim reporting after year 1 with a final report after year 2 and ongoing early-years ministerial development needs being identified and shared with the Warden of Readers and incumbent of the Reader's parish.

Recommendation 39

The reviewers urge that all students, tutors, placement supervisors and home incumbents are made aware of the programme's formational aims and their link with the selection and training grids so they can contribute to students' assessment as they embark on a personalised journey through training (pre-and post-licensing).

> The review team has Confidence with Qualifications with regard to Criterion E: Ministerial Formation.

Conclusion

> The review team has Confidence with Qualifications in Church of England Birmingham in preparing students for Reader Ministry in the Church of England.

Summary of Commendations

Commendation 1

The review team commends the team for the dedicated way they are approaching the next few months' time out of the normal training cycle to review practice, and for the positive way the PER team was received as part of that review process.

Commendation 2

The reviewers commend the evident commitment and dedication of those they met to the stated aims of the programme and to Reader ministry in Church of England Birmingham's future.

Commendation 3

The reviewers commend the good use of an evolving web of relationships between the programme and local churches, including its training relationships, enriched by the diverse staff community drawn from those active in ministry, including Reader ministry.

Commendation 4

The reviewers commend the diversity of the programme's staff team, members of which are fully engaged in a range of ministries.

Commendation 5

The reviewers commend the good awareness of the importance of Safeguarding training shown by students, along with an understanding of the need for this training to be ongoing and of a level appropriate for those engaged in ministry.

Commendation 6

The programme's mainly comfortable, adaptable and eco-friendly premises with excellent access and ancillary facilities are to be commended.

Commendation 7

The reviewers commend the student-led worship which had been planned thoughtfully and accurately.

Commendation 8

The reviewers commend the close social and pastoral relationships which exist between staff and students, and the commitment to ministry, teaching and learning which modelled by the tutors.

Commendation 9

The review team commends the programme on its shared vision and sense of purpose.

Commendation 10

The review team commends the fact that core tutors are actively involved in the design, enhancement and delivery of the programme.

Commendation 11

The review team commends the strong relationships with the diocesan central team, which provides all support services in an effective and efficient manner, allowing the programme to focus on its core purpose of training Readers.

Commendation 12

We commend the way the programme is embedded in the ministry of the diocese and its diverse communities, and its accessibility to candidates with a broad range of backgrounds.

Commendation 13

The review team commends the IME 1, and IME 2/Next and Placement handbooks, which provide clear information about the purpose and progress of each element of training, and the expectations of students.

Commendation 14

The reviewers commend the use of small tutor groups (3 or 4 students) which mean that - after feedback to teaching tutors - adaptations to the learning styles of individuals can be made swiftly and students enjoy a pastorally supportive learning environment.

Commendation 15

The reviewers commend the programme's use of a full range of teaching and learning styles in sessions and through assignment tasks.

Commendation 16

The reviewers commend the IME 1 placement as a well organised and highly successful element of the programme where self-awareness and reflection are promoted and ministry skills are discovered and developed.

Commendation 17

The reviewers commend the strong identification that students have with licensed lay ministry, which the review team believes is due at least in part to the respect afforded this ministry by those leading the programme and the appointment of Readers as tutors to those in training.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The reviewers recommend reflection on the aims of the programme and its weighting of formational input to students at both IME1 and IME2 level, and that a plan be produced for moving towards a fuller enabling of the qualities identified in the formation grids through its teaching across IME1-2.

Recommendation 2

In order to make the programme information and aims more accessible and more widely understood across C of E Birmingham, ways of communicating to those clergy and Readers not currently involved in training should be formalised.

Recommendation 3

More prominence should be given to schools, including Church schools, as part of the development of placement experiences and of the input representing wider community settings.

Recommendation 4

The reviewers urge reflection on the possibilities of appropriate further engagement with Christian diversity across Birmingham learning during IME1 and IME2.

Recommendation 5

There should be a seamless continuation of programme-tutor pastoral support from the start of IME 1 until the end of IME 2.

Recommendation 6

The Birmingham team should explore building into the programme teaching days or residentials for shared attendance by IME 1 and IME 2 cohorts.

Recommendation 7

Consideration should be given to alternative furniture arrangement for pre-session worship and room layouts, and the option of a worship space other than that prepared for teaching.

Recommendation 8

Opportunities should be created for the two cohorts to worship online or in-person as a single community.

Recommendation 9

Individual tutor appraisal and feedback relating to candidate-led worship at Programme events, perhaps by telephone or email on the following day, along with the candidate's own reflection on their performance, should take place as a matter of routine.

Recommendation 10

The Reviewers urge reappraisal of the programme's guidelines, feedback and appraisal system for candidate-led worship within the tutorial environment and in church, post-licensing.

Recommendation 11

The Steering Group should develop Terms of Reference including guidance on membership, selection and appointment, tenure, and clear responsibilities.

Recommendation 12

The Director of Reader Training, Steering Group and senior diocesan staff need to agree the desired future shape and direction of Reader training and the extent to which this can be supported by resource planning and monitoring; they should explore the scope for the Steering Group to have more information about, and influence over, the development of budgets and monitoring of expenditure to implement the agreed strategic direction.

Recommendation 13

The programme team should be clear on its approach to ensuring the team and its governance processes are representative of the community of Readers/ Diocese, for example through greater use of feedback mechanisms to ensure the Steering Group benefits from student input.

Recommendation 14

An Action Log should be introduced to accompany the minutes, including actions from previous meetings as well as those from that meeting.

Recommendation 15

A new part-time role of Administrative Support to the Steering Group should be introduced as soon as possible.

Recommendation 16

An induction programme for new Steering Group members be introduced and piloted with existing Steering Group members; the introduction of a buddying system for new members could also be considered.

Recommendation 17

Steering Group members should be encouraged to attend occasional Reader training sessions and occasionally visit Readers in their parish situations and report back to the Steering Group on their findings.

Recommendation 18

The risk register needs to include consideration of the risk of running the programme on a gifted economy.

Recommendation 19

Further consideration should be given to outlining proposed mitigations to identified risks in the risk register, and then monitoring the effectiveness of these at Steering Group meetings.

Recommendation 20

The Birmingham team should give further attention to the programme's level and depth of learning, including with regard to progression, learning resources, assignments and assessment, aiming for a standard equivalent to HE Level 4.

Recommendation 21

We recommend the programme should ensure that all candidates have the opportunity for in-depth world engagement by the introduction of a substantial project-style assignment as part of IME 2/*Next*.

Recommendation 22

The programme should maximise the value of the Pathways Moodle platform to promote attractive resources and intra-cohort communication, and encourage candidates to engage well with it.

Recommendation 23

The programme should promote background and topical reading by identifying good, often short, academic books which are known to captivate and inspire and not just inform, and ensure that these are prominent and accessible among the library resources at *The Citadel*.

Recommendation 24

The programme should explore the detailed, objective Common Awards assessment criteria for assignments at Level 4 and consider how aspects of these could be deployed in order to enhance quality and promote progression.

Recommendation 25

The programme should audit and celebrate the education and training qualifications and professional experience held within the tutor team (and Church of England Birmingham) and ensure good practice is shared and disseminated.

Recommendation 26

In teaching more use should be made of the Pathways platform: there should be a more consistent offering of materials enabling flipping of sessions or/and further study and self-directed learning.

Recommendation 27

The programme should, as part of its current review, explore harmonising assessment tasks and methods across IME1/2 and *Next*, and developing assessment criteria and methods in line with HE Level 4 criteria.

Recommendation 28

Across the IME 1 and IME 2/*Next* curricula, the programme should give close attention to all three stated formational aims of Reader training and show the students where and how they are being addressed.

Recommendation 29

The assessment relationship between IME 1 and IME 2/*Next* should be redesigned so as to enable students to trace their development using feedback for similar tasks (e.g. sermon assignments and ministry exercises) across both levels.

Recommendation 30

A project assignment should be added to IME 2/*Next*, capable of being assessed against Level 4 criteria.

Recommendation 31

The IME 1 and IME 2/*Next* cohorts should be brought together for study days in order to encourage progression and experience participation in, and insights from, a broader and larger group.

Recommendation 32

The programme should give further attention to developing students' theological reflection skills and practice, doing all they can to challenge and support students as they learn this particular language.

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