

Ministry Council: Periodic External Review Follow-up Report

Peterborough Diocese Lay Ministry Course (Reader/LLM)

Conducted onsite, July 2023

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Senior Reviewer's Follow-up Report to the 2022 Review of the Peterborough Diocese Lay Ministry Course

Introduction

The Senior Reviewer visited Peterborough Diocese on Monday July 17th 2023 to follow up the Periodic External Review of training for licensed lay ministry in the Diocese of Peterborough which had been finalised just over a year earlier. The overall outcome had been confidence with qualifications.

There was a full and constructive discussion of the response to all of the recommendations. The 2022 Review had found many positive features in the Course and made a fulsome set of commendations. The Course was well-supported by students who were enthusiastic and committed in their training. There was clear evidence of growing understanding and of formation for future ministry. The Course was administered well and created a very positive ethos based on good working relationships.

The Review identified a number of areas where greater attention to some of the structural arrangements, policy guidelines and practices would be beneficial. There was also a concern to strengthen external relationships between this single diocesan Course and other institutions undertaking comparable training for licensed lay ministries. The recommendations referred explicitly to strengthening academic benchmarks as well as intellectual rigour for students in their final year. This was in view of the fact that the Diocese, for understandable reasons, is not part of the Common Awards arrangements offered in the Church of England. Given the perceived reliance on a few able and very committed members of staff, an important recommendation was made with regard to a review of institutional resilience. It was not known at that time that the Diocesan Bishop would retire (in fact in January 2023), though his retirement gave greater significance to this particular recommendation.

Since the Review took place, the Lay Ministry Forum (LMF) has continued to meet, in the absence of the Diocesan Bishop; but a welcome change has been the extension of the Lay Ministry Committee (LMC) as a cohesive and effective, operational working group to oversee planning, policies and course evaluation. Tutors, student representatives and the person appointed from outside the diocese, have all contributed regularly and significantly to discussions and decisions. This is especially to be welcomed.

In response to the Review, the Course had provided a comprehensive action plan and the visit in July 2023 was able to assess progress made in carrying through the intended developments. *The outcomes discerned give evidence of a very satisfactory response to the Review.* The Course seems well placed, and is recruiting well in the current year, such as to be ready and confident for welcoming a new Diocesan Bishop in due course.

Peterborough Diocese Lay Ministry Course response to the 2022 PER recommendations

In what follows, the recommendations are presented in bold, the response of the Course is summarised in italics, and comments of the senior reviewer are in ordinary typeface.

Recommendation 1

We recommend that the selection for specific lay ministries takes place wherever possible in the early stages of year two in training.

The course has adopted this recommendation.

In making this recommendation the Reviewers valued the opportunity during year one for vocational exploration, with students growing in confidence and commitment, but wished to strengthen the ensuing ministerial formation. The Course fully accepts this recommendation and has found that students are becoming clear in the sense of their calling during year one. Understandably, there had been one exception, where a person's diffidence held back selection until during the second year. The recommendation is fully met.

Recommendation 2

We recommend that the Course strengthens its practical and educational links with civic and community organisations, to better promote the Course's own declared objective to be 'world-facing' in engagement and mission.

The Principal has reached out to such organisations with the help of the DDO/Vocation and Formation Team leader to discern what may be possible.

In giving feedback during the follow-up visit, the Principal explained that he had found students were already very engaged in their professional and voluntary work in 'world-facing' situations and contexts. It emerged that students would gain from fuller opportunities to *reflect* on their existing involvements, both in discerning (with each other) God's active presence in the world and in terms of being even better formed and prepared to be in future a public and authorised Christian in those places. This could readily become an intentional part of the Base Group meetings (see below). The Course provides reflection on work with schools, children and families, through the mission module. Students are also opting in a good number of cases to undertake the Course chaplaincy module which informs them about being a public Christian in non-church organisations. Overall, the course is making an appropriate and realistic response to this recommendation.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that a range of policy documents are revised and updated, including the complaints and grievance procedures, with clear statements (in each case) outlining when the next revision is due to take place.

Distinct complaints and grievance procedure have been adopted and reviewed. Equal Opportunities Policy reviewed. Dates set for future reviews, e.g. September each year, with an annual agenda item to follow this up in the Lay Ministry Forum (LMF) as the “oversight” body.

This review work has been aided by the extended membership and role of the Lay Ministry Committee (see above). This recommendation is well met.

Recommendation 4

We recommend that future tutorial staff appointments be made in the light of the fact that tutors who are lay and who are women remain significantly under-represented at the current time.

A woman who is ordained and a woman who is a Reader have been appointed as tutors. A lay woman who is the diocesan Mission Enabler for children and youth has an enhanced role in the Course.

This recommendation is well met.

Recommendation 5

We recommend that provision is made in the Course for occasions when spouses and families have contact with the Course.

Spouses and families attended the end of Course tea party in June 2023, the occasion when students give presentations on their second-year parish projects. Consideration is being given to also inviting spouses and families to an element within the introductory Saturday and Study Day 6. This has not yet been decided.

This is an appropriate response.

Recommendation 6

We recommend that the Course provides more substantial provision for staff development, based on clear job descriptions.

Each tutor has been issued with a job description which is kept on file with their CVs. Annual CPD conversations have been held with all except one of the continuing tutors, and arrangements for the last one are in hand.

As a result, there appears to be a stronger intentional ethos amongst the tutorial staff with regard to their continuing learning. This recommendation is met.

Recommendation 7

We recommend that the Governance of the Course, carried out by means of the Lay Ministry Forum, include at least one external representative from another Diocese which has a comparable approach to training for licensed lay ministry.

A current staff member of the Eastern Region Ministry Course, who has experience in ordination training and the training of licensed lay ministers and Readers, has been appointed and regularly attends meetings since December 2022. See also Recommendation 3.

This recommendation is fulfilled.

Recommendation 8

We recommend that the Governance of the Course directly includes the active presence of student representatives on a formal and regular basis.

Student Cohort representatives attend and report to meetings of the Lay Ministry Committee since December 2022, which is now the operational centre of the Course. Reports are made to the Lay Ministry Forum.

The spirit of the recommendation has been met.

Recommendation 9

We recommend that a structural diagram with commentary be drawn to identify the lines of responsibility and accountability amongst the staff team serving the Course.

The diagram was drafted and agreed in August 2022.

The parameters have been set for a potentially productive relationship between the Principal and the newly appointed DDO/Vocation and Formation Team Leader.

Recommendation 10

We recommend that the Course carry out a review of its institutional resilience.

The review of institutional resilience was completed and agreed by the LMF in November 2022. The review notes that the retiring Diocesan Bishop was fully supportive, as is the Suffragan Bishop (who is currently Acting Bishop). The retiring Bishop has chaired the LMF but it could function adequately under a different chair to the Diocesan Bishop. With regard to diocesan Finance, the review noted that “the routine functioning of the Course depends on a very experienced administrator, who has been in post for nearly ten years, and a Principal who has been in post for nearly six. Were both to step down simultaneously, that would put a significant strain on the smooth running of the Course. The Course could still function as it has before in interregna between Principals or administrators, as long as these vacancies do not overlap”. In fact, it has now been agreed that, in the event of the Principal retiring in the next few years, there would be funding for an early appointment and a time for shadowing the existing Principal, whilst the administrator continued in post.

The recommendation has proved timely and is well met.

Recommendation 11

We recommend that further provision be made by the Course for training students in study skills during the first year of study.

A Study Skills booklet has been made available to all students. The previous Study Skills tutorials were revived. These were offered to all new students in September 2022 and some students received them and each seemed to value them. This practice will continue with each new entry.

This provision has been valued by those who need it, and the recommendation is fully met.

Recommendation 12

We recommend the updating of Learning Outcomes, learning materials and reading lists.

There has been a meeting with all module tutors to conduct a comprehensive review of learning outcomes, learning materials and reading lists, all reviewed at a meeting of the LMC in December 2022. Nearly all reading lists have been updated. The learning outcomes for one module were completely recast, to draw on the students' own lived experience. The process of revision is ongoing and learning outcomes will be recast whenever a module tutor changes.

The aim of the recommendation has been met.

Recommendation 13

We recommend that attention is given by the Course to provide elements of teaching which are more intellectually stretching.

The Principal took advice from the Quality Adviser on how the intellectual level of third-year Reader students' modules could be raised. Unfortunately, the proposed new course on patristics had to be postponed when the tutor became unavailable and other possibilities to fulfil this recommendation have had to be considered. The modules on both church history and Old Testament have been given more weight, and attention given to working with conservative outlooks on biblical material. The consideration of this recommendation is ongoing with the Quality Adviser.

The tackling of this recommendation is in progress and we trust that it will continue.

Recommendation 14

We recommend that further staff training in the moderation and marking of student work is provided by the Course to ensure that standards are maintained and strengthened.

Guidance has been worked on with three tutors individually and another Practical module tutor has been advised about the use of marking criteria. In practice, student work is marked and then moderated by different members of staff.

This seems a reasonable response to the recommendation.

Recommendation 15

We recommend that the statement of purposes for the Base Groups be revised so as to give greater emphasis to gaining maximum benefit for the actual and potential ministerial formation of the students, and in addition that consideration be given to regular and planned third year meetings for those selected for Reader ministry.

The responsibilities have been revised with reference to the national Formation Framework of November 2021 and Base Groups are now used to support third year teaching.

This recommendation has been met.

Recommendation 16

We recommend that more formal provision is made by the Course for students to have the opportunity for spiritual directors to aid their ministerial formation.

The appointment of a new Diocesan lead person in spiritual direction had been very welcome and new arrangements are already underway. The Adviser has been invited to the residential weekend in October 2023 to speak with students about finding spiritual directors and this input will be ongoing.

The recommendation is well met.

Recommendation 17

We recommend that the Course devise a clearer policy for the choice of placement supervisors.

A new policy has been drafted, which clarifies the issues raised. and incorporated into the parish placement notes for student.

This recommendation is met.

Recommendation 18

We recommend the further development of CMD provision by the Course and Diocese for those in the early years of licensed ministry as Readers.

The proposed new course in patristics was intended to assist with this (see above). However, progress is being made. The mentoring scheme for new Readers has been revived. New Readers will also be included in two curate training days in November 2023 and February 2024 where the topics are relevant to Reader ministry. It is hoped this will continue for new Readers. In addition, Readers can take up Diocesan CMD opportunities as these are open to all clergy and licensed lay ministers.

This recommendation is being progressed well.

Conclusion

The Review seems to have had a helpful and beneficial impact. We are most grateful for the thorough care and generous concern shown by the Principal. The Review has also been timely in the evolution of the Diocese, the Course and intended Reader ministry. For example, the opportunity for some experienced locally-based Readers being assisted to develop as “focal ministers” is being carefully explored in the diocese in appropriate cases, whereby the Readers would essentially be responsible for a local church under the umbrella of a supervising incumbent.

We have confidence and wish the Peterborough Course well.

The Venerable Dr Brian Russell
Senior Reviewer

July 2023