

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

### Wycliffe Hall, Oxford

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Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3AZ

Switchboard: +44(0)20 7898 1000 Email: [ministry@churchofengland.org](mailto:ministry@churchofengland.org)

Website: [www.churchofengland.org](http://www.churchofengland.org)

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# Senior Reviewer's Follow-up Report to the 2021 Periodic External Review of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford

## Introduction

Wycliffe Hall's PER took place in person and online in May 2021 at a time when Covid restrictions were still limiting gathered meetings and creating uncertainty around teaching methods, student experience and formational opportunities for ministry students everywhere.

Additionally, Wycliffe Hall (WH) was in the process of applying for Excepted Pathway status with the intention of continuing its position as a PPH of Oxford University and offering the Oxford BTH as a pathway for ordinands.

WH staffing numbers were adequate but the additional preparation needed to teach a cohort of students online and some gaps in staffing had put pressure on the enthusiastic and hard-working staff at the time. These circumstances combined to create a sense of a college that had a clear vision of where it hoped to be with a realistic sense of its identity within the Church of England's TEIs but with limited ability to plan confidently for this perceived reality.

The follow-up conversation, held online, in March 2023 between WH's Principal, Senior Tutor and the PER Lead Reviewer was highly encouraging. WH's response to recommendations, certainty about their position as a PPH and staffing and governance changes have led to a college that evidences stability and an ability to confidently review and amend its policies and processes on a regular basis.

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

Dr Sally Buck, Senior Reviewer  
March 2023

## Wycliffe Hall's response to the 2021 PER recommendations

### Recommendation 1

**Given that there is no national policy preventing ordinands from the northern province from training in a southern TEI, nor other compelling reason for the regional nature of WH ordinands, we would ask WH staff to consider how it promotes itself and its formational aims to a wider number of Church of England dioceses.**

*A tour of the northern dioceses had been planned to coincide with the Durham Common Awards Graduation, but this was adversely affected by repeated changes to the graduation date. WH's progress report states "we will now aim for this to take place Summer 2023".*

In the meantime, it was reported at the follow-up meeting, WH's Principal has arranged meetings with the Bishop and DDO of Durham Diocese and meetings in the dioceses of Sheffield, Carlisle, Leeds and York. This work is ongoing, but has progressed well to date.

### Recommendation 2

**We are aware that this is a recommendation that is not fully in WH's power to act upon but we would strongly recommend that the tension regarding the double link with the national church's current policy over Common Awards and WH's status as an Oxford University PPH needs to be resolved as quickly as possible if WH is to be assured of its future as a PPH and therefore to be able to confidently continue to develop and grow as a provider of IME1 for Anglican ministry students. We would equally strongly recommend WH to do all that is in their power to further the development of the BTh pathway for ordinands so that it satisfies national church requirements.**

*WH reported that they had "embarked on a careful process of developing the BTh in such a way as to qualify as an Excepted Pathway" and also said that they were looking forward to "working with Ministry Team to complete that process".*

*The first students will be admitted to this programme in October 2023.*

*Their progress report contained an expression of a strategic aim to "foster a new renaissance of Christian scholarship and culture" saying that "this highlights the importance to us, and to the Church as a whole, of our membership of the University".*

While the work to establish this pathway has been completed it was noted that an awareness, and continual monitoring, of how ministerial formation criteria are being met alongside the academic work will be needed. WH report that student feedback evidences that current students experience significant formational growth and development as a result of being part of the wider university cohort, being exposed to a wider range of points of view and to potential involvement in culture, leadership and research as part of the university.

There is no further work needed to meet this recommendation, but continual monitoring and development are encouraged.

### Recommendation 3

**Given the very rich opportunities available in Oxford, reviewers recommend that consideration is given to how more creative use of links with inter-faith organisations may be developed to offer placements that immerse students in other faith cultures and give a perspective other than those available from Church-based interfaith projects. This could be achieved by, for example, working with other faith agencies, and not just churches set in areas with large numbers of people from other faiths.**

*WH responded to this recommendation by pointing out that the Hall “already seeks to make use of the extensive opportunities that Oxford affords in terms of inter-faith engagement, which include the Centre for Muslim Christian Studies, the Centre for Islamic Studies, the large Muslim population in East Oxford, the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, and the wide range of chaplaincies to the University. We already offer placement opportunities in Muslim-majority areas of Oxford and beyond.”*

*Beyond this, they stated in their progress report that they “have not made significant progress on this, due to capacity issues”.*

There is a level of willingness to develop more immersive placements for some students who are likely to be working in areas where there will be significant involvement with communities of other faiths. Staff are open to possibilities and willing to consider specific placements. There is still some work to be done if these placements are to become a reality.

### Recommendation 4

**a. We recommend an overhaul of safeguarding and welfare policies ensuring that they are updated now with regular reviews actioned appropriately and policies situated on a designated section of the website for ease of access for all students regardless of how much access they have to the main college buildings.**

**b. As part of the above we urge clear ownership of these matters by staff and council.**

**c. In addition, we would recommend that the suggestion that staff meetings and Principal’s Hour should be places where policies are reviewed and explained in a way that makes them living documents rather than institutional requirements is acted upon.**

*WH responded to this recommendation in the following way: “a) and b) A revised and updated Safeguarding policy was approved at our June Hall Council. c) Regular reviews at Tutors’ meetings began in Michaelmas Term 2021, and at Community Notices from Michaelmas Term 2022.”*

The revised policy is now simple to find from the WH website’s homepage and there is a procedure in place for regular review of all contact details and emergency numbers given. A conversation at the follow-

up meeting in March 2023 led to the suggestion that a flow-chart, similar to that in appendix 3 of the new policy, might be included in the document's preamble for use of members of WH seeking advice from the policy. Other than consideration being given to implementing this idea and to the ongoing revision of safeguarding information, this work is now complete.

### **Recommendation 5**

**As plans to develop and improve accommodation progress, we would recommend that all accommodation policies are reviewed with input from students who have experienced the realities of mixed-sex, mixed-age single accommodation as well as from married students currently having to live off site.**

*WH's response to this recommendation stated that "in Trinity Term 2022 we began a consultation process to help plan the renovation of the main building and we received an encouragingly large response from the student body. More work will be done in coming months but at this stage initial ideas include provision of family accommodation, more flexible lecture space, an improved reception/porters' lodge area, potential performance/studio space and a café area/hub available for students, staff, and visitors. Whatever is done will need to be compliant with disability access regulations and local heritage planning constraints. Separately, we have already provided two more ground floor rooms that are suitable for disabled students, and have completely renovated the top floor of part of the main building to accommodate tutorial offices and more."*

This work continues apace with confidence that funding will be accessible and that the work will greatly enhance the student experience. This recommendation has been sufficiently acted upon within the ongoing developmental work of the college.

### **Recommendation 6**

**It is recommended that Council adopts a more vigorous approach to overseeing the actions of WH and regularly considers its own, and others', reviews of its performance.**

*WH states that "the Governance and Nominations Committee of the Hall Council is devoting a larger share of its time and attention to the governance side of its responsibilities. The process of revising the Governance Manual has begun, and the Committee is also discussing how to provide excellent oversight of the Hall's performance."*

Evidence was given during the follow-up conversation of the work that has gone into creating more robust processes for ongoing reviews of performance. In particular ensuring that the ASE is process is given greater attention by Council leading to a greater sense of ownership of all aspects of WH's performance. This work is ongoing in its nature but all that has been established to date fulfils the requirements of this recommendation.

### **Recommendation 7**

**Reviewers recommend that the Governance Nominations Committee actively seeks new members for the Council and ensures that it has a rolling list of names for consideration.**

*Actions so far are the appointment of new people to Council. “Uppermost in the minds of the Governance and Nominations Committee is the need for greater diversity in the make-up of Hall Council, and an important start has been made on this”.*

Work to meet the requirements of this recommendation is complete.

### **Recommendation 8**

**We recommend that the Risk Register be completed and adopted by the Council as soon as possible and becomes part of the regular reviewing by Council of the operations of WH.**

*WH initially reported that “the risk register is now complete and has been adopted by Hall Council. In addition, we have implemented a process by which a section of the Risk Register is examined by SMT every month. We shall also ensure regular review by Hall Council” and in their progress report said that “the Risk Register is now updated, section by section, every month by SMT, and every quarter by Hall Council.”*

In addition, during the follow-up conversation it was said that there is now a Hall-wide management meeting which takes place alternate weeks and includes members of the tutorial body, senior support staff and members of the maintenance team.

This work very confidently meets the requirements of this recommendation.

### **Recommendation 9**

**Reviewers strongly recommend that an ASE be produced each year, reporting on progress from the previous year, and that it be adopted by Council.**

*“We will ensure that the ASE goes through Education Committee and to Hall Council. We are currently in the process of drafting our 2022 ASE and have already ensured that it is on the agenda for Education Committee and Hall Council”.*

The follow-up meeting provided significant evidence of a much greater clarity about where decision-making happens. With a stronger administrative team, these ongoing review processes are much more securely placed in the life of WH. No further work is required to enable WH to meet the requirements of this recommendation.

### **Recommendation 10**

**If the Hall wishes to realise its hope that its ordinands will engage more creatively with the arts and be better equipped to support and encourage the creative members of the livings to which they will be ordained, it is recommended that the Artist-in-Residence be given, as soon as possible, a working studio within the Hall where he may model such creative engagement in the arts.**

*“This has been implemented. We shall be further considering the provision of studio, rehearsal, and performance space as part of our plans for the renovation of the main building.”*

A post of Dean for Research and Cultural Development is soon to be advertised and the intention is to make more of this aspect of WH life in its online presence with this appointment.

No further work required.

### **Recommendation 11**

**It is recommended that WH deepens its commitment to being ‘world engaging’, rather than simply ‘world facing’, by further broadening its reading lists as well as responding to Recommendation 3 above.**

*“Reading lists have been extensively broadened in the preparation of module outlines for the new academic year, and we see this as part of an ongoing process. See our response to Recommendation 3. We shall be bringing forward plans for making the Hall more ‘world-engaging’ as part of our strategic aim to foster a new renaissance of Christian scholarship and culture.”*

This work is ongoing but WH have made sufficient progress towards this recommendation on the understanding that all areas of Hall life and the opportunities offered by Oxford life for world engagement are constantly reviewed.

### **Recommendation 12**

**In the light of awareness raised with us of the additional load being carried by teaching staff as a result of changes in working patterns due to covid restrictions, we recommend that additional levels of care are put in place to ensure teaching and learning does not suffer any longer-term effects of the pandemic.**

*Actions include “all line managers to undergo line management training, so that they are better equipped to help their staff to maintain a healthy work-life balance, Senior Management Team to give serious weight to staff workload” and the progress report states that “there has been some reorganisation of posts and additional posts created to ensure good levels of support staff. SMT had an Away Day in Hilary 2022 to discuss the overall staffing levels and needs of the Hall. This will be further reviewed following the introduction of the BTh for ordinands, which we expect to reduce some teaching loads.”*

No further work is needed to fulfil the requirements of this recommendation, except that this is an ongoing process which needs to become part of the overall review programme of the Hall.

### **Recommendation 13**

**It is recommended that, when WH comes out of Covid 19 restrictions and is planning its potential transition from CA to the Oxford BTh, it reviews its pedagogy, especially in regard to the place of reflection in academic modules.**



Action so far is “to address this at Tutors’ Meetings, as part of their rolling programme of module review. The transition from Common Awards to the BTh has involved a full review of pedagogies. The change will enable more Wycliffe teaching to be done in small group format, thus encouraging more interaction and student engagement.”

Detailed teaching plans are now being produced and the beginning of teaching on the BTh has borne out the expectation that small group teaching would become more commonplace.

With ongoing reflective practice applied, this recommendation has now been fulfilled.

#### **Recommendation 14**

**We recommend that a significant review of timing of communication, particularly of releasing of timetables and reading lists, takes place to allow students greater agency in their own planning of academic work but also of how to include extra-curricular formational events into their training.**

*WH state that “this review has already taken place, and we are now in the process of setting realistic expectations. We have significantly improved the advance planning of extra-curricular formational events. We have also been in regular conversations with students to set realistic expectations around communication, and to ensure that students are aware of handbooks etc where official information may be found.”*

A fully staffed academic office has led to improved communications. There was much greater confidence and clarity expressed during the follow-up meeting than experienced during the PER visit.

The requirements of this recommendation have been fulfilled.

#### **Recommendation 15**

**In line with recommendations in other sections of this report, the reviewers ask WH SMT to take seriously the impact on ordination training of a lack of careful scrutiny within the structures of the organisation. Advocating good leadership and governance in teaching modules needs also to be modelled in the TEI’s institutional life if ordinands are to be formed securely for ministry in a church where both the ministry of all and mutual accountability are held to be of the nature of God’s church.**

*In its initial response to this recommendation WH stated “Wycliffe believes that all areas of its life and work are subject to intense scrutiny – by its own internal processes, by student feedback and representation, by its trustee body, and by external review by the Church of England, and the Universities of Oxford and (for the time being) Durham.”*

While this was its intention, it was difficult with existing staffing for levels of scrutiny to be maintained and reviewed. Progress in all areas of staffing and governance has improved this aspect of Hall life significantly.

This recommendation’s requirements have now been met.



## Recommendation 16

**While we realise not all parish leadership skills can be taught during IME1 the fact that this was mentioned on more than one occasion leads us to recommend that WH reviews its policy on leadership teaching with a view to creating space for the teaching of parish leadership skills to be further developed, particularly taking into consideration the changing nature of the churches receiving stipendiary clergy these days and the need for greater skills of oversight earlier in ministry.**

*WH responded: "Currently, our leadership training consists of a seminar series (comprising twelve hours of teaching) currently provided by CPAS, plus an Integrated Studies Week on Spiritual Formation for Leadership, which brings into dialogue secular and Christian leadership concepts and practices. We shall, indeed, review our leadership training in the light of this feedback. And, as part of that review, we shall invite our now-ordained students to reflect on their training in general and this aspect in particular, three years after they leave Wycliffe." In addition they are developing plans to work with CPAS who "will be delivering a specific training morning on oversight ministry to our students later this academic year."*

The follow-up meeting identified that WH's response predominantly related to learning about leadership in general rather than experiencing the realities of leadership theory in parish settings. There was also a conversation about the different experience of IME1 and IME2 for full time and contextual/part time ordinands. This led to consideration about how full-time students might be given insights into the type of experiences naturally gained by contextual students. This may involve additional work within long placement settings or contact with clergy experiencing these realities on a daily basis.

Much has been done to fulfil the knowledge aspects of this recommendation. More work is planned to extend this to a more practical outworking of that knowledge.