

## Periodic External Review Follow-up Report

# Ripon College, Cuddesdon

**Conducted onsite, November 2024**

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# Senior Reviewer's Follow-up Report to the 2023 Periodic External Review of Ripon College, Cuddesdon

## Introduction

The team of reviewers representing the Church of England's Ministry Development Team visited Ripon College, Cuddesdon (RCC) in early November 2023. They attended a Cross Pathway Weekend, lectures, a staff meeting, Board of Governors meeting, chapel worship, student prayer groups and college formation groups. Two of the reviewers had a conversation on zoom with the Chair of the Board of Governors during August 2023, before his sabbatical leave. During their visit, the reviewers held conversations with all members of the Senior Leadership team (SLT), most academic staff and many of the support staff, the Directors of the Pathways, a variety of student groups and spouses and partners of ordinands in training. Online meetings were conducted with several stakeholders, associate tutors, and placement supervisors. One reviewer visited CMS and two reviewers visited Cuddesdon's Gloucester and Hereford pathway (CGH) in Gloucester, spending time with the Director and a group of students and observing teaching. In total the reviewers spent over 6 days with RCC.

All the supporting documentation was made available in good time. The reviewers had access to Moodle for the taught modules taking place during the PER Visit. Along with the RCC documentation, they also received views in writing from stakeholders including a sponsoring bishop, DDOs, placement supervisors and former students.

The PER Team made thirteen commendations and twenty-eight recommendations in their report. The overall outcome was Confidence with Qualifications.

At the time of the PER Visit, RCC was in the throes of considerable change within its organisation which included:

- The structure of the SLT
- The closure of Cuddesdon School of Theology and Ministry
- The role of Vice Principal combined with role of Academic Dean
- A reduction in Academic Staff with reshaping of structure and roles
- Significant changes in the number and structure of administration and support staff
- A new team focusing on hospitality and events
- A new Ludlow Tutor appointed to take up post in December 2023

As noted in the PER report, within this context of change the reviewers considered the following to be important for their particular attention: the impact of the new staff team, the decline in the number of ordinands (especially full time residential), RCC as a centre of theological excellence in teaching and

learning, the integration of RCC's pathways and its formational 'community of communities', and RCC's strategic planning in the current context of theological education.

Against this backdrop of challenging circumstances, the PER reviewers were impressed by RCC's formational 'community of communities' and the richness offered by its model of pathway integration. The report commended its high-quality teaching and learning rooted in a serious approach to scholarship. They found the new staff team demonstrating energy and commitment and the report noted that the student body valued being part of a supportive and inclusive formational community in which they were confident in their learning and formation. The PER report's thirteen commendations were spread throughout every section, and it is important to note that its recommendations were aimed at supporting, developing and encouraging RCC to strengthen an existing high-quality suite of formational programmes and positive student experience.

### **PER Follow Up Review**

In response to the PER recommendations RCC produced a comprehensive action plan which formed the basis of the follow-up meeting conducted between the senior reviewer and the Principal, Vice Principal and Bursar in late November 2024. It was conducted in person at RCC, and I am grateful to RCC for their hospitality, preparation and helpfulness in providing all the necessary updates for this meeting. I whole heartedly commend the attention that RCC has given to their responses to the twenty-eight PER recommendations and the positive steps they have made to enhance their highly commendable community and programmes.

### **General Comments**

Since the PER visit, there have been further changes at RCC besides those made in response to the PER recommendation include changes to the staff team and pathways. During Summer 2024, as expected the Academic Dean and Vice Principal retired. In September 2024 the Director of Formation unexpectedly resigned. The staff team has been reconfigured to the following: the Director of the CGH Pathway has also become Vice Principal and the role of Academic Dean has been assigned to the Tutor in Christine Doctrine. The previous Director of the Portsmouth Pathway has joined the staff team based at Cuddesdon as the Acting Director of Formation.

Two new pathways have been introduced in September 2024. A new Children, Youth and Families Ministry Pathway is being piloted initially at CGH and includes a new staff post based at RCC with funding for three years. In partnership with Oxford Diocese a new pathway has been launched with students spending their first year part-time engaging in vocation discernment and formation run in the Diocese and their second year as part of the RCC community studying theology and ministry.

The recruitment of full-time residential ordinands continues to be challenging for RCC but this is reflected throughout the sector. However, CGH has recruited well in both its lay and ordination pathways. The Portsmouth Pathway closed in Summer 2024, with a few students choosing to continue to study at RCC to upgrade their Graduate Diploma to a degree.

To conclude, I am satisfied that RCC has responded efficiently and positively to all twenty-eight recommendations. The Principal is to be commended on his leadership of the community through its recent challenges and the manner in which he has maintained and developed RCC's formational inclusive community such that students feel supported and energised for the ministry to which God has called them.

Dr Jocelyn Bryan, Senior Reviewer  
December 2024

## Ripon College Cuddesdon's response to the 2023 PER recommendations

The 2023 report's twenty-eight recommendations are set out below in bold. Each is followed by text in italics representing the response or agreed action plan by RCC and the Senior Reviewer's assessment of progress to date is given in regular type.

### Recommendation 1

**The PER Team recommend that RCC produces a definitive document setting out its formational aims and that this is referred to consistently in both its internal and external facing documents and website.**

*Drawing on key source documents including the Prospectus, PER Overview Document and relevant Handbooks, a 'Formational Aims of Cuddesdon' document was approved by the Board of Governors in May 2024. This will be consistently referenced across all RCC's internal and external facing documents and on its website.*

I encourage RCC to keep this under review (see Recommendation 2 below) ensuring consistency across all existing pathways and the introduction of any new pathways.

Recommendation implemented.

### Recommendation 2

**The PER Team recommend that the formational aims are reviewed on an annual basis by the Education Sub Committee.**

*A standing agenda item for the Education and Formation Sub Committee has been established to review the Formational Aims of RCC. The Academic Dean will ensure that any changes and actions are followed up.*

Recommendation implemented. Action Plan in place.

### Recommendation 3

**The PER Team recommend that the formational aims are referred to and discussed as part of student induction and integrated into the Ministerial Formation Handbooks. Furthermore, they are reviewed in tutorials and reference made to them in the student Self-Assessment Form.**

*The Formational Aims are on the RCC website and have been included in the Formational Handbooks. They will also be reflected in the new Fitness For Ministry Form.*

Recommendation Implemented. Action plan in place.

### Recommendation 4

**a) The PER Team recommend that RCC reviews the working and composition of Branding and Marketing and Outreach Group (BMOG) and considers including a member of the Board of**

**Governors with appropriate experience and skills as a member of the group. The group should, as a matter of urgency, develop a recruitment and marketing strategy which enables it to enhance its public profile and publicize the following:**

- **the quality of its formation programmes.**
- **its academic excellence**
- **the positive experience of its ordinands within the diversity of its community**
- **the ongoing significance of its contribution to forming ordinands to enhance scholarship within the Church of England.**

*The structure of BMOG has been reviewed and revised, including a skills audit of its members to identify gaps in expertise. The Governance Committee is actively recruiting a governor with the required marketing skills. In November 2024 the marketing strategy was approved and will guide discussions and actions.*

The recruitment of a governor with marketing expertise to serve on the BMOG should be a priority for the Governance Committee.

Recommendation progressed and further action required.

**b) The PER Team recommend that the roles and responsibilities for the implementation of the recruitment and advertising strategy should be clearly defined for both administrative support staff and the academic staff.**

*The roles and responsibilities of those serving on the BMOG have been developed and incorporated into an implementation framework.*

Recommendation implemented. No further action required.

**c) The PER Team recommend that the recruitment and advertising strategy and its implementation is regularly reviewed by the Education Sub Committee (see paragraph 56 for further comment on the Education Sub Committee) in the light of updates on recruitment events and recruitment data and discussed at the meetings of the Governing Body (see also Recommendation 12).**

*The Education and Formation Sub Committee's Terms of Reference have been updated to include a review of RCC's marketing and advertising strategy, its implementation, and recruitment data. There is regular reporting from BMOG to the Governance Committee.*

Recommendation implemented. No further action required.

**d) The PER Team recommend that RCC reviews and enhances its website to include video footage of students sharing their experience of formation and learning and teaching across all pathways.**

*The website has been updated with new video footage to enhance RCC's digital presence and provide prospective students with a positive, authentic perspective on life on RCC's pathways.*

The new, well produced footage provides thoughtful insights into the strengths and quality of the various pathways offered at RCC. Both staff and students share their experience of life at RCC highlighting the richness of the diversity and fellowship within its community, quality of academic teaching and the value of studying theology for ministry, pastoral and learning support, its breadth of traditions and inclusiveness. The Oxford University undergraduate and postgraduate degrees pathways are not yet covered, and I encourage these to be included as well as more information about the Cuddesdon Study Centre thus highlighting RCC's contribution to forming ordinands to enhance scholarship and theological research within the Church of England.

Recommendation progressed – further action recommended.

### **Recommendation 5**

- a) The PER Team recommend that RCC continues to dialogue with its key and close geographical Diocesan Partners regarding the enhancement of its current pathways to meet the challenges of contemporary ministry. This should include the development of new courses and pathways for lay and ordained training.**

*A new pathway in partnership with Oxford Diocese has been approved by the national Ministry Development Team and was launched in September 2024. There are ongoing discussions with other dioceses to expand RCC's pathways in alignment with the direction of ministry needs.*

The new pathway in partnership with Oxford Diocese offers a forward thinking model and I encourage RCC to pursue its discussions with other dioceses and adapt it to meet their training needs.

Recommendation progressed – further action encouraged.

- b) The PER Team recommend that RCC and CMS continue to develop their collaboration to include drawing on the expertise in mission and pioneer ministry of CMS and the diversity within RCC.**

*A termly meeting has been established to support RCC's collaboration with CMS regarding mission and pioneer ministry.*

Recommendation implemented. No further action required.

### **Recommendation 6**

- The PER Team recommend that RCC develops further its relationships with ecumenical partners and other faith communities to enhance its placement opportunities.**

*RCC has established a new policy regarding the development of ecumenical partners and interfaith communities. It is developing an ecumenical module in collaboration with Churches Together. New placement opportunities are being generated as part of this development.*

Recommendation implemented. Action plan in place.

### Recommendation 7

**The Review Team recommend that academic staff continue to foster links with Oxford University to enrich their scholarship and maintain academic excellence in the teaching and learning at RCC.**

*RCC has strengthened its links with Oxford University by establishing a more formal relationship involving a finance plan and annual review. All new RCC Cuddesdon based staff are now faculty members.*

Recommendation implemented. No further action required.

### Recommendation 8

**The PER Team recommend that there is a process for feedback to the student body from the various committees and decision-making bodies in RCC. This may take the form of minutes being made available on Moodle or an obligation on Student Representatives to ensure they achieve this as part of their role.**

*Student Governors give reports to the College Council within the bounds of confidentiality. Appropriate minutes are uploaded on Moodle. RCC is trialling student chairing of the College Council Meetings.*

Recommendation implemented. No further action required.

### Recommendation 9

**The PER Team recommend that RCC produces an environmental strategy for its estates and models positive engagement with the climate emergency.**

*A draft environmental strategy has been prepared consolidating RCC's carbon footprint report, RCC's sustainability policies and other related documents.*

Recommendation progressed. Further action to take place.

### Recommendation 10

**The PER Team encourage RCC to continue to increase the range of innovative rites, worship traditions and opportunities for creativity in college worship consistent with its formational aims and publicity material.**

*Worship practices are reviewed termly at the Big Picture Meeting and oversight of alternative worship is part of the Summer Staff Residential. There is an ongoing intention to maintain and expand opportunities for more creative worship.*

Recommendation implemented. Further action planned.



### **Recommendation 11**

**The PER Team recommend that clear guidelines are set out for staff regarding attendance on the Cuddesdon site at worship and meals, and that the staff presence over vacation periods is negotiated and shared across the whole staff team.**

*Clear guidelines for staff attendance at worship have been discussed and implemented. These have been aligned with job descriptions. A leave calendar has been set up to record holiday schedules and availability outside term time with oversight responsibility with line managers.*

Recommendation implemented. No further action required.

### **Recommendation 12**

**The PER Team recommend that RCC should press on with its plans to revive its Education Committee under its new chair and with additional membership from the Board of Governors. Its remit should be extended to include providing assurance to the Board and thence to other stakeholders that the education provided meets the ministry needs of today's Church.**

*The Education and Formation Committee has met and there is a schedule of meetings in place. An updated remit has been confirmed and membership has been expanded to include relevant Board of Governors members.*

Recommendation implemented. No further action required.

### **Recommendation 13**

**The PER Team recommend that RCC should develop contingency plans against the possibility of either of its diocesan pathway Directors being unavailable.**

*A contingency plan has been formalised and approved which includes the role of the Hereford Tutor providing support for the CGH Director.*

Recommendation implemented. No further action required.

### **Recommendation 14**

**The PER Team recommend that RCC should address diversity issues on its Board, should recruit more lay Governors so as to fill skills and knowledge gaps in its membership, and should look to those who nominate representatives to it to identify individuals with appropriate experience. All members should be reminded annually by the Chair about the nature and extent of their trustee responsibilities.**

*The Governance Sub Committee is actively reviewing the composition of the Board and is in the process of recruiting lay governors. Steps are in place to ensure an annual reminder from the Chair to all members concerning their responsibilities.*

The recruitment of Governors to ensure greater diversity is in process. This ongoing process provides an opportunity to review the Bye Laws of the Governing Body and its composition more generally with particular reference to student and staff representation.

Recommendation progressed – further action to take place.

#### **Recommendation 15**

**The PER Team recommend that RCC should refresh the RCC strategy prepared in draft in early 2022, taking into account the various developments since then and looking forward to the challenges ahead.**

*The Strategy Working Group's report was confirmed by the Board of Governors in May 2024. A business plan and feasibility study was approved in July 2024 which provides a framework for implementing the refreshed strategy.*

Recommendation implemented. No further action required.

#### **Recommendation 16**

**The PER Team recommend that RCC should add risks concerning the diocesan Pathway Directors and of allegations against staff to its Risk Register and should prepare (and keep up to date) a Disaster Recovery Plan.**

*Drafts of the updated Risk Register and Disaster Recovery Plan have been prepared and will be reviewed by the Finance Committee in December 2024. Final versions will be submitted to the Board of Governors for approval in February 2025.*

Recommendation implemented. No further action required.

#### **Recommendation 17**

**The PER Team recommend that once recent staffing changes have settled down, RCC should undertake a fresh examination of the market externally for the services it can provide, drawing on such experience and expertise as Board members can offer.**

*The Assistant Bursar has changed role to become the Marketing and Communications Officer. The Strategic Working Group and Branding and Marketing and Outreach Group are collaborating to assess external market opportunities. A digital marketing campaign is planned for January- March 2025.*

Recommendation implemented. Further action planned.

#### **Recommendation 18**

**The PER Team recommend that RCC strategically develops the Cuddesdon Study Centre, drawing on the theological experience and expertise of the staff, to enhance theological scholarship nationally and internationally.**

*The newly appointed Academic Dean is the lead member of staff tasked with revitalizing the Cuddesdon Study Centre. A draft development plan is in place and will be subjected to further review.*

Recommendation implemented. Further action planned.

### **Recommendation 19**

**The PER Team recommends that the CMS experience in forming pioneer ministers with resilience, responsibility for self and positive energy be shared more proactively across the wider TEI.**

*Termly meetings have been established between RCC and CMS. (See Recommendation 5b). Pioneer Themed Study Weeks and Cross-Pathways Weekends are being developed to strengthen collaborative efforts. RCC students are also engaging with CMS by taking modules that expand their exposure to innovative mission practices.*

Recommendation implemented. No further action required.

### **Recommendation 20**

**The PER Team recommends that the RCC staff consider in greater depth the place of pioneer ministry within the Church and integrate this into its pathway teaching, in order to enable students to reflect on a way of being church that embodies an imagination for the wholeness of the Body of Christ, where ‘pioneer’ and ‘institutional’ work together in creative tension.**

*A joint RCC-CMS development session focusing on pedagogy and its alignment with student experiences in diverse contexts is planned for a Big Picture meeting. This ongoing collaboration is helping to ensure that pioneer ministry principles are embedded into teaching across RCC pathways.*

Recommendation implemented. No further action required.

### **Recommendation 21**

**The PER Team recommend that, in the context of cross-centre discussions of assignments and assessment, the extra time required to process ‘hard-to-assess’ assignments by the Academic Registrar is reviewed, to ensure the financial arrangement between RCC and CMS is fair.**

*A discussion has taken place at the CMS Reference Group. Academic Registrars from RCC and CMS have joined the Reference Group and assist with monitoring this issue. The financial arrangement between RCC and CMS has been reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team.*

Recommendation implemented. No further action required.

### **Recommendation 22**

**The PER Team recommend that greater support is offered to all Weekend Associate Tutors, particularly technically, as required.**

*There is an ongoing upgrade of AV systems and improved technical instructions in key teaching rooms. Additional technical support staff are available at weekends to assist as required.*

Recommendation implemented. No further action required.

### **Recommendation 23**

**The PER Team recommend that RCC reviews its supervision processes for ILPs and Dissertations across all pathways ensuring that supervision records are kept, agreed by both supervisor and student and monitored and filed appropriately by the academic administrators.**

*New guidelines to standardise supervision practices across pathways have been prepared and are under review. Implementation is planned for Trinity Term 2025.*

Recommendation implemented. Further action planned.

### **Recommendation 24**

**The College should develop a more systematic approach to placement learning, ensuring that the process for the setting up of placements is clarified, supervisors are liaised with, the placement experience monitored in tutorials, and all students receive feedback in a timely way. In instances where a report is mandatory, the RCC should provide supervisors with the relevant documentation at the beginning of the placements. The documentation should set out expectations clearly, highlighting deadlines for receiving the student report and emphasising that reports are to be written in conjunction with the students.**

*A policy addressing placement learning, supervisor engagement and feedback processes has been implemented across all pathways.*

Recommendation implemented. No further action required.

### **Recommendation 25**

**The PER Team recommend that RCC increases the opportunities for students to lead worship and engage in ministry involving both children and young people, ensuring that all students have experience of this ministry before ordination.**

*The placement policy (see Recommendation 24) includes specific provision to integrate children and youth ministry placement experiences across all pathways. There is additional support for these initiatives from the funding achieved for the newly appointed Children, Youth and Families Tutor who will work on increasing this provision.*

Recommendation implemented. No further action required.

### **Recommendation 26**

**The PER Team recommend that the College make provision for all students to meet with their personal tutors for up to an hour twice per term, ensuring there are notes made as an aide memoire (not for the student file). This will provide a formal space for discussion and enable tutors to get to know their tutees in greater depth in a formal and structured way in addition to ‘soft’ contact. It will also enable more attention to be given to any formational needs as well as providing more robust development planning, monitoring, and reporting.**

*Personal tutorials for up to at least two hours per term have been agreed. This policy has been documented in the Formational Handbooks and Fitness For Ministry Forms are being used for secure note taking. The policy will be reviewed annually by staff at their residential.*

Recommendation implemented. No further action required.

### **Recommendation 27**

**The PER Team recommend that staff should formally review every Cuddesdon Based Pathway student’s progress at the end of each term to ensure that any formational or other issues are raised, so that personal tutors will be able to discuss these with their tutees at the beginning of the following term. This end of term student review will provide evidence for report writing and give opportunities for any concerns to be expressed so that personal tutors can follow these up.**

*The existing weekly staff meetings allow tutors to raise and record student concerns throughout the term. CGH ordinand students are now included in the regular weekly schedule of shared monitoring and Big Picture meeting agendas. There is a dedicated agenda item during Big Picture Meetings at the end of both the Michaelmas and Hilary Terms for tutors to discuss tutees and raise issues.*

Recommendation implemented. No further action required.

### **Recommendation 28**

**The PER Team recommend that the CGH Pathway seeks to employ a number of associate personal tutors to meet with students twice a term for an hour and meet with the Director at the end of each term for a student review meeting. These tutors should have significant input into the reporting process.**

*The Senior Leadership team are considering best practice on this issue. Students have expressed a preference for core staff to provide personal tuition. It remains under review following the appointment of a part-time associate tutor to take on personal tutorial responsibility for some CGH reader students.*

Recommendation ongoing.