

Ministry Development Board
Periodic External Review Follow-up Report

Lindisfarne College of Theology

Conducted on site, March 2025

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Senior Reviewer's Follow-up Report to the 2024 Periodic External Review of Lindisfarne College of Theology

Introduction

The most recent full Periodic External Review (PER) of Lindisfarne College of Theology (LCT), which offers Durham Common Awards validated modules for candidates for ordained and lay ministries from both Durham and Newcastle Dioceses, took place over a weekend in January 2024.

The PER visit involved attendance at a residential and teaching weekend for which Ordinands were in residence from Friday evening until Sunday afternoon. Reader/LLM and other lay ministry candidates, Ministry Experience Volunteers and independent students attended formation groups online on Friday evening and the teaching day in person on Saturday. The Board of Trustees meeting and AGM and the Common Awards team's review day on the Monday were also observed by team members.

During the review period it was clear that LCT was generally in good heart although with the inevitable concerns raised by the impending retirement of the then current Principal.

The review team made 31 commendations, reflecting significant confidence in the standards of provision. We also made 40 recommendations. Many (but by no means all) of the recommendations related to areas of governance in need of renewed attention.

As Senior Reviewer I conducted the follow up visit in person on 27th March 2025.

I would like to thank Revd Dr Richard Briggs (Principal), Revd Canon Dr Alan Bartlett and Revd Sue McCormack (co-chairs of the Board of Trustees) for their hospitality and for the openness of the conversation as we considered the TEI's response to the review's recommendations.

The conversation was supported by evidence from LCT's most recent Annual Self Evaluation report which references the PER and actions being taken to respond to recommendations.

Many of the recommendations have already been acted upon. Some, however, are still to be worked through. This is due to the fact that the incoming Principal, with the support of staff and the Board of Trustees, is taking a root and branch approach to the areas concerned with the result that the response will be deep and well thought through. It is not due to any negligence or reticence to address issues on anyone's part.

I was left with a sense of a TEI in extremely good heart, with increased student numbers (17 ordinands, 30 LLMs/Readers, 20 training for other authorised ministries and 19 independent students) and an increasingly robust structure of governance.

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
April 2025

Lindisfarne College of Theology response to the 2024 PER recommendations

Recommendation 1

Alongside our linked commendation, we recommend that LCT core staff and Trustees consider afresh how the aims of LCT are reflected in the pathways offered and whether any pathways might be more effectively offered by, or collaboratively with, a partner TEI in order to allow LCT to deepen its offering to those students it serves so well (i.e. those identified in the aims of attentiveness to place and to leading partners).

The incoming Principal convened a staff away day to begin to review LCT's aims and ethos (August 2024), and a second staff day is planned to effect a review of our academic offering and timetabling (Nov 2024). We have a process in place to develop a strategic plan in conjunction with the board, through 2024-25. The new Principal has begun conversations with partner TEIs (2 out of 3 already spoken with) to start looking at issues of synergy and collaboration. A key issue is to determine the best TEI to partner with.

Work towards fulfilling this recommendation is continuing, and not merely because this was a PER recommendation but because the new Principal naturally wants to work collaboratively with other TEIs in the area. This recommendation has, therefore, been sufficiently acted upon at this stage of LCTs development.

Recommendation 2

We recommend that regular checks are put in place to ensure that the many benefits of a 'mixed ecology' are not negated by the experiences of some students whose cohorts have very small numbers and may be without a significant voice within the strong ministry training community.

The regular checks now in place include personal tutors representing specific cohorts at tutor days held every-6- months; dedicated tutorial and programme oversight – still awaiting a new staff appointment to be fully in place; renewed emphasis on student community meetings with leadership facilitated by the Principal enabling student reps. We are looking at establishing a student 'exec' (committee) also.

The appointment of a new staff member in January 2025 has enabled the response to this recommendation to be expanded. The work is ongoing but the recommendation has been sufficiently acted upon at this stage.

Recommendation 3

The review team would strongly recommend that conversations with Cranmer Hall are revisited and taken forward by a new Principal with immediate effect. We understand that major decisions may not be possible until all senior staff posts in both dioceses are filled, but planning conversations and moves towards greater unity are essential if LCT is to thrive in its area of formational expertise.

The new Principal has initiated regular meetings with the Warden of Cranmer. We have begun by identifying 3 levels of collaboration (friendly support / project collaboration / moves towards integrating of programmes). The middle level has resulted in Cranmer and LCT seeking each to identify 3 possible collaborative areas, then compare and progress on agreed areas. Agreed that major decisions cannot proceed before a Bishop of Durham is appointed.

Recent developments in the appointment of a new Bishop of Durham leading to delays in that process mean that formal decisions about collaboration cannot yet be made. However, sufficient evidence was offered at the follow-up meeting to confirm that all possible avenues are being explored and progress made in relation to this recommendation is well on track.

Recommendation 4

We recommend that LCT's website is updated to give more detail of the aims that are in line with the formational qualities (e.g. those aims relating to attentiveness) and to offer more information on the formational aspects of training for enquirers.

The updating of the website has started. Our aims are being reviewed. The website philosophy is in fact going in the opposite direction to this recommendation: we will remove large amounts of data, seeking instead to draw people in to ask enquiries, at which point relevant info is shared 1-1.

Having explored the updated website I can confirm that the new version is more accessible and sufficiently informative to fulfil the requirements of this recommendation, even though not directly in the way anticipated but the PER team.

Recommendation 5

We recommend that care is taken to ensure that the term 'inclusion' does not enter into a narrow usage meaning simply class and educational background but that regular attention is paid to publicity material and the culture of the TEI to ensure no-one is being inadvertently excluded.

LCT has instituted an EDI group – with staff and student representation, who will attend to this taking care re the term 'inclusion'. We are reviewing and refreshing all publicity material. Initial review of this is planned by end Dec 2024, but it will become a standing regular item.

I was informed at the follow-up meeting that the new member of staff, who took up her post in January 2025, will be teaching a module on equality, diversity and inclusion. Work on the issues raised by this recommendation is ongoing. Discussion around the difference between teaching and living out inclusive qualities was received openly and I am convinced that there is sufficient awareness to evidence that this recommendation is being acted upon.

Recommendation 6

In the light of the clear value of Easter School we recommend that LCT seeks ways to open these experiences to all in training for significant, licensed ministries (both lay and ordained), including making it known that modest grants may sometimes be available from college or diocesan sources.

Staff will review the issue of an ordinand/LLM-reader Easter School, which is being reorganised root and branch in light of financial unsustainability of the previous model. We do think this recommendation is not reckoning effectively with the considerable differences in funding levels between ordinands and R/LLMs.

LCT have re-organised Easter School provision for all ordinands and are planning additional residential provision for all students where possible. The issue of inclusion of Reader/LLM candidates is acknowledged as being more one of diocesan and national funding policies for training of those who will be entering increasingly responsible areas of ministry as licensed lay ministers than it is of anything within the control of a TEI with limited funding. LCT staff are encouraged to continue these diocesan and national conversations but have done all they can to fulfil this recommendation's expectations.

Recommendation 7

We recommend that instructions about how to respond to a safeguarding issue and a number to contact are clearly placed on the home page of both the website and Moodle (one click is all that should be required) and that contact details are updated and given prominence in all other handbooks (in particular the student and placement handbooks).

This has been done, and a refreshed emphasis given to this matter at Induction Day for all new students (Sept 2024). Safeguarding is now a regular item on staff meeting agendas.

Having explored the website I can confirm that the pathway for seeking assistance with any safeguarding issue is now clear and simply accessed. This now simply needs to be kept up to date.

Recommendation 8

We recommend that time is taken for teaching about use of informal spaces for worship during residential weekends.

The standard weekend programme has been reviewed by staff and new principal. Our residentials no longer use the same venue, so much of the write-up of this recommendation no longer applies. We are in a building with various dedicated chapel spaces. Teaching on the use of 'informal spaces' can certainly be done – we will use the work of Richard Giles here

A discussion at the follow-up meeting helped to clarify the PER team's intentions behind this recommendation. This was met with openness and understanding of the issues raised and evidence of practice already in place which is fulfilling this recommendation.

Recommendation 9

We recommend that, similar to Recommendation 2 in section A2 of the report, regular checks are made on the health of the community in core staff meetings concentrating particularly on ensuring no groups of students are feeling excluded and finding ways to enable those students 'voices to be heard.

The new principal has adopted this practice as a matter of course. The EDI group (see 5 above) will also be helpful here.

Changes made by the new Principal have fulfilled the recommendations made here. This is ongoing work, but requires no further action to put this into place.

Recommendation 10

We recommend that the Trustees review how best to resolve the issues arising from the Articles of Association stipulations on Trustees 'length of service and their re-appointment.

Done by subgroup review, approved in principle at Board of Trustees on 10/10/24, to be adopted formally at AGM on 16/1/25. (In brief: moving to 3x3 yr terms, 1 long-term member resigned, now compliant with Arts.)

This work has been completed.

Recommendation 11

We recommend that AGMs and Board of Trustees meetings are both supported by the use of tabular-form action trackers.

This is effectively already in place, and we are satisfied that action points are tracked clearly enough

Although a different form of tracking has been adopted from that mentioned in the recommendation, evidence was given that actions points are now clearly tracked with good follow-up.

Recommendation 12

We recommend that action trackers, in a similar format to that advocated in Recommendation 11, be established and maintained for all regular and periodic internal and external meetings with the exception of the periodic reviews held with DDO's & Reader/LLM Wardens.

We are committed to tracking action points without necessarily adopting one specific method of doing it. The new Principal has adopted such procedures as a matter of course.

As above, issues raised by this recommendation have been resolved. In addition, staff meetings now have agendas enabling actions to be reported and tracked more efficiently. No further work is required.

Recommendation 13

We recommend the LCT Board of Trustees invites the Bishops of Newcastle and Durham, in consultation with their respective DBFs, to each nominate one person to join the Board as their representatives.

This is in place but we are now clarifying the basis for it, which was not made clear in earlier paperwork. NB that at the reorganisation of LCT as an independent charity ex officio posts were removed. We will consult with the bishops to check at next meeting.

LCT have done all that they can towards the fulfilment of this recommendation. Consultation with dioceses is ongoing.

Recommendation 14

We recommend that the co-chairs of the LCT Board of Trustees meet with the Bishop of Newcastle, the Acting Bishop of Durham (as appointed upon the retirement of the current Bishop of Durham), the Principal of St John’s College and the Warden of Cranmer Hall to agree how to initiate and progress the suggested “Big Tent” discussion.

This will be discussed at our next Diocesan Consultation on 4/2/25. We are happy to invite the Principal of St John’s and the Warden of Cranmer either to this meeting or to a separate one. The response to Recommendation 1 above indicates that partnership with Cranmer is not the only avenue we are pursuing.

Work on topics leading to this recommendation has evolved in the 15 months since the PER report was written. The specifics of this recommendation are no longer relevant on their own. I was, though, convinced by the conversation at the follow-up meeting that the work being carried out in relation to wider partnerships is more creative and wide-reaching than anything we had envisaged and so this recommendation has been more than fulfilled. However a one-year time-frame is too short for the depth and breadth of work being carried out and will therefore be ongoing into at least the next academic year.

Recommendation 15

We recommend that all key management documents such as the Business Plan and SWOT analysis, and strategic action plans arising from them, are owned and approved by the Board of Trustees, used by the Board in exercising oversight of LCT and, unless there are over-riding reasons against, shared with the LCT senior leadership team.

A new subgroup of the Board of Trustees has been convened (the Finance and General Purpose committee) to attend to these areas. The Business Plan and SWOT analysis will actually be generated from the LCT staff up to the Board for consultation and guidance, rather than the other way around. Full staff ownership of this issue is taken as read by new principal.

Much thought has been given to this area of work. The process by which this is being established evidences a deep understanding of the needs. The Principal anticipated there being another 6 months’

work to develop the vision and ownership of the strategic plan. Again, work towards fulfilment of this recommendation is ongoing but it is acknowledged that LCT is taking the recommendation to a deep and sustainable level which will provide solid foundations for years to come.

Recommendation 16

We recommend that the Board of Trustees operates with a single chair, supported by a vice-chair, at least until the governance-related recommendations of this Review are addressed. If it subsequently wishes to operate with two co-chairs, the Articles of Association must be revised to allow for this.

We are amending our memorandum of association and intend to continue with two chairs.

The decision to retain two chairs has been made with sound reasoning. Both chairs were present for the follow-up meeting and clearly work well together. All legal actions have been taken to make this the formal position. No further action is required.

Recommendation 17

We recommend that the Board of Trustees is enhanced through the addition of someone with strong business skills and experience.

Agreed. Names discussed at Board of Trustees on 10/10/24, to be approached with a view to being welcomed at AGM on 16/1/25.

It is clear that new Board members have been selected for their skills. 3 new members have been appointed and the need to continue with positive recruitment to the Board in future is acknowledged. No further work is necessary at this time.

Recommendation 18

We recommend that the Board of Trustees reflects carefully on whether the current limit on the number of Trustees should be raised (and the Articles of Association revised accordingly) or, to accommodate the additions of Recommendations 15 and 19, that one or more of the current Trustees steps down.

Done at Board of Trustees on 10/10/24. 1 trustee has stepped down. Plan to continue with current limit as 9, but open to review in future years.

Work in relation to this recommendation has been completed.

Recommendation 19

We recommend that the Board of Trustees establishes and implements a structured induction process for new Trustees.

This has been resourced from sharing trustees 'experience; and materials sent out. Learning day to be reviewed. This area is resourced using North Tyneside VODA (voda.org.uk). Plan to implement trustee buddy system.

This was reviewed at the AGM in January 2025 and work on this recommendation is now complete.

Recommendation 20

We recommend that Board of Trustees reviews and updates the skills register and implements a cycle of annual reviews.

Updated, and added to cycle of annual review, to be done at AGM

Evidence of the review process was seen at the follow-up meeting. Whilst this will be an ongoing piece of work to ensure reviews happen, no further work is needed to fulfil this recommendation.

Recommendation 21

We recommend that the Board of Trustees, with support from senior LCT staff, addresses the concerns identified in this report regarding the Business Plan by redrafting and then formally approving it.

We agree that the Business Plan presented to the PER was not fit for purpose. A whole new approach is in place to start with staff review at dedicated away day(s), go to F&GP subgroup, consult with dioceses, and bring to board. This will take time.

This work is ongoing and will, appropriately, take time due to the depth of change being implemented. The work, however, goes beyond that anticipated by the recommendation and is therefore commended.

Recommendation 22

We recommend that the Risk Register is updated, taking into account the observations made within this report.

Done. This is reviewed at every board meeting; with annual major review at AGM.

The requirements of this recommendation have been fulfilled.

Recommendation 23

We recommend that a Risk Review meeting of senior staff is held at least quarterly, and that the meeting minutes are provided to Trustees.

The new Principal has instituted as a matter of course the reporting of Board of Trustees business to the succeeding staff meeting, and can then report back to the then succeeding board meeting.

Processes put in place by the new Principal fulfil this recommendation.

Recommendation 24

We recommend that LCT discusses with Newcastle Diocese whether they would adopt the same LLM training model as Durham.

The new Principal will resume this conversation with Newcastle DMM and Warden of Readers, and follow up at the annual Diocesan consultation. The PER report speaks of 'two different ways of training LLMs' but this is not really the case – more 2 minor variations on one way of training.

It was acknowledged at the follow-up meeting that this is not something LCT can act upon as a TEI but that conversations with diocesan staff are important and are ongoing. LCT are encouraged to continue these conversations in relation to all lay training but no specific further action is recommended.

Recommendation 25

We recommend that LCT reviews course provision annually to ensure all courses are functioning well and are viable.

The new Principal has instituted this as a matter of course, and brought in an annual 'timetable review day' (1st one = Nov 2024) for extended course review

It has been decided that a timetable review day will be instituted as part of the programming for the quarterly staff away days. No additional action is needed.

Recommendation 26

We recommend that LCT conduct more market research to assess the size of any potential market for an MA, including opportunities for bursaries.

Our Director of PG Studies is working with the 2 dioceses (& CMDs), to develop more accessible pathways through PG Cert (and potentially PG Dip) courses, including new p/t options (as of 8/24). We are also reviewing a bursary scheme to attract applicants.

Our discussion at the follow-up visit evidenced sufficient awareness of the issues of low recruitment to post graduate courses, with a widening of modules offered. Ongoing evaluation will take place and action taken accordingly.

Recommendation 27

We recommend that these CPD opportunities are discussed as part of the annual appraisal process to ensure all staff take advantage of the CPD and well-being offer.

The new Principal has refreshed the annual appraisal forms and process, moved it to June/July, and rewritten the staff development policy to indicate that it (and CPD generally) will be discussed at each annual appraisal.

No further action required.

Recommendation 28

We recommend that Emmaus should only be used if there are adequate teaching facilities, that is three usable classrooms, and that they therefore continue to explore options for alternative venues, ideally without increasing expenditure.

All teaching weekends have been moved to Ushaw Historic House. Emmaus is now only used for retreat weekends where teaching facilities are not at issue. The new Principal and the Administrator conducted site visits to both, and learned Emmaus is developing new buildings and facilities, so this will be kept under review.

While ongoing review will take place, with a possible return to Emmaus if their developments prove to offer sufficient teaching space and facilities for weekends, I am content that any move will be in accordance with the requirements identified in this recommendation.

Recommendation 29

We recommend that LCT ensures all students have access to appropriate libraries and academic resources.

Regular attention is given to providing texts through the RRC (the NE Religious Resource Centre) and the Common Awards Hub. Durham University library access is ensured each year. Major developments in the RRC include excellent LCT representation on its board, including the new Principal who was 15 years a TEI academic librarian

This is an ongoing issue for all TEIs. At the time of the follow-up visit good provision was evidenced and a clear objective to keep this under review was articulated.

Recommendation 30

We recommend that LCT utilises formal and informal mechanisms for hearing student feedback on the effectiveness of the induction process.

This is done formally through termly student community meetings, the processes for which are being refreshed by the new Principal.

A clear desire to fulfil this recommendation was communicated at the follow-up visit. Work is ongoing and under constant review.

Recommendation 31

We recommend that LCT consider more extensive use of assessed conversations and other approaches to assessment.

Our 12/11/24 Timetable Review day will attend to the balance of assessment types, which was a matter of discussion and review in the 23/10/24 CA TEI forum, which related national constraints in this area.

The follow-up meeting discussion evidenced a desire to offer a wider range of assessment types and acknowledged the needs of some students to demonstrate understanding in a variety of ways. However, constraints on staff time and other resource issues make it difficult for TEIs to be creative. This is an ongoing piece of work which will need to be revisited from time to time.

Recommendation 32

While recognising the commendable work already taking place (Commendation 23), we recommend that LCT needs to remain alert to opportunities and risks of generative AI and develop appropriate strategies in response to future developments, including considering how AI can be used to reduce staff workload as well as more use of assessment methods other than essays.

LCT remains as a matter of course fully up to date with all CA guidelines in this area.

We confess to being entirely unaware of how 'AI can be used to reduce staff workload' in any constructive manner, and would welcome further guidance from MDT on this area.

This is a fast changing topic and I am convinced that LCT staff are developing their awareness of the issues raised by AI as effectively as they can. Attendance at the CA conference on AI in theological education was referenced. This work is ongoing but no further recommended actions are being made here.

Recommendation 33

We recommend that LCT should consider whether providing input on study skills later in term one might be more effective, at a point when all students have written at least one essay.

We will keep a watching brief but have a range of reflected reasons as to why it is done beforehand, based on long experience of trying it both ways.

Sufficient thought has been given to this topic. Openness to change in the future was clearly articulated. No further work needed at this time (other than keeping an open mind as time goes on).

Recommendation 34

We recommend that LCT check that feedback from formative assessment is always timely enough for students to complete their summative assessment.

This is checked termly at Board of Studies meetings. We note with dismay that checking does not equate to ensuring, which would of course be impossible.

This recommendation has been sufficiently fulfilled through changes in practice introduced by the incoming Principal.

Recommendation 35

We recommend that LCT should develop and implement a consistent approach to remote access to weeknight teaching.

There is one that was already in place before the PER. Were some students reporting a different earlier policy? The policy is: it is not normally available

The background thinking to this recommendation was discussed at the follow-up meeting. The remote access policy has since been tightened up and communicated. Continued awareness of student needs is recommended but no further action needed.

Recommendation 36

We recommend that requests to incorporate teaching on children and youth work and pioneering and church planting are considered seriously by staff and trustees, and where possible that they are accommodated and integrated into existing programs.

This will be reviewed at the 12/11/24 timetable review day, and is also part of reviewing potential co-operation with other TEs who do it already. The 'where possible' clause in this recommendation is taken seriously – good course elements may not be possible to accommodate in practice, but we are certainly keen in theory.

A draft agreement is now in place with Cranmer relating to module interchangeability which will allow for greater flexibility of programming. No further action is required to fulfil this recommendation.

Recommendation 37

We recommend that similar guidance to that included in the residential weekend program entitled 'A note about saying the Offices' be given to students in using structured or formulaic prayers, to help the prayers flow and to enable fellow worshippers to be prayerfully more engaged.

All documentation has been rewritten by the new Principal, and the historic hang-over reasons why this was included in weekend programmes no longer apply, so it has been removed from there and is now circulated once annually to all, and kept on Moodle

No further action required.

Recommendation 38

Building on the work already undertaken and acknowledged in Commendation 29, we recommend that LCT acts on the student feedback and seeks to find ways to build on the annual unconscious bias training undertaken by introducing specific anti-racism activities/training, acknowledging the intersectionality of racism and prejudice across more than just colour, and the need for a variety of voices and experiences in the debate.

Staff will review this at the timetable review day (12/11/24), and consider options. The EDI group will champion this agenda going forward. At the moment it is unclear what specific 'activities' might be appropriate or possible. We are however looking at the feasibility of adopting a CA module on diversity as part of the programme.

LCT acknowledge that this work is ongoing. Sufficient thought is being given to this for me to conclude that continued staff conversations and actions are going a long way to fulfilling the requirements of this recommendation.

Recommendation 39

We recommend that students on residential receive feedback from a variety of people including their fellow students, thus providing different perspectives and inputs to their growth in ministry.

The PER acknowledges that students get feedback from placement supervisors, church leaders, module tutors and personal tutors too. The specific residential recommendation will take some consideration, and its benefits are not entirely clear in the wider commended context.

A conversation on this topic as part of the follow-up meeting allowed consideration of the elements of power, positive feedback and learning how to offer feedback on the part of students. Further thought is being given to this topic, but the openness displayed at the meeting leaves me confident that the topic is being considered with care.

Recommendation 40

We recommend that LCT reintroduces the section ‘Areas for Development’ in the current version of interim, penultimate and final reports.

We are happy to do this. The new Principal’s intention, to be clear, is to use the report sections desired by the dioceses.

This has now been acted upon and the section reintroduced to the report documentation.