

Ministry Council: Periodic External Review Follow-up Report

St Augustine's College of Theology

Conducted onsite, July 2024

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Senior Reviewer's Follow-up Report to the 2023 Periodic External Review of St Augustine's College of Theology

The Senior Reviewer for the March 2023 Periodic External Review (PER) of St Augustine's College of Theology was pleased to meet again with the College principal, Revd Dr Alan Gregory, to evaluate progress with implementing the PER recommendations.

The following report draws together the recommendations of the PER report, the college's Action Plan responses of November 2023 and its progress updates of May 2024, and concludes in italics with the college's and Senior Reviewer's agreed assessment in each case.

Recommendation 1

We recommend that the college reviews the robustness of the provision of pastoral care within the college, to ensure that it is not overly dependent on the work of the chaplain and has an appropriate balance of being pro-active or structured as well as responsive.

Response 1

We shall review pastoral care provision in February 2024. Prior to that, we shall work on pastoral care in relation to academic practices, including teaching and grading. Our primary focus is on what we have learned through our work with neurodiversity, and with students with little educational experience, and on the implications, this has for academic practice more broadly. We have secured a professional 'coach' to lead a day's discussion and workshop on this topic. In the meantime, with respect to the OM program, we have decided that personal tutors will take more initiative in maintaining contact with Ministry Facilitators in parishes and have asked the facilitators to discuss any important pastoral care concerns with the personal tutor for their student.

Report May 24

Tutors have successfully included ministry facilitators in their oversight brief. We announced this in our October meetings with Ministry Facilitators and Supervisors, who warmly welcomed the initiative. Our staff day on pastoral care and academic practices was productive, though we ended up focusing more than intended on issues of overall program development and staff working relationships, especially in the light of concerns about the future of ordinand numbers. We have, however, continued to make progress on support of neurodiverse students, etc., with more students than ever seeking regular coaching and appropriate course modifications. Especially for dyslexic students, we are now providing more oral assignments as an alternative to written papers. The Common Awards PER team warmly commended and encouraged our provision. The more detailed review of pastoral care will take place early next year as our chaplain is leaving to take up a post in Yorkshire. With the help of the current chaplain, we shall assess the value of that role before conducting the full review. The immediate evidence suggests that, while OM students have a good experience of pastoral support via their tutors and, in many cases, through the tutor

for writing, the independent students might benefit more from the chaplain's ministry. The exit interviews that we hold in June will probably provide a more detailed picture.

Final Discussion with Senior Reviewer

Discussed provision of chaplain in the light of the unlikelihood of our finding a replacement. The conversation recognised the importance of tutorial efforts to offer pastoral care to independent students. Since this discussion, we have appointed a chaplain, who is working with both OM and independent students. The college believes that pastoral care provision is stronger than ever.

Recommendation 2

We recommend that the college develops a clear understanding of how, as staff changes occur, it can increase the level of experience for parish ministry among the core staff, so as to further support a committed vocation to parish ministry among many of the ordinands.

Response 2

Though we question some of the assumptions behind this recommendation, we agree entirely on the importance of this parochial experience among the core staff. We shall certainly take this into consideration in future appointments. In the meantime, we shall maintain the high level of such experience among our Associate Tutors. Also, see below in relation to worship. We would also urge, nonetheless, the importance of lay parochial experience among the teachers of ordinands. Parochial ministry will always benefit from the wisdom of its victims!

Report May 24

We've had no teaching staff appointments other than associate tutors, but the latter, helped by some recent additions, provide an impressive range of pastoral experience, both parochial and in chaplaincy. As new permanent positions are filled, and our fundraising is now aimed at providing at least one new post, we shall treat parochial experience as strongly desirable, alongside, but not at the expense of securing greater staff diversity.

Final Discussion with Senior Reviewer

Agreed on the importance of maintaining a significant level of parish experience among teaching staff. In late Autumn 2024, college appointed anew tutor in Pastoral Theology who has both varied and very recent experience of parochial ministry.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that the college reviews its patterns for worship, to ensure that:

- a. students are being given high-quality examples of the worship in different styles, recognisable as such by those for whom that is their natural style of worship;

- b. that an appropriate balance is being struck between worship as an opportunity to experience diversity and develop skills and worship that spiritually feeds the worshipper.

Response 3

Our worship practices are due for review at the end of this academic year. In the meantime, we have appointed an outside consultant, a liturgist with extensive parish experience, who is working with individual student groups on the planning of college worship. As a member of the UKME community, she is also able to encourage and help students think through cross-cultural expressions in liturgy. We are also negotiating with the Rector of St George's, Borough to hold occasional services, especially for our Southwark students, that will provide some more additional liturgical experience in a formally ordered church. Part b. of this recommendation is a work in permanent process, partly addressed by personal tutors in discussions of liturgy, partly by our feedback system, which covers all the services planned and led by students, and partly in planning conversations with our new liturgical consultant.

Report May 24

OM students have enjoyed worship discussions with our consultant and, though it's not easy to identify the reasons, we've seen greater maturity and attention to detail in residential worship this past year. In May, we created a task group to undertake a detailed review of the relationships and mutual reinforcement between the teaching of worship, worship in the college setting, and placement practice in leading worship. In October, the task group will report and propose changes to our practices, in order to strengthen integration across these elements of the curriculum.

Final Discussion with Senior Reviewer

The Senior Reviewer recognised that the college had made significant progress and was committed to continued monitoring and review.

Recommendation 4

We recommend that the Trustees review the governance arrangements to ensure that they exercise clear, consistent, oversight of areas such as curriculum, formation, quality assurance and enhancement, and student experience.

Response 4

We have reviewed the way discussions and decisions are recorded in our Board minutes, with the concern that they reflect accurately the level of existing board oversight in these areas. We recognise that, in the past, this has not appeared very clearly. In addition, we have established discussion of Board of Studies actions and reports as a standing item on the Trustee meeting agenda. The Board of Studies will also provide any documents referred to in its discussions. Our Trustee/Staff day this year gave extended attention to curricular matters, including planned initiatives in relation to Eco-theology and climate destruction.

Report May 24

We have introduced the provisions mentioned above. We have also involved the Trustees very closely in the development and implementation of our *Discipleship for a Planet in Crisis* project.

Final Discussion with Senior Reviewer

Senior Reviewer satisfied with initiatives taken.

Recommendation 5

We recommend that the College continues to make more explicit to both students and stakeholders the overall coherence of the curriculum.

Response 5

The Director of Studies and core teaching staff have produced a new series of handbooks for all programs. These focus on setting out the ‘logic’ of curricula in a way that draws on Durham’s own documents, as well as on our own implementation of their curricula frameworks. The next stage in responding to this recommendation involves finding key moments and, where necessary, new, more conversational material that explains the ‘narrative arc’ of student programs in ways less formal and more immediate to student experience.

Report May 24

All handbooks are now complete (see above). We are currently working on both the material and the occasions for more informal presentations. One such is our set of exit interviews, in which we shall discuss the students’ grasp of curricular logic and coherence. The results of these interviews are discussed, and changes planned during our staff day before the new academic year.

Final Discussion with Senior Reviewer

Senior Reviewer satisfied with progress made.

Recommendation 6

We recommend that the College continues to develop techniques for creating a sense of community where the vast majority of the students’ experience on a programme will be taking place online.

Response 6

Our online certificate program is the only program in which students take all their classes online. The director of that program, which will fully launch in January 2024, will meet regularly with online students for Zoom conversations designed to provide both pastoral care and build a sense of community. The program also has its own Moodle page, including a cohort forum that students are strongly encouraged to use to share experience, make suggestions, and ask questions. Those independent students that

undertake a fair proportion of their modules online have a personal tutor and are encouraged to attend college events, as well as use the Abbey study rooms and the library as a way to experience a stronger sense of location in their program.

Report May 24

See above.

Final Discussion with Senior Reviewer

Given the present lack of interest in a fully online program, PER is satisfied with the provisions currently made for those who take the majority of their program online.

Recommendation 7

We recommend that the College engages directly with the Church of England over any perceived weaknesses in the online hub, and pursues collaboration between TEIs in finding, creating, and sharing online resources appropriate for teaching.

Response 7

Agreed. We shall also include the online resources recommendation in the job description when we search for a new librarian.

Report May 24

The hub will have some assessment through our exit interviews in June but, quite honestly, this provision is improving, and we have discovered few weaknesses.

Final Discussion with Senior Reviewer

Satisfied, especially as hub provision continues to improve.

Recommendation 8

We recommend greater transparency in sharing with students the result of their feedback, for example on the 'You said ... We did...' model.

Response 8

We shall implement this on all occasions when we respond to student feedback, including the Board of Studies, whose student representatives we are asking to use this model in reporting back to the student community. Our Academic Registrar is devising ways to use Moodle more regularly as a vehicle for reporting on actions taken in response to student comments and suggestions. As the college is a somewhat 'dispersed' community, we think Moodle is the ideal location to ensure the transparency we seek. For OM students, we shall also increase the number of feedback opportunities during the Friday evenings of residenceals. The Dover Pathway students have a feedback opportunity on each Saturday they attend.

Report May 24

We've taken the initiatives mentioned above, though residential feedback is less successful due to the restructuring of several weekends. Moodle remains our best medium for this.

Final Discussion with Senior Reviewer

Senior Reviewer appreciated the changes made to feedback process. This has since improved further through a more robust reporting procedure from student reps to the Board of Studies and from the Board of Studies to the Board of Trustees.

Recommendation 9

We recommend that the college should reflect on the potential difficulties of having the same body acting as both the governance body (with delegated authority from the Trustees) and the staff-student committee.

Response 9

We have had a conversation with the Chair of the Board of Studies and plan to continue the reflection at the next Board meeting, and at the Board of Studies itself.

Report May 24

We have had the discussions and also raised this with Durham. The present arrangement, however, is appreciated and, also, has the advantage of placing student and student/staff concerns within a body with significant responsibility, especially as the Board of Studies also functions as the Common Awards Management Committee.

Final Discussion with Senior Reviewer

Senior Reviewer recognised the benefits of current arrangement, while urging continued monitoring of the Board of Studies in its role as a staff-student committee with regard to academic issues.

Recommendation 10

We recommend that, particularly in view of the move into online-only teaching on the new CertHE, the College should share best practice in teaching methods online – both from among its staff and from other TEIs – to facilitate appropriate engagement from students.

Agreed. Every year we provide best practice examples as part of our Annual Self-evaluation for both Ministry Team and Durham. We shall continue to do this, making sure we include online practices. Other than that, though, there is really no mechanism for doing this, except in informal conversations between staff and Principals. We'll certainly participate in these and share experience to the extent compatible with the realities of competition.

Report May 24

As above.

Final Discussion with Senior Reviewer

Senior Reviewer satisfied.

Recommendation 11

We recommend that the College designs a more creative range of forms of assessment to be offered to all students, as encouraged within Durham guidelines.

Response 11

During our next Tutor/Associate Tutor day, we shall encourage taking fuller advantage of the range of the assessment forms Durham allows. We have already had an initial staff planning discussion and have decided to increase use of the assessed conversation and assessed discussion options. Further discussion also forms part of our academic practices review, see above response 1.

Report May 24

We had an excellent discussion with our associate tutors who supported our interest in using a more diverse range of assessment methods, not only in the context of neurodiversity, etc. but as regular and familiar practice within all modules. We now have tutors using oral and assessed discussion assignments, as well as assessed presentations. Ministry and discipleship 'resource' assignments appear throughout the curriculum.

Final Discussion with Senior Reviewer

Senior Reviewer welcomed the initiatives, both taken and planned.

Recommendation 12

We recommend that the College keeps under regular review both the financial and the formational effects of reducing residential sessions.

Response 12

We have begun to review this issue, as well as that of increasing the number of residentials held in the Abbey site. The latter is important for our formational ethos, as well as protecting our privileges as the 'anchor tenant'. Though residentials continue to present budgetary questions, we have renewed our commitment to maintaining and, where possible, extending the number and length of residential sessions.

Report May 24

We reviewed this issue and decided that we should increase the length of the 2024 residential week, as well as of the overall residential weekend commitment. We did this for formational reasons and, fortunately, at this stage the budget allowed it.

Final Discussion with Senior Reviewer

Senior Reviewer welcomed the college's commitment to maintaining the formational importance of residential events for OM and LLM students.

Recommendation 13

We recommend that St Augustine's explore ways in which students could be further supported in maintaining a daily rhythm of prayer life that would sustain them in their future ministry.

Response 13

At present, personal tutors work with students on achieving a discipline of daily prayer, using a self-reflection form as a starting-point. We've found so far that this is a very effective way of supporting students in their prayer, especially in conjunction with a spiritual director. The college strongly encourages all OM and LLM students to find a spiritual director or mentor, and tutors help their students to find a suitable person. In addition, in the light of this recommendation, we shall also encourage ministry facilitators to discuss this with their ordinand or lay minister. All students taking the 'Introduction to Spirituality' have to adopt four spiritual practices, at least one of which will involve regular prayer, chosen from an extensive list. This is a requirement of the module and students produce a theological reflection paper on their progress with the chosen practices. Other, however, than encouraging ministry facilitators in their role and addressing the "rhythm of daily prayer" more fully in the spirituality module, we believe that the support we currently offer is effective and adequate.

Report May 24

The ministry facilitators/supervisor's handbook for next year will put some additional stress on the role of encouraging a resilient discipline of prayer.

Final Discussion with Senior Reviewer

Satisfied.

Recommendation 14

We recommend that St Augustine's reviews its strategy of placements (and students' involvement in home church contexts) to:

- a. Ensure that there is a consistency of learning experience and outcome between placements;
- b. Support students integrating their academic learning and ministerial formation;
- c. Mitigate the stress that students face in finding their own placements;
- d. Offer clarity of expectations and a level of ongoing contact during the year to placement supervisors and ministry facilitators.

Response 14

- a. **a. and d.**, see response 1 above. We think that strengthening the relationship between personal tutors and ministry facilitators is key to improvements in this area. We shall also ask the tutors responsible for marking pastoral and church ministry portfolios to attend to any evidence of inconsistency among these placements. In addition, personal tutors will initiate discussion within their tutor groups on comparative placement experience. When we have gathered the information, we shall address any problems that surface.
- b. **b.** Again, partly with a view to finding out how current students are negotiating this integration, we shall initiate the relevant tutorial discussion over the rest of the academic year.
- c. **c.** We shall revise and expand our directory of placement opportunities, taking into account recent problems with finding hospital and hospice placements. Personal tutors will make sure students are supported adequately.

Report May 24

Personal tutors have undertaken the recommendations in a. and b. above. They have found a good level of consistency here and tutees experience good integration of learning and formation. At present, the overwhelming majority of students are positive about placement experiences. We have also encouraged those who mark placement reflections and portfolios to put additional care into providing formative and integrative feedback that will help the student strengthen their reflective practice. The assignment moderation process confirms that this is happening.

Final Discussion with Senior Reviewer

Senior Reviewer appreciated the college's ongoing responses to these concerns.

Recommendation 15

We recommend that St Augustine's:

- a. Reviews with the relevant dioceses how together they ensure that the home context of Readers in training provides appropriate opportunities for learning and formation;
- b. explores ways in which Readers in training feel part of St Augustine's community and are encouraged and empowered to inhabit their distinctive call to licensed lay ministry.

Response 15

A new Lay Celebration Day has been introduced in the college calendar; this addresses very closely the specific calling. The inaugural event last academic year proved to be a great success. All lay students at college attended along with people from regional dioceses who are involved with lay ministry or interested in learning more. All speakers and seminar leaders were lay, and it was noted that there were very few occasions where lay people were able to gather in such a way in order to share and learn from each other and have opportunities for discussion and reflection together. Later this year, we shall consult both students

and diocesan LLM directors, in order to review the extent to which we successfully include LLM students within the larger community.

Report May 24

We've followed the above proposals. Also, pastoral support and community involvement are scheduled as topics for the LLM exit interviews conducted by the Principal and Tutor for Lay Ministry.

Final Discussion with Senior Reviewer

Senior Reviewer satisfied with response.

Recommendation 16

We recommend that the college considers how it can ensure that all students have the opportunity to engage in discipleship of young people whether in placement or elsewhere.

Response 16

In the light of this recommendation, we have decided to renew our efforts to establish regular school placements for OM students. We are also revising our ministry facilitators and placement handbooks to highlight the importance of work with families and children, as well as any local school opportunities. Tutors will discuss this initiative with incoming students, as well as with their students' ministry facilitators.

Report May 24

This year we made a special effort to encourage the school placement and with some success, at least by way of generating enthusiasm. The time constraints on our OM students means that very few have the opportunity to undertake this alongside the pastoral and church placements. However, two students this year have chosen school involvement, and we have an additional school that has offered to host a placement. From this year onwards, we shall encourage church placement supervisors to include a school or education element in their student's work.

Final Discussion with Senior Reviewer

Senior Reviewer satisfied, while also recognising the difficulties school placements pose for part-time students.

Revd Canon Prof Jeremy Duff
March 2025