Name of Provider: **The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education**
UKPRN: 10032282

The Queen's Foundation is dedicated to excellence in theological education and personal formation by:

- ☑ **Nurturing and equipping Christians in their discipleship**
- ☑ **Preparing people for mission and ministry in lay and ordained roles**
- ☑ **Resourcing research that serves the mission of God in the world**

1.0 Provider Context

We are currently a small alternative provider that occupies a distinctive niche within the HE sector to train ministers and leaders for churches (primarily the Methodist Church and the Church of England). Our student body is broadly comprised of two types, those preparing for some form of ministerial role (normally working at levels 4 and 5) and those in the next phase of their professional training but who, by this stage, are immersed in that ministerial context (normally working at level 6). In addition, we have a number of independent students from a variety of denominational backgrounds who are pursuing theological education for different, individual reasons, but who will normally have some involvement in their local church and accompanying ministerial role.

Most students are "sponsored" by one of these churches, which means that they (the church) pay Queen's directly for the full cost of the student's training (tuition, maintenance and accommodation), and these students, therefore, do not themselves personally pay tuition fees or other charges. This means that the sponsoring churches are the 'Professional Sponsoring Bodies', and, as such, they will:

- Approve our curriculum in terms of its meeting the requirements for their initial ministerial education[1] (and the associated ecclesial learning outcomes):
  - For Anglican ordinands, this means the formation criteria set by the Church of England for the end of Initial Ministerial Education (IME) Phase 1).[2]
  - For Methodist student presbyters and student deacons, this means the competencies expected by the Methodist Church at the point of stationing as probationers – see pp. 41-44 in the Handbook for Ministerial Probation.[3]
- Work alongside students and staff to facilitate entry both into initial professional employment (stipendiary and non-stipendiary (unsalaried)) and subsequently into accredited ministerial roles.

The churches' decisions therefore impact significantly on our students and on their overall study experience. For example, the churches are not *primarily* concerned about the academic programme a student follows or the award they might ultimately gain. That is, although sponsored students are normally expected to gain a minimum award of a Diploma in HE qualification, they are not formally *required* to do so, and instead need simply to be 'working at' level 5. Likewise, the churches' decisions about a student's prior experience or learning may result in their being funded for a shorter period of study (even when this experience cannot meet APL requirements), meaning that a student cannot obtain an award or may obtain a lower award than they may otherwise wish. At the same time, however, churches may also sponsor a student for longer periods of study, thereby enabling them to gain higher qualifications than otherwise necessary, up to and including doctoral level.

There are, then, a number of ways in which our particular context impacts on TEF metrics and their interpretation. In particular:

- The majority of our students do not have a BA award as their ultimate aim. They are usually studying at Queen's only for 2 years (full-time) or 3 years part-time and/or are already qualified to at least level 4 in different subject areas. A further BA degree - or equivalent - is unnecessary.

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[1] Generally speaking, this process is 4 years for Methodists and up to 5 years for Anglicans, and is delivered in two phases: IME 1 and 2. IME1 training pertains to initial ministerial candidates; IME2 pertains to students who have moved into a ministerial role normally as 'curate' or 'probationer'.

[2] : https://www.churchofengland.org/clergy-office-holders/ministry/ministerial-education-and-development/initial-ministerial-education.aspx and Downloaded as Appendix Q1 001 Formation Criteria for Ordained Ministry

[3] : https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-ministers-and-office-holders/ministry/probationers/handbook-for-probation/

- Many are studying at post graduate level (28% headcount), so do not feature in TEF metrics.
- Many students have the Certificate in HE or the Graduate Diploma as their qualification aim and these are excluded from the NSS, as their FTE is one year or less.
- The present timing of our Durham University (DU) Exam Board in the December following the most recent academic year excludes almost all DU validated students from HESA completion outcome data (and hence from DLHE). We understand this oddity will be resolved under Data Futures with in-year reporting, but it presently limits the extent of our Graduate Outcomes population.
- As a result, our metrics since we commenced HESA reporting are disproportionately dominated by data from our Newman University undergraduate-registered students. They are a small minority within our overall student population, as the programme has been in teach-out mode since September 2015 (in 2017-18 they represented 8.2% of total student headcount). However, we are confident that these students are typical of the wider student constituency and thus our statistics remain a representative view that we think will be borne out with future metrics based on a greater proportion of our population under Data Futures. At the same time, this explains why a number of our present metrics (particularly for full-time students, who are universally impacted by this anomaly) fall below the relevant publication threshold, and why they do so for reasons outside our control.

The demographics of our student population are as follows:

- Average age 49: students are therefore likely to have significant caring responsibilities (for both adults and children).
- 19% of our students have some form of declared disability (28% of them are in receipt of DSA).
- 24% of our students describe themselves in a category other than White-British.
- 58.7% of our students are female.
- 82% of our students are part-time (on a variety of pathways), and therefore this is our majority mode. [4]
- 8% of our students come originally from outside of the UK. This helps inculcate a global dimension to the classroom and to the wider campus community.[5]

More generally, our students come from a wide variety of backgrounds (employment/educational) and socio-economic situations, and therefore there is no 'typical' Queen's student. This cultivates a rich diversity within the student body, and enables students to benefit and learn by engaging with each other as much as through formal pedagogical processes. It is also conversant with our stated ethos and mission statement:

"We celebrate unity in diversity, in a community that is international, multi-cultural, and ecumenical. We aim to enable Christians to deepen their spiritual life, to grow in a faith that is generous, enquiring, deeply rooted and creative in thought and practice, and to be passionate for God's work in God's world."

We have one main campus in Edgbaston, Birmingham, and a satellite teaching centre near Stafford called 'Shallowford'. We have active contracts for the following Higher Education relationships:

- Validation by Durham University (levels 4-7).
- Validation by Newman University (levels 6-7).
- Memorandum of Understanding with Lichfield Diocese to deliver Reader and Curate Training.
- Memorandum of Understanding with Worcester Diocese to deliver Reader Training.[6]

The Foundation has a formal contract with Durham University for the delivery of Common Awards (CA) (academic) programmes. A separate contract exists between Durham University and the Archbishops Council of the Church of England to validate CA and to have approved validation contracts with training partners. There is a Memorandum of Understanding with the Methodist Church such that (as of 2013-14)

[4] Given the small sample used in the metrics, we have taken these statistics from our HESA Return, September 2018, which includes all students.

[5] Data from HESES18. Some of these students are on Tier 4 Visas, whereas the majority have UK passports or leave to remain.

[6] Readers are licensed lay ministers (unpaid) within the Church of England.

the Foundation is the only approved centre for the training of their ordained ministers both Initial ministerial and probationary periods).

A relatively small number of our students come to learn at Queen's as a result of their own decision, rather than through the churches' selection processes. They may come to deepen their current role in a church as pastor or lay leader; they may come as part of an exploration of their vocation; they may come to study theology, choosing Queen's because it is a professing community of faith; they may come to enhance their qualifications as part of continued ministerial education; or they may come to pursue some form of theological research. They are normally self-funding, and some are supported by student finance provision. Some receive financial support from their local church. They are referred to in this documentation as "Independent" students, as they are independent of formal sponsorship and the accompanying ecclesial requirements.

We welcome both types of students because we believe that the communities of learning that are formed are richer because of the interaction between them: the study of theology is broadened from a narrow ministerial or ecclesial focus; the variety of motivations stimulates debate and discussion about the nature of theology and its place in ecclesial and public life. We are committed to maintaining these diverse communities of learning, whilst also being aware that there are different constraints on the two groups, different funding support for them, and different expectations on the part of both the Churches and the students. This requires care in communication and clarity in practice, so that parity of esteem and equality of access can be maintained despite these differences.

2.0 Teaching Quality

In respect of both metrics applicable to this section, we are aware that we are below the benchmark for our majority mode but are still at an encouraging figure overall. Furthermore, we note that, for our full-time mode, assessment and feedback is recognised as being in the top 10% of absolute performance and this is conversant with our External Examiners' commendation to us over recent years about the quality of our coursework/summative assessment feedback.

"I saw lots of excellent feedback: detailed, constructive, clear. The best is clear about attainment of Learning Outcomes, using language that correlates with the marking criteria."

External Examiner, Durham University Programmes

"Feedback is often excellent … students are engaging with relevant material that is helpful for ongoing development"

External Examiner, Newman University PG Programmes

At the same time, we note that the feedback from the 2017-18 CA student survey yields lower satisfaction in regard to the question "*I have received helpful feedback on my work",* and hence we have begun a process to triangulate these contrasting perceptions. In particular, the Audit Committee of the Foundation asked AMG[7] to institute a process of consultation with students and staff to explore how feedback is accessed and utilised, and how our students had interpreted this CA question (we also note that the wider CA sector response to this question was similarly low, and we will be exploring the implications of that within our sector).

2.1 Student Engagement

Across the institution, we seek to foreground processes of teaching and learning that are student focused, participative and experiential. Such processes take place inside and outside the classroom, include both campus-based and placement activity, and are geared to nurturing the skills and learning outcomes required for employment and ministerial role. Learning pathways, therefore, are designed and evaluated holistically, with a view to their impact on student experience, and will include elements of learning that are: student-only, social, outside of formal university credit bearing delivery and bespoke to each individual

[7] AMG: Academic Management Group - the main academic board of the Foundation; AQSG (Academic Quality and Standards Group), APG (Academic Planning Group), the Library & Resources Committee and the Research Committee are all sub committees of AMG. AMG and AQSG have student representation as core membership.

student. These pathways are developed and evaluated in processes that always include both current students and recent alumni (with the latter's contribution particularly important given the practical nature of the subject). Recent alumni feedback includes:

> *Studying "has been a hugely positive part of my life and set me off on the path of ministry with a joy for serving God that comes from learning from people who know their stuff and feel passionate about it."*

> *"The combination of learning and the ability to reflect on it while still in the 'real world' makes for better ministers than those who were full-time."*

As such, there is student representation across *all* aspects of institutional practice. This will of course include academic and teaching processes, but because we embed learning across all aspects of community life, student participation is necessary and integral to flourishing in these regards too.

> *"There is clearly a robust ethos of including students fully in the management of the TEI's life and programmes, and a strong sense that their views are taken very seriously."*
>
> *Queen's Durham University Liaison Officer*

Student engagement is therefore a conscious process that takes place throughout a student's learning, and is premised upon the particular demographics of our student body as adult learners, with a variety of family, work, educational and ecclesial experience and responsibilities. Hence participative learning occurs in a variety of contexts - 1-to-1 tutorials, leading worship in chapel, classroom seminars, during community meals and social interaction. As part of our accountability to sponsoring churches, we report on an individual student's character, spiritual development and relationships, as well as on their academic performance,[8] and therefore it is imperative that our learning and teaching is holistically-geared, so as to enable personal growth and flourishing that is only in part academic. Hence learning in the classroom is critical both for the subject being studied but also for the experience of studying academically in a diverse discipline; in so doing, students are enabled both to engage with difference and develop skills in critical engagement that take account of the diversity they encounter (ethnicity, gender, sexuality, prior academic experience and qualification, socio-economic background, theological and ecclesial understanding). Indeed, each undergraduate programme specification includes a specific learning outcome that relates to the student's capacity to engage with diversity, prejudice and self-awareness.[9]

We have a number of ways in which we practically embed student engagement with their learning goals. A student's commitment to their studies is primarily established, monitored and reviewed through their personal Learning and Formation Agreement (LFA), a document agreed with their Personal Tutor that lays out key learning goals, establishes mutual expectations, and sets personal and professional priorities. Alongside this, sponsored students also commit to a Link Church Agreement (LCA), a document countersigned by a minister which articulates how they wish to learn from participation in their local church context (i.e. the theoretical knowledge and skills gleaned from taught modules will invariably be practiced in context on a weekly basis in their link church). To inform and enhance this process, we hold regular training days for link church ministers to share expectations and good practice, and thus to maximise this learning opportunity. Monitoring of the LFA and LCA documentation culminates in sponsored students completing an annual Self-Assessment Form (SAF) that evaluates their learning and development for the particular academic year. The SAF subsequently feeds into the annual reporting process to the student's professional sponsor.

Another example of embedding student engagement is the review and implementation of a new process for module evaluation introduced during 2017-18. The process generates both quantitive and qualitative information, and enables students to review the module in class, both with and without staff presence. AMG debated the process at length and concluded that it was a critical tool for student learning, partly for module enhancement and delivery but also *personally* for individual students, as it provides a key opportunity for

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[8] Reports are set out under the sponsoring churches' learning outcome headings and the student's achievements of them, and therefore academic achievement is mentioned as relevant throughout the report.

[9] E.g. Cert HE in Theology, Ministry & Mission: "*evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches, communicating their findings sensitively and respectfully, showing self-awareness about their own beliefs, commitments and prejudices*"

the practice of giving and receiving critical feedback (a skill which will be essential for students in their very public ministerial roles). As such, we feel the module evaluation is an integral part of teaching and learning, and is not purely an aid to tutors in module planning. It encourages students to listen to each other's feedback and perceptions of the module, and thus to reflect on their own learning and feedback accordingly. The new mode has considerably increased response rates, and this enables the enhancement of delivery for the benefit of future student cohorts; for example, every module handbook includes the feedback and learning gleaned from the previous iteration. It also emphasises students' accountability to their peers and to their student successors; again, this is a skill which is integral to their future ministerial roles, but also underscores that their contributions and feedback may benefit others more than it benefits themselves.

A further instance of enabling students to engage and commit to their study and learning has been the involvement of students in the decision to seek registration with the Office for Students (OfS). Various student representatives were present for the stakeholders meeting (9.3.18); they read the briefing paperwork, contributed to the ensuing discussion as to the appropriateness of joining the OfS, and were able to vote accordingly to recommend a decision. As such, they were able to discuss in detail the potential positive and negative impacts upon students that OfS membership might produce. Students present voted largely to proceed with registration with OfS, in spite of potential resource impacts, because they saw the benefit of the learning gleaned from retaining a diverse student body, one that would have access to different types of student finance sources and tier 4 visa allows. They also valued the accountability and external reference points that participation in the wider HE sector – and not just the ecclesial context – enables.

2.2 Valuing Teaching

Teaching is core to us as an institution, but we define teaching in its broadest sense, so as to include the student's holistic experience of learning.

To meet the requirements of both adult learners and our sponsoring churches, contact hours are significantly high for the sector for a variety of reasons:

- Sponsored students need to demonstrate that they meet *professional* learning outcomes as well as academic learning outcomes. Whilst the majority of both these types are met via credit-bearing modules, some of the former are partly assessed outside of the formal academic programme.
- Classroom delivery does not take traditional lecture format, and is more akin to a seminar mode of discourse. Students are expected to participate actively throughout classroom sessions, and to bring their own knowledge and experience to the discussion. Such an approach takes seriously the fact that our students are adult learners, invariably with previous experience of church or ministry, and we seek to build on, as well as critique and evaluate, their prior learning. It also means recognising a diversity of theological approaches and perspectives within the room, rather than lecturers just imparting information or content. Faculty are as much concerned with *how* they deliver modular material as they are with *what* they deliver, as they seek to model transferable skills to students in this regard.
- As mentioned above, 'contact' exists in various other pedagogical formats (link church expectations, college chapel, personal tutorials, cell groups, attendance at meals (required), placement etc.), and such aspects filter into reviewing the LFA and annual reporting.
- Contact exists for faculty outside the classroom as well, for instance providing assessed formative feedback on worship and preaching, community meetings, attendance at meals (required) alongside requirements for a minimum 6 personal tutorials a year for a full-time student. The tutorial process produces the initial draft of the student's end-of-year report, which is then reviewed in collegial fashion by faculty to ensure a balanced and holistic assessment of the student's learning and development. The final form is then discussed with the student prior to dissemination, so that they are able to calibrate how they are perceived to be progressing in their learning and formation.
- The level of pastoral support provided for all students continues to be a recognised institutional strength, which is noted by QAA in their official review process (see section 3 below). This is formally provided by personal tutors, but there is a recognised tension that the personal tutor is also responsible for reporting on the student. Hence there are other mechanisms to support students in their learning, such as the chaplain, the wellbeing officer and the independent student support officer. Various external discretionary funds, provided by sponsoring churches, also allow students

to access support outside of the Foundation, such as for professional counselling or other health needs.

The peer review (PR) of teaching system is a long-standing part of the annual quality cycle for academic members of staff. This has been recently reviewed and developed, borrowing from partner university processes, but presented in bespoke form to take account of our institutional context. Much teaching now happens in teams so as to draw on various faculty specialisms and to ensure consistency of delivery to different cohorts. This has a number of tangible benefits that we have identified, including (but not limited to): peer accountability, increased diversity, enabling a more discursive teaching and learning style and bringing other specialisms into the modular discourse. The peer review process, however, consciously pairs colleagues who do *not* teach together, thereby to focus on delivery, resourcing, and student engagement. This process is publicly manifest to students to demonstrate that faculty are 'reviewed' just as students themselves are (and thus to contribute to that wider process of teaching quality and enhancement). The PR outcomes are discussed with line managers as part of annual appraisal, but will also filter into wider faculty discussions around sharing best practice (these happen on a frequent, and at least termly, basis). Alongside PR there is a regular programme of peer supervision where faculty meet in small groups to evaluate their own working and teaching practices.

Staff development is a termly faculty staff agenda item and sits alongside individual personal development programmes drawn up as a result of appraisal. Recent examples include: good practice on working with deaf students; using fiction in theological study; and engaging with recent research on teaching of theology-to Christian adult learners. Also embedded in our teaching enhancement processes has been a recent review of institutional assessment practice and strategy that contributed to a wider CA review.

2.3 Rigour and stretch

We have confidence in the robustness of our assessment process, with the progress of assignments monitored through the cycle of first marking, moderation and external examination, as similarly evidenced by affirmations from a number of recent External Examiners (EE) and `University Liaison Officers (ULO). For example:

- ☑ "*There are robust systems in place to ensure that marking is consistent. There are clear procedures for internal moderation and well-developed marking criteria that line up with degree classification*" (Newman PG External Examiner)

We are clear that recent EEs have reviewed, in detail, the entirety of the module experience - particularly from the student perspective - and have therefore considered aspects such as module handbooks, learning outcomes, VLE resources, and particularly the use of 'flipped classroom' approaches across iterations of a module. As a result, the EE is attentive to where student learning has (and has not) occurred, and is thus able to review and assess the learning provision accordingly.

Integral to stretching student learning is an institutional commitment to diversity, whether in terms of subject matter, pedagogical approach or, particularly, a diversity of voices in reading lists/resources. We are pleased that our ULO has commended us in this regard:

> *"Queen's is … a leader in the sector in relation to questions of diversity – in ways that are reflected in the diversity of the staff body, in the framing of curricula and bibliographies, in the direct tackling of questions of diversity in various modules, and in the sensitivity to related questions in the whole student (and staff) experience."*
>
> Prof. Mike Higton, ULO, Durham University

Hence, for example, most Queen's students should expect to pursue modules in Black Theology, or Theology and Gender, and should expect to engage, in all modules, with perceptions and insights drawn from the global church, and particularly in the majority world. Such diversity also permeates our modes of

assessment, such that we seek to test skills that both meet the requisite academic and professional learning outcomes and allow the flourishing of a variety of learning styles.

Similarly integral is the fundamental approach which undergirds our teaching, namely the perspective of 'disruptive learning', drawing on the work of leading theological educator Professor John Hull.[10] At Queen's, it is an expected outcome of the teaching process for a student to encounter views *different* to those they have previously held. As such, engagement can have academic, personal and professional implications, and faculty work with students to navigate through the disruptions that engaging with different views, often on quite deep levels, generates. Hence student feedback on a module that expresses such anxiety or disruption – often initially perceived in negative terms – actually becomes the raw material for students to be stretched and / or strengthened in their theological knowledge and understanding. Students are thus not expected to 'change' their position – though that may well result – but rather to be enabled, through the process of engaging with difference, to articulate more robustly how and why they hold the position they so do. This is even more necessary for the ministerial roles they will eventually inhabit, as they will be serving in ecclesial and public contexts where such diversity is operative and where they will require skills in successfully handling and navigating disagreement.

"In educational terms, Queen's is fighting-fit. Students are given exemplary educational opportunities"

External Examiner, Newman University UG programme

The rigour and stretch required of our students by their professional bodies in addition to that of the academic qualification is described in section 2.1 above. For these reasons, as well as for other academic factors, our programmes are structured such that the element of independent study increases the higher the academic level. This is conversant with the situation of many of our level 6 students, who have normally transitioned from study primarily based on-campus to study primarily located alongside their new ministerial roles. As such, they are equipped and expected to assume more responsibility for their own study patterns and to engage actively in independent research.

Where permissible under our admissions requirements, we also seek to give opportunities for appropriately qualified students to work at the highest academic level available to them. For example, many of our students are already graduates in other disciplines but have no prior formal theological education. Successful completion of the CertHE in Theology, Ministry & Mission can allow such students to transition to a Level 7 programme if their results in the CertHE demonstrate the transferability of their general academic skills.

2.4 Feedback

"Feedback to students on assessed work continues to be exemplary … the quality of feedback is a beacon of good practice."

External Examiner, Newman UG programme

"I continue to be impressed by the range of assessments used and how well they are tailored to the assessment of learning outcomes and by the strengths of the curriculum at all levels"

External Examiner, Durham University UG programme

We place high value on the feedback offered to students, whether formally through assessment, informally through tutorial relationships, or via external professional stakeholders (for example, placement supervisors). As noted in paragraph 2.3 above, External Examiners consistently affirm the quality of our feedback for summative assessment. Since we assess students using 100% coursework ,and do so across the year, such feedback permeates the entire student journey and is manifest in several forms: detailed

[10] The late Professor John Hull was Emeritus Professor of Religious Education at the University of Birmingham and member of Queen's faculty. He published extensively in areas relating to theological education, religious education, blindness, disability and Christian mission. His life and work are chronicled in the 2016 BAFTA-nominated film *Notes on Blindness*.

feedback on all assessments (both summative and formative), placement supervisor reports, worship/ preaching feedback (both in Queen's and in the local church), the annual student report, and the student's own SAF.

In respect of feedback for summative assessment, we have been encouraged by our External Examiner to cultivate the practice of feeding forward – i.e. as well as commenting on the specific submission, also to advise students on how they might improve in subsequent assessment albeit on a different topic or discipline. As such the *suggestions for improvement* section is now more extensively used by faculty.

Where previously formative assessment had been operative on a more informal basis, under our validating partner (new in 2014-15), it is now a formal requirement for module delivery. Faculty regularly share their experience of using different types of formative assessment, and this serves to establish good practice in this area, and the role of a formative task and feedback is now foregrounded in all module delivery. We use formative assessment to strengthen students' engagement with the module content and to inform preparation for summative assessment, as well as giving the opportunity for exploring other themes raised within the module.

With the roll out of Turnitin for all online marking from 2016-17, we have expanded the ways in which feedback can be offered to student submissions, utilising the opportunity for specific in-text comments along with summary rubric relating to the achievement of module learning outcomes. More recently there have been extensive discussions with both faculty and student representatives about the use of in-text comments and the balance between these and the summary rubrics and these were extremely positive about this new feature. As such we were expecting students to actively engage with the particularity of intext commentary / feedback and to see evidence of this more fully in subsequent summative assessment. This accords with NSS responses for 2017 and 2018 to the effect that 90%[11] of students said they received helpful feedback on their work (significantly higher than the sector average, particularly 2018). However, the recent CA survey response to the question around the helpfulness of feedback (whilst in line with all other CA institutions) intimated that students were not taking the opportunity to use feedback. We previously suspected that this related to the fact that students could access provisional marks without having to open up the attached feedback. In the light of the survey response, AMG has engaged in wider discussion to explore with students the disparity between the External Examiner comments on feedback and the results from the survey, and thus to probe further how students are using summative feedback and commentary that they have received. Further guidance has also been issued to students to remind them of how to access the feedback and the potential benefits (academic and professional) of so doing.

Feedback is also offered to students outside of formal academic / credit-bearing processes, with a particular eye to professional practice and development. This takes place via: placement reporting, feedback on leading worship, annual report to the sponsoring churches, personal tutorials review against the LFA. The latter is particularly geared to the student's personal progression through their overall programme of study (in a way that also takes account of their particular situation, and impact, for example, of care responsibilities / paid work/ illness etc.) enabling them to evaluate and revise interim targets as well as to identify new areas of focus and specialism. As also referred to above (2.1), this means that a student's progression through a programme can be both self-directed and varied, and thus programmes are necessarily bespoke. This also means that it becomes difficult to make decisions premised upon data comparing cohorts working under the same conditions, since our population effectively fragments into many very small comparative groups; hence, as much as possible, we treat students on an individual, 1-to-1 basis.

3.0 Learning Environment

As above (paragraph 2), we are aware that both metrics applicable to this section are below the benchmark for our majority mode, but are still at an encouraging figure overall. "Joined up" student support, linking academic, pastoral and professional aspects) has been commended as an area of good practice by QAA in their last full HER 2016:

> "*The integrated academic and pastoral support for all students … is highly responsive and facilitates their development and achievement.*"

11 90.4% = 2017-18, 88.5% 2016-17

We note that the NSS responses for academic support in 2016-17 and 2017-18 are well above the 'sector' wide % agreement value. We further note that the lowest score is for NSS Q14, which pertains to 'students study choice'. This is unsurprising to us for two reasons: first, a Queen's student generally has far less choice of course options than a standard university one, since these are either fully or partly proscribed by their sponsoring churches and the requisite learning outcomes for professional practice; second, a number of students have chosen 'not applicable' as their answer to this question, thereby reflecting their understanding of the reality of this situation.

In terms of the continuation metrics, we note that this is only applicable to our minority mode of full-time students whose % / numerical population is already small (headcount 45). Coupled with this, it is possible for students with a prior degree in a different subject who are funded by their churches full-time for two years to convert - in their second year of study - to a postgraduate programme, which is part-time in university credit bearing terms, supplemented by formational requirements (not for credit) and completed in future years in their ministerial context. This means that those students formerly full-time in year one would show as 'non-continuers' in year two of our figures. We would also note that we are regularly sent a small number of students who are sponsored full-time, but for one academic year only; hence they would again appear as "non-continuers" in these figures.

3.1 Resources

As most Queen's students are re-entering study after a significant period out of education, we operate several programmes of study and research/information skills training to enable them to transition quickly into, or back into, study in Higher Education. These programmes cover a variety of topics such as note taking, speed reading, assessment preparation and database searching, and also introduce students to the different learning resources that are available to them, such as the VLE or e-books. To expedite this transition, where possible, students are invited to complete pre-induction study skills programmes via Moodle, and / or are advised on where they might improve skills such as word processing or note taking before their studies formally commence.

As noted above (2.2), we have relatively high contact hours for modules, particularly for those at level 4. As the student moves up through academic levels, there is a greater expectation for independent study, and at level 6, all students will necessarily undertake an extended piece of independent research. At the same time, though, even those students working at level 4 are expected to develop skills of independent thinking and practice, and there is a standard Key Skills learning outcome for the majority of level 4 modules as follows: *Carry out a guided task that involves: independent inquiry; management of time and resources; using IT; meeting deadlines; evaluating the task and learning from it.* (There are similar 'independent thinking' learning outcomes for level 5 and 6). For example, level 5 attachments (placements in a non-ecclesial context that take place in addition to those 'placements' mentioned elsewhere in this document) are arranged by students themselves, in consultation with a tutor who has dedicated responsibility for the attachment process, so as to inculcate responsibility and ownership of their own professional experience and learning.

The QAA HER review in 2016 commended the library as an area of good practice in supporting student learning:

> "*The comprehensive library provision … is very effectively managed and enhanced, and provides an extensive and responsive service to students.*"

The library at Queen's is one of the largest theological libraries in the West Midlands region. We have a stock of c. 50,000 books and 60 current journal subscriptions, plus access to over 500 journals online. Around 750 new books are added to the collection each year. The library is managed by a full-time librarian, who is on site and available to students (Mon-Fri, 9-5) for advice on all matters relating to library and research matters. Our annual library survey shows the aspects most valued by students are: 24 hour access, breadth of stock, on line access to services, journals and databases and having a full time Librarian The library gives particular attention to resourcing dispersed students who are less regularly on campus: it operates a satellite library service at our small base in Shallowford supplemented by a postal and weekly staff courier service; it continues to expand provision of online material (both books and journals) and book boxes for various student cohorts at their request; it encourages access to alternate University libraries via

the SCONUL scheme or to the Access to Research (public library) scheme. The reservation system and standard loan periods are also tailored to the standard student being on campus once a week or less, and also draws on resources from partner universities (one of which is accessed via the 'Hub' mentioned below).

We have invested significantly in campus technology and IT capability in the last ten years, with all students having secure access to online storage (in house) and a number of computers being set up with accessible SpLD software. Currently we are in the middle of a programme of upgrading in classroom learning resources, including use of smart screens and improved hearing loop systems. We are part of the JANET network and therefore benefit from good practice in a stable web environment.

All sponsored students resident on campus are entitled to dedicated study space in their flat or in a separate room. There are communal spaces set aside for evening or residential students. The Library and Learning Resources Committee is a subcommittee of the AMG and monitors this area of institutional practice and developments. We operate a Moodle VLE (www.queens.commonawards.org) that has been used extensively for teaching delivery for a number of years. In August 2017, we moved our VLE hosting to a central Church of England Ministry Division 'Hub', expanding e-resources available to students, notably SCM Book collection.[12] Moodle provision has also been enhanced by the addition of Big Blue Button (BBB) functionality, which allows for high quality participatory online seminars and presentations. This is of particular benefit to dispersed students, who meet for regular tutorial support during online module delivery. We are also enhancing access to online resources through Moodle by developing access to the CLA Repository. Faculty have been commended by the External Examiner for supplementing reading material during delivery with accessible online /scanned content (and thereby expanding the flipped classroom content referred to in 2.3 above).

Sponsored students have access to a range of resources to assist their study via their professional body. This can include travel grants, book grants, placement expenses, access to spiritual advisors or mentors.

3.2 Scholarship, research and professional practice

Teaching and learning takes place in an environment where teaching staff are research-active either through academic inquiry or professional practice. Staff publish regularly in academic and ecclesial fora, participate in national/international conferences (e.g. AAR, SBL, BNTC, BIAPT, SST)[13], and are active in denominational bodies and fora (e.g. the Liturgical Commission, Methodist Faith and Order Committee, Safeguarding). Staff act as External Examiners for other HE theological departments and institutions, or as reviewers for PER,[14] as well as selectors both for church candidating processes and initial stationing committees.[15] All this serves to ensure that the Foundation is able to ensure that training in professional practice for students is current and up to date.

> *"The Queen's Foundation does a very good job of preserving a research ethos amongst its staff: both maintaining an internal research culture, and encouraging staff to take part in external research conversations of various kinds"*
>
> *Queen's Durham University Liaison Officer*

Assessment is frequently research-based in that it encourages students to engage actively with their particular context(s), be that through a church/community survey, a formal piece of independent research or the encouragement to map their particular placement or attachment milieu. From level 4 onwards, students

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[12] A resource available to all Common Awards (CA) theological institutions. We have our own discrete server space for our VLE, but access this application via a communal area, which also includes subscriptions to Durham University provided resources.

[13] AAR - American Academy of Religion; SBL - Society of Biblical Literature; BNTC - British New Testament Conference; BIAPT - British & Irish Association for Practical Theology; SST - Society for the Study of Theology.

14 PER - Periodic External Review, the Churches' institutional process to ensure good standards in ministerial training. An institution is externally reviewed every six years. See https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/qae_handbook_sept_2017.pdf

15 Initial stationing: the process by which Methodist students are matched with their probationary ministerial posts.

are encouraged to use EBSCO/ATLA to solicit recent research in their particular subject area, especially from academic journals and edited volumes.

We currently have around twenty post graduate researchers (PGRs) and approximately 50% of faculty are also PhD supervisors (across a variety of sub discipline areas). 70% of academic staff are PhD-qualified or above, and several hold HEA fellowships (with others being formally encouraged to pursue such recognition). All employed academic staff are contractually entitled to a one term period of study leave within a five year period of service. All employed academic staff have a budget allocated annually to enable them to attend conferences, belong to professional societies or bodies, and to purchase books and other necessary resources to support their teaching.

3.3 Personalised learning

As noted above (section 3), once enrolled, there are few curriculum options for students (necessarily so, due to ecclesial requirements). Nonetheless, initial enrolment considers all students' personal background, prior learning and experience alongside any specific ecclesial recommendations and priorities for the student, such that a student's programme is appropriate and particular to their personal situation. Similarly, there are particular pedagogical and content-based reasons for the order in which students take modules, and this ensures a logical trajectory through a programme as learning builds. For example, before engaging in work on placement all students will complete work on pastoral and contextual theology in order to give them a framework for their learning on placement, along with the appropriate tools to enable this.

Since each pathway is individually approved by the sponsoring church, we demonstrate that we meet learning outcomes mainly through shared, cross-denominational modules. Where there is denominational specificity (e.g. in practice around sacraments or ministerial remits), module groups are able to split to consider denominational practice, and then regather to explore the ecumenical implications. Similarly, our 'Bridging into Ministry' course (a not-for-credit offering taken by all ministerial students at very end of their studies to prepare them for the transition to recognised public ministry) runs in several streams so as to enable both denominational specificity and ecumenical unity, whilst also allowing interchange between students who have been studying on different pathways. Likewise, programmes can be personally tailored to avoid unnecessary repetition of learning and take account of practicalities such as days of availability from paid employment or childcare, and/or exploit particular avenues of learning that the student wishes or needs to explore. For example, a student could be enrolled on a programme mainly taught on Tuesday evenings but, if available, access a module being taught at other times of the week or weekends (aimed primarily at a different pathway).

'Not-for-credit' versions of modules exist in order to allow students to fulfil professional learning outcomes in areas/topics that are outside their credit bearing programme; likewise, some students pursue personalised 'not-for-credit programmes' that focus on achieving professional / ministerial requirements rather than an academic award. For example, a student already doctorally qualified in theology may pursue a bespoke formational programme that facilitates learning in areas that are of particular interest to them, and which also enables professional learning outcomes (in practical areas) to be met. At the same time, students still learn *together*, and in designing bespoke pathways, a student's learning cohort remains a primary consideration since we place such a high value on learning with and from each other.

Once the programme of study has commenced, and particularly in view of our student demographic, we have mechanisms in place for the student to vary the rate of their study in different ways (as needed / appropriate). This might be in terms of flexibility as to ongoing pathway (e.g. moving from full-time to part-time), or could be in terms of a specifically designed independent learning pathway with negotiated deadlines, or could utilise the option of exit awards. Students are well supported in making such decisions: e.g. if deciding between a suspension or change of pathway, a student will be supported by their Personal Tutor (personal), their designated Director of Studies (Academic) and their Centre Director (Professional) , all working together to ensure that the three elements of the decision are discussed holistically and thus the best outcome is achieved for the student concerned in terms of their retention and progression through studies.

Also, as a result of our student demographic, and the ultimate goal of their studies, we also seek to involve partners and families of students within the scope of their period of time at Queen's, as we recognise the impact on both families and the students themselves (i.e. our students do not study in isolation). This is

manifest in several ways: partners sessions during induction, support to families living on site (meals, student-run creche, advice on schools), and the partners support group (who organise social events and send representatives to the Staff Student Community Forum (SSCF) to ensure the partners' perspective is considered on campus and community decisions).

4.0 Student Outcomes and Learning Gain

The metrics for these LOs are very good, and indeed, could not be much better! However, although unusual for the sector, they should not be a surprise for our context, for several reasons:

- The majority of our students are sponsored by churches with employment as the goal of that sponsorship. The number of students who are sponsored nationally correlates to the number of expected vacancies once appropriate training is completed, so the expectation of successful transition to initial employment is high.
- Coupled with this, Queen's faculty are actively involved in the recommendations for transition into employment (salaried or non-stipendiary (unsalaried)) and thus staff are well placed to assist and advise in that process.
- Because of the annual professional reporting process, students for whom there may be concern in respect to their suitability for their ministerial office would be advised of that at an early stage of their training, and will be reviewed by professional / ecclesial panels accordingly. If as a result of these panels sponsorship is withdrawn, the student has the option of transferring to independent study (they are not withdrawn from their university programme), and such decisions tend to happen early in the life cycle of a student's training, and well before graduation.

Thus, whilst we are obviously pleased with these metrics and wish to celebrate the achievements to which they testify, and whilst they are not exclusively made up of sponsored students, we recognise there are significant contextual reasons why they are at such a high level (and that there are other contributory factors in respect in this regard).

> *"The design of syllabi, integrating theory and the practice of skills for ministry; the choice of assessments that do that; and the range of modules make this an excellent curriculum, appropriate for formation for ministry."*
>
> *External Examiner, Durham University Programmes*

Furthermore, whilst we recognise the staged collection of Graduate Outcomes will assist in capturing a significantly higher proportion of our students than it does now, we hope that the GO survey questions will still be shaped to elicit responses from students that are tailored to the outcomes from *their studies* rather than from the paid work that they do. For example, none of our students would consider themselves 'employed' by the Church of England or Methodist Church (legally they are not), and non-stipendiary students may be retired or have a job which they have continued throughout studies and after ordination. Indeed, it is perfectly plausible and indeed quite likely, that a student may be earning a significantly higher salary prior to commencing at Queen's and have given up that work for a significantly lower stipend (or no stipend at all) to work for their church. In the light of this, we checked out our understanding of the DLHE questions with HESA before putting them to our students to ensure that the answers reflected the impact of the learning that students had done at Queen's and were thus appropriate for DLHE (for example, a part time student who worked throughout their studies and continued in the same job after graduating could answer the questions about that employment and give evidence for which their study at Queen's could claim no 'credit'). This is particularly the case when the academic award that the students pursue is not necessarily a condition for successful entry into employment, however "successful" their (required) study at Queen's is.

4.1 Employment and further study

As seen above, we have a high rate of students entering into ministerial positions and thus successful achievement of their educational and professional goals. Allied to this, we have been recognised by the Methodist Church as the key provider of a comprehensive programme study building on Common Awards in initial training for Methodist Probationers, and similarly by the Anglican Diocese of Lichfield as their approved provider for academic curacy training. As a result of this, therefore, a significant number of our 'leaving' students are able to progress in their studies by immediately 'returning' to us to either complete their existing academic award or move to the next level of study. Their church (as 'employer') agrees any training pathway in order to ensure it meets requisite Learning Outcomes for the next stage of their

ministerial career. We also offer a number of bespoke pathways for other ministers seeking professional development, including progression to postgraduate and research programmes.

Within the Bridging into Ministry course (see 3.3. above), there are sessions on good professional practice on continuing personal and academic development (e.g. one how to keep up to date in terms of theological knowledge and skills).

We also work with a number of students who are independent of formal sponsorship in their transition into 'employment'. Such employment may be on a voluntary basis though involvement in their local church, and enabling them to minister / serve in a way so as to demonstrate the learning that they have gleaned from their studies. Or it may be in a more secular context, in a paid role, where personal tutors work with students to explore how a theological mindset impacts upon their particular professional area. As 99% of our independent students are mature adults, who have had a variety of careers before and during their study, they do not choose to study at Queen's with a view to employment for the first time (as most university students normally do). Instead, our flexible approach to work and study enables independent students to develop their level of qualification in a supportive environment whilst retaining their work and / or family responsibilities.

4.2 Employability and transferable skills

As noted above (section 1), our curricula are designed with both professional and academic learning outcomes in mind. As such, sponsoring churches (as "employers") are involved with the development of all aspects of curricula, be it specific modules, the particular shape or tenor of a programme, or the extent to which, for example, context and placement learning are respectively weighted. The churches also sign off the curriculum pathways as appropriate for meeting the LOs of the respective church. This is reviewed by a cycle of periodic ecclesial review (PER - mentioned in 3.2 above) which takes place alongside, and with the input of, the validating university as one, holistic process. Accompanying this, representatives of the sponsoring churches sit on Queen's governing body, and are able, therefore, to advise the College on the impact of strategic decisions upon the churches' professional requirements. Several faculty roles are joint 'college-church' appointments; this further ensures the link between professional practice, the teaching of it and the maintenance of requisite academic standards.

We are currently developing a postgraduate pathway in Black Theology in direct response to an expressed need for the theological equipping of ministers from a variety of BME Churches that wish to draw on their own particular experience and context. Two of our Governors represent two of these churches, and they have sent several students and provided sponsorship for them to enable that theological training. The MA pathway above is the next step in these developments.

The "employer relationship" is also present at student level and linked directly to the student themselves. This is manifest in several ways: Methodist student 'accompanists', link church ministers, and Methodist Oversight tutors (Queen's members of staff). The framework provided by the LFA, along with induction briefing sessions and regular personal tutorials, ensure students make the best use of these resources available to them, and enable the linking of academic learning with professional outcomes at every stage of a student's transition through their studies.

All CA academic programmes have as their stated purpose: *The purpose of the programme is to offer the first stage of personal and professional preparation for a range of Christian ministries as well as to satisfy the aspirations of those students who undertake their studies to enhance, broaden and deepen their discipleship and ministry in other contexts.*[16]
The programmes are tailored for the following two audiences:

- Preparing people for professional ministry and mission within churches
- Preparing people for lay ministry and mission in the world.

As such, a student's entire experience of study at Queen's is tied to this purpose and context, and thus the content, assessment and feedback are shaped to achieving knowledge skills and attributes appropriate for recognised ministerial role or service. For example, assessment of a Biblical Studies module may be through the production of a sermon and commentary (as such tasks will be core to their ministerial role). Or a portfolio for Denominational Studies may include the production of a resource aimed at introducing a

[16] https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/common.awards/2017_08_09_Cert120_prog_specs.pdf

newcomer to that particular church. Likewise, our curricula are also shaped to the stage of ministry in which a student is engaged. For example, modules undertake by Probationers and Curates will necessarily have significant content on leadership (particularly on its public aspect) and will navigate processes such as negotiating the change of ministerial context, role and identity.

Hence, we constantly review our curriculum and its successful meeting of professional learning outcomes, and amend and enhance it accordingly. For example, in response to staff and student feedback as to the experience of our corporate worship together, we recognised the importance of existing worship leading groups within our full-time provision. In order to enhance these worship leading groups, staff are now present with and to the planning and evaluation of worship, and are better able to give feedback both to individuals and to the group as a whole. Such reviews also draw on the experience of recent alumni who are regularly surveyed by the institution as to how their learning and study has prepared them for the next stage of their ministerial practice.

Ecclesial placements are integral components in preparing students for their ultimate employment, and are thus undertaken by all students in some form. Placements are managed by two dedicated tutors (working with a wider team) within the Centre for Ministerial Formation, who share responsibility for designing, assessing and evaluating the student placement experience. Each Placement Tutor is responsible for organising placements within their own denomination (Methodist and Anglican). This ensures that particular denominational expectations continue to be met and that stakeholders (such as Diocesan Directors of Ordinands or Methodist Oversight Committees) can be appropriately briefed on a student's progress. An end-of-placement review may be held with the Placement Supervisor, the student (and their Personal Tutor if required) to evaluate the experience and reflect on the learning gained.

At the end of any placement, students have a university credit bearing piece of work to complete that is assessed accordingly. However, in addition, the placement supervisor (as a "representative" of the professional body) completes a formal report regarding the student's performance whilst on placement and this is a key ingredient in the production of the student's end of year report. Where the academic assessment will assess knowledge and understanding, the placement report will reflect on character and professional conduct, and both concerns or praise raised via this method are significant factors in assessing a student's suitability for public ministry.

All students participating in placement activity receive safeguarding training, utilising the specific denominational training resources of the Church of England and the Methodist Church as appropriate. The Queen's Foundation Safeguarding Officer supports individual safeguarding issues and cases as they arise. Safeguarding training is delivered by two dedicated members of staff (Queen's Foundation Safeguarding Officer and the Deputy Safeguarding Officer) experienced in professional safeguarding and training delivery nationally.

4.3 Positive outcomes for all

We refer to the demographic figures above in respect of our student population and note the high value of groups normally regarded as high-risk in terms of recruitment, retention and success in terms of Higher Education. The balance of the population provides natural support and examples of success from within the student body; mechanisms put in place by the college ensure students learn with / from each other, and contact between different cohorts enables an understanding of and appreciation of the value of diversity. This is reflected in our core values and ethos statement (see section 1 above), and is also embedded in our institutional practice and curricula. For example, modules that enable students to engage in depth with Black, liberation, majority world and contextual theologies are foregrounded in the curriculum, and these encapsulate our institutional distinctiveness. Similarly, our admissions processes explicitly take account of the differing needs and educational backgrounds of adult learners (e.g. going beyond just those trained within book cultures), so as to enable as wide an access to HE study as possible, whilst also ensuring students are able to flourish within the Queen's environment. One specific aspect of this has been to develop a Taster Course that enables potential students to experience the environment and feel of studying theology at an HE level before committing to credit-bearing study. This process also allows candidates to demonstrate their academic potential if they have would not have otherwise met admissions criteria.

We have described above (2.3) how we operate an inclusive environment. Following student and staff feedback in terms of engagement with issues of diversity (particularly but not exclusively around questions of racial diversity), we are planning an earlier and more thorough approach to training and awareness-

raising around unconscious bias. We have already delivered some training on this within our *Bridging into Ministry* programme (and have the subject specialism in-house) and are rolling it out more widely across the Foundation, and at an earlier stage in students' training.

Our students' overall well-being is integral to their flourishing. Queen's therefore has a well-being officer who along with other tutorial staff, works with students in and through the transitions and demands that intensive and demanding processes of learning and formation can generate, as well as being attentive to student needs in terms of (dis)ability, safeguarding and health. Well-being sessions are offered to all campus-based of full-time students (including a special well-being 'clinic' session as part of induction of new students), and we are exploring how this can be offered to part-time or more dispersed students.

Our wider curriculum also attends to ways in which positive outcomes are achieved by those from disadvantaged backgrounds - and not just by the students themselves. For example, a programme in social justice leadership helps students develop skills and confidence in this area and has become an integral part of the weekly programme for full-time students, with a member of faculty particularly designated accordingly to work on leadership in social justice matters. Queen's has become a principal partner institution of Citizens UK and we seek to draw more explicitly on their resources and approach in working with students on developing skills in community organising. This has resulted in a series of sessions dedicated to enabling students to engage with the social justice ramifications to ministry, and to a number of student groups focused on particular areas of social justice e.g. homelessness and food waste.[17]

Queen's "offers a very high quality of theological education and formation for ministry, resourced by an excellent curriculum, creative teaching and support for learning, passionate, collegial educators and innovative syllabi."

External Examiner, Durham University Programmes

Conclusion

It is appropriate and fitting, one suggests, in a commentary on teaching at Queen's, to give the final word to students, as to how their respective programmes of study have equipped them for whatever goal (ministry, employment, personal or otherwise) they have sought. Here is what some of our recent alumni have said:

"Queen's was just perfect for what I was looking for. I'm not a natural academic, so I was slightly nervous before I began. However I found all the staff to be very approachable and helpful if I was struggling. … Queen's is a great college and I was grateful to have been a part of it."

"I would not have missed the opportunity to develop spiritually, academically and in community through being at Queen's and recommend it as a place that equips ministers for the 21st Century."

"I would like to celebrate meeting new people; and a journey of faith and learning that has led me closer to a knowledge of God, new models of God and a broader understanding."

"Aside from the teaching, Queen's has offered me a healthy model for ordained life. I have left Queen's knowing more about myself as a person, a leader, a priest and as a Christian."

[17] http://www.queens.ac.uk/life-at-queens/student-involvement/informal-student-involvement