University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Friday 28 May 2010

Validation Report: Master of Theology in Scottish Church History and Scottish Theology: Free Church of Scotland College

Ms Rona Miller, Senate Office

Summary Report of the Validation of the Master of Theology in Scottish Church History and Scottish Theology at the Free Church of Scotland College - Thursday 13 May 2010

Panel Members

Professor D Watt, Convener of Academic Standards Committee (Convener)
Professor D Jasper, Professor of Literature and Theology, University of Glasgow
Professor L Kirkpatrick, Union Theological College, Belfast (External Panel Member) Dr V
Kolocotroni, Associate Dean (Postgraduate), Faculty of Arts
Reverend Professor J Mackay, Free Church of Scotland College
Reverend Professor J Macleod, Free Church of Scotland College
Winston Tay, Student Representative, Free Church of Scotland College

Programme Staff

Professor Donald Macleod, Principal of Free Church of Scotland College,
Systemic Theology
Professor John R McIntosh, Church History and Church Principles

In attendance: Ms R Miller, Senate Office (Clerk)

1   Summary

1.1   The Free Church of Scotland College (henceforth 'The College) has been a partner institution of the University of Glasgow (henceforth 'The University') since November 2001, and The University validates their degree programmes.

1.2   A Statement of Intent for the proposed taught Master of Theology in Scottish Church History and Scottish Theology (MTh) was presented to Academic Standards Committee at its meeting on 19 February 2010 (Min ASC/2009/47).

1.3   The Validation Review Panel met on 13 May 2010 and unanimously agreed to **recommend to Academic Standards Committee and to Senate**, that the Master of Theology be approved for a period of six years from September 2010, with the recommendation that the title be amended to 'Master of Theology in Scottish Church History and Theology'.

2   Recommendations

        The Panel made four advisory recommendations to the programme staff that:

2.1   the title of the programme be changed to 'Master of Theology in Scottish Church History and Theology' with the integration of the two themes into a structure to allow students to chose any three of the reading courses on offer;

2.2 the assessment of the study skills course be integrated into the reading courses so that there would be explicit assessment of the skills covered by that course;

2.3 there be six supervisory sessions, around fortnightly, on each reading course; and

2.4 there be internal double marking on the dissertation.

3 Introduction

3.1 The College was founded in 1843 and is situated in the heart of Edinburgh. Its mission includes the objectives to 'share their Scottish theological heritage with students from overseas and gain enrichment by their insights; provide research facilities, particularly in the areas of Scottish Theology and Presbyterian Studies; and promote rigorous and reverent Christian scholarship, matching the academic standards of the ancient Scottish universities.' While The College's allegiance is to Reformed theology it welcomes students from all church backgrounds.

3.2 The College became a partner institution of The University in November 2001 and the University validated The College's Bachelor of Theology (BTh) in 2002, revalidated in May 2007. The College also offers a Master of Theology (by Research), validated by The University.

3.3 The College put forward this proposal in the absence of a dedicated taught Master of Theology programme being offered anywhere, in the field of Scottish Church History or Theology, despite the disciplinary area forming the roots of much church teaching and practice throughout the world. It is intended to provide postgraduate level study for those interested in this field, and a potential basis for Research for those students interested in researching the subject without prior degree level knowledge.

3.4 The Regulations for the proposed MTh align with the 2009-10 Master of Theology regulations for the Faculty of Arts.

3.5 The proposed curriculum includes taking one study skills and research skills course (non-assessed) along with three 40-credit reading courses from six options, three focused mainly on Scottish Church History and three on Scottish Theology, and a 60-credit dissertation. The three 40-credit reading courses would be taken through supervised directed study. Students would also have the option to attend BTh Scottish Church History classes where relevant.

3.6 The Validation event for the MTh took place on Thursday 13 May 2010 at The College premises in Edinburgh. The Review Panel met with the Programme Staff and then three students of the BTh, as detailed in the attached Timetable.

3.7 The validation process followed The University's Code of Practice for Validation, under which the validation period is normally six years (or six cohorts).

4 Private Meeting of the Panel

The matters identified by the Panel for discussion were:

4.1 Programme Rationale and Demand - language skills of students; potential widening of curriculum.

4.2 Programme Title and Level – potential difficulty of requiring students to take both Church History **and** Theology.

4.3 Programme Design.

4.4 Relationship and overlap with Existing Programmes – The College's BTh graduates could not take MTh Scottish Church History courses, since this is covered at undergraduate level.

4.5 Evidence of Employer and Professional Demand.

4.6   Programme Aims – why limit to just before the Reformation?

4.7   Learning Objectives – should include IT, communication and presentation skills, which should be trained and demonstrated possibly by formative assessment.

5   Meeting with Programme Staff

Programme Rationale and Demand

5.1   The Panel discussed with the programme staff what ratio of home : international students they expected. It was believed that demand would come principally from outwith Scotland, and in particular North America. Demand from home students was less clear.

5.2   The Panel discussed the 'Scottish dimension' of the programme and whether this might be restrictive. However, it was seen by the Programme Staff as an advantage, with demand from overseas for the Scottish dimension and the particular expertise within The College in this area. The expertise was seen by Panel members as complimentary to The University's theological provision. Furthermore, it was recognised that the subject areas being provided were not available anywhere else globally.

Programme Title

5.3   The Panel discussed with the Programme Staff how the proposed structure of the Programme would allow students to take just Scottish Church History or Scottish Theology. Programme Staff believed that the two subject areas were inevitably intertwined.

Entry Requirements

5.4   It was anticipated that the entry level would be a 2:1 Honours degree.

Intended Student Numbers

5.5   The Panel discussed the maximum number of students The College could accommodate on the course. The College was allowed a maximum of 30 students in total (with 17 students at that time on the BTh programme) and believed six would be a reasonable number on the MTh programme to ensure availability of physical resources such as books, although they would accommodate more if necessary.

5.6   The meeting discussed the minimum number of students and whether having, for example, two on each reading course might make regular seminars unviable. However, the Programme Staff believed that including additional MTh by Research students, and some from the adjacent New College, would make this viable.

Relationship with Existing Programmes

5.7   The Panel asked whether international students with a Bachelor degree in Church History would be excluded from this MTh having covered this area. It was noted that, should there be too much overlap with a previous qualification, student might gain double credit for work in the same area, so any such students would be recommended to do the MTh by Research. Research skills training was included in that Masters programme.

Programme Aims

5.8   The Panel asked whether the earliest period for study was, as indicated in 9.1 of the Programme Document 'just before the Reformation'. Programme staff explained that there was expertise available to teach an earlier period, so the word 'just' could be removed.

Learning Objectives

5.9   The Panel asked about the extent to which generic skills, such as those referred to in 10.3 of the Validation Document 'Communication, problem-solving, and working well with others', would be demonstrated and assessed. The Programme Staff referred to the seminars, in which all students would lead at least one seminar. Students would be presenting a paper, discussing it and using IT skills, such as PowerPoint. Problem solving skills might relate to resolving areas of disagreement in discursive essays. Working with others would be required when working with the Supervisor, being part of the undergraduate team when taking up the BTh taught elements, and working towards a consensus in seminar debates. The Panel noted that learning objectives needed to be demonstrated and assessed. Assessment of these skills ought to be a requirement of the programme, and could be either formative or summative.

The Curriculum

5.10   The Panel discussed with Programme Staff the study skills course, which was not subject to assessment. They believed there was a danger that weaker students might be harder to identify in the absence of assessment and that students might take the course more seriously if it were assessed. While it was noted that the model proposed by The College was that used in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, elsewhere in the University assessment of study skills, often for 10 or 20 credits, was more common. The Programme Staff envisaged that students would include some preparation for their subsequent courses within the study skills course. It was suggested that study skills could therefore be embedded in the other courses. Assessment of the skills could be done, for example, through a verbal presentation or a book review.

5.11   The meeting discussed whether Scottish Church History and Theology could be linked to global church missions to attract a wider market. Programme Staff related that the wider dimension inevitably impacted on the academic content in the two areas. However, the roots were in Scottish Church History and Scottish Theology and Programme Staff believed that to be attractive.

Methods of Assessment and Assessment Weightings

5.12   The meeting discussed potential difficulties with having a single submission deadline for all coursework at the end of May. It was explained that this was from the generic regulations and just the final deadline for return of marks. It was agreed it could be removed from the regulation and submission dates for individual courses provided in the Student Handbooks.

5.13   The Panel and Programme Staff discussed whether students could be reassessed, should they fail any of the reading courses. Reassessment is not available on the BTh. The Convener explained that resubmission opportunities needed to be available on all programmes. [**Action**: J McIntosh]

5.14   The Panel and Programme Staff discussed whether assessment was double-marked. It was explained that the external examiner second-marked all work and that this had worked without problems. This would not be the case with the dissertation which would be double-marked internally. The Panel representative from the Department of Theology and Religious Studies offered double-marking by members of the Department.

Criteria for Success

5.15   The Panel referred to some difficulties with the credit structure of the Programme. A student would require to pass 2 reading courses and gain 80 credits to exit with a Certificate, against the 60 credits normally required. Furthermore, within this structure a D grade or better in every reading course would be required for a student to pass,

as opposed to finer grained structure in which an E or F grade might, with compensation, still allow a pass.

Resources

5.16 The Panel discussed with the Programme Staff whether they were confident that they could resource the programme on their current staffing. On their full-time and part-time academic staff resources they said they could do so.

5.17 The College had its own dedicated library resources within The College building. Students also had the option to borrow books from the New College Library and the National Library was situated nearby. The College had access to online journals through The University. The Panel remarked that The College was uniquely and overwhelmingly well resourced in the field, which could be a unique selling point.

6 Meeting with Students

The Panel met with three BTh students, from different years of the programme.

Rationale for Programme and Its Place within The College's Strategic Plan

6.1 The students had all been consulted on the proposed new programme. They believed that The College was very good at taking into account people's views. They considered that the role the Free Church had played in Scottish Church History positioned them well to provide a rigorous and reverent academic training which could benefit many from across the breadth of denominations.

6.2 The students considered that The College's evolution into postgraduate and research areas provided a good opportunity for students interested in further study in these academic areas.

Academic Standards

6.3 The students found the standard of teaching excellent and believed it provided a great foundation for further study or work in the ministry. Students were expected to present essays and exam answers in class. Referencing conventions and protocols were detailed in the Student Handbooks and expectations that students adhere to them were explicit and adhered to.

Resources

6.4 The students considered themselves unrestricted in terms of access to books, through the comprehensive library resources in The College, in the New College adjacent, and through The University's online library resources.

6.5 The students experienced unrestricted availability of study rooms, PC's in the computer room, and the coffee shop.

7 Final Panel Meeting

7.1 The Panel were unanimous in supporting the proposed new MTh Programme and considered the aspects of it which might benefit from advisory recommendations, as being:

- the Programme title, structure, and course choices;

- the management of possible staff absences;

- assessment of study skills;

- supervision arrangements; and

- double marking.

Programme Title, and Course Choices

7.2 On discussion, the Panel agreed that, should the Programme staff change the title 'Scottish Church History and **Scottish** Theology' to read 'Scottish Church History and Theology', it would reflect the interconnection of the two disciplines, which already existed. The reading lists for both disciplines overlapped. Students could be guided by staff to taking a coherent suite of reading courses. The Panel therefore believed that 2 (ii) of the submitted regulations, suggesting study in Scottish Church History, or Scottish Theology or Scottish Church History and Scottish Theology, could therefore be removed.

Management of Possible Staff Absences

7.3 The Panel felt that the simplification of the structure of the programme (as discussed in 7.2) would guard against any possible staff absences, since it would be feasible to continue to offer the MTh on a reduced range of reading courses, should this prove necessary.

Assessment of Study Skills

7.4 The Panel believed that it was important that study skills be assessed. This could be done through formative assessment, for example, critique of a journal article, or précis of students' essays as pre-requisite of the full essays. Incorrect referencing could incur penalties. It was considered that this ought to be a core component of the programme and could become a key strength.

Programme Structure

7.5 The Panel discussed alternative structures to the programme. One option would be to restructure the programme into four 30 credit modules, with one covering study skills and the other courses (detailed under 12.1 of the Validation Document), reduced from 40 to 30 credits, with a relative reduction in assessment requirements. Alternatively, study skills could be incorporated into each of the 40 credit courses, which could run in parallel over the two semesters or more of the programme.

Supervision

7.6 The Panel felt that it would be valuable to students to have six formal supervisory sessions per course. This would be the equivalent of one supervisory meeting per fortnight for full-time students, and two meetings per essay under the existing proposals.

Double Marking

7.7 On discussion, the Panel felt that it was important that the dissertation be double-marked internally, as well as being submitted to the external examiner. The current practice in which the external examiner sees and double-marks all work could continue for other courses.

8 Final Meeting with Programme Staff

8.1 The Convener reported that, following their meetings and deliberations, the Panel would be recommending approval of the programme for six years, to be delivered from 2010-11, subject to the approval of The University's Academic Standards Committee and Senate. He reported that the Panel would be making four advisory recommendations:

1. that the title of the Programme be changed to 'Master of Theology in Scottish Church History and Theology', integrating the two themes. The Panel recommended that a structure be adopted allowing students to chose any three of the six reading courses on offer – this would emphasise the

integrated nature of the two strands and provide the reassurance that if a staff member was ill, there ought still to be an adequate selection of courses;

2. that the assessment of study skills be integrated into reading courses so that there is explicit assessment of the skills covered by that course;

3. that there be six supervisions per course, around fortnightly, to ensure students remained focused and on track.

4. that there be internal double marking of the dissertation.

8.2 The Programme staff were advised that the Report would be presented to Academic Standards Committee on 28 May 2010 and subsequently to Senate. Once approved by the Convener and circulated to the Panel, it would be forwarded to the Programme Staff.

8.3 The Convener thanked the Programme Staff and the Panel for their contributions.

University of Glasgow

Validation Event – Free Church College
Master of Theology in Scottish Church History and Scottish Theology

13 May 2010

At the Free Church College
The Mound, EDINBURGH EH1 2LS

TIMETABLE

1100	Arrival, introductions, coffee	
1115	Private meeting of the Review Panel	To discuss the proposal and identify the issues for discussion.
1200	Meeting with Principal, Professor Donald Macleod, and Programme Development Team, led by Professor John McIntosh	To discuss with the Principal staffing and other resources, research and staff development, and quality assurance procedures. To discuss with the programme development team the proposal's rationale, educational intentions (aims), curriculum, assessment, student learning experience and resource issues.
1245	Meeting with students	To identify any student related issues.
1315	Lunch and Private Meeting of the Panel	To draw conclusions in relation to the main aspects of the proposal and agree the outcome: whether there are any conditions or advisory recommendations and timescales for implementation.
1415	Meeting with Principal, Professor Donald Macleod, and Programme Development Team	To report back to the Principal and Programme Development Team and agree timescales for further developments.
1430	Depart	