

## University of Glasgow

## Academic Standards Committee – Friday 15 February 2013

Summary Report for the Revalidation Event for the Bachelor of  
Theology and Master of Theology at the Free Church of Scotland  
College – Monday 17 December 2012

Lesley Fielding, Senate Office

**Panel Members**

Professor John Briggs, Clerk of Senate (Convener)  
Dr Moira Fischbacher-Smith, Dean of Learning and Teaching  
Rev Doug Gay, Theology and Religious Studies  
Professor Laurence Kirkpatrick, The Union Theological College  
Rev Dr Malcolm MacLean, Vice-Chairman of College Board  
Rev Iver Martin, Chair of Free Church of Scotland College Board  
Ms Amy Westwell, SRC School of Humanities' representative  
Ms Lesley Fielding, Academic Policy Manager, Senate Office (Attending)

**Programme Staff in Attendance**

Professor John L MacKay, Old Testament Language, Exegesis and Theology  
Professor John A MacLeod, New Testament Language, Exegesis and Theology  
Professor John R McIntosh, Church History and Church Principles  
Dr Robert Akroyd, Systematic Theology

**1. Summary**

The Panel unanimously agreed to **recommend to Academic Standards Committee and Senate** that the Bachelor of Theology and Master of Theology programmes offered by the Free Church of Scotland College continue to be validated for a period of six years from September 2013.

**2. Recommendations**

The Panel asked that the College:

- revise the content of World Religions to include a wider range of religions or amend the title to reflect more accurately its content.
- review and expand the Staff Development practices to reflect a P & DR system. The use of the University's self evaluation form which allows for self-reflection, could be a useful tool in reviewing the current system.
- consider ways in which to increase the assistance for skills development for overseas students and providing assistance and/or training for staff who have responsibility for managing overseas students. A number of on-line resources could be helpful in developing this area. A useful resource could be the University's College of Social Sciences webpage for international students at:

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/info/students/international/preparingforstudy/>. The College International Student Learning Officer, Dr Gail Pringle Barnes, could provide some advice in this area.

- consider ways in which to introduce more diverse methods for learning such as seminars and group work.
- consider introducing more varied methods of assessment. Additional group work would be beneficial. The Panel considered that there was insufficient assessment of oral work and that the College should consider ways to address this.

### **3. Introduction**

3.1 The Free Church of Scotland College (henceforth The College) was approved as a partner institution on 8 November 2001. The Bachelor of Theology (BTh) programme was revalidated on 7 May 2007 for a period of five years which was extended to six under revised University regulations in 2010. In June 2010 the College submitted for validation a one year full-time or two year part-time programme leading to the degree of Master of Theology (MTh). In 2010 approval was given for the University to validate the Master of Theology programme being provided by the College for a six year period.

3.2 In accordance with the University's Validation Procedures, Free Church College programmes must be revalidated on a rolling six-year cycle. Thus, a Validation Panel, including external representatives, visited the College on Monday 17 December 2012 to consider the revalidation of the Bachelor of Theology and Master of Theology programmes for an award of the University for a further six year period commencing September 2013. The Master of Theology programme was revalidated early at the request of The College in order to reduce the administrative work that two separate validations incurred. The role of the Validation Panel was to:

- consider the programme proposal in detail;
- make recommendations to the Academic Standards Committee and then to Senate.

3.3 The timetable for the visit is appended.

### **4. Private Meeting of Panel**

4.1 The Panel wished to explore the following areas:

- Assessment
- Curriculum design/content
- Overseas students support
- Student progression
- Staff development

### **5. Meeting with Students**

5.1 The Panel met with a group of three full-time students on the BTh programme included representatives from years 1, 2 and 4, one of whom was an overseas student and one part-time MTh student. Three were Ordinands and one a Non-Ordinand student.

- 5.2 The students expressed their overall satisfaction with their programmes, finding the degree courses comprehensive, beneficial and challenging. The overseas student advised the Panel that he was most satisfied with the programme and the standard of education offered by The College. The students considered that the professors were excellent, offering interactive classes and encouraging questions from the student body.
- 5.3 The Panel enquired about the level of support offered and the opportunity for the development of learning skills. The students deemed there was ample support in learning skills with a presentation on essay writing and techniques at the induction session. They thought that the student handbook offered comprehensive, informative advice. With regard to the level of support offered, the students reported that there was an “open door” policy among staff which was effective due to the size of the College.
- 5.4 The Panel enquired whether the formal nature of the feedback on learning and teaching created any difficulties in relation to anonymity. The students confirmed that feedback questionnaires were submitted by the students and compiled into a report by professorial members of staff. The students regarded this as being effective with consultations being initiated on any issues identified as problematic. The students did not perceive anonymity as an issue of concern and advised the Panel that the students were not inhibited about raising issues directly with the staff.
- 5.5 The Panel explored the language element of the programmes and sought the students’ views on whether the time of study spent on languages was disproportionate in relation to other subjects. The students confirmed that they believed this to be the case and advised that this had been raised with the College Board. The students found the area of languages to be challenging and had some doubts regarding the long term benefits. However, the students acknowledged that the languages taught were useful in the study of the New and Old Testaments in both the BTh and MTh.
- 5.6 The Panel enquired how the students found the balance between their seminary placements and their academic work and whether they would like more integration between work based learning and academic reflection. The students considered that the reflective essay which was submitted upon completion of their placement was the only connection between their placement and academic work. The students commented that it would be helpful to have a wider range of religions covered in World Religions as currently the curriculum covers only Islam. The students considered that it would be useful to have more recognition of the Scottish context in this subject which would be more relevant to their placements (e.g. the Catholic religion, and societal attitudes to religion). These issues had been discussed with the staff and the students hoped that this would be addressed in the future.

The students found the Practical Theology course diverse and helpful, however they would welcome more opportunities for practical preaching. The Panel learned that this had been raised in the past two years, and that it was hoped that an additional workshop may be arranged in the future.

- 5.7 The Panel noted that assessment was mainly essay or exam based across the programme, and enquired whether the students would welcome the introduction of other methods of assessment. The students were generally satisfied with the current modes of assessment, however they had some reservations about the method of assessing their sermons which was not based on their delivery of the sermon but on the written version. The students concurred that they would welcome alternative

methods of assessment throughout the degree, such as peer assessment and more interactive seminars/workshops.

### **Meeting with Programme Staff**

#### Programme Proposal

- 6.1 The Panel advised the programme staff that the meeting with the students had been most useful and informative. The Panel enquired about how the staff approached the development of the curriculum. The Panel learned that the curriculum was mainly designed to meet the requirements of the Free Church Ministry which is the main source of feedback on the suitability of the curriculum and of course the main employer of the College's graduates. The Principal advised that the development of the curriculum was also influenced by student feedback on the delivery of individual components and by the contributions of the student representatives on the Board of Studies. An example of this was the Practical Theology course which had been significantly changed due to feedback from the students. The Panel learned that the language components of the Old and New Testament courses had changed significantly over the years in an endeavour to encourage students to develop a better understanding rather than relying purely on memory work. The Panel enquired whether, when revising an existing programme, staff replaced existing material or added new material to the curriculum. The programme staff advised that this was an ongoing challenge and recent practice was to shorten one module in order to accommodate an extra module. The staff considered that The College had succeeded in maintaining the balance when amending the curriculum with class content quotas and contact hours being maintained. The staff were aware that a number of students wished for more practical elements to be introduced into the course and advised that whilst there was discussion time at the end of lectures, these discussions were not assessed.
- 6.2 The Panel noted that the assessment methods were primarily essay and exam based and canvassed the staff's opinion on various alternative methods of assessment such as the formal assessment of a presentation of a sermon. The programme staff advised that until six years ago papers read in class time were assessed, however, this was halted due to the limited language capabilities of some international students who were uncomfortable with this form of assessment. The staff considered that the current practice whereby the students chose an area of pastoral care and produced a reflective piece of work worked well with international and home students, and allowed both summative and formative assessment. The staff expressed reservations about the introduction of formative assessment on class presentations.
- 6.3 The Panel explored the issue of the content of World Religions which appeared to have a particularly strong weighting towards Islam with little reference to other religions such as Judaism. The programme staff acknowledged the dominance of Islam and attributed this to the research interests and part-time status of the staff member teaching the module. The Panel was advised that Judaism was covered in the Old Testament classes. The staff were aware that there was a shortcoming in the area of World Religions and agreed that this would have to be reviewed. The Panel asked the staff about the World Religions module from a Scottish perspective and enquired how this was addressed. The staff advised that this area was covered at the end of the course and that the examination contained questions on this subject.

#### 6.4 Support Activities

The Panel enquired about the support provided by The College to those international students who experienced difficulties with their language skills. The staff responded that, despite offering the services of an EFL teacher for a special course, none of the international students had signed up for the language class. The staff considered that integration was the key to improving language capabilities and perceived by second year most international students' language capabilities had improved considerably. The staff attributed the reluctance to attend these additional classes as being rooted in cultural differences.

- 6.5 The Panel followed up this issue with questions about how the College addressed the international students' transition from different education systems. The staff considered that, as most students had a first degree when they came to the College, the majority of students had similar early educational experiences and hence were familiar with practices such as essay writing. The Panel enquired as to how the College dealt with plagiarism among its students. The staff advised that the College implemented Turnitin to identify possible cases of plagiarism and addressed this issue with a section on plagiarism in the student handbook. The staff considered that the practice of plagiarism was not restricted to a particular section of the student group and was not overly affected by cultural differences.

#### 6.6 Staff Development

The Panel explored the subject of staff development and learned that there was no formal programme for this area within the College. The Principal expressed the view that formal staff development was of little practical use and that individual development came through research. Due to the small size of the College staff did not have sabbatical leave. The Panel learned that staff appraisal was undertaken at an annual review whereby a pro forma was completed and a one hour meeting was held with an individual's line manager. The recent QAA visit had raised the issue of staff development and therefore the College was aware that staff development and its current format would have to be considered further. The College welcomed the Panel's suggestion of accessing the University's professional feedback form which allowed for self-reflection and would be useful to the College in developing this area.

- 6.7 The Panel asked about what provision was made to ensure that the College handbook was kept abreast of recent changes to Glasgow University regulations. The staff advised that the handbook and the regulations were updated annually and submitted to the Joint Board in June and finalised at the Joint Board in January.
- 6.8 The Panel enquired whether the staff considered that there was evidence of conscious progression through the three years of the BTh programme. The staff believed that this was the case and that the introduction of the Hebrew language in second year and the progression from writing essays to the production of a dissertation in the final year substantiated this.

### **7. Feedback to Programme Staff**

The Panel was joined by the Principal.

- 7.1 The Panel confirmed that the students were most content with the provision at The College at both Bachelor of Theology and Master of Theology levels.
- 7.2 The Panel outlined to the Principal the main areas of their proposed recommendations and sought clarification on some issues. The issue of increasing

the assistance for skills development for overseas students was raised. The Principal acknowledged this but advised the Panel that the learning experiences of international students varied widely and it would need careful consideration to address this.

- 7.3 The Panel outlined the desirability of a wider range of assessments such as oral assessments and explored the current practice of assessing oral assessment currently within the college.

## 8. Conclusions

- 8.1 The Panel agreed that the provision offered by the College continued to be consistent with degree level education. They were impressed with the standard of the documentation provided and the engagement between the staff and students.
- 8.2 The Panel unanimously **agreed to recommend** to Academic Standards Committee and Senate that the Bachelor of Theology and Master of Theology programmes offered by the Free Church of Scotland College be revalidated for a period of six years from September 2013. The panel made **five** recommendations which are outlined in paragraph 2 above.

L Fielding  
Senate Office  
January 2013

Timetable for the Re-Validation Meeting

Bachelor of Theology and Master of Theology

Free Church of Scotland College, The Mound, Edinburgh  
17 December 2012

0930	Depart University of Glasgow	1:00hrs
1030	Arrive at College	0:15hrs
	<i>Preliminary introductions and tea/coffee</i>	
1045	Private meeting of Panel	0.30hrs
	<i>To identify key issues and themes for discussion</i>	
1115	Meeting with students	0:45hrs
1200	Lunch and Private meeting of Panel	1:00hrs
1300	Meeting with Staff	1.00hrs
	<i>To discuss the proposal and identify key issues and themes</i>	
1400	Private meeting of the panel	0.30hrs
1430	Meeting with Principal, John Mackay	0:30hrs
1500	Private meeting of the panel	0.30 hrs
1530	Finish	