



BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM INSPECTION (College)

INSTITUTION:	Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland College
ADDRESS:	133 Woodlands Road Glasgow G3 6LE
HEAD OF INSTITUTION:	Rev. Dr James Tallach
ACCREDITATION STATUS:	Accredited
DATE OF INSPECTION:	20 October 2020
ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE:	Continued accreditation, 28 January 2021

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the institution

The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland College (the Institution) has been in operation since 1896, three years after the foundation of its parent organisation, which is the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland (FPCS/the Church). The Institution is owned by the Church, which is a registered Scottish charity.

The Church and Institution are funded from contributions from congregations, donations, legacies and the interest accruing from investments. The members of the Church Finance Committee are the trustees of the Church as well as the Institution, which is an integral part of the Church.

The Institution's administrative headquarters are in Glasgow, within the St Jude's Congregation's church building. The Institution's training is delivered on three Scottish sites, in the cities of Glasgow and Aberdeen and in the town of Dingwall, north of Inverness.

The aim of the Institution is to train students to become effective ministers of the Church. This is achieved through face-to-face tuition delivered by tutors who are ministers of the Church. The tuition is provided in the locations where the tutors provide their ministry. The Divinity course is the Institution's sole programme. It is a three-year course for those seeking to be licensed as ministers in the Church.

The Institution is managed by the Church's Training of the Ministry Committee (TMC). The TMC is responsible for the Church's educational functions and for the Institution and its Divinity course. The TMC's authority to manage the Institution comes from the Church's Synod, which is the Church's governing body. The TMC is appointed annually by the Synod, although its members normally serve several terms. The TMC comprises the Convener or Chair of the TMC, who is the Head of the Institution, the three tutors who deliver the course, and some other ministers and/or elders of the Church. While the number of TMC members who are elders can vary, the TMC normally has a maximum of ten members. The TMC reports annually to the Synod.

The Convener and the three tutors are ministers of the Church. Their role in training ministers is therefore part of their broader role in the Church.

The General Treasurer acts as the chief administrator and finance officer for the Institution and is supported by a secretarial assistant.

2. Brief description of the current provision

The Divinity course consists of three years of study, of at least 30 weeks each year, running from September to April each year. The course has three distinct components, each delivered on a different site by a different tutor. The New Testament Greek and cognate subjects started in 2018. Old Testament Hebrew and cognate subjects were delivered in 2019/20, and Systematic Theology and cognate subjects are being delivered in 2020/21. Systematic Theology and cognate subjects are the only part of the course currently being delivered. Cognate subjects cover areas such as Church Law and Polity, Apologetics and Catechetics.

The delivery of the course each year is face to face for all students for six months. Students from outside the United Kingdom (UK) normally start studying the course in the UK and complete the academic year in their home country, using online meeting facilities. They then return to Scotland the following year for a further six months and undertake the next year of the programme. However, the approach is flexible in relation to international students and, in the current session, there is one student from outside the UK who is undertaking the first two months of the course online and will then go to Scotland for the period November to April. The UK students are normally in face-to-face contact throughout the course but may study partly online.

Successful students are given a certificate from the Church’s Training of the Ministry Committee (TMC). The certificate states that they have passed their exit examinations. Successful completion of the course is a prerequisite for being licensed as a minister of the Church.

The current students are in their final year of study and there are no other students due to join the course after the completion of this year. There are currently three male students, two Scottish and one Zimbabwean. The students are studying remotely in their home locations at present. The Zimbabwean student expects to travel to Scotland to join his colleagues in November 2020 for the remaining six months of the course.

The minimum age for entry to the course is 21. The three components of the course can be taken in any order.

Entrants are normally required to hold a qualification beyond secondary school level in a relevant subject, although each applicant is considered on an individual basis. The TMC advises applicants on any additional pre-entry courses they require for progression onto the course and, if necessary, applicants are financially supported to undertake them.

3. Inspection process

The inspection was carried out by one inspector over one day virtually using video conferencing. The inspector held meetings with the Convenor of the TMC and Head of the Institution, the General Treasurer of the Church, a tutor and two students. The inspector observed teaching and scrutinised relevant documentation. The premises in Glasgow, where the tutor who delivered the teaching observed as part of the inspection was based, were inspected. The Institution’s staff and students co-operated fully with the inspection and the additional information requested was readily provided.

4. Inspection History

Inspection type	Date
Stage 2	2 May 2018
Stage 3	21-22 November 2018

PART B – JUDGEMENTS AND EVIDENCE

The following judgments and comments are based upon evidence seen by the inspector during the inspection and from documentation provided by the institution.

1. Significant changes since the last inspection

The face-to-face tuition is delivered by tutors in the locations where they provide their ministry. Since the last inspection, one of the tutors has moved location from Ness in the north of the Isle of Lewis to Dingwall and is, therefore, currently delivering their tuition from Dingwall.

2. Response to actions points in last report

18.7 The institution must introduce an explicit policy and procedure and training regarding protecting students from radicalisation and extremism.

A policy to prevent extremism and radicalisation has been developed. It is thorough in regard to recognising the need for such a policy, and in assessing the risks posed by extremism and the procedures to be followed if a student displays views or behaviour that are of an extremist nature or shows signs of radicalisation. However, the policy does not indicate that tutors will receive training in preventing radicalisation and extremism.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

It is recommended that the Institution develops a consolidated Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland College (FPCSC) action plan to be reviewed and updated on a regular basis to enhance quality assurance and monitoring.

The action plan is put together as a result of the relevant decisions made by the TMC and the Synod. Actions from committees other than the TMC that impact on the Institution and its students are not always recorded within the minutes of the TMC's meetings. Therefore, issues coming forward from other committees that impact on the Institution and its students are not routinely recorded in the action plan.

It is recommended that the FPCSC finalises arrangements for teaching observations on all sites as part of staff appraisal.

The minutes of a meeting of the TMC record that teaching observations on all sites are now taking place as part of staff appraisal. The minutes included an oral report on a recent teaching observation of a class in Aberdeen. This was subsequently followed up with a written report. External appraisal of teaching provides confidence to students that the quality of the tutoring they receive is being independently reviewed. It is also beneficial for the individual tutor to receive constructive feedback that encourages the tutor to reflect on their quality of their teaching.

It is recommended that FPCSC monitors the implementation of its assessment policies and processes to ensure that they meet the needs of learners and the Institution.

Assessment policies and procedures are appropriate for the course being delivered. The TMC formally seeks feedback from students, and the implementation of the assessments is a key aspect of the TMC's work. There is a robust external examiner system for reviewing examinations before they have been taken and the marking of student papers afterwards. Comments by external examiners are reviewed by the TMC.

Assessment policies and procedures are implemented and subsequently reviewed on a regular basis by the tutors to ensure that these meet the needs of the Institution in relation to training students for the ministry. Such reviews are then reported to the TMC, which helps to ensure that it is confident of the fitness for purpose of the teaching and assessment.

It is recommended that the Institution finalises and distributes the consolidated student handbook.

The consolidated student handbook has been completed and distributed to students and TMC members. It provides useful information, including essential contact details for staff who can assist students in progressing their studies, and information on student welfare provision, financial arrangements relating to grants, accommodation, council tax, course materials and resources, travel and expenses. In addition, it contains the complaints and grievance policy, guidance for overseas students and the manual of practice, which contains the regulations for the reception and training of students for the ministry. The student handbook, therefore, provides a comprehensive and useful resource guide for students.

The Institution should consider greater use of notice boards to disseminate information at each training site.

Notice boards to disseminate information at each training site have been installed.

The Institution should ensure the installation of a wireless connection at the Ness site.

The Ness site is no longer in use as the tutor has moved to Dingwall where a wireless facility is available. The TMC recognises that a wireless connection should be made available at all sites for student and tutor use.

4. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements

4.1 Management, Staffing and Administration (spot check)

The standards are judged to be: Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The Institution is very well administered. It has a robust and detailed manual of practice that is used effectively to guide its operations. As there are only a few students undertaking the course at any one time, any issues that arise are addressed speedily.

Data collection and collation systems are effective. Neither the Institution nor the Church holds a central database. This works well for the Institution as it is part of such a small organisation. Committees of the Church are held in different locations and maintain their own records of proceedings. This is appropriate given the nature of the service provision spread out over Scotland.

An appropriate formal appraisal process exists for the administrative staff which is appropriate and effective for the few staff involved. The process enables the staff to know what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve. In addition, there is an annual theology conference, which provides a forum for staff development.

All the entrance examinations are held in Greek and Hebrew at the beginning of one year of the course, but knowledge of Hebrew is not required until the subsequent year. This may create difficulties for students with regard to the language and it would be more appropriate to hold the entrance examinations at the beginning of the year in which they are directly relevant.

Feedback is provided by students in a variety of effective ways. Informal feedback is provided on an ongoing basis and students are able to raise any points directly with their tutors. Formal feedback is provided by means of an annual interview held between individual students and a member of the TMC, who is not the student's tutor. This provides a good opportunity for the student to raise any issue confidentially and helps to ensure that the feedback is accurate and honest. As a result, the relevant committees are able to review the comments made and address any issues.

4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The tutors recognise the learning outcomes they are aiming for students to achieve and the lessons and assessments focus on these appropriately. However, the learning outcomes are not articulated formally to the students, who become familiar with them as the course subjects progress through discussion with each tutor. Articulating the learning outcomes formally would provide a reference point for students at the beginning of their study of each subject and help the TMC in its review of the effectiveness of summative assessments.

There is effective regular appraisal of teaching staff that is appropriate to the presbyterian nature of the Institution. The teaching staff appraisal system incorporates classroom observation and discussion of teaching delivery at the TMC on a regular basis. The process used enables consideration of teaching performance and agreement on how subject teaching may develop and provides for dissemination of effective practice. The tutors are all members of the TMC. In addition, there is an annual theology conference, which provides a forum for staff development.

The Institution's tutors are appointed for their knowledge and expertise in training students for the ministry. In the teaching session that was observed, effective feedback was provided to the students by the tutor. The tutor asked detailed questions and provided appropriate guidance to the students to enable them to understand the points being made. This led to a useful discussion of the theological basis of the subject matter being considered, which involved both students and the tutor. As a result of this approach, the tutors provide the students with a deep level of learning experience and the students develop a deep understanding of the subject matter.

The students confirmed that this was a normal feature of their classes and that that they found this to be a challenging and rewarding process. This outcome from the teaching will prove invaluable when the students are confronted with practical issues when working in their ministry. Overall, the students were very positive in their judgements about the course and the teaching they had experienced. However, there was a view that there was some repetition in the reading across the course that could be rationalised to reduce any repetition in the content.

The TMC receives reports from the tutors on student progress and course delivery, which include marks for assessments, and this enables the TMC to review the comparability of marks awarded by the different tutors, which have been moderated by the external examiners. This also enables the TMC to review the uniformity of the assessment process over the three years of the course.

Assessments are carried out through examinations, which are subject to a rigorous pre- and post-moderation process. The moderators are not drawn from the tutors teaching the current students and are experts in their field of study. Any changes in the examination process or content for future examination activity, as a result of the moderators' feedback, is recorded and acted upon. There is an opportunity to re-sit examinations for students who fail at their first attempt. Failure in the re-sit examination would lead the student to reflect on their future career direction, with guidance as appropriate from the Institution and Church elders.

The individualised nature of the tuition ensures that any student who is experiencing difficulties in their studies will be identified early by the tutor so that appropriate action can be taken speedily.

There is an appropriate process for escalating appeals against examination results. The process begins with the tutor, followed by the TMC, the Board of Examiners and, ultimately, the Synod of the Church. In the later stages of the appeal process, both sides put their case forward and then withdraw. This allows the body hearing the appeal to arrive at a decision. This is an effective process for handling appeals and ensures that a student will receive a fair hearing.

4.3 Student Welfare (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The tutors undertake a pastoral as well as an academic role for each student. The individualised attention provided by the tutors ensures that students receive effective pastoral support.

In addition, students are able to make direct contact with the General Treasurer, who handles all the financial and administrative affairs relating to the students' study requirements. This support includes accommodation and travel requirements. The General Treasurer will escalate any matters that he cannot make a decision on to the relevant committee members to ensure that a speedy decision is arrived at to address the issue raised by the student.

18.7 Tutors do not have appropriate training to protect students from the risks related to radicalisation and extremism.

4.4 Premises and Facilities (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

The teaching premises in Glasgow, where the tutor who delivered the teaching at the time of the inspection was based, are fit for purpose. They include a study with a large number of textbooks and are typical of the teaching facilities available to students although, on this occasion, the teaching session was delivered online.

There is a Church library facility in Glasgow, to which students have access. The library provides an appropriate multi-purpose teaching space, reference room and private study area and is suitable for carrying out assessments. The library contains the religious texts that form the foundation for the course. It has wireless access and students normally use their own laptop computers although there is a computer available if required.

In addition, there are extensive textual resources held by ministers, which students are welcome to access. Over time, students build up their own library of texts and have access to online libraries and facilities.

There is suitable office accommodation on the Glasgow site that is sufficiently spacious to hold meetings. There is also a modern, well-equipped kitchen and relaxation area.

4.5 Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.

Yes No

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS

The staff and students share a common faith, which provides a guiding principle for all the activities undertaken by the Institution.

The teaching effectively facilitates self-directed learning and development, enabling the students to gain the confidence required for their future ministry and the Institution to achieve its overall aim.

Students receive strong pastoral support and the staff and the TMC take a keen interest in their spiritual, academic and personal well-being. This provides an environment that is conducive to effective learning.

The flexibility of the teaching facilities, that are located where a tutor is carrying out his ministry, provide an appropriate learning environment and enable the effective delivery of the curriculum.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

18.7 The Institution must provide training for tutors relating to protecting students from radicalisation and extremism.

High Medium Low

RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT *(to be reviewed at the next inspection)*

It is recommended that the FPCSC considers establishing a mechanism for the TMC to ensure it captures issues relating to the Institution and students that are discussed in other committees of the Church.

The FPCSC should consider applying the language entrance assessments before the year of the course to which they directly relate.

It is recommended that the Institution formally articulates the learning outcomes for each of the subjects it delivers.

The FPCSC should consider reviewing its reading requirements to avoid unnecessary repetition of course content.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS - FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE

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