

ELQs and the Churches' ministerial training – a review

An interim report from the Ministry Division of the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England (acting as 'lead' denomination in consultation with other churches through the Ecumenical Strategy Group for Ministerial Training) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Summary

The introduction of ELQs will create additional costs for training ministers and lay workers. This will in turn reduce the churches capacity to contribute to social cohesion and interfaith understanding. An initial exploration of the issues has identified a potential solution which aligns with the government's policy on employer engagement and skills development. It will involve a modest investment to implement.

Although we have consulted widely in developing this solution and believe that it can be made to work, it will require the active support of a number of different players - the churches, the HEIs and a number of independent providers. It will mean longstanding relationships and traditional methods of delivery will need to be modernised in line with the employer engagement agenda. This will have a number of practical benefits but will not be easy to achieve.

We therefore consider this an interim report as we think it is important to consult more widely and formally so we can build the level of support for the solution and better understand what would be required to make it work.

At this stage we would like the Secretary of State to indicate an in principle agreement to the approach. **We will finalise our report within 8 weeks of receiving your agreement in principle but will start work straight away on developing the solution.**

1. Introduction

- a. In his evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee for the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills on 17th January, the Minister of State, Bill Rammell MP, requested that the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) carry out a two month consultation on the effect of the proposed policy to withdraw funding for equal or lower academic awards on theology and consequently the churches' programme of ministerial training.
- b. This interim report of the consultation exercise sets out a more detailed examination of the effect of the changes, suggests potential solutions to some of the problems and suggests further work to be carried out over the next 12 months. It is made jointly by the Ministry Division of the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England and the Higher Education Funding Council for England.
- c. Other ecumenical partner churches (particularly the Baptist Union, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church) have been involved in all discussions with HEFCE and the interim report has been sent to them for their approval within the next month. It is hoped that the final report will be made as from HEFCE and the Churches Ecumenical Strategy Group for Ministerial Training
- d. In this report, 'ministerial training' refers to the programmes of education and formation offered by the churches with regard to the initial training of ministers, ordained and lay. For example, this would include the ordinands and Reader ministry candidates of the

Church of England, as well as comparable training in other churches. It does not include academic programmes taken by students not sponsored for ministry by the churches.

2. The Problem as originally identified

- e. The proposal to withdraw funding for equal or lower academic awards was received with concern by all Christian Churches involved in ministerial training in an HEI context. The House of Bishops expressed their concern at its meeting in January 2008 as approximately 75% of those training for ministry (ordinands) do so as previous graduates. At the request of the House of Bishops, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York along with the Bishop of Norwich wrote to the Secretary of State to express the view that
 - i. The policy would result in a substantial increase in the cost of training for the ministry of the Church of England and other ecumenical partner churches.
 - ii. The Policy would weaken the long established links of the church with the Higher Education Institutions (HEI)
 - iii. The teaching of theology would be endangered should ministerial training be restricted to isolated seminaries, which would jeopardise the building of social cohesion through dialogue between well trained faith leaders at a time when this is particularly necessary.
 - iv. Whilst it was difficult to be precise (because of the complexity of individual arrangements between HEIs and ministerial training institutions) there was anxiety that this could amount to an additional £1.5m to the cost of training for the ministry of the Church of England and with similar proportionate costs to other churches. This additional cost would have to be raised from the voluntary giving of members of the church congregations.
- f. The concern about additional costs arose from three main areas
 - i. Some universities had indicated that should ordinands be no longer eligible for HEFCE funding then the fee levels for their studies would be increased possibly as high as the overseas rate for non EU students.
 - ii. There was concern that other universities who provide validation services would increase their cost for this service, although at the time there was no clarity as to which students of the ministerial training providers were included within the HEI numbers for HEFCE purposes.
 - iii. There was concern that some HEIs which provide services such as academic support, library and computer facilities did so as a result of HEFCE funding received by them and that on its withdrawal would seek to charge a full economic cost for the facilities provided.
- g. The ELQ initiative could have a disproportionate impact on the churches given that many future ministers enter training in later life having previously studied a different subject.

3. The Problem on further detailed examination

- h. Following the request for the consultation, the staff of the Ministry Division gathered detailed evidence from the Higher Education Institutions as to the exact numbers of ordinands who were included in the institutions' HEFCE numbers and the exact nature of the relationship between the theological institutions and the HEIs.

- i. After an initial meeting between the Rt Revd Graham James, the Bishop of Norwich and Chairman of the Ministry Division, and Professor David Eastwood, Chief Executive of HEFCE, two consultation meetings were held between Stephen Egan, Deputy Chief Executive of HEFCE, representatives of the national church bodies, some representative theological institutions and related Higher Education Institutions, and Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed Church representatives.
- j. Initial work has revealed a complex system of arrangements with no standard pattern as to the ordinands included in HEFCE numbers, or to the services provided by the HEIs to ministerial institutions. For the Church of England 611 out of 1505 ordinands in training in the academic year 2007/08 were included in the HEFCE numbers returned by the HEIs. Varying sums of the HEFCE funding were passed to the ministerial training institutions. The Methodist Church has 189 students in training, 74 holding first or higher degrees, though it is not clear whether any HEI claims HEFCE funding. The United Reformed Church has 62 in training and estimates that of them, 30 hold first or higher degrees. The Baptist Church has an estimated 21 students studying for an ELQ for whom HEFCE funding is received.
- k. HEFCE funding is also received for additional students who follow comparable courses leading to Reader and other lay Ministry. An estimate of these numbers, including those of our ecumenical partners where possible, is being compiled.

4. Potential ways forward

- l. It was noted that it would be possible to reconfigure some programmes of study into Foundation Degrees with strong employer involvement in the curriculum and giving a further pathway into higher awards.
- m. Bachelor level awards could be supported through the creation of a stream of employer co-funded routes either as part of initial training or later in the ministry of these people.
- n. An area to be explored will be whether the validation of the foundation degrees could be or should be concentrated in a fewer number of HEIs so that the Churches could benefit from economies of scale in meeting foundation degree requirements. This could have the advantage of streamlining the process and provide for a greater comparability between the institutions, though would in some cases end long-term local relationships between theological institutions and HEIs. Alternative arrangements might be possible based on greater collaboration between institutions. The lifelong learning network model may offer a way forward
- o. These potential solutions do not address the issue of those studying for undergraduate theology degrees (BA) and high entry level ministerial degrees (BTh) at Cambridge, Oxford, and some other universities. Those studying for these awards need to hold a first degree at the level of 2.1 or higher and be funded by the churches for additional years of training. Here the loss of HEFCE funding will certainly lead to an increased cost to the churches which as at yet has not been finalised by the universities. The churches are also concerned that we do not lose this much valued stream of future theological educators and potential senior clergy. It is hoped that by increasing the funding available to the Church or its institutions from foundation and co-funded awards it will be possible to meet this increased cost without placing the overall finances of the churches under strain. It is recognised that whilst this suggestion may work for the Church of England, it may not work so well for smaller ecumenical partner churches. Whilst foundation degrees are unlikely to offer a way forward, employer co-funding may be possible. It may also be possible to offer entry to these courses via foundation degrees. This will require careful development of the curriculum and creative and flexible responses from the providers.

5. Resources needed to achieve these aims

- p. Although the preceding section outlines some possible ways forward, much work will need to be done to explore this in greater detail over the next year through further detailed work. To this end it is recommended that
- i. The introduction of the policy regarding ELQs for those studying theology for ministerial training in the context of ministerial formation **should be postponed for one year** and come into effect from the start of the 2009/10 academic year. This would affect approximately 250 students at an estimated cost of £1m. However, the cost could be significantly lower as some institutions are safety netted so the postponement would simply reduce the safety net.
 - ii. Consultants with appropriate competencies should be appointed **to explore ways of developing ministerial education** in relation to public funding streams, as set out above, with the main stakeholders: HEFCE; the churches; the HEIs and the ministerial training institutions. The cost of this would be relatively modest and would be provided by HEFCE.
 - iii. This period of one year should be used **to develop an appropriate curriculum** for foundation degrees and employer co-funded higher awards for future ministerial formation and development. The cost of this would again be provided by HEFCE.
 - iv. A solution would involve providing additional student numbers both through foundation degrees and co-funded routes. Some of these numbers may come from existing numbers at institutions that are prepared to invest in this provision. For other institutions HEFCE will need to provide the additional capacity.

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**Professor David Eastwood
Chief Executive
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