



Baptist Union
of Great Britain
Encouraging Missionary Disciples



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

Ministry Council

Inspection Report

The Oxford Partnership for
Theological Education and
Training
(OPTET)

March 2009

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GLOSSARY

OPTET	The Oxford Partnership for Theological Education and Training
OBU	Oxford Brookes University
ODM	Oxford Diploma in Ministry
PPH	Permanent Private Hall
RIC	Recognised Independent Centre
RTP	Regional Training Partnership
CMS	Church Mission Society
OxCEPT	Oxford Centre for Ecclesiology & Practical Theology
OCCC	Oxford Centre for Christianity & Culture
ELQ	Equal or Lower Level Qualification
OU DCE	Oxford University Department for Continuing Education

INSPECTORS

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THE INSPECTIONS FRAMEWORK

On behalf of the sponsoring churches, inspection teams are asked to assess the fitness for purpose of the training institution for preparing candidates for ordained and licensed ministry and to make recommendations for the enhancement of the life and work of the institution.

Within the structures of the Church of England, this report is prepared for the House of Bishops acting through the Ministry Council.

In coming to their judgements, inspectors are asked to use the following outcomes with regard to the overall outcome and individual criteria:

Confidence

Overall outcome: a number of recommendations, none of which question the generally high standards found in the inspection.

Criteria level: aspects of an institution's life which show good or best practice.

Confidence with qualifications

Overall outcome: A number of recommendations, including one or more of substance that questions the generally acceptable standards found in the inspection and which can be rectified or substantially addressed by the institution in the coming 12 months.

Criteria level: aspects of an institution's life which show either (a) at least satisfactory practice but with some parts which are not satisfactory or (b) some unsatisfactory practice but where the institution has the capacity to address the issues within 12 months.

No confidence

Overall outcome: A number of recommendations, including one or more of substance which raise significant questions about the standards found in the inspection and the capacity of the institution to rectify or substantially address these in the coming 12 months.

Criteria level: aspects of an institution's life which show either (a) generally not satisfactory practice or (b) some unsatisfactory practice where it is not evident that the institution can rectify the issues within the coming 12 months.

**THE REPORT OF THE INSPECTION OF THE
OXFORD PARTNERSHIP
FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING
(OPTET)**

MARCH 2009

SUMMARY

Introduction

OPTET (Oxford Partnership for Theological Education and Training) was established in 1994. The three Anglican Theological Colleges in Oxford - Ripon College Cuddesdon, St Stephen's House and Wycliffe Hall, with the cognizance of the Theology Faculty of Oxford University, collaborated to produce the Oxford Diploma of Ministry (ODM) course that was then validated by the participating colleges. Since its beginning, other colleges and institutions, including Regent's Park College, have opted in or become Associates. These four colleges comprise the self-designated 'core' members.

Summary of outcomes

The inspection team regards OPTET as fit for the purpose of supporting the colleges as they prepare candidates for ordained, licensed and recognised ministry in the Anglican and Baptist churches.

Criteria

OPTET was assessed on six out of the 13 Inspection Criteria. (See paragraph 9 below)

CRITERIA	OUTCOME
A. Aims, objectives and evaluation of the institution	Confidence with qualifications
B. Relationships with other Institutions	Confidence with qualifications
C. Governance, Management, Constitution	Confidence with qualifications
E. Community and Corporate Life	Confidence with qualifications
F. Common Worship	Confidence
H. Teaching and Learning: Content, Method and Resources	Confidence with qualifications

Overall Outcome	Confidence with qualifications
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General Observations

Since the Oxford University's Review of the Permanent Private Halls (*PPH Review*) was published in 2007, OPTET's most significant piece of work, in conjunction with the Faculty of Theology, has been the development of the proposed Certificate and Diploma in Theology and Pastoral Studies to replace the Oxford Diploma in Ministry. The OPTET Steering Group has devoted considerable energy to this task.

The Inspectors have detected a much lower level of energy in the Steering Group's commitment to the formational and ecumenical dimensions of OPTET's role. The educational contribution of OPTET will be stronger when, in conjunction with the Faculty of Theology, the Steering Group promotes joint Study Weeks and Placements that are clearly integrated with the University's BTh Practical Theology syllabus and its assessment processes, alongside the current commitment to Common Teaching. There is a need for OPTET members to develop a deeper level of mutual trust among the institutions.

Response to the four recommendations of the last inspection (2004)

1. Joint placements to facilitate 'in depth' interaction among students. Until recently a number of pastoral studies weeks were shared, for example: 'Faith and Work' and 'Rural Ministry'. Joint placements continue to take place in the Hospital Pastoral Studies Placement course run by the Chaplaincy.

2. Strategies to meet the training needs of Part-time and Non-residential students:

Since the Oxford Ministry Course (OMC) merged with Ripon College Cuddesdon, part-time non-residential training is more closely integrated there with the residential programme. The relationship with Oxford Brookes University (OBU) and its courses has helped this to happen. Fruitful cooperation with the Faculty of Theology, in developing possible new Oxford University awards, also holds promise for part-time and non-residential students.

3. Strategic thinking and decision making in relation to the outworking of the Hind Report:

A staff member of St Stephen's House serves on the Steering Group of the South Central Regional Training Partnership (RTP). Ripon College Cuddesdon and St Stephen's House have been negotiating membership terms.

4. Further active consideration of joint OPTET Appointments

Geographical factors, together with issues about the nature, timing and financing of any joint OPTET appointment, raise difficulties for development in this area. However, bi-party appointments, shared teaching arrangements and a project partnership between Ripon College Cuddesdon and Regent's Park College have been made successfully.

Strengths

- Collaboration with the Faculty of Theology in the development of new courses;
- The opportunity given to the students to encounter and interact with a range of theological positions and ways of being church ;
- Bi-party appointments and projects in 'partnership';
- 'Common Teaching' in joint OPTET lectures in the Michaelmas and Hilary terms;
- Occasions for joint worship and social interaction;
- The OPTET Hospital Studies Placement;
- Revitalised Subject Tutor Group meetings.

Areas for attention

- A deeper level of mutual trust among the member Institutions;
- An agreed statement of OPTET's aims and objectives;
- Increased energy for the formational and ecumenical role of OPTET;
- Student representation on the Steering Group;
- Interactive and team-teaching in the joint lectures;
- A coherent and effective system for reviewing 'Common Teaching';
- As part of the integrated University syllabus in Practical Theology:-
 - The re-introduction of joint OPTET Study Weeks;
 - More joint practice-based OPTET placements;
- Opportunities for students to review the experiences of joint worship;

FULL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The Background to OPTET

- 1 The Oxford Partnership for Theological Education and Training (OPTET) was formed following the demise of the Church of England's General Ministerial Examination (GME) in 1992. The three Anglican Theological Colleges in Oxford, Ripon College Cuddesdon, St Stephen's House and Wycliffe Hall with the cognizance of the Theology Faculty of Oxford University collaborated to produce the Oxford Diploma of Ministry (ODM) course that was then validated by the participating colleges. Mansfield (United Reformed Church) and Regent's Park (Baptist) joined in to form OPTET which was established in 1994. Since then other colleges have opted into the partnership.
- 2 Today, the full members are those associated with Oxford University. Four are considered to be the 'core' members – Regent's Park College, Ripon College Cuddesdon and the Oxford Ministry Course, St Stephen's House, and Wycliffe Hall. The other members are Blackfriars (Roman Catholic – Dominican), Campion Hall (Roman Catholic – Jesuit), St Benet's Hall (Roman Catholic – Benedictine), and Harris Manchester College (Free Christian). The Diocese of Oxford Ordained Local Ministry Scheme, the Westminster Institute of Education (Oxford Brookes University) and the Church Mission Society are Associate members.

The Inspection 2009

- 3 The last Inspection of OPTET took place in 2004 and the Follow-up Report was published in March 2006. The 2009 Inspection took place at roughly the same time as the inspections of the four 'core' members. Mansfield College ceased training for the United Reformed Church ministry during the intervening period.
- 4 In response to our request, the 'core' OPTET institutions prepared a Submission (2009) that included an 'OPTET Rationale' before going on to outline OPTET's relationship with the University of Oxford, Oxford Brookes University (OBU) and the new South Central Regional Training Partnership (RTP) formed in 2008.
- 5 In addition to the Submission (2009), the Inspectors received copies of the Draft Constitution (revised) 2006, which was confirmed by the Steering Group in 2008.

- 6 In the course of the Michaelmas Term (2008) the Inspectors were present at a meeting with the Oxford University Supervisory Committee for the Permanent Private Halls (PPHs).
- 7 During the course of the Hilary Term 2009, the Inspectors attended two lunch meetings for OPTET members that were followed, at the first by a meeting of the 'Steering Group' and at the second by a meeting of Subject Tutor Groups. On one occasion we were able to attend the joint 'Common Teaching' (lectures) which takes place in central Oxford each Thursday during the Michaelmas and Hilary terms. In the Inspection week itself (March 2-5), we were present at four of the once-a-term 'Joint Worship' services when, the Colleges welcomed members of other OPTET institutions to their own form and style of liturgy which was followed on each occasion by 'table fellowship'.
- 8 We met with the Chair and two members of the Oxford University Faculty of Theology and with the three Heads of the Roman Catholic Houses. We interviewed individually three OPTET Principals and, in the case of Wycliffe Hall because of the Principal's sabbatical, the Vice-Principal. We were able to have conversations with several other OPTET members and Associates. We also visited the joint weekly 'Hospital Pastoral Studies Placement' that takes place in the Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals and is supervised by the Chaplaincy Team.
- 9 When the lead Inspector met the Steering Group in January 2009, the terms of the Inspection were confirmed with the Steering Group. Because not all the sections and criteria in the *Inspections Handbook* (see pages 9-17, 2004 partially updated 2008) relate to the objectives, structures and activities of OPTET, it was agreed the Inspection would report on the present status of the Recommendations in the last Inspection Report, and in relation to only six of the sections and, in those sections, only to the relevant criteria:-
 - Aims, Objectives and Achievements of OPTET.
 - Relationships with other Institutions.
 - Governance, Management, Constitution and Organisation.
 - Community and Corporate Life.
 - Common Worship.
 - Teaching and Learning: Content, Method and Resources.

In the Report which follows, in addition to the **Recommendations**, there are points at which the inspectors **urge** or *suggest* that action be taken.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE 2004 OPTET INSPECTION REPORT

10 The last inspection of OPTET made the following recommendations:

- 1 that OPTET consider how further opportunities might be given for 'at depth' interaction among students, possibly through joint placements.**

Joint placements continue to take place in the Hospital Chaplaincy course run at the John Radcliffe and Littlemore and Warneford Hospitals. A number of pastoral studies weeks have been shared until recently (eg Faith and Work, Rural Ministry).

- 2 OPTET produces strategies for its involvement in the training of part-time and non-residential students and the meeting of their particular needs.**

Since the Oxford Ministry Course (OMC) merged with Ripon College Cuddesdon, part-time non-residential training is more closely integrated there with the residential programme. The relationship with OBU and its courses has helped this to happen. See also the status of the following Recommendation .

- 3 OPTET explores ways by which there can be an increase in strategic thinking and decision making, especially in relation to the working out of the Hind report.**

A staff member of St Stephen's House serves on the Steering Group of the RTP. Two colleges have been negotiating membership terms. Fruitful cooperation with the Faculty of Theology, in developing possible new Oxford University awards, holds promise for part-time and non-residential students.

- 4 OPTET should give further active consideration to the making of joint appointments.**

Geographical factors, together with issues about the nature, timing and financing of any joint OPTET appointment, hamper decision making in this regard. However, bi-party appointments and shared teaching arrangements have been made successfully. For instance, Regent's Park College and Wycliffe Hall, in partnership with the Church Mission Society (CMS), have appointed Dr Cathy Ross as the John V. Taylor Fellow in Missiology. Also, Ripon College Cuddesdon's Oxford Centre for Ecclesiology and Practical Theology (OxCEPT) and Regent's Park College's Oxford Centre for Christianity and Culture (OCCC) have entered into a partnership that

includes the mutual recognition of staff members and joint research projects.

A AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE INSTITUTION

Inspectors will consider to what extent the declared aims and objectives, strategies and policies of the institution correspond to the needs of the Churches, to the institution's own curriculum validation proposals and to accepted public and legal criteria.

A.i The aims and objectives of the institution should be appropriate to the preparation of ordinands for public ministry within the breadth of traditions of the sponsoring church.

A.ii There should be evidence that the current, published statements on training policy produced by the various denominational bodies have been suitably integrated into the training programme.

A.iii There should be evidence of action taken in response to the previous inspection Report and any follow-up.

11 According to its constitution (2006 and confirmed 2008),

‘OPTET is a partnership of institutions in Oxford, most associated with Oxford University, all of which are involved in the teaching of theology, and most in education for Christian ministry. It was established in 1994. Each of the partners is an independent institution and has a distinctive role within its own denomination. The level of participation will vary depending on the different roles of the different institutions in their denomination and in the University.’

12 The Submission (2009) states,

‘The four core institutions cooperate to help one another achieve their own individual aims and objectives while also working on joint initiatives and arrangements.’

Both the Constitution (2006) and the Submission (2009) go on to describe what OPTET does in terms of addressing policy issues and strategy, planning joint worship and ‘table fellowship’, and organising subject tutor groups etc. (See below Section 3). The Inspectors believe that OPTET achieves more than is suggested in the two statements above.

13 The Inspectors therefore decided that during the week of their visit they would ask the groups and individuals that they interviewed two basic questions:-

- 1 What do you value about OPTET?
- 2 How could OPTET be improved?

The questions elicited a range of replies that illustrate both the breadth and depth of respondents' reflections upon the work of OPTET.

14 There can be no doubt that both the Theology Faculty of Oxford University and its members value OPTET highly as a body which participates in the development and monitoring of awards, making college appointments, and organising the delivery and assessment of the taught courses.

15 From the University's point of view, OPTET provides it with an opportunity to cooperate with the churches in the theological education of the clergy. The University derives benefit from its direct involvement and engagement with people in training for professional positions in one of the significant social bodies in modern British society, clergy and ministers of churches – a matter of national interest. It also values the opportunity to cooperate with the churches in the theological education of the laity.

16 From the Colleges' point of view, OPTET offers students the educational advantages of encountering and interacting with diversity, while at the same time challenging any temptation to find security within a prevailing sub-culture. OPTET enables reciprocal teaching, social exchange and 'joint worship'. It performs a formational and ecumenical role in opening a window on the wider church, and enabling students to 'map' their own spiritual experiences alongside those of others, while growing in the knowledge of what 'living together' means within the churches today.

17 We accept these important points made by both Faculty and OPTET members in answer to our questions. In section 3 (see para 34) we draw attention to a failure, in the OPTET Steering Groups we attended, to develop any further collaboration beyond current business in hand.

18 The Constitution states that the role of the Steering Group is to ensure that the 'aims' of OPTET outlined in the Constitution are efficiently put into practice. However, the Constitution does not outline any aims. We believe that the formational and ecumenical purpose of OPTET, along with the academic purpose, needs to be clearly stated in the Constitution.

Recommendation 1

We recommend that the OPTET Steering Group draws up an agreed Statement of Aims and Objectives.

The inspection team has confidence with qualifications with regard to Criterion A, Aims, Objectives and Achievements of the Institution.

B RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS

Inspectors will examine how the institution relates to other educational provision (including any partner university) and to the Churches and secular organisations in its locality, with particular reference to regional groupings of providers of theological education.

B.i The terms of academic and validation/accreditation arrangements with universities should be fair and appropriate to an institution offering training and formation for candidates for ordained ministry.

B.ii The institution should show signs of drawing as much benefit as may be possible from the demands and resources of universities in teaching quality assessment, staff development and the promotion of research.

B.iii There should be evidence of effective engagement with Churches, other faith communities and secular organisations in the locality such as to enhance preparation for public ministry.

B.iv The institution should demonstrate commitment to effective partnership with the other providers of theological education in the region.

- 19 Member institutions of OPTET are all related to the University of Oxford whether as Permanent Private Halls (PPHs) or, in the case of Ripon College Cuddesdon, as a Recognised Independent Centre (RIC).
- 20 The Chair of the Faculty of Theology Board meets the OPTET Heads of House at the beginning of each term. This meeting has proved useful and important, especially since the University's *Review of the Permanent Private Halls* (July 2007). Most of the OPTET teaching staff are Faculty members. Some serve on important committees. Some are examiners across the range of University awards. The BTh Supervisory Committee, which includes OPTET members, not only supervises the cluster of courses under its umbrella but has also responded to the *PPH Review* (2007) and is planning future developments.

- 21 Because the PPHs are licensed to enter students only for the awards of Oxford University, Ripon College Cuddesdon is the only OPTET 'core' institution that relates to Oxford Brookes University and so is able to make use of its provisions.
- 22 All the 'core' OPTET institutions have been involved in discussions about the establishment of the South Central Regional Training Partnership (RTP). The RTP is still in its earliest stages of formal arrangements and each individual OPTET institution is considering its future relationship. Ripon College Cuddesdon and St Stephen's House have joined but are presently involved in negotiations about the terms of their membership.
- 23 One notable collaborative exercise in the past few years, apart from that involving the Faculty of Theology, has been with Blackfriars, one of the Roman Catholic Halls. OPTET is seeking to identify a 'Catholic route' through the Oxford University's BTh which would make it a live option for their lay students thus broadening the ecumenical base of the BTh and its associated courses. Blackfriars took part in the 'Joint Worship' exchange during the course of our inspection.
- 24 It will have become apparent in reading the last few paragraphs that there are different degrees of participation of the individual institutions in the academic courses provided through the Oxford University Faculty of Theology. For instance, the University provides no ministerial training for the Roman Catholic institutions, and the associated institutions like the Church Mission Society have no formal links with the University. As Inspectors, we believe there will be value in OPTET reviewing its membership according to the degree of an individual institution's participation. There could possibly be three categories of membership; 'Core' (as currently understood), Standard (for institutions licensed or formally recognised in some way by Oxford University) and Associate (for those which make an important contribution to OPTET but without formal affiliation to Oxford University).
- 25 There is another important issue with regard to 'accountability'. Questions were put to the Inspectors such as, 'To whom is OPTET accountable?' 'Who authorised the Inspection?' and, 'By whose permission might the Report be posted on the internet?' We believe OPTET should address questions of 'accountability' squarely, along with the review of its membership.

Recommendation 2

We recommend that the Steering Group of OPTET reviews the question of its 'accountability' as well as the categories of its

institutional membership, according to the differing degrees of participation.

<p>The inspection team has confidence with qualifications with regard to Criterion B, Relationships with other institutions.</p>

C GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT, CONSTITUTION AND ORGANISATION

Inspectors will examine the role of the Governing Body and other bodies in the oversight and administration of the institution, taking particular note of the way decisions are made and implemented at different levels of the institution.

- C.i There should be evidence of effective financial, administrative and management structures that facilitate the stated aims and objectives of the institution.*
- C.ii There should be evidence of a structured contribution made by the student body so that it plays an effective role in decision-making processes.*
- C.iii There should be evidence that tutorial and administrative staff are able to fulfil their job descriptions both individually and corporately and are resourced to do so.*
- C.iv There should be a well-designed and operative appraisal system for all staff.*
- C.v The training institution should meet the current legal requirements, for example, with regard to Fire prevention, Health and Safety and Child Protection.*

26 As noted above, OPTET is a partnership of institutions in Oxford, most of which are related directly to Oxford University, and all of which are involved in the teaching of theology, the majority in education for Christian ministry. Associate Institutions have no direct association with the University. OPTET is administered by a Steering Group which has a history.

27 A Joint Committee was established between the Board of the Faculty of Theology and the OPTET Steering Group in 1999. After a period of some years in which, according to the OPTET Submission (2009), the Joint Committee 'functioned rather feebly' it has 'recently gained vigor and relevance in the wake of the *PPH Review* (2007), proving a useful forum

- for discussion of matters of common interest including ELQ proposals, BTh/CTh matters, and more.'
- 28 The Steering Group is described by the Constitution as consisting of at least one and not more than two representatives nominated by the participating institutions to represent them, and one member nominated by each Associate Institution. Representatives may be invited from other institutions. There is a Chair and a Secretary. The Chair is a senior member of staff at one of the 'full member institutions', usually a principal. The Secretary is drawn from a different institution. Each of the two officers serves for two academic years, and the offices are not renewable. To ensure continuity the officers change in alternate years. Currently the Chair is the Principal of Regent's Park College, and the Secretary is the Vice-Principal of St Stephen's House. The minutes of the Steering Group meeting of 24th January 2008 indicate that the Chair is elected, but no where is it specified how or by whom the Chair is elected, nor how the Secretary is appointed.
- 29 The 'role' of the partnership, as outlined in the Constitution, is to promote:-
- Efficient sharing of resources;
 - Consultation, collaboration and cooperation in the delivery of academic and other programmes;
 - Shared acts of worship;
 - Formal and informal meetings of staff and students.
- 30 The current tasks of OPTET are identified as to:-
- Work with the University to ensure the smooth delivery of University courses delivered in the OPTET Institutions, especially the MTh, BTh/Cth and OUDCE qualifications;
 - Organise twice-termly lunches for all members of staff;
 - Organise shared acts of worship and social events;
 - Organise joint lecture courses and other shared teaching as appropriate;
 - Ensure appropriate representation on University committees;
 - Prepare joint submissions for inspections;
 - Promote appropriate collaboration and representation on staff appointments;
 - Ensure regular meetings of different subject groups;
 - Ensure efficient dissemination of information between Institutions;
 - Conduct other business as determined by the Steering Group or the University.
- 31 The Steering Group meets once a term, following a buffet lunch in one of the colleges. The lunches at which we were present were attended by the

staff of the host institution and some staff from other OPTET institutions. The lunches provide a relaxed opportunity for teaching staff of the various institutions to meet, for new members of staff and visitors to be introduced, and for an informal exchange of reports updating OPTET members on the news and upcoming initiatives of the colleges.

- 32 At the Steering Group meeting we attended there were two representatives from each of the four 'full member institutions', and in each case one of the representatives was the principal. Five 'full member institutions' were unrepresented. There were no representatives from the three 'Associated Institutions'. We were informed by the Chair of the Steering Group that meetings are usually well-attended by the representatives of the four 'core' colleges (Regent's Park, Ripon College Cuddesdon, St Stephen's House, and Wycliffe Hall).
- 33 The first meeting in the Hilary Term (2009) was used to:-
- plan the complexities of the termly exchanges of students for worship;
 - consider and review the courses jointly offered in conjunction with the University;
 - review the common lectures offered to students on Thursday mornings;
 - any other business.
- 34 From our observation of two meetings of the Steering Group (January 2008 and January 2009), the time (about an hour) was used to review and forward business currently in hand. There was no evidence that any initiatives to further develop collaboration between the colleges was envisaged, or to share resources, or learn from each other's experiences of ministerial training. In the January 2009 meeting, although concerns were expressed by some present about the value of the joint Thursday lectures, there was no follow up of this. We return to this in Section 6 below.
- 35 The most significant piece of work that has involved the participation of OPTET principals during the last year has been the part they have played with the Faculty of Theology in the development of the proposed Certificate and Diploma in Theology and Pastoral Studies to replace the Oxford Diploma in Ministry. The 'Joint Preface' in the OPTET Submission (2009) prior to the Inspection describes this as an example of 'OPTET working at its best, with each of the Anglican institutions in particular taking the lead at different stages of their development and the overcoming of tensions along the way'. This is admirable, but there is clearly considerable potential for developing further closer cooperation between the institutions. The proposals made in the 'Joint Preface' for possible further cooperation are very modest

- 36 At the second OPTET meeting each term, the lunch is followed by Subject Tutor Groups. The 'Joint Preface' to the Inspection indicates that during the academic year 2008/9 these groups have been given a more robust structure by the Steering Group. Coordinators have been appointed to set basic agendas to include consideration of examiners' reports and sharing for good practice in teaching.
- 37 In evidence submitted to the inspectors, in conversations with OPTET members and principals, and in their own observation of the way Steering Group members engaged in the business of the meetings they attended, the inspectors were made aware of the need for OPTET institutions to develop a deeper level of mutual trust.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that the OPTET Principals set aside time to reflect on present levels of mutual trust among the institutions and consider the way forward.

<p>The inspection team has confidence with qualifications with regard to Criterion C, Governance, Management, Constitution and Organisation</p>
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E COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE LIFE

Inspectors will consider how the institution understands and structures community life, and interprets the role of corporate life in training for ordained ministry; also how far corporate life is evident in the relationships between members of the institution.

E.i The institution should offer a clear statement of how it understands its corporate life, including issues of gender, ethnic grouping and disability and other matters of natural justice, in a way, which harmonises with its aims and objectives in preparing candidates for public ministry.

E.ii The institution should show evidence that the structures, requirements and practice of the institution reflect the stated policy.

- 38 As noted above, the Steering Group of OPTET arranges for the teaching staff to meet twice termly, for about two hours. Apart from 'Joint Worship' and the 'Common Teaching' programme, to which we refer in Sections 5 and 6 below, the Steering Committee arranges for 'table fellowship' to

follow each act of worship. Recently, by changing days, it has been possible to include in the exchanges Baptist ministerial students, most of whom are pursuing a church-based training course that brings them to Oxford for only two days at the beginning of each week. There is a periodic residential exchange of students between St Stephen's House and Wycliffe Hall.

- 39 We note that although, in compliance with the OPTET Constitution (2006), 'formal and informal meetings of staff and students' take place, students are not represented on the Steering Group. In conversation with students on the joint hospital placement, we heard that meeting, learning and working with students from other theological training institutions in Oxford is a valued component of the whole experience. We believe students bring a mature and engaged perspective to their formation in an ecumenical setting where people with different strongly held traditions are able to meet in a shared commitment to the common task. We believe students have much to contribute to the planning and organisation of OPTET's priorities and activities.

Recommendation 4

We recommend that students should be represented in the membership of the Steering Group.

- 40 The termly meetings of the teaching staff, as we have said, were short and mainly social in character. In our experience, the meetings of the Steering Group, also short, have concentrated understandably on OPTET's response to the recommendations of the *PPH Review* (2007). There is considerable energy being invested by the OPTET Heads of House in the current discussions with the Faculty through the supervisory committee for the BTh. Although the latest new course proposals have seen OPTET working at its best, we detected a lack of energy in promoting the formational and ecumenical dimensions of OPTET which, in terms of practice, could be addressed through a review of the organisational structure of the partnership and its responsibility for the academic, practical theology, ecumenical, and formational development of students.
- 41 Bearing in mind the general change of mood in the churches about the ecumenical imperative, we noted that the majority of respondents to our two questions did believe it to be important. We endorse the general observation made in the joint Submission (2009); '... it may be appropriate for all institutions to be challenged about the extent and depth of their future cooperation.' In the case of all four 'core' OPTET institutions, their respective Inspection teams have made recommendations emphasising the need to build on OPTET's ecumenical role as stated in the Constitution, and extend it in its practical outworking (see the Recommendations

concerning OPTET made to the four 'core' institutions in their recent Inspections listed at the end of this document). It is for this reason that we believe the OPTET Steering Group should re-order itself appropriately to give equal energy to the formational and ecumenical task as it does to its university and academic concerns. For example, it was pointed out to us by more than one respondent that today the ecumenical challenge is not so much between churches as - perhaps more significantly at any rate for Anglicans - within them. In any event, living, learning and working together as Christians, with respect for difference, is a commonly agreed priority among all the OPTET partners.

Recommendation 5

We recommend that the Steering Group considers a division of labour between (a) University and Academic concerns and (b) Formational and Ecumenical concerns and activities.

- 42 Although we believe that the inclusion of student representation on the Steering Group will help to facilitate efforts to achieve formational and ecumenical goals (as well, of course, as educational objectives), it could help if there is another focus person in addition to the Chair to enable progress in both dimensions.
- 43 The Secretary plays a considerable part in overseeing the administrative details of the OPTET programme. We acknowledge the value of this essential contribution. We do not consider that our recommendation of a division of labour should lead to burdening the Secretary with further responsibilities. We are thinking of someone else who would help the Chair to develop the vision and aims of OPTET, and accept the responsibility for ensuring that decisions about formational and ecumenical priorities are taken and implemented.

Recommendation 6

We recommend that the Steering Group considers appointing someone (perhaps as a Vice-Chair) to help facilitate and energise such a division of labour, and implement OPTET decisions with regard to formational and ecumenical priorities.

<p>The inspection team has confidence with qualifications with regard to Criterion E, Community and Corporate Life.</p>
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F COMMON WORSHIP

Inspectors will consider the arrangements for common worship and the policy underlying them, noting the use of the authorized and other forms of worship, and how worship is conducted.

- F.i The spaces designated for prayer and worship should be appropriate for their purpose.*
- F.ii There should be a publicly stated policy on, and arrangements for, corporate worship. The policy and arrangements should take account of, and equip candidates to work within, the variety of practice within the sponsoring church.*
- F.iii There should be a policy concerning balance of worship, including authorized and innovative forms, and of denominational worship in ecumenical situations.*
- F.iv In the light of preparation for public ministry, there should be provision to address the tension between worship as an activity of the Church and as a vehicle of professional training.*
- F.v There should be a policy about expected attendance at public worship and evidence of its outworking.*

44 OPTET's constitution of January 2008 states that one of the roles of the partnership is to promote 'shared acts of worship', and in the Appendix to the Constitution it is stated that currently this consists of

- Michaelmas Term: Wednesday of fifth week: Joint Colleges' Eucharists in the three Church of England colleges, which students from other Institutions may be invited to attend.
- Hilary Term: Thursday of sixth week: Anglican Institutions in turn invite non-Anglican students to evening worship and meal; Monday of seventh week: non-Anglican Institutions invite students of Anglican Institutions to evening worship and meal.
- Trinity Term: Monday of fifth week: joint act of worship organised by one Institution usually in collaboration with others in the University Church followed by meal.

45 Since the last inspection, in an attempt to make the events more inclusive, and Baptist involvement more viable, the Hilary exchange has changed days, and this year, for the first time, Regent's Park College has been included in the Michaelmas Term Joint Colleges' Eucharists.

- 46 Clearly organising student exchanges for these services is a major logistical feat, and a certain amount of time was devoted to it at the Steering Group meeting earlier in the Hilary term. The current Secretary of the Steering Group has done a good job in allocating visiting groups, to ensure that accommodation in various chapels and dining rooms was not overstretched. We attended the 'shared acts of worship' one Monday in the Hilary Term, and managed to attend part of the evening worship at Blackfriars, Regent's Park College, Ripon College Cuddesdon and St Stephen's House. So far as we could tell students from other institutions were present, and were provided with helpful leaflets setting out the service. The worship was in general a good example of the non-eucharistic worship of each tradition. Visitors were hospitably received, and the opportunity, was used, so far as we could tell, for students from different colleges to get to know one another, and to be shown round the buildings.
- 47 Greater benefit could be obtained from these valuable experiences. We *suggest* that students, either in their own institutions, or, better in groups representing at least one other institution, could usefully reflect together on their experience of the worship. It would be better still if a staff or student member of the host college were present to outline the rationale of the worship in which the students participated.

The inspection team has confidence with regard to Criterion F, Common Worship.

H TEACHING AND LEARNING: CONTENT, METHOD AND RESOURCES

Inspectors will attend a representative sample of different teaching and learning activities, noting their quality and effectiveness and the methods used. They will examine the adequacy of educational resources, especially libraries, and will look at samples of students' written work.

H.i The content and process of the educational programmes should equip candidates for beginning public ministry, in line with denominational guidelines.

H.ii Principles concerning what is included in pre-ordination/authorisation training and left to post-ordination/authorisation training should be available and consonant with any denominational requirements

H.iii Teaching and learning programmes should serve the aims and objectives of the institution and of the educational programmes of which they form a part. They should demonstrate a proper balance

between the academic, formational and practical aspects of training.

- H.iv Units of teaching and learning should have clear and appropriate aims, be well structured and enable students to achieve appropriate learning goals. Teaching programmes should introduce students to the appropriate knowledge and learning processes, while drawing on student experience.*
- H.v The educational methods employed, and the balance of methods within the educational programme, should underpin the stated aims of the programme.*
- H.vi Teaching programmes should be complemented by structured opportunities for students to learn, as individuals and as groups.*
- H.vii Staff should provide formal and informal feedback to students and assessment of work and of candidates' progress, both in terms of academic progress and in terms of preparation for beginning public ministry. There should be both affirmation and constructive criticism, as appropriate, of students and of work.*
- H.viii Published assessment criteria should be used by the teaching staff and be available to students.*
- H.ix The educational programmes offered should be supported by an appropriate learning environment. This should include adequate provision of resources, library and ICT, placements and practical opportunities to learn.*

- 48 At a meeting with the Oxford University Supervisory Committee for PPHs (November 2008), the Inspectors were made aware by the Chair of their concern about 'the academic standards of certain of the degrees and diplomas that are taught at the PPHs'. The Committee needs to be able to assure the University 'that the standards of teaching at the Permanent Private Halls are appropriately high....' They informed the Inspectors that the Board of the Faculty of Theology intends to take full responsibility for the BTh and its operation, 'strengthening its representation on the committee that manages the degree, so as effectively to ensure Faculty Board control.' In addition, they indicated that 'a new lecture series in 2008-09 will strengthen the involvement of post-holders in delivering the course, and it is proposed that there should be an increased presence of post-holders as BTh examiners.' One of the purposes of a greater measure of University control is 'to make the delivery of the courses less local in character' to ensure that the same degree or diploma should not be taught in different Halls in 'significantly different ways'.

- 49 OPTET's Constitution of 2008 indicates that one of the roles of the partnership is 'consultation, collaboration and co-operation in the delivery of academic and other programmes'. The Appendix to the Constitution states that there will be Lectures on Wednesday mornings:-

Michaelmas Term

Introduction to Ethics
Theology of the Church of England
Introduction to Old Testament

Hilary Term

Christian Witness in the Contemporary World
Marriage, Sexuality and the Family

- 50 For some years OPTET has promoted courses of lectures in Oxford on Wednesday mornings of particular relevance for those pursuing the BTh, Certificate in Theology and Diploma in Ministry courses. The Follow-Up Report (December 2005) to the 2004 Inspection indicated that the Wednesday morning lectures were due for a rethink. Following the PPH Review (2007), OPTET in cooperation with the BTh Supervisory Committee reviewed the lectures to seek to make them more comprehensive and to tie them more securely to the rich resources of the University's Faculty of Theology. The lectures are now taught jointly by OPTET and Faculty post-holders to provide core teaching on the most commonly taken BTh options.
- 51 Lectures now take place on Thursdays, in the Examination Schools. There are lectures during the Michaelmas and Hilary terms:-
- Michaelmas term for first years on:
Old Testament, New Testament and Church History
and for final years students on:
Doctrine, Ethics and Spirituality,
- Hilary term for first years on:
Christian Witness, New Testament, and Church History,
and for final year students on:
Christian Mission and Ministry, Worship, and Biblical Interpretation.
- 52 We attended lectures on one Thursday during the Hilary term. The administration seemed satisfactory in that the lectures were well signed, and the rooms used were satisfactory. The lectures were each in their different ways well presented, and the content varied from good to very good. In one lecture a member of one college staff introduced a member of another college to give the lecture, and a member of a third college staff was

- present, and we gathered that from time to time they did team teaching. We thought that was exemplary.
- 53 The lecture format, however, even though a few minutes were allowed at the end of each lecture for questions, does not allow for much interaction between lecturers and students, nor any opportunity for interaction amongst students from different Anglican and Christian traditions.
- 54 It was difficult to estimate whether all colleges were well-represented by the students for whom the lectures were intended. We were surprised how few students took notes during the lectures.
- 55 While a start has been made with setting up subject tutor meetings as part of the second OPTET meeting of each term, we consider the Steering Committee should seek ways of ensuring that more time is given to consultation and planning the OPTET lectures between the relevant subject tutors and that there should be team teaching, so that students can experience tutors from different Anglican and Christian tradition interacting with one another. There would be great advantage if tutors were to attend the lectures given in their field, or at least circulate their handouts to one another, so that they can refer in their teaching in their own institutions to material from other lectures in the series.
- 56 We also consider college authorities should make it clear to students that the OPTET lectures are essential to their courses, and demonstrate that they trust the quality and content of the lectures by resisting the temptation to duplicate the lectures in their colleges. We were told that this has been happening in at least one case.
- 57 We recognise that there may be reluctance in some students to give credit to views expressed by lecturers from traditions other than their own and an unwillingness to move out of their own comfort zones, indicated by a tendency for students of particular colleges to sit together. However we believe the Steering Committee, with the Faculty of Theology, should seek ways in which there could be a more interactive approach to learning, to help students to explore the understanding of their own tradition in relation to students from institutions of a different tradition. In the past, joint Study Weeks have served this purpose. We believe they should be re-introduced in such a way that they are closely integrated with the Practical Theology teaching and assessment processes for the University's academic awards.
- 58 Whereas students have prejudices and disagree with some of what they hear in lectures and are more likely to report these points to the authorities in their own institutions, we believe the Steering Group should set up an appropriate common process of securing feedback about all the OPTET

lectures from students. The results of this feedback should be collated and circulated to the lecturers, the Faculty Board and the Heads of all the Institutions responsible for, and participating in, the lectures. They should be reviewed by the Steering Group.

Recommendation 7

We recommend that as part of the ongoing review of ‘Common Teaching’ and in consultation with the Theology Faculty, the Steering Group should

- **Oversee a more thorough consulting and planning process between subject tutors;**
- **Make the OPTET joint lectures the normal provision of teaching in the subject areas they cover, accepted by all the Colleges;**
- **Plan the re-introduction of joint Study Weeks;**
- **Establish a common process of securing feedback on OPTET lectures, the results of which should be circulated to lecturers, the Faculty Board and Heads of the ‘core’ institutions, and be reviewed by the Steering Group.**

59 We were able to visit students and their supervisors on the joint ‘Hospital Pastoral Studies Placement 2008-2009’. The course is divided between taught sessions and time spent on the ward. On ward visiting days there is an opportunity to reflect pastorally and theologically on the experience in small groups, one of which we were able to attend. The students we met, from two different OPTET colleges, spoke warmly of the benefits they derived from practice-based learning in a diverse team drawing upon different denominations, church traditions and Christian experiences.

60 We believe there is considerable potential for pooling the theological experience and ability amongst the tutorial staff and students of the various institutions that form OPTET, as well as in the Faculty of Theology, and we consider that further opportunities should be explored for making this appropriately available to the students of all the institutions. For example, there could be an exchange of information about challenging cross-grained placements for students: that is, outside their comfort zones.

Recommendation 8

In consultation with the Theology Faculty, the Steering Group should promote more supervised observational and/or practice-based joint placements.

- 61 In reporting on the status of the Recommendations in the 2004 OPTET Inspection Report (see paragraph 10 above), we have already referred to the recent joint appointment made by Regent's Park College and Wycliffe Hall and to the 'partnership' between Centres associated with Ripon College Cuddesdon and Regent's Park College.

Recommendation 9

We recommend that the Steering Group should encourage and support more bi-party or collaborative appointments and initiatives between the partner institutions.

The inspection team has confidence with qualifications with regard to Criterion H, Teaching and Learning: Content, Method and Resources.

CONCLUSION

- 62 OPTET members need to develop a deeper level of trust between the Institutions, not least in the light of the recommendations made to each of the 'core' member institutions by their inspectors, and listed below. Following the publication of the PPH Review in July 2007, the most significant piece of work that has involved the participation of OPTET principals has been the part they have played with the Faculty of Theology in the development of the proposed Certificate and Diploma in Theology and Pastoral Studies to replace the Oxford Diploma in Ministry. The Steering Group has devoted considerable energy to this task. The Inspectors have detected a much lower level of energy in the Steering Group's commitment to the formational and ecumenical dimensions of OPTET's role. We believe the impact of OPTET will be stronger when, in cooperation with the Faculty of Theology, the Steering Group promotes joint Study Weeks and Placements that are clearly integrated with the University's BTh Practical Theology syllabus and its assessment processes. There should also be opportunities for theological reflection on OPTET's shared acts of worship and other ecumenical activities.

Overall Outcome: The inspection team has confidence with qualifications in OPTET as it supports the institutions which prepare candidates for ordained ministry.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

We recommend that the OPTET Steering Group draws up an agreed Statement of Aims and Objectives. (para 18)

Recommendation 2

We recommend that the Steering Group of OPTET reviews the question of its ‘accountability’, as well as the categories of its institutional membership, according to the differing degrees of participation. (para 25)

Recommendation 3

We recommend that the OPTET Principals set aside time to reflect on present levels of mutual trust among the institutions and consider the way forward. (para 37)

Recommendation 4

We recommend that students should be represented in the membership of the Steering Group. (para 39)

Recommendation 5

We recommend that the Steering Group considers a division of labour between (a) University and Academic concerns and (b) Formational and Ecumenical concerns and activities. (para 41)

Recommendation 6

We recommend that the Steering Group considers appointing someone (perhaps as a Vice-Chair) to help facilitate and energise such a division of labour, and implement OPTET decisions with regard to formational and ecumenical priorities. (para 43)

Recommendation 7

We recommend that as part of the ongoing review of ‘Common Teaching’ and in consultation with the Theology Faculty, the Steering Group should

- Oversee a more thorough consulting and planning process between subject tutors;**

- **Make the OPTET joint lectures the normal provision of teaching in the subject areas they cover, accepted by all the Colleges;**
- **Plan the re-introduction of joint Study Weeks;**
- **Establish a common process of securing feedback on OPTET lectures, the results of which should be circulated to lecturers, the Faculty Board and Heads of the 'core' institutions, and be reviewed by the Steering Group. (para 58)**

Recommendation 8

We recommend that in consultation with the Theology Faculty, the Steering Group should promote more supervised observational and/or practice-based joint placements. (para 60)

Recommendation 9

We recommend that the Steering Group should encourage and support more bi-party or collaborative appointments and initiatives between the partner institutions. (para 61)

Recommendations concerning OPTET made to the four ‘core’ institutions in their recent Inspections:

Regents Park Inspection Team:

We recommend that the College energetically continues to share in, extend and promote the work of OPTET.

St Stephen’s House Inspection Team:

We recommend that the staff in co-operation with the other members of OPTET seek further ways in which the existing collaborative work on the BTh can be extended.

Ripon College Cuddesdon Inspection Team:

We recommend that RCC maintain its involvement and commitment to OPTET and continues to work collaboratively with others to develop and extend the work and resources of OPTET for enhancing the ecumenical and inter-church experiences of theological education and ministerial training.

We recommend that the institution explore with the University and with its partner colleges in OPTET ways in which theological reflection and the development of practical theology can be integrated more seamlessly across the BTh curriculum.

Wycliffe Hall Inspection Team:

In making decisions that could affect other partners, such as staff appointments and in considering new opportunities for ordination training pathways, Wycliffe Hall should consult, collaborate and co-operate with its partners in the Oxford Partnership for Theological Education and Training (OPTET).