

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

STRATEGIC REVIEW OF TEACHING OF THEOLOGY AT QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

2 June and 3 June 2016

Panel Membership

[REDACTED] (Chair)
[REDACTED] (University of Durham)
[REDACTED] (Trinity College Dublin)
[REDACTED] (University of Glasgow)

In attendance: [REDACTED] (Academic Affairs Queen's University)

The Panel held a range of meetings with senior University staff; [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] of the Institute of Theology; [REDACTED] including relevant colleagues; and the [REDACTED], and undergraduate and postgraduate students.

1. Introduction and Context

This report represents the findings of the Strategic Review Panel which was carried out at the request of the University and with the agreement of the Colleges.

Historically, the teaching of Theology has been carried out through four independent Colleges, recognised by the University. The four Colleges are Union Theological College (UTC), Belfast Bible College (BBC), Edgehill Theological College (ETC) and Irish Baptist College (IBC). St Mary's University College had been approved as the fifth College but withdrew formal membership a number of years ago.

The 1908 Irish Universities Act restricted *"the use of any building belonging to the university or college for any teaching given by such professor, or for any other religious teaching no part of the cost of which is defrayed out of public funds."*

Over the years this has been interpreted as precluding the employment of University staff to teach Theology on University premises. Therefore, the teaching of Theology has been carried out by the Colleges on behalf of Queen's and is co-ordinated and quality assured by the Institute of Theology, a unit within the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences which is headed by a Director and two Associate Directors appointed from among the University's full-time senior academic staff. The Panel noted that the University has approved and teaches modules in Religion on its mainstream programmes, for example, Sociology of Religion and Religion and Ritual, therefore, the spirit and terms of the 1908 Act may already be contravened.

UTC and BBC are constituent member Colleges and deliver undergraduate and postgraduate teaching. IBC and ETC have signed Affiliate Membership Agreements with the University permitting the teaching of postgraduate students only. In September 2015 BBC withdrew from undergraduate teaching and did not recruit undergraduate students in 2015-16. Therefore, undergraduate students shall be taught out at BBC during 2016-17 and subsequently BBC shall also operate under an Affiliate Membership Agreement.

The Panel was asked to consider:

- (i) the current organisational shape and academic operation of the Institute of Theology and its fit for the purpose of delivering a contemporary research-led education in religious studies and theology;
- (ii) the strengths and weakness of the current organisation and what elements of a contemporary education in religious studies and theology could enhance the undergraduate provision;
- (iii) the appropriateness of the PGR student experience;
- (iv) what a sustainable model of education and research provision in Theology and Religious Studies might look like going forward.

The Panel noted significant ambiguity around how the 1908 Irish Universities Act is reflected in the University Charter and what it actually means for the teaching of Theology and Religion. The ambiguity now not only restricts progressive developments in the subject but also leads to confusion over the ownership and entitlements of the students. The Panel suggested that the 1908 Act may have different meaning and significance today and advised that the University seek legal clarification as a matter of urgency. The Panel would strongly recommend that the University seek to take whatever measures necessary to address any changes to its Charter as a result. Further expansion on this recommendation can be found in sections 10 and 11.

2. Role of the Institute of Theology

Historically, the Institute of Theology has been a mechanism for the administration of the degree programmes developed and taught by the Colleges, and it was not seen as a proactive platform for delivering change or innovation. However, the Panel admired the current management of the Institute for the leadership it has shown in areas where it was able to take initiatives, for example, with the introduction of a core Master's level module; the setting up of the Research Forum; and improved relationships with the Colleges.

The Panel noted that the Institute Management Board is the key management and decision-making body and is chaired by [REDACTED]. The University appoints an external advisor to the Management Board who is a subject specialist. The Institute's Education Committee oversees any module/programme changes and the University's Collaborative Provision Group is responsible for monitoring the provision annually and periodically every 5 years.

The Panel noted that the Colleges have observed closer control and leadership from the Institute in recent times but that the Colleges were hugely supportive of the [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] where very good personal relationships had been built up.

The Panel acknowledged that the unusual context for the provision of the teaching of Theology has resulted in the development of a hybrid model of collaborative provision; it neither operates under a franchised or validated model of collaborative provision. A redefined characterisation of Theology and Religion at Queen's could open up the subject within the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. There are a large number of A Level students studying Religious Studies in N Ireland but the current offering in Theology appears not to meet the needs of a large number of these students. All the Colleges have an evangelical protestant ethos, and predominantly male staff and the University has no control over College staff appointments. A new

model that would underscore the quality of the existing provision supplemented and enriched by an interdisciplinary aspect and joint delivery of modules in a pathway on Religion and Theology would offer an exciting option.

The Panel acknowledged the constraints of the 1908 Irish Universities Act; however, it pointed out that it is highly unusual for an Institute of Theology not to be led by a theologian. The current arrangement offers a narrow breadth of subject matter and perspective and restricts opportunities for innovation.

3. Undergraduate

The Panel noted the following undergraduate programmes provided by the Colleges through the Institute of Theology and awarded by Queen's University:

BTh
BD
BA (J) Theology and History
BA (J) Theology and English
BA (J) Theology and Philosophy
Graduate Diploma in Theology

Currently in 2015-16 there are 88 students on the BTh, 29 students on the BD and 51 students across the joint honours programmes. Recruitment to undergraduate programmes across the University is restricted by the Maximum Aggregate Student Numbers (MASN) cap. Theology has been allocated approximately 50-55 student places each year with approximately 360 applications made each year, mostly to the BTh programme.

It was noted that 85 per cent of students are taught at UTC and 15 per cent currently taught at BBC. ETC and IBC withdrew from providing Queen's undergraduate programme in 2010 as a result of not being able to meet the minimum student number threshold per module. BBC withdrew in 2015. Therefore, from 2015-16 all new undergraduate students will be taught at UTC. It was noted that the Graduate Diploma which is at undergraduate level will also only be taught at UTC. ETC, IBC and BBC offer undergraduate degree programmes validated by other UK Universities.

The undergraduate curriculum is largely based on protestant evangelical teaching with little input to the teaching from other perspectives. As the University does not have subject specialists in Theology the curriculum developments are initiated by the subject specialists in the Colleges.

The Panel expressed concern about the academic diversity and narrow breadth of subject matter and perspective of the curriculum over the past years and particularly now that undergraduate provision is concentrated in one College. The quality of the provision is severely affected by this lack of diversity. In addition, there is a lack of diversity in the teaching provision and staff. For example, there are now no full-time female members of staff teaching on the undergraduate programmes, which is a critically important feature of any academic subject.

UTC acknowledged that its primary mission is to train students for the ministry but now the situation has arisen that it is the only provider of undergraduate teaching in Theology for Queen's University. It was noted that nearly all Ministry students studying at UTC are Queen's students studying on the BD pathway. But not all Queens' Theology students are studying for the Ministry. It was noted that it has been agreed that appropriately qualified UTC Ministry students who are not Queen's students could

register as Credit Earning Non Graduating (CENG) students which would regularise the situation and help assure the quality.

The Panel noted that the current Joint Honours programmes combined modules from two curricula areas rather than genuinely jointly developed or interdisciplinary programmes. There was little evidence of collaboration with other University departments. The Panel noted and commended the [REDACTED] innovative vision for the development of joint programmes if constraints around the teaching of Theology/Religion were removed. It was agreed that the difficult institutional structures work against interdisciplinary and properly developed joint programmes. The characteristics of a contemporary university education are here diminished by the institutional structures, therefore limiting the opportunity for effective Joint Honours and interdisciplinary teaching.

[REDACTED] has a positive vision for potential growth and expansion of the subject and its contribution to global citizenship and international debate. The Panel noted that at a recent curriculum review undertaken through the Institute of Theology, UTC staff expressed an interest in expanding into the following innovative areas (either by extending their own expertise, or by working with colleagues in AHSS):

- Philosophy of Religion
- Religion/Theology and Politics
- Religion/Theology and Society
- Religion/Theology and Literature
- Religion/Theology and Language
- Religion /Theology and Culture
- Religion/Theology and the Arts
- Religion/Theology and Creative Writing
- Christian and non-Christian Belief and Identity

In the shorter term, UTC suggested structural changes to the teaching of the Biblical Languages so that these modules would be delivered as year long modules, and the development of an Introduction to Theology module for 2017-18. However, further discussion would be required on the provision of such a module for Joint Honours students.

The Panel noted that the curriculum developments suggested by [REDACTED] would enhance the provision and ensure that Theology was delivered both from an outside perspective 'looking in' as well as from the denominational perspective 'looking out'.

The Panel noted that Theology at Queen's scored highly in the NSS results and that recruitment to the programmes was steady. However, the Panel recommended that diversity in the teaching of Theology at Queen's needs to be radically increased in the teaching staff, student body, teaching methods and teaching content as well as in issues of gender, race, sexual orientation and most particularly in faith affiliation. The Institute is frustrated in its efforts to address these issues by the current structures. [REDACTED] is to be commended for outlining an innovative and progressive vision but little progress can be made within the current institutional context and structure.

4. Postgraduate Taught

The Panel noted that the MTh is currently offered in all four Colleges and that the MDiv has been withdrawn. The Panel further noted the desire of all four Colleges to continue to offer postgraduate provision with Queen's University and to have more involvement in the intellectual life of the University. However, IBC and ETC recruit very few postgraduate students. Application to the MTh is made to the University and the students select at which College they wish to undertake the programme based on the College ethos. There are currently 20 MTh students across the Colleges.

The Panel expressed concern that the structure and delivery of the MTh was more akin to the normal structure of a typical MRes in that modules are tailored to the interests of the individual students and are taught in isolated conditions, although it was noted that taught modules are offered at BBC under a more traditional MTh structure. Students are allocated a first and second supervisor by [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Depending on the dissertation topic the first or second supervisor could be a member of University staff but most are supervised entirely within the Colleges. The Panel suggested that this would not be common practice in most other Universities. As a result of this structure and a number of the students undertaking the MTh in a part-time basis it is difficult to establish a cohort of MTh students. The Panel noted that the individualised model of delivery is very labour-intensive and costly and reduces the ability to establish a postgraduate and research community. The Panel noted the difficulties of establishing equality and consistency of standards. It was also noted that oversight provided by the Institute's Postgraduate Committee was limited by structural constraints but that rigorous assessment of all materials was carried out by the external examiner.

The Panel noted ETC's desire to develop postgraduate provision related to the practice of ministry; however, this has not been something that the University has been able to approve. The potential for a Master's programme in Spirituality has been discussed which would be taught collaboratively across the Colleges. There are some practical issues over student registration, fees and geographical distance.

The nature of the delivery of the MTh makes it difficult to establish a Postgraduate and research environment. In addition, the practical arrangements whereby the individual teaching of the MTh is carried out in the four different Colleges to largely part-time students makes for a fragmented student community. The Institute should be commended for its attempts to establish a Postgraduate environment under this difficult structural context. The tensions arising from different Colleges seeking to do different things is indicative of a lack of coherence between the College and University structures.

5. Research Students

There are currently 24 students undertaking PhD study through the Colleges. 18 of those have a first supervisor based at UTC. The Panel noted that 40 per cent of the total number of PhD students is currently allocated to the same supervisor. UTC acknowledged that this is a considerable workload, exceeding the limits normally set within university structures elsewhere. It is not clear that this is sustainable or good academic practice. The students are required to participate in research skills and career development courses offered by the University's Graduate School. The Panel noted a series of events designed to promote the research environment in an interdisciplinary way for the students, including development of practical skills, poster presentations, seminars and participation at the Religious Studies Forum.

The Panel suggested that the Faculty-led Religious Studies Forum offered a very positive opportunity for staff and students in the Colleges to engage with staff teaching in various disciplines across the University. However, attendance has been problematic and its potential to deliver inter disciplinary research has not been fully utilised. As a large proportion of PhD students study on a part-time basis it is difficult to get them together or to interact across disciplines. There are uneven and very limited levels of financial support offered to students to attend UK or international conferences.

The Panel noted the establishment of a Centre for Intellectual Disability Theology and Ministry in 2015 based at BBC. The Centre emerged out of a solid foundation of academic and practical work carried out by staff in the College and a number of graduate students over several years. It is seen as a hub for sharing ideas, skills, practices and possibilities.

The Panel noted that the Institute of Theology invite an international Visiting Fellow to come to the University for up to one month to deliver lectures and student workshops. The Institute organises an Annual Showcase Religious Studies Forum lecture. However, the Panel felt that the impact of these initiatives on students was very limited. The Panel noted with concern that the research environment was patchy and suggested that more could be done to develop a research environment which is integrated more fully with the University.

ETC and IBC are keen to maintain the link with the University although it was acknowledged that they play only a marginal role in the life of the Institute and with such small student numbers it is difficult to build an appropriate research environment. The Panel noted a willingness from some College staff to engage collaboratively with colleagues in the wider Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. Currently there are severe limits upon students working together in an interdisciplinary way.

The Panel was pleased to note that Theology students are now permitted to submit applications for funding from the Department for Employment and Learning and other funding sources such as Northern Bridge. However, it was noted that there is no opportunity for Postgraduate students to have experience of teaching or be trained to teach.

The Panel was surprised to note that the Institute of Theology was included in national league tables as the University only offers validated programmes and does not have control over staffing. This raised concerns which are highlighted in section 6 under staffing.

The Panel suggested that the structure and the fragmented nature of the collaborative arrangement hinder the potential to develop a coherent research environment. Researchers are torn between academic and church commitments. The University could seek to provide a crucial diverse environment in a post conflict Northern Ireland.

6. Staffing

As independent institutions the Colleges are responsible for the appointment, appraisal and staff development of their staff. Staff appointments are financially dependent on the denominational churches. The Panel was concerned to note that the University had no formal role in the appointment of staff who teach Queen's Theology students.

All full-time teaching staff at UTC are male and from a Presbyterian background. The Panel was deeply concerned about the impact of this lack of diversity in the staff. College staff appointed to deliver Queen's programmes are required to submit an

application for recognised teacher status. College staff that are required to supervise PhD students are eligible to apply for the title of an Honorary Lecturer in the University. Recognised teachers are encouraged to attend staff development courses organised by the University subject to the availability of places. The Panel was concerned to note that this is not a specific requirement of being a recognised teacher. It was noted that the College staff in many cases do not have the same research profile as that required by the University for research-active academic staff.

It was noted that all Colleges individually have a policy to allow staff to apply for sabbatical leave. However, the inclusion of research within staff contracts differs among, and even within, Colleges.

The Panel acknowledged the academic quality of a percentage of staff in the Colleges but was concerned to note variability in collaboration among colleagues in the Colleges and staff in the University. The Panel pointed out and discussed potential areas throughout the University where there would be an interest in developing innovative programmes with religion as a theme. The Panel noted a willingness to move to a more collaborative approach but suggested that the initiative must be taken forward by the University.

Overall, the Panel noted much variation in research quality of staff in the Colleges and therefore the ability to supervise and provide research-led teaching. This is partly related to the fact that staff are not entered in the national Research Excellence Framework (REF).

The current structures bring about a situation where there is variable quality but not sufficient mechanism to resolve the difficulties mentioned above. The University is unable to adopt its normal processes and mechanism to appoint and appraise staff as they are not University employees. This issue cannot be resolved as long as there is no clarity over the terms of the 1908 Irish Universities Act.

7. Students

The Panel met with [redacted] undergraduate and [redacted] postgraduate/research students currently studying Theology at Queen's. All the students clearly viewed themselves as Queen's students; however, they tended to regard the Colleges as their primary learning environment. The relatively low staff:student ratio and the strong pastoral support arrangements may contribute to this position.

The postgraduate students that the Panel met were satisfied with the teaching and support received from the Colleges. At Postgraduate and PhD level the research skills module and compulsory training days were seen as very beneficial. Some students reported a desire for more events to be organised by the Institute to bring students together and that the variable and very limited availability of financial support hindered attendance at UK or international conferences.

The Panel was concerned to note an apparent total lack of teaching opportunities offered to PhD students.

The Panel noted that the undergraduate students were also satisfied with the teaching and support offered through personal tutors. This level of student satisfaction with the undergraduate experience is reflected in the consistently high NSS scores. Some of the students suggested that the age and experience of the Ministry students could be daunting for young undergraduate students when classes are taught together.

While the students are clearly comfortable with the learning environment the Panel was concerned that the students were not exposed to the necessary intellectual and cultural diversity of perspective normally associated with a University undergraduate experience.

8. Relationship between Colleges

The Panel noted engagement across the Colleges at Institute Board level and Principals' meetings. But limited collaboration occurs, either in terms of teaching at the undergraduate module level, or in terms of actual attendance at the research seminar that was designed specifically to promote greater collaboration. Practical difficulties around geographical location were highlighted as barriers to pooling resources. The Panel recognised that the College staff are constrained by their denominational allegiances and their own internal structures and missions.

9. Strengths and Weaknesses

The Panel noted the Periodic Review report on Theology carried out in March 2015 and affirmed the recommendations outlined in that report. The aim of this review was to consider the wider strategic issues surrounding the delivery of Theology in the University.

In addressing the four questions outlined in section 1 the Panel considered the strengths and weakness in the current structure; in the Undergraduate provision; and in the Postgraduate provision.

9.1 Strengths of Current Organisational Structures

The Colleges provide a highly supportive student learning environment which is reflected in high NSS student satisfaction ratings. UTC provides excellent library resources for Undergraduate study and student support arrangements are excellent. The Panel commended the willingness of staff to look to the future and explore options for change, and the ability of [REDACTED] to lead the required change.

9.2 Weakness of Current Organisational Structures

The current arrangements for the delivery of the teaching of Theology are provided by Colleges that do not have the same mission or ethos as the University. The denominational constraints; the various forms of fragmentation; and a lack of diversity work against innovation and interdisciplinary development. The terms of the 1908 Irish Universities Act have led to a situation whereby *de facto* the University's Institute of Theology cannot be led by a Theologian.

The organisational structures have created an situation which has impeded a proper research-led environment. A lack of control over staff appointments has resulted in a lack of diversity in staffing and in the curriculum.

In a post conflict Northern Ireland it is highly unsatisfactory that the teaching of Theology is not provided across denominational lines.

9.3 Strengths of Undergraduate Provision

The selection of undergraduate students portrayed a very positive experience of their Undergraduate studies. The BTh programme recruits well, has good retention rates and excellent student satisfaction rates. The staff are dedicated and committed to providing excellent support to students.

9.4 Weaknesses of Undergraduate Provision

The learning environment, whilst supportive, may be too comfortable and the students not exposed to the necessary diversity of perspective. By default, and against the will of the Institute, all new undergraduate students shall be taught by UTC from September 2015. This single denomination providing all the undergraduate Theology provision for a research-based University is highly problematic and not sustainable in today's post conflict Northern Ireland.

All full-time staff are male and from a Presbyterian background, and thus the students are not being exposed to the spread of teaching which is particularly important for the teaching of Theology. This lack of diversity could expose the University to criticism particularly in relation to the Athena SWAN initiative.

The limitations of the structure frustrate the Institute in its vision to develop an interdisciplinary dimension in Undergraduate provision.

9.5 Strengths of Postgraduate Provision

The development of the Religious Studies Forum is a good initiative and shows the beginnings of an interdisciplinary infrastructure. The research expertise of some staff is to be commended, as is the development of a core Postgraduate Taught module. The innovative development of the Centre for Intellectual Disability Theology and Ministry is noted as very positive.

9.6 Weaknesses of Postgraduate Provision

The dispersed nature of the Postgraduate Taught students taking individual bespoke programmes does not allow for exposure to a wider research environment and therefore, there is effectively no sense of a research community.

The majority of PhD students are studying on a part-time basis which makes it difficult to establish an energetic research environment. In addition, the lack of teaching opportunities for PhD students is a major concern.

10. Recommendations

The Panel also considered the organisational shape and academic operation of the Institute of Theology and its ability to deliver a contemporary research-led education in religious studies and theology, within the current confines of the 1908 Irish Universities Act; and what the provision of teaching and research in Theology might look like if those constraints were removed.

The Panel discussed the limitations imposed by the 1908 Irish Universities Act and its implications for the University's Charter. The Panel would urge the University to take the steps necessary to clarify the legal position regarding the 1908 Act and what latitude there is within its existing terms. If that proves over-restrictive, in terms of the

vision outlined here, the Panel suggested that the University commit to getting the Act revised to reflect the very different conditions of early 21st century, post-conflict Northern Ireland. Only then can the provision of Theology and Religion in the Institute of Theology be transformed and the University preserve its mission as a site of academic freedom.

The current structure is unable to deliver the kind of teaching and research necessary in today's society. The University must address the current limitations on teaching which are preventing it achieving its goals. It has a unique opportunity in light of Northern Ireland's current socio-political situation to enliven a multi-cultural theological research culture.

The Panel suggested the following options for the University to consider.

10.1 No Change to Current Structure

The Panel considered that the weaknesses in the current structures make it an imperative that change takes place. To continue with the status quo would be unacceptable. Therefore, the Panel considered options under the following two separate scenarios.

10.2 No Restrictions on University teaching of Theology

In a situation whereby the terms of 1908 Act has been removed or radically revised and there were no restrictions on the University including teaching and research in Theology under its normal processes and procedures the Panel recommended that the University take the lead in shaping the nature of the provision.

The University should develop its Institute of Theology (including Study of Religion) along non-denominational lines which would be open to contribution from the Colleges. The Institute should be led by a Theologian. The aim should be to provide the study of Christian Theology in a pluralist, critical, open environment where Christianity is discussed in-depth but also in the context of religion more generally. The relative isolation in the current provision could be broken down by integration and research links with other Universities.

Breadth could be provided in the undergraduate BTh curriculum by building on what already exists at UTC and establishing obvious links with other areas of the University. The BD programme could remain as a validated programme taught at the College.

The potential for research collaborations with the Senator George Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice could be explored.

The Panel recommended that the University sets out an ultimate goal of having a variety of methods (Theology and Study of Religion), a variety of staff (from various Protestant as well as (almost certainly lay) Catholic backgrounds; as well as people of other faith-identities), nearly all of whom should be REF-returnable in terms of their research standard. It should look at including as many aspects of its current undergraduate provision via UTC as possible (community-mindedness, a well-cared-for student body, a fine library and library culture, and a real sense of the place of scholastics in ministry) but connect these to the wider University culture through societies, seminars, etc.

The University should seek intensively and thoroughly to develop its PGT and PGR provision, with a five-year plan to eliminate the too-narrowly personalised degree pathways that currently deny some students the essential experience of gaining critical grasp on their subject. There should be encouragement to University researchers to submit bids for major grants (for example, for the BBC disability project) and, simultaneously, to develop much more the Theology (and interdisciplinary) research seminars. This could be achieved firstly, by making attendance from staff on faculty mandatory, secondly, by creating a web presence for them, and thirdly bringing in varied regular expert outside speakers from other established research departments in research-intensive universities.

10.3 Existing Restrictions of 1908 Act remain in place

In a situation whereby current restrictions remain in place the Panel recommended that a University-approved curriculum for the current MTh is implemented and delivered in a group learning environment. The limitation of College distance cannot be allowed to dictate a bespoke MTh programme. There are models of delivery that exist which would allow for full-time and part-time students to come together in a group learning environment, whether this is intensive weekends or block teaching over several periods in the academic year.

The Panel recommended that consideration should be given to Postgraduate taught and research supervision workloads. As a minimum PhD students should have one of their supervisors from the University.

Consideration should be given to the further development of the research environment for staff and students. Attendance at University-led seminars should be compulsory and a minimum funding level established to allow for equal opportunities for students to attend conferences in at least the UK and Ireland. The Institute must ensure that there is an opportunity provided for PhD students to teach at Undergraduate level.

Close consideration would need to be given to emphasising to undergraduate students that they are working towards a University degree. Students should be encouraged to participate and embrace opportunities and challenges offered in the wider University environment. The Undergraduate curriculum needs to be broadened and there needs to be increased diversity of staff in terms of gender as well as intellectual, cultural and denominational/faith perspectives. A genuine process of diversification of the curriculum should be led by the University. Alternatively, the University should only approve joint honours programmes.

In future staff appointments for academics to teach on University validated programmes, the University should seek to formalise its participation on shortlisting and interview panels preferably with members of University staff having voting rights. In relation to staff development, staff should be appropriately provided for and attendance required in line with common University practice.

Staff research should be developed with involvement from the University's Research Office and Graduate School. The Panel recognised that there are areas of excellence in the current situation but recommended that collectively a discussion is needed to identify and develop areas where research could be

developed if staff were allowed research time. Time should be given to develop funding bids and develop succession planning. The Institute needs to take the lead in developing areas of research excellence between Theology and the rest of the University.

If the University cannot appoint a theologian to lead the Institute then the mechanism for external theological involvement must be strengthened through the Management Committee.

11. Conclusion

The Panel recognised that the Institute has performed a very good job under the limitations of the current structural arrangements. However, the Panel suggested that the implications and terms of the 1908 Act are hindering the potential innovation and impact, and if this is to be realised, a legal opinion on revising its effect must be sought as a matter of urgency. The Panel suggested that there is huge potential in the Northern Ireland context for Theology to make an impact in the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

Diversity in the provision of Theology at Queen's needs to be greatly improved in teaching staff, student body, teaching methods and programme content. The University needs to establish a long term plan to transform its Theology provision so that it is comparable with Theology and Religions departments in other UK Universities.

The University needs to take the lead and create a vision to develop a quality, academically rigorous product, delivered in an academic environment by quality research led staff.

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QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

University Executive Board
23 October 2018

Review of Institute of Theology's Agreements and Relationships**1. Introduction**

At the request of the University Executive Board a Review Group, chaired by the [REDACTED], was established to review the Institute of Theology's Agreements and Relationships relevant to its undergraduate and postgraduate delivery. The Terms of Reference and Membership of the Review Group are attached as Appendix 1.

The Institute of Theology is the mechanism which manages the relationship between the University and the four Theological Colleges. Union Theological College (UTC) is described as a constituent member College and delivers undergraduate and postgraduate teaching. Belfast Bible College (BBC), the Irish Baptist College (IBC) and Edgehill Theological College (ETC) have signed Affiliate Membership Agreements with the University permitting the teaching of postgraduate students only.

The Review Group carried out a fundamental review of the governance, management, delivery and viability of undergraduate and postgraduate provision taking into account the oversight and quality assurance of the relationships and arrangements for the delivery of programmes in Theology.

The Group received written submissions and met with key internal and external stakeholders including representation from the four Theological Colleges. Students and recent graduates provided written submissions to the Group.

2. Key Issues

The Group noted the recommendations in the 2016 Strategic Review Report (attached as Appendix 2). The Strategic Review Panel concluded that the diversity of the provision of Theology at Queen's needed to be greatly improved in teaching staff, student body, teaching methods and programme content. In noting the recommendations, the Group identified the undergraduate curriculum, student experience, staffing and the recognised teacher process as key issues highlighted in the 2016 report that required further discussion to ascertain progress made and the direction of travel.

2.1 Undergraduate Curriculum

In response to the recommendations made in the 2016 Strategic Review Report the Institute, in collaboration with UTC, developed a new BA in Theology (to replace the BTh in Theology) and restructured the BD programme. The new programmes were approved in May 2017 for delivery beginning 2018-19. The Group noted that the new BA is essentially a Major Theology/Minor Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. In addition to some new thematic modules in religious studies (as broadly conceived), this new degree offers students an opportunity to engage with other disciplines, staff and students beyond the

College and, to this extent, goes some way to incorporating diversity into the teaching staff on the programme. However, the Group concluded that the new BA degree did not deliver the same diversification in the Theology modules.

As a result of the withdrawal of the IBC and ETC from undergraduate provision in 2010, followed by the withdrawal of BBC in 2015, undergraduate programmes have been provided only by UTC. This has resulted in a difficulty for the University as the undergraduate curriculum in Theology, however diverse the subject matter, is taught almost entirely from a particular theological and religious perspective, with very little opportunity for students to gain from theological perspectives other than those approved within the theological ethos and doctrinal framework of UTC.

The Group concluded that no significant improvement in the diversity of the Theology provision had been achieved since the 2016 review.

2.2 Student Experience

It is clear from the students' feedback that many students appreciate the sense of community fostered by UTC and describe a family atmosphere in the College. Many (but not all) students were largely comfortable with this learning environment. Despite this, the Group was concerned that the students were not gaining access to the intellectual and cultural diversity of perspective normally associated with a University undergraduate experience.

The Group noted that, as of mid-September 2018, the student body in UTC consisted of 143 registered students, 62 males and 81 female. Typically, the undergraduate population in Theology contains more females than males but that trend reverses at postgraduate level. It was noted that discussion at the Theology Board suggested that the lack of female role models in Theology staff may do little to encourage women moving from undergraduate to postgraduate study.

2.3 Staffing

The Group noted that the University's arrangement for the delivery of Theology programmes through the Theological Colleges for a Queen's award is a unique arrangement and not comparable with the arrangements for the teaching of Theology at any other UK university.

As independent institutions the Colleges are responsible for the appointment, appraisal and career development of their staff. In some cases staff appointments are financially dependent on the Churches with which the Colleges are associated.

All full-time teaching staff at UTC reflect the College's commitment to providing confessional training. They are all male and from a Presbyterian background. The job description for the appointment of lecturing staff includes criteria that the successful applicant will 'have a personal Christian faith, and be committed to working within the Christian ethos and doctrinal framework of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland'. The criteria for Professorial appointments includes 'being an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, or eligible to become such'.

The Group noted that no action plan had been put in place to address the lack of female teaching staff in full-time roles. The Group expressed concern about how such a lack of action in increasing the diversity in the College staff may impact the student experience.

The Group concluded that, as the University has no formal role in the appointment of staff who teach Queen's Theology students, it [the University] is significantly limited in its ability to ensure the quality and ethos of the teaching provision at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level (including the supervision of dissertations and theses) or to mobilise effectively the Queen's core values. In addition, heavy teaching loads for some UTC staff, and recent UTC decisions relating to staff deployment, have highlighted the vulnerability of the University in assuring the student experience.

2.4 Recognised Teacher Appointments

College staff appointed to deliver Queen's programmes are required to submit an application for recognised teacher status, with such staff who are also required to supervise PhD students being eligible to apply for the title of Honorary Lecturer in the University.

Recognised teachers are encouraged to attend staff development courses organised by the University, subject to the availability of places. However, renewal applications for recognised teacher status often indicate little or no Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities.

The University's Collaborative Provision Group is tasked with ensuring that equivalent standards for recognised teachers are maintained and seeks to ensure the applicants' ability to teach and supervise is taken into consideration when applications for recognised teacher status are considered. However, the College's process for the selection of applicants seeking teaching recognition is not transparent and often the levels of contribution suggested for some Teaching Assistants seem excessive. In recent years, this standard and process has caused considerable tension between the Institute and UTC.

It was also noted that, in many cases, the College staff put forward for PGR supervision do not have the same (or equivalent) research profile as that required by the University for research-active academic staff. Whilst, at this time, the College does not make a submission to the national Research Excellence Framework (REF), the University's criteria still apply when awarding honorary lecturer status.

As the University does not have a formal role in the appointment of College teaching staff, there are insufficient mechanisms to resolve these quality issues. Furthermore, the University is unable to adopt its normal processes and mechanisms to appraise and develop College staff as they are not University employees.

The Group concluded that the variability in staff profiles from that of University lecturing staff has the potential to impact the student experience.

3. Options Going Forward

Appendix 3 highlights a continual reduction in undergraduate student numbers year on year since 2014-15. In addition, as undergraduate Theology provision is provided by

a single College, and there is no formal University control over staff appointments, a situation has been created which is highly problematic for the University, given its priorities as a research-intensive institution committed to providing top-class teaching and making an impact on society.

In considering the above issues, particularly for undergraduate programme delivery, both the Group and UTC representatives recognised that their different core values have created a tension between the University and the College. During the review both parties acknowledged that the current situation is unsustainable and that radical change is required.

It is clear that the concerns raised in the 2016 Strategic Review Report still feature and continue to create tensions for both partners. Therefore, on the basis that the status quo is no longer tenable, the Group suggested the following options for consideration by the UEB:

- (i) the University takes full control of the Theology provision through the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.
- (ii) the University actively seeks to widen the network of partner Colleges in order to strengthen the Institute by deepening and broadening the diversity of provision of its Theology offer.
- (iii) the University gives notice of withdrawal from the collaborative arrangement with the Colleges and dissolves the Institute.
- (iv) the University enters a phased withdrawal of its current arrangement and the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences is tasked with developing a proposal for incorporating the teaching of religious studies and/or Theology in future years at undergraduate and postgraduate level.

The Group acknowledged that the provision of Theology is not a strategic priority for the Faculty, that options (i) and (ii) would require significant University investment, together with a different institutional landscape and that, therefore, these options are not currently feasible.

However, the Group recognises the appropriateness of courses in religious studies being offered in a Northern Ireland university. Reflecting the current work around the new BA in Theology – as something of a ‘Theology with AHSS’ model – the Faculty may have the capacity to offer degrees ‘with’ Religious Studies as a Minor. Therefore, the Group recommended option (iv) as a pragmatic way forward, albeit subject to further work within the Faculty.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

The University has ultimate responsibility to maintain academic standards and to ensure the quality of learning opportunities for all its students. Additionally, the Group acknowledged that the primary mission of UTC is to train ministers for the Presbyterian Church and that the BD programme is an important element in this process. Therefore, the Group recommended a staged withdrawal from the current arrangement for the delivery of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes as follows:

- (i) BD – a final intake to be admitted in September 2019. This would allow sufficient time for UTC to obtain validation from another awarding body or make other arrangements. Arrangements, including financial arrangements, to be agreed for the appropriate teaching out of students until August 2022.
- (ii) BA Theology – no further intake. Arrangements, including financial arrangements, to be agreed for the appropriate teaching out of students until August 2021.
- (iii) Graduate Diploma – no further intake. Arrangements, including financial arrangements, to be agreed for the appropriate teaching out of students until August 2020.
- (iv) MRes – continue as an offer of the University, with appropriate supervision being drawn from within the Colleges as required and to be subject to annual monitoring by the University.
- (v) PhD – continue as an offer of the University, with appropriate supervision being drawn from within the Colleges as required and to be subject to annual monitoring by the University.

In line with its development of new major/minor pathways, the Faculty will review the quality assurance and administrative requirements for any minor in religious studies and in respect of managing MRes and PhD projects. In the 'teach out' phase the Institute of Theology may be an appropriate vehicle.

Review of Institute of Theology's Agreements and Relationships for the provision of Undergraduate (UG) and Postgraduate (PG) programmes

Terms of Reference:

- a) To review the governance, management, delivery and viability of QUB's academic UG and PG programmes in line with the current Agreement and against the University's policies and procedures.
- b) To review the Institute's ability to assure quality in the delivery of its Theology programmes and to ensure they are provided in a critical, open, academically stretching environment.
- c) To review oversight of, and adherence to, the institutional quality assurance procedures as relevant to the Institute of Theology, including the process for the appointment of recognised teachers and the establishment of a Student/Staff Consultative Committee.
- d) Following the Strategic Review in 2016, to assure the University of the breadth, quality and balance of the curriculum content in the Theology degree programmes in terms of planning for and delivering a contemporary research-led education in the area.
- e) To review the student experience including in respect of breadth of intellectual and cultural diversity.
- f) To take into account such other matters which may come to light in the review.

Membership:

Composition		Member Name
Chair:	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
	School of Law	[REDACTED]
	External Subject Specialist	[REDACTED]
In Attendance	Secretary	[REDACTED] (Academic Affairs)

Notes:

Meetings to be conducted 26-28 September 2018 with report to the University Executive Board in October 2018.

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

STRATEGIC REVIEW OF TEACHING OF THEOLOGY AT QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY
BELFAST

2 June and 3 June 2016

Panel Membership

[REDACTED] (Chair)
[REDACTED] (University of Durham)
[REDACTED] (Trinity College Dublin)
[REDACTED] (University of Glasgow)

In attendance: [REDACTED] (Academic Affairs Queen's University)

The Panel held a range of meetings with senior University staff; [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] of the Institute of Theology; [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] including relevant colleagues; and the [REDACTED]
[REDACTED], and undergraduate and postgraduate
students.

1. Introduction and Context

This report represents the findings of the Strategic Review Panel which was carried out at the request of the University and with the agreement of the Colleges.

Historically, the teaching of Theology has been carried out through four independent Colleges, recognised by the University. The four Colleges are Union Theological College (UTC), Belfast Bible College (BBC), Edgehill Theological College (ETC) and Irish Baptist College (IBC). St Mary's University College had been approved as the fifth College but withdrew formal membership a number of years ago.

The 1908 Irish Universities Act restricted *"the use of any building belonging to the university or college for any teaching given by such professor, or for any other religious teaching no part of the cost of which is defrayed out of public funds."*

Over the years this has been interpreted as precluding the employment of University staff to teach Theology on University premises. Therefore, the teaching of Theology has been carried out by the Colleges on behalf of Queen's and is co-ordinated and quality assured by the Institute of Theology, a unit within the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences which is headed by a Director and two Associate Directors appointed from among the University's full-time senior academic staff. The Panel noted that the University has approved and teaches modules in Religion on its mainstream programmes, for example, Sociology of Religion and Religion and Ritual, therefore, the spirit and terms of the 1908 Act may already be contravened.

UTC and BBC are constituent member Colleges and deliver undergraduate and postgraduate teaching. IBC and ETC have signed Affiliate Membership Agreements with the University permitting the teaching of postgraduate students only. In September 2015 BBC withdrew from undergraduate teaching and did not recruit undergraduate students in 2015-16. Therefore, undergraduate students shall be taught out at BBC during 2016-17 and subsequently BBC shall also operate under an Affiliate Membership Agreement.

The Panel was asked to consider:

- (i) the current organisational shape and academic operation of the Institute of Theology and its fit for the purpose of delivering a contemporary research-led education in religious studies and theology;
- (ii) the strengths and weakness of the current organisation and what elements of a contemporary education in religious studies and theology could enhance the undergraduate provision;
- (iii) the appropriateness of the PGR student experience;
- (iv) what a sustainable model of education and research provision in Theology and Religious Studies might look like going forward.

The Panel noted significant ambiguity around how the 1908 Irish Universities Act is reflected in the University Charter and what it actually means for the teaching of Theology and Religion. The ambiguity now not only restricts progressive developments in the subject but also leads to confusion over the ownership and entitlements of the students. The Panel suggested that the 1908 Act may have different meaning and significance today and advised that the University seek legal clarification as a matter of urgency. The Panel would strongly recommend that the University seek to take whatever measures necessary to address any changes to its Charter as a result. Further expansion on this recommendation can be found in sections 10 and 11.

2. Role of the Institute of Theology

Historically, the Institute of Theology has been a mechanism for the administration of the degree programmes developed and taught by the Colleges, and it was not seen as a proactive platform for delivering change or innovation. However, the Panel admired the current management of the Institute for the leadership it has shown in areas where it was able to take initiatives, for example, with the introduction of a core Master's level module; the setting up of the Research Forum; and improved relationships with the Colleges.

The Panel noted that the Institute Management Board is the key management and decision-making body and is chaired by [REDACTED]. The University appoints an external advisor to the Management Board who is a subject specialist. The Institute's Education Committee oversees any module/programme changes and the University's Collaborative Provision Group is responsible for monitoring the provision annually and periodically every 5 years.

The Panel noted that the Colleges have observed closer control and leadership from the Institute in recent times but that the Colleges were hugely supportive of the [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] where very good personal relationships had been built up.

The Panel acknowledged that the unusual context for the provision of the teaching of Theology has resulted in the development of a hybrid model of collaborative provision; it neither operates under a franchised or validated model of collaborative provision. A redefined characterisation of Theology and Religion at Queen's could open up the subject within the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. There are a large number of A Level students studying Religious Studies in N Ireland but the current offering in Theology appears not to meet the needs of a large number of these students. All the Colleges have an evangelical protestant ethos, and predominantly

male staff and the University has no control over College staff appointments. A new model that would underscore the quality of the existing provision supplemented and enriched by an interdisciplinary aspect and joint delivery of modules in a pathway on Religion and Theology would offer an exciting option.

The Panel acknowledged the constraints of the 1908 Irish Universities Act; however, it pointed out that it is highly unusual for an Institute of Theology not to be led by a theologian. The current arrangement offers a narrow breadth of subject matter and perspective and restricts opportunities for innovation.

3. Undergraduate

The Panel noted the following undergraduate programmes provided by the Colleges through the Institute of Theology and awarded by Queen's University:

BTh
BD
BA (J) Theology and History
BA (J) Theology and English
BA (J) Theology and Philosophy
Graduate Diploma in Theology

Currently in 2015-16 there are 88 students on the BTh, 29 students on the BD and 51 students across the joint honours programmes. Recruitment to undergraduate programmes across the University is restricted by the Maximum Aggregate Student Numbers (MASN) cap. Theology has been allocated approximately 50-55 student places each year with approximately 360 applications made each year, mostly to the BTh programme.

It was noted that 85 per cent of students are taught at UTC and 15 per cent currently taught at BBC. ETC and IBC withdrew from providing Queen's undergraduate programme in 2010 as a result of not being able to meet the minimum student number threshold per module. BBC withdrew in 2015. Therefore, from 2015-16 all new undergraduate students will be taught at UTC. It was noted that the Graduate Diploma which is at undergraduate level will also only be taught at UTC. ETC, IBC and BBC offer undergraduate degree programmes validated by other UK Universities.

The undergraduate curriculum is largely based on protestant evangelical teaching with little input to the teaching from other perspectives. As the University does not have subject specialists in Theology the curriculum developments are initiated by the subject specialists in the Colleges.

The Panel expressed concern about the academic diversity and narrow breadth of subject matter and perspective of the curriculum over the past years and particularly now that undergraduate provision is concentrated in one College. The quality of the provision is severely affected by this lack of diversity. In addition, there is a lack of diversity in the teaching provision and staff. For example, there are now no full-time female members of staff teaching on the undergraduate programmes, which is a critically important feature of any academic subject.

UTC acknowledged that its primary mission is to train students for the ministry but now the situation has arisen that it is the only provider of undergraduate teaching in Theology for Queen's University. It was noted that nearly all Ministry students studying at UTC are Queen's students studying on the BD pathway. But not all Queens' Theology students are studying for the Ministry. It was noted that it has been agreed

that appropriately qualified UTC Ministry students who are not Queen's students could register as Credit Earning Non Graduating (CENG) students which would regularise the situation and help assure the quality.

The Panel noted that the current Joint Honours programmes combined modules from two curricula areas rather than genuinely jointly developed or interdisciplinary programmes. There was little evidence of collaboration with other University departments. The Panel noted and commended the [REDACTED] innovative vision for the development of joint programmes if constraints around the teaching of Theology/Religion were removed. It was agreed that the difficult institutional structures work against interdisciplinary and properly developed joint programmes. The characteristics of a contemporary university education are here diminished by the institutional structures, therefore limiting the opportunity for effective Joint Honours and interdisciplinary teaching.

[REDACTED] has a positive vision for potential growth and expansion of the subject and its contribution to global citizenship and international debate. The Panel noted that at a recent curriculum review undertaken through the Institute of Theology, UTC staff expressed an interest in expanding into the following innovative areas (either by extending their own expertise, or by working with colleagues in AHSS):

Philosophy of Religion
Religion/Theology and Politics
Religion/Theology and Society
Religion/Theology and Literature
Religion/Theology and Language
Religion /Theology and Culture
Religion/Theology and the Arts
Religion/Theology and Creative Writing
Christian and non-Christian Belief and Identity

In the shorter term, UTC suggested structural changes to the teaching of the Biblical Languages so that these modules would be delivered as year long modules, and the development of an Introduction to Theology module for 2017-18. However, further discussion would be required on the provision of such a module for Joint Honours students.

The Panel noted that the curriculum developments suggested by [REDACTED] would enhance the provision and ensure that Theology was delivered both from an outside perspective 'looking in' as well as from the denominational perspective 'looking out'.

The Panel noted that Theology at Queen's scored highly in the NSS results and that recruitment to the programmes was steady. However, the Panel recommended that diversity in the teaching of Theology at Queen's needs to be radically increased in the teaching staff, student body, teaching methods and teaching content as well as in issues of gender, race, sexual orientation and most particularly in faith affiliation. The Institute is frustrated in its efforts to address these issues by the current structures. [REDACTED] is to be commended for outlining an innovative and progressive vision but little progress can be made within the current institutional context and structure.

4. Postgraduate Taught

The Panel noted that the MTh is currently offered in all four Colleges and that the MDiv has been withdrawn. The Panel further noted the desire of all four Colleges to continue to offer postgraduate provision with Queen's University and to have more involvement in the intellectual life of the University. However, IBC and ETC recruit very few postgraduate students. Application to the MTh is made to the University and the students select at which College they wish to undertake the programme based on the College ethos. There are currently 20 MTh students across the Colleges.

The Panel expressed concern that the structure and delivery of the MTh was more akin to the normal structure of a typical MRes in that modules are tailored to the interests of the individual students and are taught in isolated conditions, although it was noted that taught modules are offered at BBC under a more traditional MTh structure. Students are allocated a first and second supervisor by [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Depending on the dissertation topic the first or second supervisor could be a member of University staff but most are supervised entirely within the Colleges. The Panel suggested that this would not be common practice in most other Universities. As a result of this structure and a number of the students undertaking the MTh in a part-time basis it is difficult to establish a cohort of MTh students. The Panel noted that the individualised model of delivery is very labour-intensive and costly and reduces the ability to establish a postgraduate and research community. The Panel noted the difficulties of establishing equality and consistency of standards. It was also noted that oversight provided by the Institute's Postgraduate Committee was limited by structural constraints but that rigorous assessment of all materials was carried out by the external examiner.

The Panel noted ETC's desire to develop postgraduate provision related to the practice of ministry; however, this has not been something that the University has been able to approve. The potential for a Master's programme in Spirituality has been discussed which would be taught collaboratively across the Colleges. There are some practical issues over student registration, fees and geographical distance.

The nature of the delivery of the MTh makes it difficult to establish a Postgraduate and research environment. In addition, the practical arrangements whereby the individual teaching of the MTh is carried out in the four different Colleges to largely part-time students makes for a fragmented student community. The Institute should be commended for its attempts to establish a Postgraduate environment under this difficult structural context. The tensions arising from different Colleges seeking to do different things is indicative of a lack of coherence between the College and University structures.

5. Research Students

There are currently 24 students undertaking PhD study through the Colleges. 18 of those have a first supervisor based at UTC. The Panel noted that 40 per cent of the total number of PhD students is currently allocated to the same supervisor. UTC acknowledged that this is a considerable workload, exceeding the limits normally set within university structures elsewhere. It is not clear that this is sustainable or good academic practice. The students are required to participate in research skills and career development courses offered by the University's Graduate School. The Panel noted a series of events designed to promote the research environment in an interdisciplinary way for the students, including development of practical skills, poster presentations, seminars and participation at the Religious Studies Forum.

The Panel suggested that the Faculty-led Religious Studies Forum offered a very positive opportunity for staff and students in the Colleges to engage with staff teaching in various disciplines across the University. However, attendance has been problematic and its potential to deliver inter disciplinary research has not been fully utilised. As a large proportion of PhD students study on a part-time basis it is difficult to get them together or to interact across disciplines. There are uneven and very limited levels of financial support offered to students to attend UK or international conferences.

The Panel noted the establishment of a Centre for Intellectual Disability Theology and Ministry in 2015 based at BBC. The Centre emerged out of a solid foundation of academic and practical work carried out by staff in the College and a number of graduate students over several years. It is seen as a hub for sharing ideas, skills, practices and possibilities.

The Panel noted that the Institute of Theology invite an international Visiting Fellow to come to the University for up to one month to deliver lectures and student workshops. The Institute organises an Annual Showcase Religious Studies Forum lecture. However, the Panel felt that the impact of these initiatives on students was very limited. The Panel noted with concern that the research environment was patchy and suggested that more could be done to develop a research environment which is integrated more fully with the University.

ETC and IBC are keen to maintain the link with the University although it was acknowledged that they play only a marginal role in the life of the Institute and with such small student numbers it is difficult to build an appropriate research environment. The Panel noted a willingness from some College staff to engage collaboratively with colleagues in the wider Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. Currently there are severe limits upon students working together in an interdisciplinary way.

The Panel was pleased to note that Theology students are now permitted to submit applications for funding from the Department for Employment and Learning and other funding sources such as Northern Bridge. However, it was noted that there is no opportunity for Postgraduate students to have experience of teaching or be trained to teach.

The Panel was surprised to note that the Institute of Theology was included in national league tables as the University only offers validated programmes and does not have control over staffing. This raised concerns which are highlighted in section 6 under staffing.

The Panel suggested that the structure and the fragmented nature of the collaborative arrangement hinder the potential to develop a coherent research environment. Researchers are torn between academic and church commitments. The University could seek to provide a crucial diverse environment in a post conflict Northern Ireland.

6. Staffing

As independent institutions the Colleges are responsible for the appointment, appraisal and staff development of their staff. Staff appointments are financially dependent on the denominational churches. The Panel was concerned to note that the University had no formal role in the appointment of staff who teach Queen's Theology students.

All full-time teaching staff at UTC are male and from a Presbyterian background. The Panel was deeply concerned about the impact of this lack of diversity in the staff.

College staff appointed to deliver Queen's programmes are required to submit an application for recognised teacher status. College staff that are required to supervise PhD students are eligible to apply for the title of an Honorary Lecturer in the University. Recognised teachers are encouraged to attend staff development courses organised by the University subject to the availability of places. The Panel was concerned to note that this is not a specific requirement of being a recognised teacher. It was noted that the College staff in many cases do not have the same research profile as that required by the University for research-active academic staff.

It was noted that all Colleges individually have a policy to allow staff to apply for sabbatical leave. However, the inclusion of research within staff contracts differs among, and even within, Colleges.

The Panel acknowledged the academic quality of a percentage of staff in the Colleges but was concerned to note variability in collaboration among colleagues in the Colleges and staff in the University. The Panel pointed out and discussed potential areas throughout the University where there would be an interest in developing innovative programmes with religion as a theme. The Panel noted a willingness to move to a more collaborative approach but suggested that the initiative must be taken forward by the University.

Overall, the Panel noted much variation in research quality of staff in the Colleges and therefore the ability to supervise and provide research-led teaching. This is partly related to the fact that staff are not entered in the national Research Excellence Framework (REF).

The current structures bring about a situation where there is variable quality but not sufficient mechanism to resolve the difficulties mentioned above. The University is unable to adopt its normal processes and mechanism to appoint and appraise staff as they are not University employees. This issue cannot be resolved as long as there is no clarity over the terms of the 1908 Irish Universities Act.

7. Students

The Panel met with [redacted] undergraduate and [redacted] postgraduate/research students currently studying Theology at Queen's. All the students clearly viewed themselves as Queen's students; however, they tended to regard the Colleges as their primary learning environment. The relatively low staff:student ratio and the strong pastoral support arrangements may contribute to this position.

The postgraduate students that the Panel met were satisfied with the teaching and support received from the Colleges. At Postgraduate and PhD level the research skills module and compulsory training days were seen as very beneficial. Some students reported a desire for more events to be organised by the Institute to bring students together and that the variable and very limited availability of financial support hindered attendance at UK or international conferences.

The Panel was concerned to note an apparent total lack of teaching opportunities offered to PhD students.

The Panel noted that the undergraduate students were also satisfied with the teaching and support offered through personal tutors. This level of student satisfaction with the undergraduate experience is reflected in the consistently high NSS scores. Some of the students suggested that the age and experience of the Ministry students could be daunting for young undergraduate students when classes are taught together.

While the students are clearly comfortable with the learning environment the Panel was concerned that the students were not exposed to the necessary intellectual and cultural diversity of perspective normally associated with a University undergraduate experience.

8. Relationship between Colleges

The Panel noted engagement across the Colleges at Institute Board level and Principals' meetings. But limited collaboration occurs, either in terms of teaching at the undergraduate module level, or in terms of actual attendance at the research seminar that was designed specifically to promote greater collaboration. Practical difficulties around geographical location were highlighted as barriers to pooling resources. The Panel recognised that the College staff are constrained by their denominational allegiances and their own internal structures and missions.

9. Strengths and Weaknesses

The Panel noted the Periodic Review report on Theology carried out in March 2015 and affirmed the recommendations outlined in that report. The aim of this review was to consider the wider strategic issues surrounding the delivery of Theology in the University.

In addressing the four questions outlined in section 1 the Panel considered the strengths and weakness in the current structure; in the Undergraduate provision; and in the Postgraduate provision.

9.1 Strengths of Current Organisational Structures

The Colleges provide a highly supportive student learning environment which is reflected in high NSS student satisfaction ratings. UTC provides excellent library resources for Undergraduate study and student support arrangements are excellent. The Panel commended the willingness of staff to look to the future and explore options for change, and the ability of [REDACTED] to lead the required change.

9.2 Weakness of Current Organisational Structures

The current arrangements for the delivery of the teaching of Theology are provided by Colleges that do not have the same mission or ethos as the University. The denominational constraints; the various forms of fragmentation; and a lack of diversity work against innovation and interdisciplinary development. The terms of the 1908 Irish Universities Act have led to a situation whereby *de facto* the University's Institute of Theology cannot be led by a Theologian.

The organisational structures have created an situation which has impeded a proper research-led environment. A lack of control over staff appointments has resulted in a lack of diversity in staffing and in the curriculum.

In a post conflict Northern Ireland it is highly unsatisfactory that the teaching of Theology is not provided across denominational lines.

9.3 Strengths of Undergraduate Provision

The selection of undergraduate students portrayed a very positive experience of their Undergraduate studies. The BTh programme recruits well, has good retention rates and excellent student satisfaction rates. The staff are dedicated and committed to providing excellent support to students.

9.4 Weaknesses of Undergraduate Provision

The learning environment, whilst supportive, may be too comfortable and the students not exposed to the necessary diversity of perspective. By default, and against the will of the Institute, all new undergraduate students shall be taught by UTC from September 2015. This single denomination providing all the undergraduate Theology provision for a research-based University is highly problematic and not sustainable in today's post conflict Northern Ireland.

All full-time staff are male and from a Presbyterian background, and thus the students are not being exposed to the spread of teaching which is particularly important for the teaching of Theology. This lack of diversity could expose the University to criticism particularly in relation to the Athena SWAN initiative.

The limitations of the structure frustrate the Institute in its vision to develop an interdisciplinary dimension in Undergraduate provision.

9.5 Strengths of Postgraduate Provision

The development of the Religious Studies Forum is a good initiative and shows the beginnings of an interdisciplinary infrastructure. The research expertise of some staff is to be commended, as is the development of a core Postgraduate Taught module. The innovative development of the Centre for Intellectual Disability Theology and Ministry is noted as very positive.

9.6 Weaknesses of Postgraduate Provision

The dispersed nature of the Postgraduate Taught students taking individual bespoke programmes does not allow for exposure to a wider research environment and therefore, there is effectively no sense of a research community.

The majority of PhD students are studying on a part-time basis which makes it difficult to establish an energetic research environment. In addition, the lack of teaching opportunities for PhD students is a major concern.

10. Recommendations

The Panel also considered the organisational shape and academic operation of the Institute of Theology and its ability to deliver a contemporary research-led education in religious studies and theology, within the current confines of the 1908 Irish Universities Act; and what the provision of teaching and research in Theology might look like if those constraints were removed.

The Panel discussed the limitations imposed by the 1908 Irish Universities Act and its implications for the University's Charter. The Panel would urge the University to take the steps necessary to clarify the legal position regarding the 1908 Act and what

latitude there is within its existing terms. If that proves over-restrictive, in terms of the vision outlined here, the Panel suggested that the University commit to getting the Act revised to reflect the very different conditions of early 21st century, post-conflict Northern Ireland. Only then can the provision of Theology and Religion in the Institute of Theology be transformed and the University preserve its mission as a site of academic freedom.

The current structure is unable to deliver the kind of teaching and research necessary in today's society. The University must address the current limitations on teaching which are preventing it achieving its goals. It has a unique opportunity in light of Northern Ireland's current socio-political situation to enliven a multi-cultural theological research culture.

The Panel suggested the following options for the University to consider.

10.1 No Change to Current Structure

The Panel considered that the weaknesses in the current structures make it an imperative that change takes place. To continue with the status quo would be unacceptable. Therefore, the Panel considered options under the following two separate scenarios.

10.2 No Restrictions on University teaching of Theology

In a situation whereby the terms of 1908 Act has been removed or radically revised and there were no restrictions on the University including teaching and research in Theology under its normal processes and procedures the Panel recommended that the University take the lead in shaping the nature of the provision.

The University should develop its Institute of Theology (including Study of Religion) along non-denominational lines which would be open to contribution from the Colleges. The Institute should be led by a Theologian. The aim should be to provide the study of Christian Theology in a pluralist, critical, open environment where Christianity is discussed in-depth but also in the context of religion more generally. The relative isolation in the current provision could be broken down by integration and research links with other Universities.

Breadth could be provided in the undergraduate BTh curriculum by building on what already exists at UTC and establishing obvious links with other areas of the University. The BD programme could remain as a validated programme taught at the College.

The potential for research collaborations with the Senator George Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice could be explored.

The Panel recommended that the University sets out an ultimate goal of having a variety of methods (Theology and Study of Religion), a variety of staff (from various Protestant as well as (almost certainly lay) Catholic backgrounds; as well as people of other faith-identities), nearly all of whom should be REF-returnable in terms of their research standard. It should look at including as many aspects of its current undergraduate provision via UTC as possible (community-mindedness, a well-cared-for student body, a fine library and library culture, and a real sense of the place of scholastics in ministry) but connect these to the wider University culture through societies, seminars, etc.

The University should seek intensively and thoroughly to develop its PGT and PGR provision, with a five-year plan to eliminate the too-narrowly personalised degree pathways that currently deny some students the essential experience of gaining critical grasp on their subject. There should be encouragement to University researchers to submit bids for major grants (for example, for the BBC disability project) and, simultaneously, to develop much more the Theology (and interdisciplinary) research seminars. This could be achieved firstly, by making attendance from staff on faculty mandatory, secondly, by creating a web presence for them, and thirdly bringing in varied regular expert outside speakers from other established research departments in research-intensive universities.

10.3 Existing Restrictions of 1908 Act remain in place

In a situation whereby current restrictions remain in place the Panel recommended that a University-approved curriculum for the current MTh is implemented and delivered in a group learning environment. The limitation of College distance cannot be allowed to dictate a bespoke MTh programme. There are models of delivery that exist which would allow for full-time and part-time students to come together in a group learning environment, whether this is intensive weekends or block teaching over several periods in the academic year.

The Panel recommended that consideration should be given to Postgraduate taught and research supervision workloads. As a minimum PhD students should have one of their supervisors from the University.

Consideration should be given to the further development of the research environment for staff and students. Attendance at University-led seminars should be compulsory and a minimum funding level established to allow for equal opportunities for students to attend conferences in at least the UK and Ireland. The Institute must ensure that there is an opportunity provided for PhD students to teach at Undergraduate level.

Close consideration would need to be given to emphasising to undergraduate students that they are working towards a University degree. Students should be encouraged to participate and embrace opportunities and challenges offered in the wider University environment. The Undergraduate curriculum needs to be broadened and there needs to be increased diversity of staff in terms of gender as well as intellectual, cultural and denominational/faith perspectives. A genuine process of diversification of the curriculum should be led by the University. Alternatively, the University should only approve joint honours programmes.

In future staff appointments for academics to teach on University validated programmes, the University should seek to formalise its participation on shortlisting and interview panels preferably with members of University staff having voting rights. In relation to staff development, staff should be appropriately provided for and attendance required in line with common University practice.

Staff research should be developed with involvement from the University's Research Office and Graduate School. The Panel recognised that there are areas of excellence in the current situation but recommended that collectively a

discussion is needed to identify and develop areas where research could be developed if staff were allowed research time. Time should be given to develop funding bids and develop succession planning. The Institute needs to take the lead in developing areas of research excellence between Theology and the rest of the University.

If the University cannot appoint a theologian to lead the Institute then the mechanism for external theological involvement must be strengthened through the Management Committee.

11. Conclusion

The Panel recognised that the Institute has performed a very good job under the limitations of the current structural arrangements. However, the Panel suggested that the implications and terms of the 1908 Act are hindering the potential innovation and impact, and if this is to be realised, a legal opinion on revising its effect must be sought as a matter of urgency. The Panel suggested that there is huge potential in the Northern Ireland context for Theology to make an impact in the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

Diversity in the provision of Theology at Queen's needs to be greatly improved in teaching staff, student body, teaching methods and programme content. The University needs to establish a long term plan to transform its Theology provision so that it is comparable with Theology and Religions departments in other UK Universities.

The University needs to take the lead and create a vision to develop a quality, academically rigorous product, delivered in an academic environment by quality research led staff.

Undergraduate Student Numbers

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	TOTAL
2018-19*	31	43 (+ 2 to reg)= 45	36 (+3 to reg)= 39	110 (+5) = 115
2017-18	57	42	47	146
2016-17	49	47	62	158
2015-16	56	63	61	180
2014-15	67	64	51	182
2013-14	67	45	65	177

Table 1: UG population statistics, 2013-2018

* As at 15 October 2018 – a few students to complete the financial registrations

