

A Vision for Theological Education in the Common Awards

Preamble

1. The colleges and courses that make up the Common Awards partnership are diverse and independent institutions. They train people for a range of different roles in several different denominations; they employ different modes and styles of education; they are located in different geographical and social locations; they draw on different theological traditions.
2. These institutions work in partnership with one another, with the Church of England's Ministry Division, and with Durham University, to implement a shared framework for theological education for ministry: the Common Awards. This document is intended as a resource for the conversations that shape this framework. It offers a statement of purpose that can inform how these partners develop the Common Awards, providing terms in which proposed alterations of the scheme might be supported or critiqued.
3. This statement itself open to revision, by the agreement of the partners, as the partnership develops.

A. Beginning with God

4. The Common Awards institutions have different approaches to theological education for Christian ministry, but these approaches are held together by our worship of one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; creator and sustainer of all things; victor over death and source of life, the One who is above all and through all and in all. The mortar that holds our vision for theological education in place is confidence, trust and delight in this God, and the horizon of our vision is the fullness of life and love that God has prepared for all things, towards which God is drawing all that God has made. Our vision for theological education begins and ends with delight in the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
5. We therefore focus on God's activity before considering our own. We focus upon the eternally active life of the triune God, and upon the activity by which God shares this life. We focus on God's action in creating and lovingly sustaining the world, in reconciling creatures to Godself and to one another, and in healing, fulfilling, and perfecting what God has made, drawing all things into the knowledge and love of God. It is God who establishes the Kingdom, God who draws all God's children into that Kingdom, God who ministers and educates.
6. When the activity of God's creatures serves God's purposes, it is because God is active in them, drawing them into God's mission in the world together, and making their action bear fruit. The first note in our vision of ministry, and of theological education for ministry,

should therefore not be our own effort, determination, or commitment, but our confidence in God's work in the world, our thankfulness as recipients of God's grace, our trust in God's bounty, our assurance of God's enlivening presence, and our resting in God's strength.

7. The activity of God in which we are called to rest is a triune activity. It is the activity of the Spirit, conforming God's creatures to Christ and to Christ's ongoing action in the world, and so drawing them to share together in Christ's relationship to his Father, who sends us out in the power of the Spirit as Christ's witnesses in the world. It is a work that the triune God begins, continues, and will complete.

B. Ministry and Mission in the Body of Christ

8. To understand the role of Theological Education Institutions, and of the Common Awards partnership, in the light of this focus upon God, it is necessary first to understand the place of the Church's ministry and mission in this vision.
9. The triune God is at work in and amongst all God's creatures, creating, sustaining, reconciling, healing, and fulfilling. It is as part of this work that God calls together a people in the midst of the world to be a visible witness to God's name, in worship, proclamation, and service. The overflowing abundance of God's work in the world is not confined to this people, but this people is called to share in God's work.

10. When we are baptised in the triune name of God, we are welcomed as members of this visible community of witness, and so named as people being caught up in the triune activity of God. To be baptised is to be called to, and empowered by the Spirit for, Christlike life together before the Father. Baptism is therefore an initiation into the community of disciples, united to Christ, witnessing to Christ in worship, proclamation, and service, actively following Christ together on the way of cross and resurrection, participating in the mission of Christ in the world and for the world, discerning and responding to the work of God in the world, in all the particular contexts in which we find ourselves. Spirit-filled Christlikeness in and for the world is our baptismal identity. As God so loved the world that God sent God's only Son, so God sends us too, in the power of the Spirit, in sacrificial love for the world.
11. We are being conformed to Christ in this way not as isolated individuals but together, as the Spirit unites us into the one Body of Christ. As members of that Body, we participate together in God's mission in the world. The work to which we are called is therefore the work of Christ, and the work of every member of Christ's Body together; it is the work of all the baptised, of all God's people. The Spirit calls and empowers each person to participate in this shared work differently, by giving each one diverse gifts to bring to the shared life of the Body in the world, each one a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

12. When we use the word 'ministry' in what follows, we mean first of all this shared work of all the baptised, participating together in the mission of God in the world. Each of the baptised is called and equipped to minister, contributing to the whole life and mission of the Body; each is called to do so in his or her own distinctive way.
13. This differentiated unity that the Spirit gives to the Body of Christ is not only visible in the life of a local congregation, but in the whole worldwide Body. The complex interplay of differing vocations and gifts in the life of the Church can be visible in different ways at all sorts of scales, from home group to province, diocese to denomination, and in the rich variety of cultures that shape the church nationally and internationally.
14. When considering any particular form of ministry, this differentiated unity of the whole Body is the proper backdrop. Each particular form of ministry is a specific calling given to some for the sake of the whole, and the Spirit works through all of them together, in cooperation and mutual accountability, to shape the Church and the mission of the Church in the world. Our vision of any particular form of ministry is therefore inseparable from our vision of the Church as a whole, and of all the ministries that shape it, and of the purpose that God has for it in the world.
15. Every particular form of ministry is therefore a kind of service. That should govern how we think of any of the forms of authority, or of power, or of leadership, or of distinction, or of public visibility that some of them require. Those requirements only make

sense when seen as gifts given to some for the sake of the whole Body and its shared mission. If any authority is given, it is authority for the sake of our formation together; if any power is given, it is power for the sake of our building up together; if any leadership is given, it is servant leadership to enable our deeper participation together in God's activity in the world. Any forms of authority, power, and leadership proper to the Church will be determined by this fact: they exist only for the sake of building up the Christlike life of the Church in the world, and must themselves be Christlike.

16. Our accounts of the nature of ordained ministry will follow this pattern as well. Since the institutions that make up the Common Awards partnership are training people for ministry in Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, United Reformed, and other contexts, this shared statement is not the place to offer a definition of ordained ministry. Nevertheless, although our understandings of ordained ministry might differ, in the context of the vision presented in this document we can say that such ministry makes sense only within the differentiated unity of the whole Body. The distinctiveness of ordained ministry is one particular distinction given to the Church for the sake of its whole life in the world, alongside all the other distinctions in forms of calling and gifting that constitute the Church's life.
17. As we focus, however, on all the diverse ministries, lay and ordained, that shape the Church, we should in no way lose sight of the priority of God's action with which we started. It is Christ who is at work in his Church in and through all these ministries: Christ is active in the

sacraments and in the proclamation of the gospel; he is active in all particular vocations, all acts of love. Jesus Christ is the minister of his Church; he is the great Prophet, Priest, and King. All our differentiated ministries rest in his ministry, share in it, and are carried by it, and we are called above all to celebrate the presence of Christ.

18. That is why the differentiated unity of the Church's ministry, the ministry of all the baptised together, properly has the character of witness. We are called together to be a witness to the priority of God: to witness to God's love, God's life, God's victory, as the horizon for all that we are and do, and for the life of the whole world. We are called to name and to celebrate the divine source of our action, to name and to celebrate God's grace as the foundation of our life, to name and to celebrate God's sustaining and healing activity in the world. We are called to witness as we are drawn together by God into the life of the church and sent out into the world. We are called to witness in word and sacrament in our public worship; in our care for one another; in our penitence and amendment of life; in our whole embodied life together in community; in all the vocations we live out in the world, in our homes and workplaces; in singleness and in married life; in our social engagement; in our evangelism; in our responses to loss, brokenness, and darkness. We are called to witness in deeply rooted forms of life that the Spirit has taught the Church through its long history, and in new ways of acting faithfully into which the Spirit leads us in the present. We are called to witness in all these ways, as they mutually interact and shape one another.

C. Formation for ministry

19. To understand the role of Theological Education Institutions, and of the Common Awards partnership, in relation to this picture of the Church's ministry and mission, it is necessary to understand the role that formation plays in this vision.
20. To be made into God's witnesses together requires that we be shaped in certain ways: it demands our formation. Formation is the lifelong work of God in us, taking all the material of our lives – all that we have been and are – and working with it by the Spirit to enable it to reflect Christ, in the distinctive way appropriate to us and to the specific situations in which we find ourselves. God's formative activity works on our habits of action, speech, and thought; it works on our character and our desires; it works on our intellects and our imaginations. It works to clothe us with the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. In this work of formation God both works with what is already present in us and brings new things about; it is work that both nurtures and transfigures our lives.
21. To the extent that this formation runs true, it is God's work. It is God who forms us throughout our lives, drawing us by the Spirit to participate in a specific way in the Body of Christ. Yet it is work in which God calls us to share. By the grace of God, this formation can take place in part by means of our ongoing, deliberate, disciplined patterns of action.

22. It is also work in which we are called to participate together. As members of the Body together, we are involved in each other's formation. Members of the Body are called to learn from each other, challenge each other, and inspire each other, and to go on doing so throughout their lives.
23. God's formative work leads us deeper into God's life, rooting us more firmly in the knowledge and love of God, leading us to participate more fully in Christ's Body by the power of the Spirit, teaching us to be more fully witnesses in the world to God's love in Christ. We are formed as recipients of God's grace and thereby freed to mediate God's love to others. This is formation that leads us on the way of cross and resurrection, teaching us to follow Christ's whole incarnate existence including his learning of obedience even to death on a cross, and raising us up to new life.
24. The heart of this learning is found in worship and prayer – in our participation in the liturgy of word and sacrament, in sung and spoken praise and worship, in prayers of adoration, penitence, thanksgiving and intercession, together and alone. It is nourished and directed by diligent engagement with the scriptures, which witness to the triune God and to God's ways with the world. By drawing us by the Spirit to hear and receive Scripture, God teaches, rebukes, corrects, and trains in righteousness, nurturing our faith in Christ and equipping us for the work to which God has called us.
25. This learning in worship, prayer, and engagement with scripture is accompanied by and interacts with the learning that takes place in the

whole course of our interaction with one another and our presence in and engagement with the world, as we seek to respond together to God's call and to share in God's work.

26. Formal processes of formation for ministry, of the kind found in Theological Education Institutions and in the Common Awards scheme, are simply one region of this wider pattern of mutual formation in the life of the Body of Christ, in which, by the grace of God, we participate in God's forming work. Formal theological education sits alongside, and interacts with, the formation that takes place in the whole course of people's lives, in homes and workplaces, in the rest of the life of the Church, in confirmation classes and discipleship courses, in home groups and Lent courses, in continuing ministerial development and in leadership training. When members of the Body of Christ are welcomed into formal theological education, they are not being asked to do something wholly new, but to deepen and extend in particular ways the learning in which they are already involved as disciples, for the sake of the ministry to which they have been called. That learning should connect with and build on the learning that they experience before and outside their formal training, encourage lifelong habits of learning that will extend well beyond the end of formal training, and keep them engaged with those whose learning has been deepened and extended in other ways.
27. People involved in formal training for ministry continue to learn in all the ways that all members of the Body learn: in prayer, worship, and the reading of scripture; in engagement with one another and with the

world. Formal training for ministry includes, however, processes that extend and intensify this learning in specific ways. Those involved share together in common patterns of prayer, learning with and from one another, being introduced to new practices and deepening their own spiritual discipline. They are taken into particular kinds of diligent engagement with scripture, and extend their conversation with other readers of scripture, past and present, who can help them hear its witness more clearly and respond to it more fully. They explore the wide variety of forms that witness to that gospel has taken in the Church in the past, gaining access to a rich treasury of resources. They explore the wide variety of forms that witness to the gospel takes in the present, in their own culture and social location and in a variety of others, as well as exploring the witness to God's work visible in the wider world and in the height, depth, and breadth of creation. They learn new ways of attending closely to the world (social, cultural, political, and ecological) in and for which they are called to minister, and to understand and respond to the challenges and opportunities that it presents. They learn to reflect on their practice in new ways, in the light of all they are learning.

28. By these means, they learn to grasp more deeply the nature of God and of the ministry to which God calls them, and to delight in that understanding; they gain the various forms of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and skill that they need in order to pursue the specific callings that God has given them within the Body of Christ; and they

learn to imagine what faithful and creative response to those calls can mean in a wide variety of situations.

29. This formation involves the whole person. It involves formation of character, of understanding, of habits, of skills, of relationships, of feelings, and of imagination. It involves heart, soul, strength, and mind; it involves the offering of our bodies as a living sacrifice, spiritual worship, and the renewal of our minds.
30. Intellectual development is one deep current in this formation, as those engaged in formal theological education are inducted into the forms of wisdom, understanding and knowledge that will empower them for their calling. Theological education will rightly deepen and extend the breadth and depth of their understanding, the clarity and rigour with which they explore and test it, the mental flexibility and imagination with which they can draw on it in their ministry, the range of people past and present with whom they are in deep conversation as they do so, and the delight with which they learn to see all this in the light of God and God's ways with the world.
31. Because those being formed in this way are being formed for different callings within the Body of Christ, the forms of pedagogy appropriate to them, the demands made on them, and the ways in which intellectual formation is woven in with other aspects of formation, will differ from institution to institution, programme to programme, and person to person. Some may have a particular calling to intellectual engagement: to especially wide and deep exploration of the Christian tradition and its interpreters, to especially rigorous engagement with

the best current learning, and to especially thorough formation in habits of intellectual questioning and creativity. Such learning on the part of some is a gift to the whole Body, helping it preserve its intellectual heritage, learn from the knowledge and understanding that God gives to the world, and respond convincingly to intellectual challenges and opportunities.

32. The true measure of all theological education is whether and how it contributes to our witness together, to our fruitful, imaginative, and passionate participation together in the differentiated unity of the Church, to our deeper participation together in the mission of God in the world.
33. All of this formal learning is one aspect of the ongoing, deliberate, corporate activity by which we are, by the grace of God, formed for participation in God's work. All the learning that takes place in formal theological education therefore properly takes the form of a corporate spiritual discipline, a training together in the habits of holiness, by which we seek to be formed more deeply for participation in God's work, and led more deeply into God's superabundant life.