The University of Edinburgh

Internal Periodic Review

School of Divinity

PG Provision

1st and 2nd November 2022

Contents

Executive summary

This report comprises the outcomes from the internal review of PGT and PGR provision in the School of Divinity.

The review team found that the School has effective management of the quality of the student learning experience, academic standards, and enhancement and good practice.

The report provides commendations on the School's provision, recommendations for enhancement that the School will be asked to report progress on to the Senate Quality Assurance Committee and suggestions on how to support developments.

Key Commendations

The review team commended the School for their exemplary student support, the clear sense of community developed amongst both students and staff and the development of research-led programme and course design. Further commendations are included in the report.

Key recommendations

The top three recommendations identified by the review team for the School to prioritise were:

- The review team had sympathy for the staff's view that the named PhD programmes provided layers of unnecessary complexity from an administrative viewpoint, potentially resulting in students being siloed within their research groupings. However, subsequent to meeting the students the team considered that before abandoning these named PhD programmes, it would be important to assess whether they were in fact functioning as an important hook in recruitment. The review team strongly **recommend** seeking further intelligence from students and applicants on how these labels were feeding into choices made before a firm decision either way was taken. It was also **recommended** that the School look at interactions between degree finder and google, as when the panel searched ''world Christianity programmes' Edinburgh came up top because it is one of the only named PhD programmes in search results.
- The review Team considered that blended courses across UG and PGT programmes offered a flexible approach for managing delivery of provision from year to year. It was recognised that this may be a sustainable way of offering broad choice at both levels, and have many advantages for students within the room. However, having a majority of optional offerings in this format is arguably excessive. It was **recommended** that the emerging 'norm' of automatically producing a level 11 version of existing or proposed level 10 courses for some PGT programmes should be critically reflected on. So too the diversity of practice across PGT programmes with regard to having separate tailored PGT sessions within UG/PGT blended courses should be monitored as student experience seems very variable across programmes.
- The Review Team noted it would be helpful if University systems could digitally facilitate more modularity across disciplines by using keywords more explicitly and promoting courses likely to have more availability as choices. It was **recommended** that the process for accurately co-listing courses from year-to year should be monitored.

Commendations, recommendations and suggestions

Commendations

Key strengths and areas of positive practice for sharing more widely across the institution.

No	Commendation	Section in report
1	The team were **commended** for their ongoing creative innovation in programme design as seen in the recent development of the Religion and Literature programme described by both staff and students as one of a kind in the sector.	1.3
2	The review team additionally **commend** the approach to Research-led course design led by world-class academics who are subject leaders in their field who really care about nurturing the next generation of scholars.	1.3
3	The review team **commend** the teaching team for their agility and flexibility in the planning and delivery of teaching.	1.4
4	The review team **commended** the teaching staff for their contributions to teaching on courses elsewhere in the university and in attracting students from other programmes into the School (for example students from the law school undertaking courses in the Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations programme).	2.1.3
5	The School is highly **commended** for the myriad ways in which it carefully developed a sense of community and belonging for all PGT/PGR students from induction onwards. Feeling part of a diverse, international, intellectually vibrant, and supportive academic and social community was evident in student recruitment, success, and retention across all programmes.	2.3.1
6	The review team **commend** the teaching team's level and frequency of contact with students and their approach to student support they described as 'Keeping students well'. The review team also **commend** the provision of on-site support provided by non-academic staff including Student Support Officers, wellbeing advisors and the professional services team that contributed to the New College community.	2.3.2
7	The review team **commended** the wealth of good practice demonstrated in PGR supervision, spanning academic and pastoral spheres.	2.3.4
8	The review team **commended** the School on their approach to equality, diversity and inclusion which sought to recognise and embed required EDI initiatives and was responsive to student feedback.	2.5.1
9	The review team **commend** the School's initiative to work with the Holyrood campus to access IT support going forward, thereby benefitting from economies of scale.	2.8.3
10	The review team **commended** the School for their management of admissions. Managing applications internally enabled a sense of connection between the student and school to develop from the get-go. The review team noted that excellent Professional Services staff were crucial to the School's success, and the students' sense of belonging and care from application through to graduation.	3.1

Recommendations
Areas for development and enhancement – progress to be reported.

Priority	Recommendation	Section in report	Responsibility of
1	The review team had sympathy for the staff's view that the named PhD programmes provided layers of unnecessary complexity from an administrative viewpoint, potentially resulting in students being siloed within their research groupings. However, subsequent to meeting the students the team considered that before abandoning these named PhD programmes, it would be important to assess whether they were in fact functioning as an important hook in recruitment. The review team strongly **recommend** seeking further intelligence from students and applicants on how these labels were feeding into choices made before a firm decision either way was taken. It was also **recommended** that the School look at interactions between degree finder and google, as when the panel searched ''world Christianity programmes' Edinburgh came up top because it is one of the only named PhD programmes in search results.	1.5	Head of School and Director of PG Studies
2	The review Team considered that blended courses across UG and PGT programmes offered a flexible approach for managing delivery of provision from year to year. It was recognised that this may be a sustainable way of offering broad choice at both levels, and have many advantages for students within the room. However, having a majority of optional offerings in this format is arguably excessive. It was **recommended** that the emerging 'norm' of automatically producing a level 11 version of existing or proposed level 10 courses for some PGT programmes should be critically reflected on. So too the diversity of practice across MA programmes with regard to having separate tailored PGT sessions within UG/PGT blended courses should be monitored as student experience seems very variable across programmes.	2.1.2	Head of School, Director of Postgraduate Studies
3	The Review Team noted it would be helpful if University systems could digitally facilitate more modularity across disciplines by using keywords more explicitly and promoting courses likely to have more availability as choices. It was **recommended** that the process for accurately co-listing courses from year-to year should be monitored.	2.1.3	School to liaise with College/Student Systems

4	The review team **recommend** that the University invest in adequate on-site IT support and a stable Wi-Fi connection throughout the building. IT issues were obviously a pressure point felt keenly by all members of the learning community in New College.	2.8.3	School to liaise with College/Student Systems
5	The review team **recommended** the School go ahead with their plans to provide a multi-faith prayer space once the fire asset protection work was completed.	2.8.4	Head of School

Suggestions
For noting – progress reporting is not required.

No	Suggestion	Section in report
1	It was **suggested** that the teaching teams consider developing thematic Level 11 courses that could be shared and/or co-taught by two or more PGT programmes to make the development of Level 11 specific courses more viable.	2.1.2
2	The Review Team noted that the complexity and numbers of PGT programmes, including the number of courses, had resource and staffing implications, though generally all colleagues seemed broadly supportive of sustaining these multiple programmes (despite small numbers on some from year to year). The Review Team **suggested** that a radical solution to manage these challenges, might be to develop one single PGT programme with nested pathways in various sub-disciplines. If this sort of rationalisation was followed, sharing of level 11 courses between pathways (where possible, meaningful and appropriate) should be encouraged.	2.1.2
3	The review team noted that if attracting more, and a wider diversity of students (WP/access/social mobility), was a key priority for the School, then it was **suggested** that the School considered lowering the tariff for entry on all PGT programmes. (It was noted that the newer MSc in Philosophy, Science, and Religion currently operated a lower).	2.5.2
4	The review team **suggested** that consideration was given to embed PhD proposal preparation within existing assessments, for example within the 'Approaches to Research' course, to ensure readiness for participation in funding competitions.	2.6.1
5	The review team **suggested** that the School provide more bespoke support for envisaging career paths outside of academia and engaging PGR alumni community who have not gone into academia.	2.6.2

Section A – Introduction

Scope of review

Range of provision considered by the review (see Appendix 1).

The Internal Periodic Review of The School of Divinity in 2022 consisted of:

- The University's remit for internal review (see Appendix 2)

- The subject specific remit items for the review**:**
  - PGT Courses
  - PGR Programmes

- The Reflective Report and additional material provided in advance of the review

- The meeting of the review team including consideration of further material (see Appendix 3)

- The final report produced by the review team

- Action by the School and others to whom recommendations were remitted following the review

Review Team Members

Convener	Professor Cathy Abbott, Deanery of Molecular, Genetics and Population Health Sciences
External Member	Professor Louise Lawrence, University of Exeter
External Member	Professor Alec Ryrie, Durham University (unable to attend review visit)
Internal Member	Dr Simon Trepanier, School of History, Classics and Archology
Student Member	Gulce Baskaya, School of Social and Political Sciences
Administrator	Victoria Bennett, College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine

The School

The School of Divinity is one of twelve schools within the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

Physical location and summary of facilities

The School of Divinity is located in a single campus situated in New College. The building is dedicated to School of Divinity provision. New College has a dedicated library and dining hall. The library and other areas of New College were subject to fire asset protection works during the time the review took place and in the year proceeding the review. During this period some teaching and library collections were located off site.

Date of previous review

9th and 10th November 2015.

Reflective Report

The Reflective Report was prepared by Dr David Grumett, Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement at the School of Divinity. Internal meetings informed the subject specific remit items identified and Dr Grumett met with student representatives to ensure student input into the document.

Section B – Main report

1 Strategic overview

1.1 Postgraduate taught provision at the School of Divinity is made up of seven Masters programmes: Religion and Literature, Science and Religion, Biblical Studies, Religious Studies, Islam and Muslim-Christian Relations, Theology in History and World Christianity. The School also delivered a Graduate Diploma in Theology and Religious Studies and contribute to an online Masters programme, MSc Philosophy, Science and Religion delivered in partnership with the School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences (PPLS). Ownership and administrative responsibility for this programme will move from the School of PPLS to the School of Divinity from academic year 2023/24. Together the School of Divinity owned PGT programmes have approximately 50 students each year.

There is a high number of courses provided to service the seven programmes and 50 students, with 110 SCQF Level 11 courses on the books and 60 currently running. PGT Students take 1-2 core SCQF Level 11 courses on each programme and then have access to a wide variety of options, including the opportunity to take up to two courses in another School. Approximately half of the Level 11 courses were paired with a Level 10 version of the course taken by third and fourth year undergraduate students. The Level 10 and 11 courses were delivered concurrently with undergraduate and postgraduate students taught together, but where the postgraduates were provided with additional seminars and/or supported reading.

Delivery of this number of courses was reported to be resource heavy and the School identified PGT Courses as one of the subject specific remit items they wished to explore with the panel. Areas they wished to explore were whether the number of Level 11 courses should be reduced and whether PGT provision should be made more distinctive with reduced use of pairing.

1.3 The School Management team outlined the School's strategic approach to developing new courses and programmes. Each year the School met to discuss size and shape, with University and College views feeding into these discussions. Generally the School was satisfied with their UG profile, but they wished to grow PGT provision. It was noted that fee levels were high in comparison with competitors and entry criteria were higher than in other Schools in the University. The Team understood fee levels were unlikely to change, but there was some willingness to review entry criteria despite some concerns that this might lead to a lower conversion rate from a greater number of applications.

To encourage growth the School had recently developed two new programmes within newer areas of enquiry considered to be of interest to the market. These new programmes, Religion and Literature and Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations were now running. The Religion and Literature programme had been quite successful, however, there was more work to be done in raising the profile of the Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations programme to further support recruitment. The team were **commended** for their ongoing creative innovation in programme design as seen in the recent development of the Religion and Literature programme described by both staff and students as one of a kind in the sector. The review team additionally **commend** the approach to research-led course design led by world-class academics who are subject leaders in their field who really care about nurturing the next generation of scholars.

1.4   The School Management Team outlined the method undertaken to plan and manage PG teaching. Each year programme clusters would discuss and agree which courses would run for a particular academic year, ensuring all programmes were appropriately serviced and a sufficient spread of student choice available. The Head of School maintained oversight of all courses being taught at each level across the School. Reflecting on the large number of courses, the Head of School would suggest which particular courses may be pulled for that year, however, people were generally very keen to teach their courses which were often research-led. Not all courses ran every year, with a number of courses being delivered on alternate years. Students were informed about which courses were running ahead of course choices being made and decisions about course delivery might change based on the profile of students enrolling across the programmes in a given year. The review team **commended** the teaching team for their agility and flexibility in the planning and delivery of teaching.

1.5   Postgraduate Research provision is made up of PhD programmes in nine named fields: Religion and Literature, Ethics and Practical Theology, Hebrew and Old Testament Studies, History of Christianity, Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations, Science and Religion, New Testament and Christian Origins, Religious Studies, Systematic Theology and World Christianity. There were approximately 115 students (65 in years 1–3) in total across these nine programmes. These named fields were organised across research clusters, each holding an independent seminar series. Students were invited to attend seminars within their own research cluster and across clusters.

It was reported that the nine named fields supported marketing and recruitment to the programmes by indicating areas of specialism. However, the administration of the nine programmes could be onerous. The School reported it was unclear if the marketing benefits of having the nine programmes outweighed the administrative burden of overseeing nine programmes. The nine named fields supported the admissions process by serving as a triage point into nine different academic review panels, however, the School were concerned that the fields may give the impression that projects crossing traditional boundaries were not desirable and having fixed academic review panels may also have the effect of discouraging these. It was also noted that the named programme would not appear on students' degree certificates. The School had identified consideration of whether there should be fewer PhD programmes, or whether distinct PhD programmes should continue, as their second subject specific remit item with reflection on how administrative burdens could be reduced and research crossing traditional fields promoted if it was decided to retain these.

The review team explored moving away from the nine defined PhD programmes with current PGR students. Students reported a variety of reasons for choosing to study at the School of Divinity, including research profile of staff, reputation of research centres, funding and the unique and supportive community. When asked explicitly about the named PhD programmes as listed in the University Degree Finder, the majority of students reported that the named PhD programmes had been a hook for them to choose the School, as it helped them identify exactly what they were looking for. The bespoke programmes appeared to be an asset with some students reporting they would be put off by a generic PhD in Divinity. This view was particularly strong for those students on interdisciplinary programmes such as Science and Religion.

The review team had sympathy for the staff's view that the named PhD programmes provided layers of unnecessary complexity from an administrative viewpoint, potentially resulting in students being siloed within their research groupings.

However, subsequent to meeting the students the team considered that before abandoning these named PhD programmes, it would be important to assess whether they were in fact functioning as an important hook in recruitment. The review team strongly **recommend** seeking further intelligence from students (for example, undertaking a survey) and applicants on how these labels were feeding into choices made before a firm decision either way was taken. It was also **recommended** that the School look at interactions between degree finder and google, as when the panel searched ''world Christianity programmes' Edinburgh came up top because it is one of the only named PhD programmes in search results.

2 Enhancing the student experience
The approach to enhancing Learning and Teaching

2.1 Curriculum design and development

2.1.1 The School operated a Postgraduate Studies Committee and a Board of Studies. Together these bodies governed the development and approval of changes to provision, development of new courses and programmes and closure of programmes. The review team were interested to know how these bodies worked together and duplication of effort avoided. It was explained that the Postgraduate Studies Committee was a smaller body where detailed discussions around the development of course proposals took place. Subsequent to this stage proposals were refined and then received by the Board of Studies where the whole School came together to consider and give formal approval to proposals as appropriate. It was noted that there was some cross-membership of both bodies, including staff with dual roles.

2.1.2 There was a detailed discussion between the review team and those with senior leadership roles in teaching and learning and with programme and course directors around the issue of PGT courses as raised in the first subject specific remit item. There were mixed views amongst school staff around the viability of the number of courses and approach to pairing SCQF Level 10 and Level 11 courses. It was noted that in general when a course was proposed, both Level 10 and Level 11 versions would come forward simultaneously. Paired teaching made sustainable a great breadth of choice to students but this meant that teaching was shared with undergraduate students. The review team explored the composition of programmes in terms of core, specific Level 11 courses and shared level 11/10 courses. Most programmes had 1-2 core specific Level 11 courses with electives generally being delivered as paired Level 10/11 courses. Some programmes had a greater number of bespoke level 11 courses, for example Science and Religion, while others such as Religious Studies, had most other courses taken in the paired format. In general it was considered that across PGT provision, 50% of courses taken would be delivered paired.

The panel recognised that the paired approach to teaching supported the sustainability of courses, including the unknowns around PGT recruitment until students finally matriculated, but had some questions about the balance of paired courses against bespoke Level 11 courses in some programmes. Concerns raised were around student experience, including level of 'masters' teaching and the development of a coherent PGT cohort identity. It was also considered that the number of paired courses might impact PGT recruitment from within the undergraduate cohort as they might already have undertaken courses in the areas that most interested them.

In paired versions of courses, PGT students would join the UG students for the main teaching sessions, but also had access to Level 11 specific seminars. UG and PGT students would also undertake assessment designed at Level 10 or Level 11 as appropriate. Courses may have a larger grouping of UG students with very few PGT students and might also have some PGR students auditing. In courses with no other PGT students, the Level 11 elements would be delivered in a bespoke fashion in the format of a supervised research essay. Where sufficient numbers of PGT students elected to take a specific course the decision might be taken to deliver the course completely at Level 11.

Minimum thresholds for courses to run were not in place. Staff worked to ensure students had access to the courses of most relevance and interest to students' programmes of study. The review panel explored the administrative burden of managing many courses, particularly the complexity of course delivery with the professional services team. The teaching manager acknowledged that there were a large number of courses, but the numbers on those courses were small. If student numbers were higher, it would be more challenging to manage resources. However, the team felt strongly that administrative burden should never be the only reason a course did not run if it was pedagogically correct for students to have access to it.

Delivery of courses in this paired format or as bespoke provision enabled the teaching team to provide a wide variety of choice to students and maintain their nimble approach to management of teaching based on the differing profile of PGT student numbers across programmes in a given academic year.

The review team discussed the experience of taking paired courses with PGT students. Students described a variety of experiences such as being in mixed classes, attending Level 11 only classes, engaging in PGT only additional seminars and undertaking courses on an individual research essay basis. Positives included being amongst a larger body of students to discuss topics, with one PGT student noting that it offered diversity and scale in conversations just not possible with only one or two students. Another student highlighted that materials prepared for the Level 10 cohort helped embed subject knowledge needed to develop as an independent learner. Negative views on being in mixed classes expressed by the students included the lower quality of discussion where the majority of students were undergraduate, and the higher level of PGT student preparation for seminars, which they considered often resulted in them leading discussions.

The review Team considered that blended courses across UG and PGT programmes offered a flexible approach for managing delivery of provision from year to year. It was recognised that this may be a sustainable way of offering broad choice at both levels, and have many advantages for students within the room. However, having a majority of optional offerings in this format was arguably excessive. It was **recommended** that the emerging 'norm' of automatically producing a level 11 version of existing or proposed level 10 courses for some PGT programmes should be critically reflected on. So too the diversity of practice across PGT programmes with regard to having separate tailored MA sessions within UG/PGT blended courses should be monitored as student experience seemed variable across programmes. It was **suggested** that the teaching teams considered developing thematic Level 11 courses that could be shared and/or co-taught by two or more PGT programmes to make the development of Level 11 specific courses more viable.

The Review Team noted that the complexity and numbers of PGT programmes, including the number of courses, had resource and staffing implications, though generally all colleagues seemed broadly supportive of sustaining these multiple

programmes despite small numbers on some from year to year. The Review Team **suggested** that a radical solution to manage these challenges, might be to develop one single PGT programme with nested pathways in various sub-disciplines. If this sort of rationalisation was followed, sharing of level 11 courses between pathways (where possible, meaningful and appropriate) should be encouraged.

2.1.3   The teaching team highlighted an ongoing challenge in delivering some of the interdisciplinary programmes, where students eligible to take courses in other Schools were in reality not able to do so, due to rigorous quotas being met internally in those Schools. This issue was reported to be particularly acute for those students on the Religion and Literature PGT programme accessing courses in English Literature. Students confirmed their frustration with this issue, with one noting that their assumption had been that the departments were linked and that courses offered would be honoured, but they had been informed when they had arrived that they may not be able to access particular courses. Staff were concerned that promoting the programme as offering opportunities for students to take courses in other areas of the University was misrepresenting the reality of the offer due to restraints out of their control. One student confirmed that this is how they would have felt had they not had an issue with access to a particular course resolved. This new programme, which was recruiting well, had developed a new core course at Level 11 which was open to students from other Schools.

Staff described the process for cross-listing courses each year to highlight which courses within the School were available to students from other parts of the University. It was noted that it was unpredictable what courses in other parts of the University were available to their students each year. Issues that impacted students not being able to take outside courses included courses not running every year, courses not being listed accurately, quotas in other schools and timetable clashes. The review team discussed potential strategies with the team for promoting available courses with capacity, including the use of key words in searches. Challenges with University systems were highlighted, for example, key words were not visible within EUCLID (despite inputting them at course creation) and it was only possible to search courses by title rather than topic. The review team noted it would be helpful if University systems could digitally facilitate more modularity across disciplines by using keywords more explicitly and promoting courses likely to have more availability as choices. It was **recommended** that the process for accurately co-listing courses from year-to year should be monitored.

The review team **commended** the teaching staff for their contributions to teaching on courses elsewhere in the university and in attracting students from other programmes into the School (for example students from the law school undertaking courses in the Islam and Christian-Muslim relations programme).

2.1.4   The School had two collaborative programmes, an MTh with China Graduate School of Theology and a DMin with Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. There had been challenges in renewing the Memorandum of Agreement with the China Graduate School of Theology programme due to wishes of the partner that the institution could not fulfil. This had been a joint award but was not currently recruiting. The programme with Pittsburgh Theological Seminary was a part time ministry programme that took place part time over three years. Due to the small cohort this programme ran only every other year.

2.2   Assessment and Feedback

2.2.1   A wide variety of assessments were utilised across the PGT programmes. With courses and assessments considered in detail at the School Learning and Teaching committee before going to the School Board of Studies for final approval. Where paired versions of courses were delivered, assessments were designed at both SQCF level 10 and 11.

2.2.2   The reflective report noted that feedback was generally returned within 15 days as per the University policy but PGT students noted a couple of instances where there had been an issue regarding timely feedback. In general students were content with the timeliness of marks and feedback.

2.2.3   Moderation was undertaken across all PGT courses and PhD theses were examined by both internal and external examiners. It was noted that the pandemic had resulted in greater use of virtual vivas which had supported the recruitment of leading international scholars to undertake external examining roles. Boards of Examiners were conducted in line with University expectations and aligned with national expectations.

2.3   Supporting students in their learning

2.3.1   The review team met with a number of staff and students across the two day review visit. Without exception, everyone commented on the supportive community and collegiate atmosphere in New College. In addition to formal support structures, staff reported lots of informal points of contact, for example in Rainey Hall and in research seminars. It was considered to be the multiple contact points within a shared space that facilitated the sense of community at New College. The School was highly **commended** for the myriad ways in which it carefully developed a sense of community and belonging for all PGT/PGR students from induction onwards. Feeling part of a diverse, international, intellectually vibrant, and supportive academic and social community was evident in student recruitment, success, and retention across all programmes.

2.3.2   Programme Directors were the primary support contact for PGT students, acting as their Personal Tutor. In these roles Programme Directors provided support themselves as well as sign posting students to specialist services as required. Programme cohorts were reported to be small, so a Programme Director may only have around five students, which compared favourably with other Personal Tutors in the School who might have up to 20 tutees. The small cohorts in place on PGT programmes were reported to permit bespoke staff attention. This enabled staff to know students well and to be able to intervene early where issues arose. Staff described this approach as 'keeping students well' in order to head-off crisis points. Where issues did arise the extensions and special circumstances service was in place.

In addition to the Programme Director, students had access to the PGT Student Support Officer embedded within the teaching organisation. The University had recently established a student wellbeing service and more challenging cases could now be referred through that service or guidance sought. A wellbeing advisor was now based in the School twice per week. In addition to these support roles, students also had the option of opting into a mentorship programme where they would be matched with a member of staff outside their subject area, with some students taking up this opportunity.

Programme Directors met with students on a one to one basis during welcome week to support course choice processes. They discussed students' interests, early thoughts about potential dissertation topics, and suggested members of staff students should meet based on research interests. Programme Directors were involved in admissions processes so had often established a connection with students ahead of commencing their studies. The University was introducing a new student support model. In this model guidance was for a cohort lead which would be the Director of Postgraduate Studies having oversight of all students. In addition, the School planned to retain their Programme Director role as part of formal support structures in the School as this approach was working well.

Relationship breakdown between a Programme Director and a student was rare. If this happened the Director of Postgraduate Studies would step in. There had been no examples of any PGT students needing to switch Personal Tutor due to relationship breakdown. The only examples of switching were related to a student changing academic programme.

PGT students were satisfied with support received at New College and welcomed the openness of academic staff to engage with them. Personal Tutors were reported to be responsive when contacted and if you saw them around the building they would often check in with tutees. The students reported that welcome week activities were excellent and they considered they had had a good induction to the School and their programmes. They reported a strong sense of being a cohort from welcome week onwards with students across the PGT programmes mixing freely.

The review team **commend** the teaching team's level and frequency of contact with students and their approach to student support they described as 'Keeping students well'. The review team also **commend** the provision of on-site support provided by non-academic staff including Student Support Officers, wellbeing advisors and the professional services team that contributed to the New College community.

2.3.3   One point raised by PGT students was that New College was a Christian School. Some of the students, particularly those enrolled on the Science and Religion and the Religion and Literature programmes, reported to the review team that they had not expected this. They considered the school to be an open Christian institution, but not a secular one as they had expected. They considered the school might modify their communications to make this clearer to applicants.

2.3.4   PGR students reported feeling well supported in both a pastoral and academic sense. Supervision teams were the primary support mechanism with students also having access to a named Student Support Officer in the Teaching Office. Other support mechanisms referenced to be in place for PGT students, such as the School mentorship scheme and the University Wellbeing Service, were also available to PGR students.

Supervisors were reported to be responsive both in responding to email and in setting up meetings. The students considered they were well supported by supervisors in relation to their research projects, developing as researchers, and supported in making funding applications, career mentorship as well as pastoral care where personal problems arose. One student reported that they felt they were treated like a human being with other students agreeing. One student noted supervision was like 'academic therapy'. The Director of Postgraduate Studies was also reported to be supportive and welcoming. Where students might wish to talk to someone outside their direct programme, students were able to seek support from the Director of Postgraduate Studies, the School Senior Tutor and Student Support Officer. It was

also noted that during vivas, students were given the opportunity to speak to the non-examining chair alone to build in space for students to provide feedback on supervision or examiners. The review team **commended** the wealth of good practice demonstrated in PGR supervision, spanning academic and pastoral spheres.

PGR students reported a strong sense of community at the School with some noting they chose to stay on for PGR study after completing PGT programmes at the School. Community building activities included both those organised by the School and peer-led initiatives via the student-led PG committee. Community building activities were noted to be intentional and very welcome, particularly those organised during the pandemic. The Rainy Hall was conducive to community building where students met and ate together. Students also welcomed the dedicated PGR study areas where students were assigned desks and they were able to build up friendships through encountering familiar faces in shared work spaces.

2.3.4   PGR students on distance PhD programmes reported that they considered themselves to be a cohort. They had been encouraged to form a community as a group and this had served them well. However, they would welcome more formal community building initiatives. The students recognised the challenges around this due to different time zones, with this considered to be as much of a challenge as physical distance. The students reported to the review team that the pandemic made being a distance student easier due to other provision also moving online. The students had been able access classes and activities that they would not normally have access to. Now the wider University had opened again there had been efforts to bring people back onto campus, but this resulted in fewer online or hybrid activities available for the distance students. Students would welcome more activities being delivered in a hybrid format post pandemic.

Students welcomed the opportunity to study on a distance learning basis as this enabled them to undertake PGR study which would otherwise have been unavailable to them.

2.4.   Listening and responding to the Student Voice

2.4.1   During the review team visit students confirmed opportunities to provide feedback outlined within the reflective report. These included opportunities to provide course specific feedback as per the student voice policy, participation at student-staff liaison committees, via student representatives on committees and via student meetings with the Director of Teaching and Director of PG Studies.

2.4.2   The reflective report noted that despite strong overall satisfaction demonstrated by PTES results, results in some categories were lowered in comparison with previous years. Staff considered this to be in relation to the challenges brought about by the ongoing fire asset protection work which had impacted access to the New College library, teaching and office space. Staff also considered the pandemic to have influenced this feedback; this had been an isolating experience for students, and international students in particular. The School were working hard to implement the new student support model, looking at needs across all cohorts. It was noted that the School had received recognition from the College for support provided to students during the pandemic.

2.5   Accessibility, Inclusivity and Widening Participation

2.5.1   The review team met the EDI Director, Dr Shadaab Rahemtulla at a number of meetings over the two day review. During discussions Dr Rahemtulla often drew the panel's attention to EDI challenges and provided examples of local EDI initiatives. These included round table discussions and a mentorship programme for students of colour, noting the particular challenges of students coming to Edinburgh from more diverse areas such as London.

PG students had requested a method to provide anonymous feedback to the School in relation to EDI issues. The School set up both analogue and digital methods of providing anonymous feedback. If students chose to include their name, the EDI Director would follow up with them to discuss the issue or to report back what action had taken place. Feedback loops were closed via a 'You asked us…We did' poster campaign. One of the initiatives set up as a result of anonymous feedback was a School mental health day.

The review team **commended** the School on their approach to equality, diversity and inclusion which sought to recognise and embed EDI initiatives and was responsive to student feedback.

2.5.2   The School operated higher entry criteria to programmes than Schools in other areas of the College (65% rather than 60%). These higher entry criteria were aimed at admitting students that would be better prepared for postgraduate level study. They considered that there was a link between their strong student performance and student retention levels and the higher entry requirements. The review team were interested to know if the high entry requirements impacted recruitment. The School highlighted their relatively high conversion rate from applicants to students (20%) as opposed to the wider College conversion rate (10%). Fee rates were reported to be the main challenge to conversion. It was highlighted that the high fee levels diametrically opposed promoting widening access to study at the School.

As explored further below, admissions were managed at the School, unlike the Schools within the wider College. There was some concern that lowering entry criteria would increase the number of applications submitted without an attendant improvement in conversion rates and resulting in a higher admissions workload and resultant strain on resources.

The review team noted that if attracting more, and a wider diversity of, students (WP/access/social mobility), was a key priority for the School, then it was **suggested** that the School considered lowering the tariff for entry requirements on all PGT programmes. (It was noted that the newer MSc in Philosophy, Science, and Religion currently operated a lower to no ill effect). The review team had commended the School on support provided to students and considered that structures in place would well support students undertaking the programmes with a lower tariff score at entry.

2.6   Development of Employability and Graduate Attributes

2.6.1   PGT students reported a desire for more support in preparing for PhD study. They noted attending a lecture delivered by a careers advisor regarding applying for PhD study. The message had been that students required to start thinking about this pathway straight away as funding body application dates were around Christmas. Students noted that this message had caused some anxiety. The review team explored this with the teaching staff and they confirmed that the deadline for PhD proposals were fixed externally and were getting earlier. This required them to prepare students to start making decisions about PhD study early in their PGT

programmes which caused anxiety. They noted that they highlighted deadlines for the upcoming cycle at welcome week as well as noting support was available where students chose to do this. They also advised students not to panic, and that they did not need to do this the following year, and that there was a benefit in slowing down and waiting for the next cycle.

The review team **suggested** that consideration was given to embed PhD proposal preparation within existing assessments, for example, within the 'Approaches to Research' course, to ensure readiness for participation in funding competitions.

2.6.2   Both PGT and PGR students reported that they would welcome more support around career planning, particularly outside an academic career. The review team **suggested** that the School provide more bespoke support for envisaging career paths outside of academia and engaging the postgraduate alumni community who had not gone into academia.

2.7   Supporting and developing staff

2.7.1   All staff, academic and professional services had access to an annual review. Staff confirmed that they were encouraged to take up opportunities for professional development, both during annual review and throughout the year as opportunities arose. Support from management was reported to be exceptional and colleagues supportive.

2.7.2   Personal Tutors and Supervisors considered they were well prepared to support students. There was a wealth of experience amongst colleagues who were always willing to advise. Those supporting students knew where to signpost students to specific support services such as the disability service or student counselling. Staff also had access to the School Senior Tutor and Student Support Officers for support. The University's new wellbeing service was welcomed with a wellbeing advisor on site twice per week and regular catch ups with the wellbeing advisor's line manager to seek further guidance and assurance around support provided. It was also noted that a number of staff had undertaken additional mental health training.

2.7.3   The review team met with a group of PG Tutors and the staff responsible for supporting them. It was very clear to the review team that robust mechanisms had been put in place to support the development of this group of staff and ensure appropriate oversight of PG Tutor teaching and marking. The School had appointed a Senior Teaching Fellow with responsibility for PG tutor support. The role holder, Dr Linden Bicket, had since been promoted to lecturer, although their role maintained protected time to continue their work to support the development of PG Tutors. This role holder was responsible for the developmental support, evaluation and training of this group of staff and outlined measures put in place to undertake this work. Another member of staff was now supporting Dr Bicket to ensure continued sustainability of this work through succession planning. A range of mandatory and voluntary training sessions had been put in place, with tutors paid to attend the mandatory sessions. All tutors met with Course Organisers ahead of course delivery as well as receiving in-person or virtual guidance on marking course assessments. The PG Tutors also received formal annual appraisal and mentorship from Dr Bicket and at least once per session Dr Bicket dropped in on tutorials and provided tailored feedback.

2.8   Learning environment (physical and virtual)

2.8.1   The physical context of New College was conducive to peer support and social interaction. Staff and students all noted the supportive community space, often commenting on the Rainy Hall which was conducive to building community. A number of students referenced programme lunches and the review team saw one such lunch taking place during the review visit. Desk space was offered to all PGR students. This was an enviable feature of the School's PGR experience, and one which the students themselves treasure and value.

2.8.2   Fire asset protection work commenced in January 2020 and continued to be taking place at the time of the review. This involved substantial areas of the building, including the library, teaching space and a number of staff offices to be out of use. Library materials and desks had been moved to 40 George Square with teaching space and offices in 1–7 Roxburgh Street. Staff and students reported significant impact of these works during this period. It was hoped that work would be completed by January 2023.

2.8.3   Access to IT services was reported to be an ongoing challenge with no dedicated IT support based in the School. A learning technologist was on site and they provided some limited support when able. An agreement had been reached with Schools located on Holyrood campus to share IT support and recruitment of an IT Officer was taking place. This arrangement would enable the School to take advantage of economies of scale and to share dedicated support with other Schools. The IT Officer once in place would provide an IT clinic twice a week in the School which was anticipated to improve access to IT support. Heavy use of the IS helpline was reported, both currently, and in particular over the pandemic.

Staff and students both reported inadequate WIFI connection at the School. This was also experienced by the review team during the review visit. The review team **recommend** that the University invest in adequate on-site IT support and a stable WI-FI connection throughout the building. IT issues were obviously a pressure point felt keenly by all members of the learning community in New College. It was also noted that this potentially had implications for data security and information governance at the School. The review team **commended** the School's initiative to work with the Holyrood campus to access IT support going forward, thereby benefitting from economies of scale.

2.8.4   Staff reported no current prayer space. Normally the sanctuary under the library was available for prayer but it was currently out of use due to fire asset protection work. This space had a lot of Christian symbolism, so a multi-faith prayer space was planned once building works were completed. The chaplaincy in George Square was noted to have a multi faith prayer space, but one student reported that this was away from the School and not easily accessible between classes (a particular issue for faiths with set prayer times). The review team **recommended** the School go ahead with their plans to provide a multi-faith prayer space once the fire asset protection work completed.

2.8.5   PGT Students spoke highly of online provision, particularly over the pandemic periods. Staff were reported to put a lot of effort into developing online resources, which students noted were engaging. The Learn platform was reported to have improved and was more interactive. Students considered that some of this may have been in place since the pandemic. Students spoke highly of Learn course resources, in particularly they welcomed the library section of learn used in some courses. They were grateful for the effort put in by staff to include links directly to the readings and for asterisks suggesting which readings to focus on which they noted helped direct them in their reading. Students also spoke favourably of the wide variety of sources

used in courses to support learning, such as radio, film and documentary as well as traditional journals and books. They reported that this added texture to their learning.

2.8.6 PGR Distance students reported a reduction in bespoke online provision since the pandemic ended which reduced their ability to engage with the wider New College community. They acknowledged that most students were on campus and that these events would have reverted to in-person only. They would welcome more opportunities to take part in events.

3   Assurance and enhancement of provision

3.1 The School's approach to Quality assurance and Enhancement was outlined within the reflective report. Discussions with School staff confirmed this approach was in operation and the statement provided by the College confirmed that in principle processes aligned with the University QAE Framework and were effective. The review team also had access to student feedback, and external examiner reports and responses. The team were satisfied that the School had an effective approach to reviewing provision, responding to student and external stakeholder feedback and had well established and robust quality assurance processes

3.2 Admissions were managed internally by the School of Divinity. This was a different model than that used more widely in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. The academic and professional services colleagues who managed admissions described their process to the review team. Applicants were funnelled based on programmes applied for and directed to relevant admissions panels. Staff engaged with applicants all the way through the process, supporting them to identify the right programme and/or supervisors.

The review team **commended** the School for their management of admissions. Managing applications internally enabled a sense of connection between the student and school to develop from the get-go. The review team noted that excellent Professional Services staff were crucial to the School's success, and the students' sense of belonging and care from application through to graduation.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Range of provision considered by the review

Taught Programmes
Biblical Studies (MSc/MTh)
Science and Religion (MSc)
Religious Studies (MSc)
Theology in History (MSc/MTh)
World Christianity (MSc/MTh)
Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations (MSc)
Religion and Literature (MSc/MTh)

Research Programmes
Ethics & Practical Theology (MPhil, PhD)
Hebrew & Old Testament Studies (MPhil, PhD)
History of Christianity (MPhil, PhD)
New Testament Language, Literature & Theology (MPhil, PhD)
Religious Studies (MPhil, PhD)
Science and Religion (MPhil, PhD)
Systematic Theology (MPhil, PhD)
World Christianity (MPhil, PhD)
Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations (MPhil, PhD)
Theology and Religious Studies (MTh by Research, MScR)

Appendix 2 – University remit

The University remit provides consistent coverage of key elements across all of the University's internal reviews (undergraduate and postgraduate).

It covers all credit bearing provision within the scope of the review, including:
- Provision delivered in collaboration with others
- Transnational education
- Work-based provision and placements
- Online and distance learning
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
- Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD)
- Provision which provides only small volumes of credit
- Joint/Dual Degrees
- Massive Open Online Courses MOOCs (even if non-credit bearing)

1. **Strategic overview**
   The strategic approach to:

   - The management and resourcing of learning and teaching experience,
   - The forward direction and the structures in place to support this.
   - Developing business cases for new programmes and courses,
   - Managing and reviewing its portfolio,
   - Closing courses and programmes.

2. **Enhancing the Student Experience**
   The approach to and effectiveness of:

- Supporting students in their learning
- Listening to and responding to the Student Voice
- Learning and Teaching
- Assessment and Feedback
- Accessibility, Inclusivity and Widening Participation
- Learning environment (physical and virtual)
- Development of Employability and Graduate Attributes
- Supporting and developing staff

3. **Assurance and Enhancement of provision**
   The approach to and effectiveness of maintaining and enhancing academic standards and quality of provision in alignment with the University Quality Framework:

   - Admissions and Recruitment
   - Assessment, Progression and Achievement
   - Programme and Course approval
   - Annual Monitoring, Review and Reporting
   - Operation of Boards of Studies, Exam Boards, Special Circumstances
   - External Examining, themes and actions taken
   - Alignment with SCQF (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework) level, relevant benchmark statements, UK Quality Code
   - Accreditation and Collaborative activity and relationship with Professional/Accrediting bodies (if applicable)

Appendix 3 Additional information considered by review team

- Reflective report
- PGR and PGT statistical reports
- PRES report
- PTES report
- External Examiner reports and responses

Appendix 4 Number of students

(Internal Review Support to include this)

Include the number of students on each related course/programme, for each of the three to five years prior to the review. This can be obtained as part of the information included in the statistical documentation.

[Note: this information is useful to Heads of College/School especially if a report highlights concerns over resources]