The University of Edinburgh

Internal Periodic Review 2019/20

Internal Periodic Review of Divinity

3 & 4 March 2020

Final report

Section A- Introduction

Scope of the review

Range of provision considered by the review:

Current Programmes
Divinity and Classics (MA Hons)
Divinity (BD) (Honours)
Divinity (BD Hons) (Part-time)
Divinity MDiv(Hons)
Philosophy and Theology (MA Hons)
Religious Studies and English Literature (MA Hons)
Religious Studies and Scottish Literature (MA Hons)
Religious Studies (MA Hons)
Religious Studies MA(RS)(H) (Part-time)
Theology and Religious Studies (GradDip) (Full-time)
Theology and Religious Studies (GradDip) (Part-time)
Theology (CertHE)
Theology MA(Hons)

The Internal Periodic Review of Divinity consisted of:

The University's remit for internal review (listed in Appendix 1)

The subject specific remit for the review, consisting of the following items**:**

Undergraduate summative assessment loads
There is considerable variation in assessment loads within the courses in Divinity programmes. This may have developed as topics and courses that were previously assessed by a single exam, and then by an exam and coursework essay, have in some instances accrued several additional assessment components. In joint degree programmes the typically lower assessment loads for core or optional courses that are delivered in other Schools provide essential comparisons. It's desirable that students have a breadth of assessment modes across their degree programme. However, there's no requirement that many different modes be used within an individual course. High assessment loads increase workload for all. They may contribute to reduced feedback quality if they lead markers to experience workload pressure due to the number, frequency or length of assessment tasks. Recent University Careers Service research recommends that assessment structures be reviewed to create more space for risk-taking and experimentation.

School structure to support UG programmes
In its current structure Divinity dates from 2002, when the UoE faculties were restructured. It contains the four UG subject areas of Biblical Studies, History of Christianity, Religious Studies, and Theology and Ethics. The lead recommendation of the 2013 TPR was that Divinity should develop 'stronger processes for curriculum development and management, monitoring and review

at programme and School levels'. We have begun to do this but are approaching a point where further progress may be difficult without structural change. SAs show course groupings but contribute to a lack of structure in our Theology MA programmes (which about 70% of UGs study) and to numerous courses (120 for <300 UGs) being offered in the School. It's unclear what useful functions SAs now perform and therefore whether they should be retained.

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

The visit by the review team including consideration of further materials (*listed in Appendix 2)*

The final report produced by the review team

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

Membership of review team

Convener	Dr Jonny Murray, Edinburgh College of Art
External Member	Dr Catrin Williams, University of Wales Trinity Saint David
External Member	Dr William Tooman, University of St Andrews
Internal Member	Professor Tim Drysdale, School of Engineering
Student Member	Marco Garcia Mendez, School of Social and Political Science
Administrator	Victoria Bennett, College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine

School within its College

The review considered the undergraduate provision of the School of Divinity, 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 with some larger lectures delivered offsite. New College has a dedicated library and dining hall.

Date of previous review:

The previous review took place in academic year 2013.

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   Undergraduate provision at the School of Divinity is made up of the MA Theology, MA Religious Studies, a number of joint programmes delivered with either Theology or Religious Studies (as listed above) and the MDiv and BD Divinity programmes that prepare candidates for Ministry in partnership with the Church of Scotland. The School operates a mixed economy of programme structures with each programme managed by a Programme Director. Divinity students must select only from Theology courses. Religious Studies Students must take four core Religious Studies courses, but can otherwise select across the entire range of Theology and Religious Studies courses. Theology students have no core courses and can select freely across the full portfolio.

Courses are organised under four Subject Areas led by Subject Area Conveners. The Subject Areas are Biblical Studies, History of Christianity, Religious Studies, and Theology and Ethics. Subject Areas propose, develop and manage their 'own' courses identified via four separate subject codes. Undergraduate provision consists of a wide portfolio of courses at SCQF Level 8 and Level 10 available across Subject Areas and Programmes based on the level of choice permitted within individual programme structures.

The Head of School noted that current Church of Scotland plans aimed to reduce the number of providers involved in training candidates for the Ministry. The School was planning to put together a bid to remain a key provider, however, the submission date had been pushed back and the full scope of potential bids had not yet been confirmed. The School was developing a range of proposals to meet criteria based on the amount of money the Church might have to spend on this work which would influence what criteria they would be looking for. It was anticipated that the successful bid would include an element of online provision. It was noted that this area was and would remain a relatively small element of the School's undergraduate provision.

1.2   The School Management team outlined the School's strategic approach to developing new courses and programmes and how Subject Areas and Programmes interacted. It was reported that the four classic Subject Areas made less sense as administrative structures for undergraduate curriculum design and management in the context of greater university emphasis on development, management and evaluation of teaching at Programme level. Subject Areas were also of unequal size with the Theology and Ethics Subject Area disproportionately large compared with the others. It was also noted that over recent years most new academic appointments had been staff that did not fit easily into a specific Subject Area due to interdisciplinary approaches to research and teaching or because their research are was outside the classic disciplines (for example, atheism). These new staff and courses have generally been absorbed into the Theology and Ethics Subject Area resulting in its disproportionate growth.

It was noted that the dissolution of Subject Areas had been a recommendation at the previous Teaching Programme Review in 2013 but had not yet taken place. Subject Areas as meaningful structures for undergraduate teaching was therefore a subject-specific remit item for this review. The Head of School reported that the dialogue around Subject Areas had evolved over the past few years in the School and it was considered that, while some staff retained reservations about this change, generally there was now wider support for their dissolution. Since the remit meeting for this review in November 2019, a working group had been set up, led by the Director for Undergraduate Teaching, to progress this conversation across the School and prepare the ground for change. The Senior Management Group reported that they had been encouraged by wider support for the change within the School than they had anticipated. It was recognised that Subject Areas were effective as units to develop and manage research, including PGT programmes

aligned to Subject Area research interests, and the Head of School stated her support for maintaining Subject Areas in this context where they continued to be meaningful.

Currently, proposals to introduce new courses or make changes to existing courses were undertaken at Subject Area Level where courses were owned. Each Subject Area operated a Subject Area committee where proposals were developed before further consideration at the School UG Studies Committee. Final consideration and approval was then taken at the School Board of Studies. It was acknowledged that current course approval processes led to a bottom up approach to curriculum development rather than a programmatic or strategic School-wide approach.

1.3   The School Management Team outlined the current method undertaken to plan and manage UG teaching. Individual academic staff completed a Workload Allocation Model form which included the courses they wished to deliver in the coming academic year. This was then reviewed by the Head of School and final teaching allocation negotiated. The current Head of School reported that she had introduced an additional review stage where she met with the Director of Undergraduate Teaching to consider teaching allocations against the needs of the programmes and to ensure an appropriate spread and delivery of courses. This review included consideration of which courses attract students from other Schools and aimed to prevent internal competition between popular courses as part of the School financial strategy. The Head of School acknowledged that this method of workload and teaching allocation introduced an element of strategic oversight of teaching, but at a later stage than she would like. The Management Team wished to ensure greater strategic oversight of the undergraduate portfolio and hoped this review would contribute to decision-making around the School structure and governance.

The Senior Management Team outlined their vision to ensure this more strategic approach to both curriculum development and the management of teaching. This would include the dissolution of Subject Areas as administrative structures for the development and management of undergraduate curriculum and teaching and the strengthening of the UG Studies Committee to make more holistic decisions about course approval and curriculum changes across undergraduate provision. It was anticipated that longer term these changes would support greater curriculum oversight at Programme level as well as contribute to decisions about the delivery of courses each academic year. This committee would also lead the implementation of any directives coming out of the wider University curriculum review. To implement these changes the membership of the committee would shift to focus on teaching management along programmatic lines across three main clusters: Theology; Religious studies; and Ministry. The difference this amended membership would bring was focus at the Programme rather than course level.

1.4   The Review Team welcomed the frank and open discussion around current challenges and planned developments as outlined by the School Management Team's vision. These themes were discussed throughout the review when speaking to School staff, including Subject Area Conveners and Programme Directors. The Review Team **commends** the collaborative, mutually supportive ethos demonstrated by the Senior Management team and **commend** their openness and imagination in discussing different possible configurations of formal responsibility and strategic decision-making to manage undergraduate teaching. These included proposals to reconfigure the existing landscape of Subject Areas as administrative structures and strengthening the remit and operation of the UG Studies committee to develop a collective approach to strategic decision-making.

1.5   Following discussions with School staff it became clear that concerns expressed by some staff around the dissolution of Subject Areas centred around: the continued identity and cohesion of the disciplines; the need to maintain opportunities for students to develop the knowledge and understanding of appropriate, subject-specific methodological approaches and skills necessary to progress within these areas; and that appropriate, discipline-specific routes for students to progress to higher levels of study in these disciplines would be maintained. Staff were, however, also open to the School Management Team's

proposed change in structure to support the management of teaching where this would be more efficient administratively and provided that this change was managed in such a way that the above-noted concerns were addressed.

1.6   The review team accepted the strategic and organisational considerations behind changing the School structure for the management of undergraduate teaching and supported current plans to dissolve subject areas as administrative structures. However, at the same time the review team **recommends** that the School also identify, implement and/or preserve clear DPT-defined pathways that support disciplinary progression and integrity, in order to address the above-noted staff concerns highlighted at the review. This means that the School should collectively examine and confirm that current DPTs would remain fit for purpose in this regard after the dissolution of Subject Areas as administrative structures. In instances where uncertainty or reservations around this question might arise, the School should be open to making changes to current DPTs necessary to underwrite staff confidence, for example, looking at programme-specific instances where new and/or additional DPT pre-requisites would be needed to support disciplinary progression and integrity.

1.7   There was a discussion about the impact of anticipated University-led curriculum review and changes resulting from the Service Excellence Programme. The review team **commended** extensive School awareness and engagement with wider University initiatives and conversations around all aspects of learning, teaching and student experience. At the same time, it is **suggested** that the School's existing and ongoing collective achievements and awareness in this regard entail that it should have the confidence to develop and implement local solutions in relation to curriculum development and restructuring as appropriate and when needed, rather than feeling compelled to wait for final outcomes of parallel University-wide initiatives.

2   Enhancing the Student Experience

2.1   The approach to enhancing Learning and Teaching

2.1.1   As outlined in section 1, courses are currently proposed and developed by Subject Areas and scrutinised at Subject Area Committees. All new courses are considered and approved at the School Board of Studies as per University requirements. As UG Studies Committee received course proposals subsequent to Subject Area development and scrutiny, the operation of the UG Studies Committee was perceived to be a duplication of this work undertaken by the Board of Studies. The Director of UG Learning and Teaching outlined her hopes that strengthening the UG Studies Committee would enable it to contribute to course development in overarching strategic and pedagogical ways and not operate primarily as an additional approver of courses. It was anticipated that these changes to UG Studies Committee would lead to a more shared, School-wide approach to course development across all stakeholders involved with undergraduate teaching and not simply within Subject Area groupings. This would strip out the perceived duplication of roles between the Board of Studies and current UG Studies Committee.

The review team strongly supported the proposed strengthening of the UG Studies Committee to undertake strategic decision-making in relation to curriculum development and provision and **recommended** that this change was undertaken as soon as possible. It was anticipated that strengthening the committee would lead to the following enhancements in the School's approach to managing learning and teaching. These envisaged enhancements should be used by the School in order to monitor the effectiveness of the rollout and subsequent embedding of the proposed new committee remits and inter-committee working relationships:

- It would enable more strategic, School-wide overview of teaching and inform decisions about what courses would to be offered each year.

- It would act as a critical friend in course development, changes to courses and course closures.
- It would undertake work to agree a School-wide approach to assessment (further discussion in section 2.2 below).
- It would lead in the local School response to and design and implementation of changes arising out of anticipated University of Edinburgh curriculum review.

2.1.2   There were currently approximately 120 live undergraduate courses within the School. Each course had a designated course organiser who planned to run the course either this session or in a future session. On average each academic member of staff was Course Organiser for four courses with some courses running each year and others every two years. While the Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement or the Director of Undergraduate Teaching led a review of existing courses every few years, and it was noted that another 15 courses had recently closed, the School was reluctant to close courses where there was a chance they may be delivered at a future date, due to the administrative burden of new course approval processes. The Senior Management Team expressed a desire to further reduce the number of UG courses offered by the School, although it was noted that a certain number were required to: (a) manage class size across very popular level 10 courses available to students outside the School, and (b) do so while simultaneously protecting, in financial terms, language courses that generally had fewer numbers of students enrolled. It was also highlighted that the existing School approach encouraged staff to teach from their current research which benefited both staff and students.

2.1.3   Currently all undergraduate courses were Level 8 or Level 10 with no compulsory pre-requisites for University of Edinburgh students apart from in Biblical languages. A few courses had recommended pre-requisites for University of Edinburgh students and a few had compulsory pre-requisites for Visiting Students. This structure was in response to University guidance to promote openness, enable visiting students to enrol and to build capacity for students to work across disciplines and take up opportunities to take courses outwith their home Schools. While Divinity UG courses were organised under Subject Areas and identified via subject code, the School's full suite of courses were open to students to choose from within the limits of their respective programme structures. Some students took up the opportunity to engage with a wide range of courses across Subject Areas and courses outside the School, while others chose to pursue courses around a particular area of interest within a Subject Area (for example, one student noted that she had chosen to take all courses available related to Islam).

The review team were interested to learn that students might attain an award in Theology or in Religious Studies but have an identical or very similar course profile recorded on their transcripts. Academic staff recognised both the rich opportunities for exploration and the challenges associated with this model. It was noted that Theology and Religious Studies offered different approaches to study, Theology focuses largely on the study of Christian faith and Religious Studies on the study of religions. The Director of Undergraduate Teaching acknowledged a duty of care to ensure that students understood the consequences of some course choices they may make. For example, a student undertaking a high proportion of courses in Religious Studies while gaining a degree in Theology may experience barriers to future employment if they then wished to pursue a vocation in ministry. Personal Tutors and the Director of Teaching worked to identify any student going down such a route, counsel them as to their options and support them to transfer degree programme where appropriate. Personal Tutors were also well placed to discuss implications of course options with tutees when making course choices and could help identify pathways where students indicated a particular interest (for example, in languages, history or texts).

2.1.4   While the review team supported the dissolution of Subject Areas as administrative structures as reported above, the team considered that greater clarity about potential

pathways through the course options would strengthen students' ability to make informed choices, both for those who wished to develop particular expertise and support for those who might find the lack of formal structure intimidating. The review team recognised that many students valued the flexibility and opportunity to explore a wide range of interests possible with these degrees. However, the review team considered that documentation of potential interest/theme/discipline-based pathways would both support student experience and choice and help to allay fears expressed by Subject Area staff around maintaining disciplinary integrity by ensuring that students who wished to progress to further study within the disciplines were prepared for this.

Under the proposed new model for student support currently under consultation across the University, the roles of Professional Services support staff would be enhanced. One area in which this might take place would be in supporting students around making course choices. The Teaching Manager noted that documentation of potential pathways and routes through the available courses would enhance the support Student Support Officers would be able to provide while undertaking this enhanced role.

2.1.5   The School delivered a number of joint degree programmes. Feedback received ahead of the review from partner Schools noted that these programmes ran well and continued to be valuable to these Schools. The review team **commended** the School of Divinity's commitment to interdisciplinary working, supporting students on joint programmes and willingness to support students to undertake non-formalised outside course options where student interest and availability makes this possible. The opportunity to take courses outside of the School for students on single Honours programmes enabled students to explore new subjects without committing to a joint programme. There were no plans to develop any new formal joint degree programmes; however, the School was open to considering this if they saw a marked increase in student interest in a specific area.

Staff and students highlighted some organisational challenges in the management of joint degrees where different administrative processes existed between Schools. Challenges included: timetabling; student movement across buildings and areas of campus with limited time; differing School-specific schedules and processes for making course choices each year; and School-specific differences in dissertation preparation. However, students enrolled on joint programmes reported less organisational issues with the elements of their programme delivered by the School of Divinity than with the partner School. The Teaching Manager noted that currently all joint degrees offered with Theology and Religious Studies were owned by the School of Divinity, which helped to mitigate against some of the issues experienced. It was noted that the College Dean of Undergraduate Education was undertaking work to harmonise issues experienced by students on joint programmes across the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. This would include the designation of Programme Directors linked to the programme in counterpart Schools. In light of the significant proportion of UG students enrolled on joint programmes, the review team **recommended** that the College Deanery continue this work to further align processes and student experiences across these programmes. The team note that this is a continuation of a recommendation made in the 2013 TPR.

2.1.6   The School Management Team outlined their approach to developing digital and online approaches to learning and Teaching. A MOOC in Christian-Muslim relations was currently being developed, the School partnered with the School of Philosophy in the delivery of an online PGT programme, and the School would be including a blended learning option as part of their bid to remain a provider of Ministry education with the Church of Scotland. The School had also managed to secure a Learning Technologist to support local development of digital education. The review team **commended** the foresight of the School in securing the services of an embedded learning technologist so as to progress digital education initiatives for both on-campus and online learning enhancement. Anticipated developments in MOOC provision and partnerships with external organisations such as the Church of Scotland suggest that this Learning

Technologist role was likely to expand and any such expansion would also benefit wider considerations that relate to the School's public mission and profile.

2.2   Assessment and Feedback

2.2.1   The Director of Undergraduate Teaching and the Teaching Manager kept close oversight of assessment turnaround times across the School and it was reported that the 15 day marking turnaround expectation outlined in the Taught Assessment Regulations was almost always met. It was noted that the School performed well against this benchmark in comparison with other Schools in the University.

2.2.2   Undergraduate summative assessment load was one of the subject-specific remit items identified by the School. The reflective report and discussions with staff and students at the review highlighted some issues around assessment load and diversity of assessment loads across courses. These included some feedback about turnaround times where a high assessment load in some courses resulted in feedback not always being returned in time to be productively used for the next submission task and date. It was also recognised that assessment volume on courses within the School of Divinity appeared to be higher in comparison with partner Schools delivering joint programmes. High assessment loads were most common in older courses. Course Organisers were keen to introduce new assessment methods, but these were often placed in addition to existing assessments rather than in replacement, resulting in assessment volume increasing in these courses over time. The Director of Quality wished to develop staff understanding that ensuring a diversity of assessment methods was desirable across a programme, not at course level. The review Convener also encouraged the School to consider that not all assessments within a course had to address each Learning Outcome, but that different assessments could address different outcomes or selective combinations of outcomes. It was anticipated that changes to the UG Studies Committee discussed above would enable these conversations to take place.

2.2.3   High assessment loads impacted student experience. There was a perception that student focus was increasingly preoccupied with hitting the next deadline. A recent report from the University's Careers Service highlighted that this impeded opportunities for exploration, risk taking and student reflection on their learning. High assessment loads also impacted the experience of both academic and professional services staff. The marking load, turnaround times and ensuring consistent high quality feedback was challenging and the administrative load in relation to assessment was high. It was also considered that assessment volume was impacting the number of Special Circumstances and Extension applications received.

2.2.4   Another reason behind the increase in assessment volume over past years was the University focus on providing more opportunities to give feedback to students. This had resulted in the growth in the number of assessments to enable feedback opportunities. The School were now trying out alternative methods to provide feedback. For example, instead of marks for seminar participation the Director of Undergraduate Teaching had recently introduced a requirement in one of her courses that students met with her on a one-to-one basis to discuss feedback on their essay plan. This was reported to have worked well, although it was acknowledged that the small class size made this type of practice easier to manage that it would be for other, larger courses within the School. During the review, staff and students noted that the School had attempted to introduce a peer feedback scheme more than once but this had not proved popular and had not been taken forward by the students.

2.2.5   The review team **recommends** a holistic review of the School's entire UG course provision to ensure appropriate consistency, diversity, timing, constructive alignment, and cumulative volume of assessments across the curriculum. This would include consideration of the impact of assessment practices on all stakeholders (students,

academic staff and professional services) when conducting this review and arriving at its conclusions.

2.2.6   Students met during the review highlighted that participation of all group members within group assessments was a concern. Students perceived unfairness in situations where all students received identical marks for a given assessment task where individual students' participation was not equal. Students would welcome an element of participation being considered within the distribution of marks, or a peer marking element where peer assessment was based on participation. The review team **suggests** that the School consider approaches to address this concern from students.

2.3   Supporting students in their learning – all aspects of support relevant to students' learning including:

2.3.1   The Personal Tutor System worked effectively at the School of Divinity. NSS feedback indicated that student satisfaction with Personal Tutors was high in comparison with feedback in other Schools and this was supported by conversations with students and staff during the review. The Senior Tutor had oversight of the Personal Tutor System, and worked closely with Personal Tutors and Student Support Officers. A mutually supportive and respectful relationship between all role holders was demonstrated during the review. Personal Tutors considered that they were well supported by the Senior Tutor and Student Support Officers. The Senior Tutor organised training sessions, prepared guidance and worked as an interface between Personal Tutors, SSOs and students, navigating and resolving any issues that arose between individual students and their tutor. Tutors reported that they never felt alone when making decisions as all role holders worked together to ensure students received the support they required.

All Students had formal one-to-one meetings with their Personal Tutors. Discussions at these meetings were informed by the stage that students were at in their academic careers. For newer students, the focus might be around settling in and making appropriate elective choices, while more senior students were encouraged to reflect on their academic journey and discuss dissertation preparation, potential further study and future employment. Students also had group meetings with Personal Tutors at programme level. Students could also access Personal Tutors or Student Support Officers on an ad hoc basis as required.

The School made an effort to maintain Personal Tutor assignments across relevant programmes. Where this was not possible tutors, including those supporting students on joint programmes, utilised tools and information available to them, including the School UG Handbook and the University DPT and Path systems, to support students to make appropriate course choices. School administrative staff also checked student course choices against the DPT before finalising course registration.

The review team heard a number of anecdotes throughout the review from both staff and students indicating that students and tutors knew each other well. The shared common spaces such as Rainy Hall enabled additional opportunities to build rapport between students and tutors which made it easier for students to seek support when required. The size and close community cohesion evident at the School clearly supported the effectiveness of the system, but this was not the only reason for its effectiveness. The School also had good processes and systems in place and staff, both academic and professional services, demonstrated a real commitment to supporting students. The School aimed to cap the ratio of tutors to tutees at 1:20. Personal Tutors knew their tutees by name and while much pastoral care took place in the form of signposting to specialist services, it was considered that support being funnelled through Personal Tutors was effective. There were some concerns that anticipated changes to the University system for supporting students would dilute this level of support: for example, in proposals for one person to be the named cohort lead for a full programme.

The Review Team **commends** the effectiveness of the operation of the Personal Tutoring system at the School of Divinity. All role holders (Senior Tutor, Personal Tutors and Student Support Officers) demonstrated an empathetic culture with mutually respectful relationships between academic and professional services colleagues clearly evident.

The review team **recommends** that the excellent local practice in personal tutoring currently demonstrated in Divinity is preserved in any forthcoming system transformation. This will be the responsibility of colleagues leading the joint University-SEP review of the personal tutoring system, who should consult directly with Divinity on this matter.

2.3.2 Students met during the review reported to the review team that those with less privilege and/or from certain demographic backgrounds sometimes struggled to access support. This was not considered to be a structural issue, but rather one of student perception and lack of confidence that support would be available to them. Personal Tutors reported that they recognised their role in reaching out to students. The Teaching Manager reported that she recognised that some students were more confident in their expectations that they would receive support, for example in applying for extensions, etc. while others held back. She considered it the role of the Student Support Team to keep telling students what support services were available to them. For example, to contact students with guidance on extensions and Special Circumstances in a proactive way. One tutor noted that she set up a questionnaire to ask new first years to signal things they were worried or unsure about and used this as a reference point at the first meeting. The review team considered this to be a proactive way to signpost students to support available. One tutor reported that what he mainly aimed to communicate to his tutees was they could contact him if they needed support ; he would be responsible for activating the various support structures and services available to students and that they did not need to do everything themselves.

2.4.   Listening to and responding to the Student Voice

2.4.1 The School operated a system of programme-based student representatives and had both a UG and PG School-wide student representative. Student Staff Liaison Committees (SSLC) were now held at School level for UG provision. Previously, multiple SSLCs were in operation, often for very small cohorts of students. The current UG School representative confirmed that the larger SSLC was more effective, as common cross-programme concerns were more easily addressed. Membership of the SSLC had also been enhanced with the Director of Undergraduate Teaching, Teaching Manager and Learning Technologist present, providing a clear action route for all types of issues raised. Actions were also clearly reported in minutes. For the most recent SSLC students had organised a survey to encourage peers to provide feedback to their representatives.

2.4.2 Students were able to provide course-specific feedback through mid-course feedback processes. Students reported that different lecturers used different methods for collecting mid-course feedback and expressed a preference for the post-it note-based systems as they were easier and quicker to participate in and students were subsequently more likely to engage with them. Some lecturers were reported to formally advise what they planned to do with student feedback while others did not. Students reported examples of feedback being addressed, such as the development of an electronic calendar of events at the School, while other responses to course feedback were less visible, particularly as courses often ran every two years and, up until this year, there had been no formal expectation of continuity between student representatives. One student representative reported receiving a useful handover from their previous representative while another did not receive anything. It was acknowledged that a formal expectation was now in place, so consistency and effectiveness of feedback response processes, including student representation within these, was expected to improve.

2.5   Accessibility, Inclusivity and Widening Participation

2.5.1   During the review and within Annual Quality Assurance Reports, the School acknowledged that they had not been attracting sufficient numbers of Scottish students. It was noted that in general the University did not always have a positive reputation amongst Scottish (and in particular, Widening Participation) applicants. During the review some students confirmed this perception. Students from both Scottish and/or WP backgrounds noted that they had experienced being the only or one of very few such students in their courses. Students also reported related concerns around team dynamics in group assessments. Some students reported feeling uncomfortable when joining groups, noting that people often formed groups within friendship circles based on schools they had attended before coming to University with other students then having to request to be able to join. The review team **suggests** that the School consider introducing an approach to group work where group members were mentored and supported to collectively develop and practice inclusive and equitable working relationships and divisions of responsibility and labour.

2.5.2   The School was taking active steps to enhance recruitment amongst students from Scottish and WP backgrounds. Work was taking place around how to enhance prospectus content, open days and post-offer visits as well as additional more targeted measures. Measures included School staff visiting local schools to run discovery days and taster sessions. Activities during discovery days included students learning about life in ancient Greece, learning how to write their names in the Hebrew alphabet, and staff scaling elements of current research to a student audience. This year, current UG students were calling offer holders to talk about life at the School and the Head of School had written to all Scottish offer holders to welcome them to the School. At open days in the past, tours were led by School of Divinity student volunteers, but this year the School planned to hire student ambassadors who would be paid on the basis of 12 guaranteed hours per year. Last year, sessions had been run during welcome week to support students to adjust to University life. Such sessions had proved popular and the School planned to continue running these during future welcome weeks.

2.5.3   In general, most staff and students highlighted a very positive and inclusive community across the School during the review. However, some students did note that they felt some voices were lost amongst this general positive experience. The review team acknowledges feedback received on strong aspects of community identity, but **recommends** that the School formally consider how best to preserve and further enhance existing levels of inclusivity, bearing in mind all student voices, identities and experiences (e.g. BAME, carers, LGBTQ+ and WP). Such enhancements include, but are not limited to, expansion of existing outreach work to engage prospective candidates from WP and other currently underrepresented backgrounds, and further proactive advisory engagement with students with diverse learning requirements to direct them towards support services.

2.6   Development of Employability and Graduate Attributes

2.6.1   As part of the discussion related to the subject-specific remit item of assessment load, the review team explored the School's approach to the development of employability and graduate attributes. As part of this, there was a discussion of skills development. It was noted that the School expects students to have developed a specific set of skills when they graduate. Academic skills developed within the programmes included: critical thinking; reflection; writing; analysing; and project management skills. These skills were also key transferable ones that prepared graduates for post-graduation employment. The School acknowledged that they could do more to be explicit about this skills development, to communicate to students the value of this skillset, and to encourage student understanding that assessment contributed to skills development, not simply attainment of marks. It was noted that documentation of these academic and transferable skills that are nurtured within Divinity's UG programmes would also contribute to recruitment efforts for the latter.

It was acknowledged that best practice in skills development was for this activity to be embedded within any given programme. However, the variety of courses and choice available to students made mapping skills development across programmes challenging. This resulted in some skills development sessions being delivered outwith the programmes themselves. The Director of Undergraduate Teaching delivered a well-received session during welcome week this year to enable students to understand expectations around engaging with their own learning, how to prepare for a seminar and how to approach their reading. Electronic research methods resources had also been developed to support student skills-building. Assessments also ensured that certain core skills were developed by all.

The review team **recommends** that the School make explicit their vision for graduate attributes and how this relates to programme design, with particular emphasis on making explicit the link between assessment and skills building: for example, articulating the ways in which academic skills such as critical thinking also prepare students for the world of work. This recommendation will overlap and interact with those recommendations made elsewhere within the review that relate to documenting potential pathways through the programmes and the strengthening of the UG Studies Committee.

2.7 Supporting and developing staff

2.7.1 Academic staff were supported to make use of opportunities available through the Institute for Academic Development and to engage with teaching accreditation. The Director for Undergraduate Teaching was the School contact for the Edinburgh Teaching Award and she also acted as a mentor on this programme. The Head of School reported that teaching was the first topic discussed at professional development reviews and all academic staff were provided with £1300 each year to use towards their own professional development, for example in attending conferences. This explicit support for professional development encouraged opportunities that ensured teaching was research-led.

Internally the Director for Undergraduate Teaching organised lunchtime 'Teaching Matters' sessions to share good practice and offer support for development in relation to teaching and learning. Previous topics at these sessions have included 'how to propose a course' and 'how to get teaching accreditation'. Staff from the wider University have also attended these sessions to present expertise on a range of topics.

The review Team **commends** the outstanding work of the current Director of Undergraduate Teaching for her leadership in enhancing the learning and teaching culture across UG provision and in identifying and commencing strategic initiatives around local assessment as discussed in section 2.1. The Director for Undergraduate Teaching was shortly to demit office and it was hoped that the new role holder would continue to provide these informal development opportunities.

2.7.2 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 reported that she was responsible for the developmental support, evaluation and training of this group of staff and outlined measures put in place to undertake this work. 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 Becket dropped in on tutorials and provided tailored feedback. Course Organisers outlined the oversight measures in place to moderate PG Tutor marking and feedback and how they ensured the development of a shared understanding of academic standards. Course

Organisers reported that they considered the overall standard for UG teaching to have improved at the School due to the measures put in place by Dr Bicket to support the development of PG tutors. PG Tutors all reported that they felt well prepared for the role and supported within in the role.

The Review Team **commends** the vision of the School in appointing to the role of PG Tutor coordinator. We also commend the work and initiative of the PG Tutor Coordinator for fulsomely achieving that vision through her recruitment, training, support and evaluation of the PG Tutoring community. The Review Team **recommends** that the wider University formally examines the local arrangements put in place within Divinity, in order to identify aspects of best practice that might be scalable across the wider institution more generally.

2.7.3   One PG Tutor reported that he tutored on the online joint MA programme. He outlined some challenges around adjusting to tutoring online due to the different delivery methods. It was reported that further guidance on expectations for Tutors on online programmes would be welcomed. In particular, how to maintain a work-life balance with the facilitation of online discussion when this took place asynchronously. In light of the School of Divinity's current (and potentially growing) online provision, it was **recommended** that the College develop further guidance, guidelines and support for PG Tutors and demonstrators contributing to teaching and assessment of online courses and programmes. The review team recognises that this is a College-level responsibility, however, given the outstanding culture of tutor and demonstrator mentoring and support within Divinity we consider the School would be well placed to contribute to this work.

2.7.4   The Teaching Manager outlined support and development opportunities provided to Professional Services members of staff. Regular formal and informal training opportunities were provided and structured annual review processes took place where the Teaching Manager sought to discover what was important to each member of staff, where their particular interests lay and how individuals could be best supported to achieve their development goals. The Teaching Manager supported a flexible approach and staff were enabled to engage in adjacent as well as directly role-relevant development opportunities as these were identified. During the review this group of staff demonstrated a strong team ethos and it was clear to the review team that they were well supported by the Teaching Manager and School leadership role holders.

The review team **commends** the Teaching Manager for her effective leadership of the Professional Services team and for establishing a student centred and mutually supportive team ethos. The review team **commends** all aspects of the Professional services team's work – their support of each other, their academic colleagues, and the wider student community. Students and academic colleagues spoke consistently highly about the Professional Services team's effectiveness and person-centred approach throughout the review.

2.8   Learning environment

2.8.1   The School of Divinity is situated in its own building, New College, on The Mound. The building has its own library and dining hall on-site. Staff offices, tutorials and some lectures were located in the building with larger lectures taking place in other parts of the University. The location of the School in its own dedicated building was highlighted throughout the review by students and staff as one of the reasons for its strongly cohesive academic community, with students identifying strongly with the building itself.

3   Assurance and Enhancement of provision

3.1   The School Quality Assurance model outlined the School's approach to Quality Assurance and Enhancement. Discussions with School staff confirmed this model was in operation and the statement provided by the College confirmed that processes aligned with the

University QAE Framework and were effective. The review team also had access to student feedback, annual monitoring reports 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 The School shared its strategies to disseminate good practice across the School. These included sharing good news stories, with the Head of School contacting everyone via email when staff were nominated for teaching and other awards. During the review it was highlighted to the review team that the Teaching Manager and Director of Undergraduate Teaching had been nominated in recent College recognition awards. Good practice in teaching and learning was shared through 'Teaching Matters' lunches organised by the Director of Undergraduate Teaching where speakers from within the School and across the wider University were invited to share practice on specific topics. These have also been used for staff development purposes as noted above. Good practice ideas were also emailed across the School with links to examples of good practice, for example in undertaking mid-course feedback. An annual away day was also used as an opportunity to share good practice that had been identified during the year. The panel was satisfied that the School had effective systems in place for the dissemination of good practice to effect enhancement in teaching and learning.

Section C – Review conclusions

<u>Confidence statement</u>

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

Key Strengths and Areas of Positive Practice for sharing more widely across the institution

No	Commendation	Section in report
1	The Review Team **commends** the collaborative, mutually supportive ethos demonstrated by the Senior Management team and **commend** their openness and imagination in discussing different possible configurations of formal responsibility and strategic decision-making to manage undergraduate teaching.	1.4
2	There was a discussion about the impact of anticipated University-led curriculum review and changes resulting from the Service Excellence Programme. The review team **commended** extensive School awareness and engagement with wider University initiatives and conversations around all aspects of learning, teaching and student experience.	1.7
3	The review team **commended** the foresight of the School in securing the services of an embedded learning technologist so as to progress digital education initiatives for both on-campus and online learning enhancement. Anticipated developments in MOOC provision and partnerships with external organisations such as the Church of Scotland suggest that this Learning Technologist role was likely to expand and any such expansion would also benefit wider considerations that relate to the School's public mission and profile.	2.1.6
4	The Review Team **commends** the effectiveness of the operation of the Personal Tutoring system at the School of Divinity. All role holders (Senior Tutor, Personal Tutors and Student Support Officers) demonstrated an empathetic culture with mutually respectful relationships between academic and professional services colleagues clearly evident.	2.3.1
5	The review Team **commends** the outstanding work of the current Director of Undergraduate Teaching for her leadership in enhancing the learning and teaching culture across UG provision	2.7.1
6	The Review Team **commends** the vision of the School in appointing to the role of PG Tutor coordinator. We also commend the work and initiative of the PG Tutor Coordinator for fulsomely achieving that vision through her recruitment, training, support and evaluation of the PG Tutoring community.	2.7.2
7	The review team **commends** the Teaching Manager for her effective leadership of the Professional Services team and for establishing a student centred and mutually supportive team ethos.	2.7.4
8	The review team **commends** all aspects of the Professional services team's work – their support of each other, their academic colleagues, and the wider student community. Students and academic colleagues spoke consistently highly about the Professional Services team's effectiveness and person-centred approach throughout the review.	2.7.4

Recommendations for enhancement/Areas for further development

Priority	Recommendation	Section in report	Responsibility of
1	The review team accepted the strategic and organisational considerations behind changing the School structure for the management of undergraduate teaching and supported current plans to dissolve subject areas as administrative structures. However, at the same time the review team **recommends** that the School also identify, implement and/or preserve clear DPT-defined pathways that support disciplinary progression and integrity, in order to address the above-noted staff concerns highlighted at the review. This means that the School should collectively examine and confirm that current DPTs would remain fit for purpose in this regard after the dissolution of Subject Areas as administrative structures. In instances where uncertainty or reservations around this question might arise, the School should be open to making changes to current DPTs necessary to underwrite staff confidence, for example, looking at programme-specific instances where new and/or additional DPT pre-requisites would be needed to support disciplinary progression and integrity.	1.6	Head of School and Director of Undergraduate Teaching
2	The review team **recommends** a holistic review of the School's entire UG course provision to ensure appropriate consistency, diversity, timing, constructive alignment, and cumulative volume of assessments across the curriculum. This would include consideration of the impact of assessment practices on all stakeholders (students, academic staff and professional services) when conducting this review and arriving at its conclusions.	2.2.5	Head of School, Director of Undergraduate Teaching
3	The review team strongly supported the proposed strengthening of the UG Studies Committee to undertake strategic decision-making in relation to curriculum development and provision and **recommended** that this change was undertaken as soon as possible.	2.1.1	Head of School and Director of Undergraduate Teaching
4	The review team acknowledges feedback received on strong aspects of community identity, but **recommends** that the School formally consider how best to preserve and further enhance existing levels of inclusivity, bearing in mind all student voices, identities and experiences (e.g. BAME, carers, LGBTQ+ and WP).	2.5.3	Head of School, Director of Undergraduate Teaching and Senior Tutor
5	The review team **recommends** that the excellent local practice in personal tutoring currently demonstrated in Divinity is preserved in any forthcoming system transformation. This will be the responsibility of colleagues leading the joint University-SEP review of the personal tutoring	2.3.1	Service Excellence Programme and Personal Tutor Review Project Team

No		Section in report	
	system, who should consult directly with Divinity on this matter.		
6	In relation to commendation 6 above, the Review Team **recommends** that the wider University formally examines the local arrangements put in place within Divinity, in order to identify aspects of best practice that might be scalable across the wider institution more generally.	2.7.2	IAD and the College Dean of Postgraduate Education to take forward with the College Deans in MVM and CSE to share practice
7	It was **recommended** that the College develop further guidance, guidelines and support for PG Tutors and demonstrators contributing to teaching and assessment of online courses and programmes. The review team recognises that this is a College-level responsibility, however, given the outstanding culture of tutor and demonstrator mentoring and support within Divinity we consider the School would be well placed to contribute to this work.	2.7.3	College Dean of Postgraduate Education and the IAD.
8	It was noted that the College Dean of Undergraduate Education was undertaking work to harmonise issues experienced by students on joint programmes across the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. This would include the designation of Programme Directors linked to the programme in counterpart Schools. In light of the significant proportion of UG students enrolled on joint programmes, the review team **recommended** that the College Deanery continue this work to further align processes and student experiences across these programmes.	2.1.5	College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Dean of UG Education
9	The review team **recommends** that the School make explicit their vision for graduate attributes and how this relates to programme design, with particular emphasis on making explicit the link between assessment and skills building: for example, articulating the ways in which academic skills such as critical thinking also prepare students for the world of work. This recommendation will overlap and interact with those recommendations made elsewhere within the review that relate to documenting potential pathways through the programmes and the strengthening of the UG Studies Committee.	2.6.1	Head of School and Director of Undergraduate Teaching

Suggestions for noting

If an issue is minor but the review team nevertheless wants to flag it as a potentially useful action, it will be couched as a suggestion rather than a formal recommendation. Suggestions are not tracked in onward reporting.

No	Suggestion	Section in report
1	Related to commendation 2 above, it is **suggested** that the School's collective achievements and awareness in this regard mean that it	1.7

	should have the confidence to develop and implement local solutions in relation to curriculum development and restructure as appropriate, rather than feeling compelled to wait for final outcomes of parallel University wide initiatives.	
2	Students met during the review highlighted that participation of all group members within group assessments was a concern. Students perceived unfairness in situations where all students received identical marks for a given assessment task where individual students' participation was not equal. Students would welcome an element of participation being considered within the distribution of marks, or a peer marking element where peer assessment was based on participation. The review team **suggests** that the School consider approaches to address this concern from students.	2.2.6
3	The review team **suggests** that the School consider introducing an approach to group work where group members were mentored and supported to collectively develop and practice inclusive and equitable working relationships and divisions of responsibility and labour.	2.5.1

Appendices

<u>Appendix 1 – University remit</u>

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)

March 2019

Appendix 2 Additional information considered by review team

List of programmes and courses covered by the review

Reflective report

Previous reflective report and response to recommendations (2013)

Subject specific remit items

School forum discussion paper: The Future of Subject Areas

School Quality Assurance Reports (2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19)

School Quality Model

External Examiner summary reports (2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19)

Careers Service report

School organisation charts
- Academic staff
- professional services staff
- School committee remits and descriptions

Undergraduate handbook

Programme Specifications
- Divinity and Classics (MA Hons)
- Divinity (BD) (Honours)
- Divinity MDiv (Hons)
- Philosophy and Theology (MA Hons)
- Religious Studies and English Literature (MA Hons)
- Religious Studies and Scottish Literature (MA Hons)
- Religious Studies (MA Hons)
- Theology and Religious Studies (GradDip) (Full-time)
- Theology MA (Hons)

Statistical information
- Applications by Year of Entry
- Offers by Year of Entry
- Ratio of Offers to Applications by Year of Entry
- Acceptances by Year of Entry
- Percentage High Classification Awards
- Entrants report
- Progression Report
- Completion rate of entrants
- Course Results
- Widening Participation entrants
- Students Studying Abroad
- Equality and Diversity Student Report
- School Background Data for First Destination Statistics (DHLE Survey)

National Student Survey results 2018-19

Minutes from Staff-Student Liaison Committees

- Theology and Ethics 16 October 2018
- Biblical Studies 23 October 2018
- History of Christianity 13 November 2018
- Biblical Studies 13 February 2019
- Religious Studies 14 February 2019
- Theology and Ethics Level 8 28 February 2019
- Theology and Ethics level 10-11 1 March 2019

Comments from subject areas that share joint degrees with Divinity
- Classics
- Scottish/English Literature

Edinburgh University Student's Association School Report

Glossary of Terms

School Personal Tutor statement

Academic Standards comments from the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Student Voice arrangements

Student Representation arrangements

Quality Assurance arrangements

Appendix 3 Number of students

Entrants by Qualification and Programme, by entry session and mode of study
Undergraduate Taught

	2015/6	2016/7	2016/7	2017/8	2017/8	2018/9	2019/0	2019/0
	FT	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	FT	PT
BD (Hons) in Divinity	3		1	6		3	1	2
BD (Ord) in General Divinity		1						
BD (Ord) in General Divinity (3 yrs)		1						
Grad Dip in Theology and Religious Studies				1	1			
MA(Div)(H) in Divinity	1							
MA (Hons) in Divinity and Classics	2	4		1			2	
MA (Hons) in Philosophy and Theology	17	25		28		28	21	
MA (Hons) in Religious Studies	27	10		20		15	17	
MA (Hons) in Religious Studies and English Literature	7	6		6		9	1	
MA (Hons) in Theology	21	18		23		15	25	
MA(RS)(H) in Religious Studies	1		1					
MDIV (Hons) in Divinity	2	7		4		7		
Undergraduate Certificate of Higher Education in Theology		1						
TOTAL	**81**	**73**	**2**	**89**	**1**	**77**	**67**	**2**