A report on the future of theological training in the Church in Wales.

Preamble

The working party appointed by the Bench of Bishops consists of

Canon Dr Christina Baxter, former Principal of St John’s College Nottingham
The Right Reverend Richard Pain, Bishop (formerly Archdeacon) of Monmouth
The Right Reverend Robert Paterson, Bishop of Sodor and Man (Convener)
The Reverend Canon Alan Tiltman (Secretary)

The group co-opted

The Reverend Dr Philip Jenson, Lecturer in Old Testament & Biblical Theology, Ridley Hall Cambridge

Eight full meetings were held in various locations including St Michael’s College and Ty’r Esgob Bangor. The group met staff from SMC and St Seiriol’s, representatives of the Ecumenical Validation Board and Representative Body staff, all of whom also provided written submissions of various kinds. Dr Baxter also spent additional days in Bangor and Cardiff, meeting staff and researching background information.

The working party is grateful to all those who made their time and information available to us for this work. We have seen some creative and thoughtful dedication to students and the task of formation which we hope will continue into the future. Our task focused on the Church in Wales but we were conscious that there are good ecumenical relationships with other churches and we recommend that our conclusions should be shared with their leaders at the earliest opportunity so that any next stage can be planned with those churches, should they so wish. This report assumes ecumenical cooperation throughout, but where formal collaboration will make a difference to the structures, then this has been indicated.

1. Should the Church in Wales have a validated program for preparing Christians for ministry and mission?

It is in theory possible that those training for ministry and others could be taught on a non-validated program, which would significantly cut cost in time and money for the training budget. However, this would be a step away from other churches’ practice and in not currently appropriate for those preparing for ministry in an increasingly educated and qualified society. Accordingly, we recommend that a new validated programme is developed, with teaching beginning in September 2016.

It would include potentially

Level 4 Certificate level
Level 5 Diploma level
Level 6 Degree level
Level 7 MA level

We recommend that the normal level of academic achievement for all those in training for public ministry be Level 5 (i.e. Readers, SSM, SM). The focus of the teaching will be on Levels 4 and 5. However, we hope that it will be possible (though perhaps not immediately) to teach also at Level 6:

- Some recommended for training may already have taken the equivalent of level 4.
- Independent students may be interested in completing a degree at their own expense.
- Ordained clergy and admitted readers (with the permission of the bishop and PCC) may wish to upgrade their Diploma to a Degree.

In time it is hoped that it will also be possible to teach a Level 7 MA course. This would be of interest to

- Ministers interested in undertaking further vocational and academic training.
- Students who already have a theology degree.
Validated modules would not include Level 3 (Access level such as discipleship courses). However, we are keen to encourage the development of modules at this level, along the lines of the ‘Living Faith’ course, which is contributing significantly both to the competence of the churches to engage in Mission and to offer ministry, but also to the flow of candidates to authorized ministry. We recommend that each diocese considers adopting this or an equivalent course, perhaps partnering between dioceses where there is initially insufficient interest or facilitation resource.

2. Should Wales have a full-time ordination program taught at a College?
At present this takes place at St Michael’s, Llandaff (SMC), validated by Cardiff University (CU).

Advantages
- CU charges a low validating fee.
- It offers support to students with learning disabilities.
- The faculty of SMC are teaching members of the University.
- Full-time ordinands are able to attend University lectures, thus allowing students to access subjects for which a SMC staff member is not available, and enabling cross fertilization between students studying in a secular university and those engaged in formational training. This can be beneficial to both.
- It has a good library.
- It strengthens the teaching of Christian theology in an important Welsh University (although the dominant language is English, so that this aspect of Welsh culture has minimal influence).

Disadvantages
- The training of ordinands runs at a substantial loss. It is our opinion that this will be unsustainable in the near future
- The small size of the cohort makes ministerial formation less than ideal. This is largely a result of the limited size of the Province, and scarcity of vocations. It has led to pressures to send all full-time residential students to SMC, rather than having more flexibility in the place and character of training which will best prepare a person for authorized ministry.
- The teaching at CU is at a distance from College, fragmenting community life.
- Many students are only in the College for part of the week.
- It is impossible to develop the vocational implications of subjects within a University taught module.
- The practical training for ministry is distinct from the academic course and not integrated with it.
- The Baptist College is committed to its relationship to CU. However, the number of Baptist students is now very small.
- The teaching is primarily local to Cardiff. It was noted that there were signs that CU was open to developing part-time and distant teaching, although this would require time and money for development.

We therefore recommend that full-time residential training ceases at SMC by 2016. A new Principal should not be appointed but careful thought should be given to managing the transition so that no-one suffers through the handover period, either students with decreasing numbers or staff with uncertainty over future provision.

One consequence is that students for which full-time residential training is deemed appropriate will normally be sent to train in a theological college in England for part or the whole of their formational period. It was noted that this is inevitably the case for students from the Diocese in Europe and the Diocese of Sodor and Man.

We hope that it will be possible for the well-regarded Chaplaincy course to continue as a CU course. It should be possible for it to become financially self-supporting when released from the financial costs of being based at SMC.
We recommend a feasibility study on whether SMC can become a Conference Centre that is financially viable. At present the ordination programme severely limits its ability to raise income from paying guests. We hope that with dynamic and entrepreneurial management it could pay its way and become a valuable resource for the Church in Wales as a Conference Centre based around a library and other learning resources, not dis-similar to Gladstone’s Library at Hawarden.

It may be appropriate for this fresh start to be symbolized by a change in name for the centre, such as St Teilo's Library.

2. Who should validate this programme?
There are several potential validating bodies.

a. Glyndwr University (GU)
Advantages
• There is a good relationship between St Seriol's and GU
• The University charges a low validating fee.
• It offers support to students with learning disabilities.
• It is committed to learning in Welsh.
• It provides some facilities for the Diocese of St Asaph.

Disadvantages
• It has no theology faculty
• There is limited assurance that the continuing level of support will be maintained.
• The curriculum is not a national one.

b. Cardiff University (CU)
Advantages
• The University charges a low validating fee.
• It offers support to students with learning disabilities.
• The faculty of SMC are teaching members of the University.
• Local students would have access to a good library.

Disadvantages
• There is limited assurance that the continuing level of support will be maintained.
• The curriculum is not a national one.

c. Another Welsh University e.g. Carmarthen, Lampeter, Aberystwyth
Disadvantages
• The process of validation would need to start from scratch.
• It is unlikely that the support offered would be more generous than that of Cardiff or Glyndwr.

d. Common Awards (Durham University)
Durham University provides the overall validation and programme framework. However, the specific pathways and management of the courses is the responsibility of each Theological Education Institution (TEI). We were clear that it would make sense for Wales to have a single TEI if this option were chosen.

Advantages
• It is a national curriculum that is designed from the onset to integrate theology, mission and ministry for formational training
• It will bring with it a modern and flexible Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). This is designed for dealing with students at a distance, one of the chief challenges of training in Wales.
A number of CA institutions will be developing Distance Learning and Blended Learning modules. It is possible for these to be shared or franchised by the Church in Wales.

Many of the modules are oriented to learning in a context. These would be appropriate for those training for leadership in Ministry Areas.

The VLE will enable students to access a number of resources (JSTOR, ATLA journals).

The national character of CA would allow students to access modules at any training institution in Wales, and to be certain that they were undertaking a coherent course.

Durham University intends to provide a forum for the ongoing development of theological staff and is committed to encouraging a research-oriented teaching ethos ('research' understood flexibly). Welsh staff would be able to access this larger learning and research community and indeed make a contribution to it. It will also be possible for the Church in Wales to share findings of their ground breaking Ministry Areas with those preparing for another province. CA requires a high quality of teaching and resources that will be comparable in all areas of the Province.

Some interchangeability between learning institutions may be possible to enhance or challenge student learning. So some students might take a term at a residential college.

Disadvantages

- The cost of validation would be higher than that from GU or CU. It will probably be no more than £500 per level per student, although this would need to be confirmed.
- There is no support for students with learning disabilities. Providing this would be a cost. Exploring what financial support is available from Government sources should be undertaken at an early stage.
- Ensuring a high quality of teaching throughout the Province will be a challenge with the limited resources available. Of particular concern is the quality of the library provision available to students.

NB CA is validated by an English university and there may be fears about a loss of Welsh identity. However, the effective body managing the course would be a Welsh TEI. The modules are written at a general level so that they can be adapted to local delivery. We have strong indications that there is no major problem in working with teaching and scripts in Welsh. Durham University has ultimate responsibility for academic standards, but their role is at a distance from the training on the ground. Indeed, there are similar significant differences in ethos between the North and South of England. Moreover, in due course, specific modules for the Welsh TEI could be developed, although we do not recommend that this in the first instance.

On balance we believe that Common Awards is the best way forward. The following points fills out some of the detail of how this might be achieved.

It is hoped that full use will be made of the rich inheritance of understanding of training issues in St Seriol's and SMC. While what is being taught at present need to be brought into the proposed new framework, there is a great deal of overlap, both of aims and content. For example, many of the Exploring Faith modules could simply be revised in accordance with comparable modules in the CA suite.

3. Ministry oversight in Wales

We believe that training should be organized provincially but delivered locally. We do not consider that Wales is a large enough province to have more than one TEI. This could include ecumenical representation, or could be owned by an ecumenical body.

a. Theological Education Institution (TEI)

The main teaching staff of the TEI would be a Principal and six Diocesan Directors of Studies (DDS). Between them they will need to cover the main subject areas that need to be taught (Old Testament, New Testament, Doctrine & Church History, Liturgy Worship & Spirituality, Mission & Evangelism, Practical Theology). Although these DDSs would have primary responsibility for the
running of CA and discipleship programs in their dioceses, they would also constitute a resource for the Province. These proposals are intended to facilitate dioceses cooperating in flexible and creative ways. However, it is important for there to be clear lines of responsibility, with teaching expertise not isolated from participation in the provincial structure. The advantage of the small size of the Province is that it is easier to develop a coherent and cooperative program that is integrated with the diocesan structure and the resources available.

The subject expertise should contribute to overcoming one of the main concerns for the validation of a Welsh TEI, the lack of high quality teaching in the various modules. It is intended that creative and flexible use of the VLE, residential week-ends and summer school can overcome some of the problems posed by the distances in Wales. We recommend that the TEI considers the level of residential training currently required in its sister province, namely 6 weekends and a one week summer school. This will foster cohort cohesion, which will build foundations for lifelong cooperation, and enable significant investment in formational work.

b. Provincial Ministry Council (PMC)
We recommend that a Provincial Ministry Council (PMC) be set up to have oversight over all ministry and training. Under the PMC would be the CA TEI Management Group and other training bodies (e.g., those responsible for CMD).

Membership
The Ministry Bishop (and another bishop if appropriate) Training Education Institute: Principal and DDS representative
A provincial and diocesan CMD representative
Two ministry officer representatives (ordained and lay)
A provincial and diocesan Discernment and Vocations representative
A mission officer

It would be a very significant development if there were an annual meeting of the PMC with the Bench for a formal report on progress and to offer the opportunity for mutual reflection on the progress and outcomes of ministerial formation.

The order in which these should be set up is:

- The PMC
- The PMC will set the terms of reference for the TEI and be involved in the appointment of the Principal (perhaps in September 2014). If the Bench believe that this must be an ecumenical venture then the setting up the TEI will be done by the PMC with their partner churches.
- The Principal, the Bishop of the particular diocese or an alternate, along with the PMC will be involved in the appointment of diocesan Directors of Study. The PMC may well wish to encourage current post holders to make themselves available so that current knowledge of the Welsh context is not lost.

4. Ministry/Mission Areas
The TEI has the freedom to develop appropriate pathways within the outline framework of CA. There will be the need to select appropriate modules that add up to a coherent course and take into account the specific challenges and opportunities of Wales. The balance of modules and their sequencing can be something that the Bishops (and their ecumenical partners) can influence through the PMC.

For example, the Welsh bishops have adopted the policy that mission and ministry takes place in the context of Ministry Areas. Accordingly it makes sense that the TEI validation submission will ensure that students take at least one module related to mission and one module that will prepare for their participation in the leadership teams of Ministry Areas.
The training of youth ministers (and others) will be important in resourcing Ministry Areas. CA is at present developing specialized modules to be used by the English centres of children and youth training. It is hoped that a comparable Welsh centre for the training of youth ministers can be set up, although some youth ministers may also need to be encouraged outside the Province to broaden their experience and professionalism.

5. Libraries and learning resource centres
One of the areas of discussion in the CA validation process is library and learning resources.

The two main libraries in the Province are at SMC in the South and Gladstone Library in the North. We recommend that the library at SMC be retained and developed as a diocesan and national resource, whatever happens to SMC. The Gladstone Library is independent, but it is hoped that it would welcome a closer relationship with the Welsh TEI. This would no doubt mean contributing to the costs of maintaining the library. We would hope that many students would travel and make use of these libraries, perhaps for an extended period.

It is proposed that the librarian of the SMC library is also the VLE officer for the Province.

In addition we recommend that each diocese consider whether it could set up a library as a diocesan resource for students/ministers (perhaps in the Cathedral).

6. Provisional costings
The following estimates of annual costs are guesstimates and need to be checked carefully. We understand that there is not an unlimited budget, but that the Bench wish to consider not only financial costings but also the quality and consistency of the formational training in order to make a decision.

- Principal and six Directors of Study £375,000
- Full-time Validation secretary/PA for Principal £30,000
- Validation of 50 accredited students in training £25,000
  (25 Readers, 15 SSM, 10 SM)
- Library development in the Province £25,000
- Residencies (£1500 a year for 50 students) £75,000
- VLE officer/SMC librarian £35,000

Total cost £565,000

The main source of this annual cost would be from the closing of SMC. The major costs of the building will not be incurred, but in time it may be a net contributor to the Province.

It is proposed that the Province pays the costs of the DDSs, which in most cases at present are being met by the dioceses. However, the dioceses will incur costs relating to administrative support of the DDSs and the need to provide offices. Effectively the staff costs would be spread over the dioceses.

7. Discipleship training
We were impressed by the vision of integrated lay and ministerial training developed by St Seriol’s. The Living Faith modules at Level 3 lead onto the Exploring Faith modules, which take a student from Level 4 to Level 6 (Degree level).

There were a number of issues raised by this model, particularly in the Exploring Faith modules.  
- Groups often contain an awkward mix of those studying for personal development (‘auditors’ who often don’t do much preparation) and those who wish to study for credit for whom preparation can be deep and demanding.
- The limits of targeting the general lay person are especially evident when those training for ministry are present. What will be relevant for one may well not be relevant for the other.
- This does not matter so much in a format where a subject specialist can contribute (e.g. lecture or guided seminar). However, it can become a serious problem when a tutor is seeking to facilitate a group without specialist knowledge.

The CA framework is flexible, but validation will require that the teaching environment is thought through carefully
- The CA framework proposed above is oriented primarily to ‘serious’ students. CA modules are not designed exclusively for those training for ministry, but do assume a committed involvement in a local church.
- There is no given limit as to how many students in a class are being validated or are ‘auditors’. However, the satisfaction and effectiveness of a module depends on participation. It is often a matter of proportion. 2-3 auditors in a class of 10 can be ‘carried’. When the proportion is reversed, then there are real difficulties in facilitating effective discussion.
- Modules require a certain amount of contact time with a competent teacher. The VLE opens up the possibility of online lectures and discussion at a distance. Various models of blended learning can be developed.

The demands of a validated course often inhibit a more general participation by lay people. It may be wise to develop a range of Level 3 (access) modules that can provide practical training and the up-building of the faith at a less demanding level. Examples of basic training in practical skills might be in the areas of pastoral visiting, worship leading, mission and evangelism, and ethics. Modules oriented to spiritual nourishment might be in the areas of biblical reflection, doctrine, apologetics. Those doing these modules for assessment might also be helped to develop good reading and study skills.

The movement from Level 3 to the higher levels of CA deserves further thought and discussion, and should involve asking questions of vocation and selection.

8. Summary
The proposals suggest an exciting and comprehensive way forward for the management, training and development of ministry for the Church in Wales and its ecumenical partners.

The proposals meet head-on the regional challenges of the management of ministry training and offer a flexibility of approaches to ministry formation and training for the future under the rigorous validation of Common Awards.

The establishment of a Provincial Ministry Council allows all stakeholders a role in the strategic planning and management of training provision throughout the church in Wales.

A single training institution TEI following the Common Awards curriculum will allow a coherent programme of training and formation whilst acknowledging the particular needs of cultural and linguistic diversity. It will offer good Quality Assurance procedures.

The appointment of six diocesan Directors of Studies as part of the TEI will allow Dioceses to own the training programme and give them the flexibility to respond to local needs and experiment with different forms of ministry and its training methods.

The proposals recognise the importance of the development of diocesan training programmes and happily promotes mixed mode training. Full time training on this course can include being placed for part or the whole of training as a lay minister in a suitable Ministry/Mission Area. The place of academic training is safeguarded but will be seen as part of the process of formation. Residential elements for training would be seen as an essential part of formation. It is recognised that only a
small number of ordinands would require full time residential training and in terms of the economy of scale this would be better provided by a TEI outside of the Province.

The shift in training provision would allow central funds to be allocated to provide for the Principal and the six DDS and would address the current lack of balance in funding.

The proposals recognise the need for national standards whilst giving Bishops and their DDS and ministry officers an opportunity to form training and vocations as appropriate to the emerging Ministry Areas. This must all be done with a conscious focus on mission. The exploration of different forms of ministry such as youth and pioneer should be paramount to complement and promote ministry area development as places of mission and community engagement.