

Annual Report and Enhancement Plan

September 2021



Union Theological College

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Introduction

Union Theological College is a denominational College of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, with a core commitment to the training of ministers and deaconesses for service to the Church.

In addition, as an alternative provider Union offers awards in Theology that compare favourably with the best available within higher education in the UK. In regard both to ministerial training and to the delivery of theology, Union continues to find itself in a time of major transition, with some study pathways – both ministerial and theological – coming to an end, while others have been newly created and still others are in the pipeline for next academic year and beyond.

Students

At the heart of Union College are its students. The following table summarises how this transitional phase was reflected in the student body last academic year, setting out student numbers for the various academic pathways that they followed. Further narrative detail ahead expands on the data given here.



| Programme of Study | Students Enrolled | Retention Rate |
|---|-------------------|----------------|
| On-Campus Pathways | | |
| PTFI Postgraduate Diploma in Ministry (in conjunction with QUB awards) | (4) | 100% |
| CTM Non-award ministry courses | 5 | 100% |
| PTFI Master of Divinity | 11 | 100% |
| Bachelor of Divinity | 12 | 100% |
| QUB Bachelor of Theology | 1 | 100% |
| QUB Bachelor of Arts (Single Honours) | 17 | 100% |
| QUB Bachelor of Arts (Joint Honours) | 2 | 100% |
| QUB Master of Research | 1 | 100% |
| QUB Doctor of Philosophy | 4 | 100% |
| Online/Non-Residency Pathways | | |
| PTFI Master of Theology: Reformed Theology | 19 | 89.5% |
| PTFI Master of Theology: New Testament | 4 | 100% |
| PTFI Master of Arts in Theology | 16 | 87.5% |
| PTFI Doctor of Philosophy | 6 | 100% |
| PTFI Postgraduate Certificate in Biblical Greek | 5 | 80% |
| All Pathways | 103 | |

COVID-19

Every student's education was significantly impacted by the coronavirus pandemic in 2020-21. Some face-to-face teaching quickly gave way to remote learning for all students. Providentially, the College's development of online pathways for postgraduate study – as further described below – meant that an appropriate digital infrastructure, a range of digital resources and some experience of teaching and learning in the virtual classroom were already in place or in practice. All things being considered, Union offered quality support to students in these circumstances, while students responded positively to the situation. Tutors followed up with students in their pastoral group through online meetings via MS Teams – thus extending to the ordinarily on-campus student

community the sort of interaction and support practised with the College's online students. For much of the academic year, a weekly experience of online community was provided, also via MS Teams, with virtual coffee followed by a time of corporate worship. Given the extra stressors and difficulties impacting their studies and their mental health, it was important that students could voice their concerns, report their challenges and request solutions to any problems; they did this either through their representatives on the Institute of Theology's Student Voice Committee, or in equivalent College committees, or else directly to module conveners.



MINISTERIAL STUDENTS

Placements for ministerial students were affected by covid-19 in much the same way that ministry in congregations was disrupted by the health emergency: and supporting students in these circumstances fell partly to the College, partly to the Church. From the academic angle, much as applied to undergraduate students, ministerial students, too, found their studies – and especially work for time-limited academic assessments – impacted by the pandemic, as they faced and had to resolve issues about their own or relatives' health, to care for vulnerable family members or to arrange and perhaps share in childcare. The incidence and variety of such issues gave rise to discussion and then communication to Faculty of ministerial students' concerns. Faculty acknowledged the importance of the concerns raised, drafting a

report whose recommendations would help College meet students' needs by formulating student-facing policies to govern possible disruptions to studies. At time of writing, a working group has been tasked with implementing this.

A large majority of the cohort of ministerial students in 2020-21 was engaged in study for any one of six distinct academic awards, including two offered by Queen's University, Belfast, and four by the Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland, under its Royal Charter (1881) and Supplemental Charter (2021). The Queen's degrees awarded were the Bachelor of Divinity and the Master of Research; the PTFI Postgraduate Diploma in Ministry (in its final iteration) was also awarded to these students, who studied for it concurrently as part of their professional training. The other PTFI awards being pursued, part-

time, were the Master of Divinity and the Master of Theology, in both its New Testament and Reformed Theology specialisms. The remainder of ministerial students studied to attain competencies for ministry as prescribed by the CTM courses.

Now that the PTFI Postgraduate Diploma in Ministry has been discontinued, non-award CTM courses represent the minimum standard in professional competency for ministry required of all ministerial students before they are eligible for licensing as probationary ministers. Alongside these competencies sit any award that students may also seek to achieve. Modules that make up the Master of Divinity pathway – the most popular award pathway last year – are designed to dovetail with

some core CTM competencies, in Biblical Studies and in Theology, and to allow MDiv students to obtain required elements of their training in an academically enhanced form that merits and leads to an award. They also write a short dissertation, focussed on an aspect of applied theology of their choice. While some alignment with CTM requirements also applies for students studying for an MTh, here the emphasis is more on helping students with a prior degree in Theology and a particular aptitude for biblical or theological work, to bring their advanced knowledge and skills to bear as they enter full-time ministry.



ONGOING COLLABORATION WITH QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY, BELFAST

Although the closure of Theology at Queen's University, Belfast (QUB), has meant that no new QUB students have begun studies in College since the 2018 intake, Union has persisted in its commitment to offering existing students – whether undergraduate or postgraduate – the best experience possible for their Theology studies, until they graduate. Only a handful of such students last year were also ministerial students: most were 2018 school leavers.

UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES

Amid the ongoing challenge of the covid-19 pandemic, the last full-time Queen's University cohort of undergraduate Theology students completed their studies, graduating in summer 2021: some are continuing with the College or the University, in ministerial training or on the Postgraduate Certificate in Education course, with a specialism in religious studies; others are taking up further studies elsewhere or entering the world of work; all of them can be proud of what they have achieved and confident in the capabilities and qualities they bring to the next stage of their lives.

Together with undergraduate awards, one postgraduate-taught award at graduation in summer 2021 is also listed here for simplicity.

Master of Research

- One student achieved a distinction.

Bachelor of Divinity

- Two students achieved a First-Class Honours.
- Six students achieved a Second-Class Honours, First Division.

Bachelor of Arts in Theology

- One student achieved a First-Class Honours.
- Twelve students achieved a Second-Class Honours, First Division.
- Three students achieved a Second-Class Honours, Second Division.

Diploma in Theology

- One student was awarded this diploma.

A virtual graduation ceremony was held by the University in July 2021, to which the Principal, various other Faculty colleagues and colleagues from the University contributed. Prizes were also awarded by the Institute of Theology to the top-performing student on each degree pathway, with a further Bachelor of Divinity student also receiving a commendation for outstanding performance.

In this year's National Student Survey, overall satisfaction from this cohort of final-year students with the quality of their degree was 100% – up from 94% the previous year – and, as such, comparable with satisfaction rates among Theology students at the highest-performing Universities. In concluding remarks occasioned by this final cohort's graduation, and coinciding with the end of their collaboration in assuring the quality of the University's Theology



programmes, the three Theology external examiners saluted the exemplary teaching provided by all College colleagues; commended “a superb programme” that brought out the best in students; remarked on high-quality, impressive work from students; and underlined the commitment shown to students by both academic and administrative staff. For all their insight and input to the Theology programme at Queen’s and in Union College, the College’s thanks are recorded here to these externals: to Dr David Moffitt (University of Aberdeen); Prof Wayne Morris (University of Chester); and Prof Scott Spurlock (University of Glasgow).

Union College is grateful to the Institute of Theology and especially its Director for the professionalism and spirit of co-operation that have marked the final major phase of the teach-out of Theology and of

collaboration between the University and the College in 2020-21. As the Institute disbands, some remaining part-time QUB Theology students – looked after by another University School – will continue to enrich the College community over the next few semesters, as they work towards completing their studies with Union’s ongoing support. One of the external examiners expressed his conviction that Union students would “continue to receive a great education in whatever new arrangements.”

Even as Union’s long-standing relationship with Queen’s – reaching back to the 1920s – draws towards a close, a new collaborative relationship is being forged with St Mary’s University, Twickenham (SMU), with a view to putting in place from autumn 2022 a new Bachelor of Arts in Theology, taught by Union and validated by St. Mary’s. Much of the groundwork for this

was laid in 2020-21, through the design of the programme and its constituent modules and through liaison with SMU and implementation of its requirements.

During the next academic year, detailed preparation will be made for the launch of the new programme in September 2022.

POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

Some remaining QUB postgraduate taught or research students also completed their programmes in 2020-21: of those supervised by Union College, one student was awarded a Master of Research, with a dissertation focussed on an aspect of Theology, and two others obtained a Doctor of Philosophy, specialising in Old Testament. Three further doctoral students are expected to complete and submit their dissertation in the area of biblical studies next academic year.

Since the creation, in 2019, of a part-time on-campus Master of Divinity programme – so as to offer a master's award to ministry students with the required undergraduate degree classification



for entry – Union College has been working with external advisers to design and deliver a range of additional postgraduate taught programmes (all of them online), corresponding to relevant UK benchmarks for higher degrees in Theology. In tandem with their development and delivery, an online postgraduate student community has begun to thrive and grow, numbering close to 50% of the student body in 2020-21. In addition, through PTFI the College has also begun to offer research degrees, with a number of beginning PhD students successfully submitting their projects for scrutiny by Faculty and becoming differentiated doctoral students in 2021. Although there is no requirement for PTFI PhD students to be resident in N. Ireland, some are; they have been

contributing to campus life in various ways, including teaching or research assistance.

This academic year, and including the summer 2021 semester, a number of students have completed or will complete their studies towards a PTFI postgraduate award and are expected to graduate and receive their awards in October 2021. They include four students with the Diploma in Ministry; two students with the Certificate in Biblical Greek; two students with the Master of Theology in Reformed Theology, together with one from the previous academic year; and three students with the Master of Theology in New Testament.

Staff

Not least among the changes that Union College has been experiencing in 2020-21 has been the turnover of staff.

First, Mr Ken Brown retired as College Bursar: the College is grateful to Ken for the expertise he brought to College finances and to the daily running of Union. Then Rev Dr David Allen exchanged his role as Dean of Ministerial Studies and Development for the post of Deputy Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland: as Secretary to the Council for Training in Ministry, David is now working with the College where once he worked in College, a happy continuity for which Faculty and other staff are very grateful.

The Executive Principal, Rev Dr Stafford Carson, retired in December 2020: the College and Faculty record their gratitude to Stafford for his leadership and guidance over more

than seven years and for his teaching as Professor of Ministry. Rev Prof Drew Gibson retired in July 2021 as Professor of Practical Theology, having also served as Secretary to Faculty and Vice-Principal: the College and Faculty record their gratitude to Drew for his teaching, supervision, research and pastoral contribution over fifteen years. We wish Stafford and Drew a long and happy retirement.

After five years as Lecturer in Biblical Studies, Dr Zachary Cole accepted a post as Associate Professor of New Testament in Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando campus: the College and Faculty record their gratitude to Zach for his contribution to the teaching of Greek and New Testament.



At time of writing, Faculty's human resources have been replenished with the recent arrival of three new colleagues appointed to various roles; their recruitment corresponds to priority staffing needs identified by Faculty and by the Church.

Following congregational ministry, most recently in the Magherafelt area, Rev David Leach becomes the Professor of Ministry and Director of the Institute for Ministry – a non-academic post with an emphasis on the support and training of ministerial students.

Dr Olwyn Mark joins Union from the charity Love for Life as Lecturer in Practical Theology, with special interests in ethics, contemporary culture and Christian education.

Following doctoral studies in N. Carolina, Dr Robbie Booth joins Union as Lecturer in New Testament, bringing particular expertise in Greek and in the Gospels. Faculty bids

these colleagues a warm welcome and looks forward to the contribution they will each make to Union's ministry and mission.

In August 2020, Mrs Karen Henderson became Head of Academic Administration, bringing to this new role in College her considerable experience in quality assurance in higher education: Karen's influence and contribution have emerged in many aspects of the College's life and work in 2020-21, as featured in the present report, and she has helped the College ensure that adequate administration underpins all its processes and procedures.

In January 2021, Mr Alan McCormick took up the position of Operations Manager and has since been very active in leading a variety of important projects relating to the buildings, finances and other resources of the College.

In the summer, Mr Jonathan Davidson – a graduate of the College – took up a post as Senior Secretary in the College office. The College bids all these colleagues a warm welcome and is grateful for the contribution they are each already making to Union’s ministry and mission.

Given all the above changes in staff, some re-organisation of the internal workings of College has been both necessary and welcome. Faculty has decided, at time of writing, to operate with a new two-department model: the existing Dept. of Biblical Studies, led by Prof Gordon Campbell; and a reconfigured Dept. of Theology, led by Prof Michael McClenahan.

Each department has its complement of full- or part-time professors and lecturers, together with adjunct colleagues, occasional lecturers and teaching assistants whose valuable contribution assists Faculty in delivering on all supervision and teaching commitments.



College and Church

Faculty and the College Management Committee work closely together, with their partnership reported to, and overseen by, the Council for Training in Ministry whose responsibility it is to facilitate and superintend much of Union's ministry on behalf of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Through the Principal and a Faculty colleague, with assistance from the Head of Academic Administration, Faculty reports regularly to the College Management Committee's Teaching and Learning Panel, whose membership is strongly representative of the Church. Its agenda monitors all aspects of Faculty's work, most notably delivery of the curriculum for

ministerial training and other study pathways. In 2020-21, progress in the developing plans for a new undergraduate programme, in collaboration with St Mary's University, Twickenham, was of particular interest, as well as the process of ongoing engagement with the Quality Assurance Agency and the outcome of its monitoring visit to the College: see further below.

With assistance from the College's Operations Manager and the denomination's Finance office, as well as input from the Principal, Management Committee's other Panel – Finance, Property and Administration, whose members bring expertise in a range of practical areas – is responsible for overseeing all aspects of the College

budget. These include, for instance, the staffing budget or the resources and activities of the Gamble Library, together with all matters relating to the College buildings. In 2020-21, important capital projects have been underway to replace elements of the heating system and carry out structural repairs to the Gamble Library and to some parts of the roof.



The Gamble Library

This academic year has brought no major changes to staffing in the Gamble Library. However, in early Spring, after an extended period as Acting Librarian, Ms Joy Conkey became College Librarian. The Gamble Library became a particular focus, at the heart of the College's life and work, in a number of ways this year.

First, its acquisition of a growing number of eBooks and other electronic resources has kept pace with the development of online teaching and learning: Faculty is grateful to the Librarian and Library Assistant for all their hard work in facilitating ready access to these resources by academic staff and students alike. Second, covid-19 has not been the only source of disruption, with a piece of fallen plaster leading to major internal investigations and diagnosis and rectification of various faults and rendering the Library's physical resources inaccessible to all but the Library staff, and under strict conditions of health and safety: here, too, gratitude is to be expressed to

Library staff for such measures as a click and collect service for hard-copy resources. Finally, in this Centenary year, marking the beginning of the period when the College was home to the Northern Ireland Parliament (1921 – 1932), the Library (and one-time House of Commons Chamber) has put on show – both digitally and physically – a range of artefacts from a century ago, with the Librarian curating these in several ways for the attention of the College community and wider society, the Church, historians or the media: once more, the sterling work of Joy and her assistant Margaret merits the College's gratitude and congratulations.

Pursuing Union's Mission

In 2020-21, and in context of the ongoing transformation of the College's ministry, the College put in place and began to implement a five-year Teaching and Learning Strategy (2020-25) to underpin all teaching and learning at undergraduate level and beyond.

This Strategy was elaborated by College Faculty, in close consultation with the student body. As well as our students, it takes explicit account of all relevant stakeholders: the Church, College staff, Union's partners and the community as a whole in which the College finds itself. The Strategy sets out the College's aspirations and plans for having a positive impact on all who come within its sphere of influence and benefit from its service.

The Strategy grows out of, and builds upon, the College's Learning and Teaching Policy and Procedures, developed since early 2019. Union finds itself in a new

era of increasingly independent activity, both as an alternative provider and as a collaborative partner, with other institutions, in delivery of joint ventures – such as a future new validation arrangement for undergraduate teaching. In particular, Union has been working in collaboration with the Biblemesh Institute, first in provision of the College's new online courses through a bespoke virtual learning environment and its embedded learning resources; then in partnering with Biblemesh to market the College's online courses to a wider audience; and finally, in supporting the roughly 20% of Union's current students recruited



by and enrolled with Biblemesh and assuring the quality of their educational pathway. Other partnerships are currently being envisaged.

The following sections outline some core elements of the Strategy elaborated this academic year (in italics), offering explanatory comment as appropriate. An appendix provides the full Teaching and Learning Strategy from which various core elements, as highlighted next, have been excerpted.

Our Mission Statement

Union Theological College welcomes students from all backgrounds to study Christian Theology in a community of faith and research-led scholarship to prepare them for life, work and service in both local and global contexts.

It should be said that this statement adheres to and owns, for the 2020s, the College's double tradition of providing a Christian community of faith, discipleship and scholarship while embracing and welcoming all-comers as students of Theology – as reflected in the statistical data above for the student body. In gearing

up to work with a new validating partner institution, itself committed to engagement with secular society while maintaining a Christian ethos, the College intends to ensure that all Union undergraduate students can have their particular identity recognised and enriched through involvement in a diverse and inclusive learning community. For the qualities that should mark students who will graduate from the programme, in 2025 and beyond, see further the Graduate Attributes.



Our Vision

Our vision is to:

- Equip all our students with a theological literacy that will enable them to flourish as individuals, and contribute positively to society and culture.
- Train effective ministers to lead Christ's church in fulfilling its calling in the world.
- Resource all in the Church by providing a hub for learning and research.

This threefold vision enables Union intentionally to channel its energies into three areas: resourcing the public square, in N. Ireland and beyond, with theologically literate voices and participants; ensuring that ministerial training continues to deliver what the Church has identified as necessary for effective ministry in today's contexts; and giving the whole Church access to what Theology offers, building in particular on past initiatives such as Theology for All.

Attributes

Union Theological College's graduates from its undergraduate programme should be those who are:

- Morally self-conscious, with an awareness of the virtues and values that promote human flourishing and positive social relationships
- Academically excellent, with subject-specific expertise and an appreciation of the contributions of different disciplines to theological, ethical, and cultural issues
- Lifelong learners, with an aptitude for innovative, self-directed, and collaborative learning
- Intellectually flexible, with a repertoire of well-developed skills of critical thinking
- Effective communicators, who can engage with others in order to enhance their understanding and influence others in a positive and respectful manner
- Culturally literate, equipped for life and work in diverse contexts and environments
- Digitally literate, equipped for life and work in an increasingly digital world
- Proactive individuals, who can work and make decisions both independently and collaboratively
- Locally and globally engaged, with an awareness of their privileges and responsibilities and an appreciation of the concepts of vocation, enterprise, and leadership



In many ways, the above attributes are inspired by Union College's former students and by the calibre that has characterised them. Union's alumni who have studied on QUB undergraduate pathways have had all or most of their teaching take place in Union College: in the College context, they have been exposed to an ethos and a hidden curriculum that place great importance on core values and key virtues. They have also flourished in a climate conducive to personal development, where an interest in every student is combined with an emphasis on open and mutually supportive relationships. Union's open, and openly Christian, vision of human flourishing has long been embedded in its ministerial training or, more recently, in its online programmes.

In future, as Union recruits its own undergraduate students from across the local community and beyond, the College will be free to promote and address this vision in developing and marketing the new BA in Theology.

General Principles of Learning and Teaching

As the College pursues its mission and vision, through a commitment to excellence in the provision of theological education, the Strategy enunciates four key principles of teaching and learning that will direct the College's efforts and enable it to implement the Strategy successfully, applying a detailed rationale in each case. These are:

1. We will provide all our students with high-quality, research-informed learning opportunities which encourage reflective practice and growth and have practical relevance to the contemporary world.
2. We will develop and maintain a research-active community that produces original contributions to the study of Christian Theology of relevance to the Church and wider society.
3. We will foster an inclusive learning community that supports students and enables them to flourish and develop both academically, spiritually and emotionally.
4. We will work in engaged partnership with students, external experts, collaborative partners, and stakeholders to achieve these aims.



These general principles were trialled in the course of 2020-21 and began to help the College refocus the aims and objectives of ongoing teaching and learning on all existing academic pathways. They also significantly shaped activity for staff and students on the one new pathway inaugurated this academic year: the Master of Theology in New Testament.

For 2021-22, and as a further step towards full implementation by 2025, a whole series of interim goals, or desired strategic outcomes, have been established. More than twenty in all, they unpack elements

of one or another of the above four principles. In turn, the College's strategic enhancement action plan for 2021-22 will be keyed to these principles and their outcomes. For each strategic outcome, an action to be undertaken in order to achieve it will be specified and an agent tasked with implementing it identified. A target completion date will be set in each case, while progress towards completion will be monitored and key indicators of success used to measure achievement of each strategic outcome.

One such outcome for each general principle is given here by way of example, as an illustration of outcomes that the College is committed to achieving, while pursuing its mission, by the end of the 2021-22 academic year.

- 1. Creation of a new validated undergraduate degree programme;**
- 2. Enlargement of an active research community;**
- 3. Enhancement of support services for the benefit of students; and**
- 4. Development of mutually beneficial relationships with other Christian faith-based institutions.**

The full set of strategic outcomes is provided in the Strategic Enhancement Plan to follow.



Quality Assurance of Union's Work

Following a similar monitoring visit in 2020, and submission of a further annual return in Spring 2021, the Quality Assurance Agency carried out its latest monitoring visit to the College in May 2021: this visit focussed on progress made by the College since the previous review.

The full report is available to view on the QAA website. The report's principal findings include:

- confidence in the comparability of academic standards with those of other UK providers
- a strong level of support for students, especially given the coronavirus pandemic
- ample opportunities for the student voice to be heard in College processes
- commendable achievement by students in their studies.

The report's stated outcome is that, since the last review, the College "is

making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision." The College is grateful to all students and staff who contributed to the review process leading to this satisfying outcome. It can be reported that the only action remaining to be completed since the 2020 exercise – the recruitment of additional full-time academic staff, to take greater account of the diversity, needs and potential of all students – has now been achieved in the interim, with the appointment of several new academic staff (as detailed above) in the ensuing summer period.

Strategic Enhancement Plan

Each general principle of learning and teaching, set out above, has a set of strategic outcomes associated with it. A brief sample was given above; the boxes below provide a full set of goals associated, in each case, with the particular principle to which they apply.

PRINCIPLE ONE

We will provide all our students with high-quality, research-informed learning opportunities which encourage reflective practice and growth and have practical relevance to the contemporary world.

Strategic Outcomes for 2021-22

- A validated undergraduate degree which provides opportunities for students.
- The first cohort graduating from the MDiv
- The addition of a MTh OT to the suite of online Master's programmes
- A new Student Information System
- An active research community
- A network of practice/support
- Support for students on their transition to HE
- Support for online students who are returning to study following a break



PRINCIPLE TWO

We will develop and maintain a research-active community that produces original contributions to the study of Christian Theology of relevance to the Church and wider society.

Strategic Outcomes for 2021-22

- An active research community
- Research links with other institutions including SMU Twickenham
- UG Modules which include guest lectures by research experts
- Research workshops and seminars for online and residential students

PRINCIPLE THREE

We will foster an inclusive learning community that supports students and enables them to flourish and develop both academically, spiritually and emotionally.

Strategic Outcomes for 2021-22

- A programme of student support activities
- A Personal Tutor for each student, with a clearly defined role
- Student community bubbles (online and ministry)
- Revised equality and diversity policy
- Revised disability policy
- Student access to a counselling service
- Student-led volunteering activities supported by the College within the context of the Graduate Attributes Framework

PRINCIPLE FOUR

We will work in engaged partnership with students, external experts, collaborative partners and stakeholders to achieve these aims.

Strategic Outcomes for 2021-22

- Begun two-way conversations with our partners in PCI towards identifying needs, taking opportunities and providing collaborative solutions
- Established mutually beneficial relationships with other Christian faith-based institutions
- Initiated our relationship with St Mary's University, Twickenham
- Engaged students in developing a student partnership policy

In various ways, these goals further those whose realisation in 2020-21 is the object of the fore-going report and, as such, they will bring a renewed focus to the College's efforts towards fulfilling its mission in the 2021-22 academic year. As Principal, I am profoundly grateful to all who have helped Union meet its commitments since summer 2020 and who will do so in the year ahead.



Appendix

The College is currently in a time of transition, moving from a long-standing relationship with Queen's University Belfast to a new relationship with St Mary's University, Twickenham (SMU) for a validated undergraduate degree in Theology.

New postgraduate taught programmes have been developed and delivered since 2019 and there is a growing online postgraduate student community. The postgraduate degrees are awarded by the Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland (PTFI).

The College has also started to offer research degree programmes through PTFI. Therefore, it is timely for the College to put in

place a five-year Teaching and Learning Strategy which establishes the parameters and context for development in the next five years.

This Strategy is holistic, taking into account all stakeholders – the Church, our students, our staff, our partners and our community as a whole and setting out how the College will have a positive impact on all who come within its influence.

MISSION STATEMENT

Union Theological College welcomes students from all backgrounds to study Christian Theology in a community of faith and research-led scholarship to prepare them for life, work and service in both local and global contexts.

VISION

- Equip all our students with a theological literacy that will enable them to flourish as individuals, and contribute positively to society and culture.
- Train effective ministers to lead Christ's church in fulfilling its calling in the world.
- Resource all in the Church by providing a hub for learning and research.



GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

Union Theological College's graduates from its undergraduate programme should be those who are:

- Morally self-conscious, with an awareness of the virtues and values that promote human flourishing and positive social relationships
- Academically excellent, with subject-specific expertise and an appreciation of the contributions of different disciplines to theological, ethical, and cultural issues
- Lifelong learners, with an aptitude for innovative, self-directed, and collaborative learning
- Intellectually flexible, with a repertoire of well-developed skills of critical thinking
- Effective communicators, who can engage with others in order to enhance their understanding and influence others in a positive and respectful manner
- Culturally literate, equipped for life and work in diverse contexts and environments
- Digitally literate, equipped for life and work in an increasingly digital world
- Proactive individuals, who can work and make decisions both independently and collaboratively
- Locally and globally engaged, with an awareness of their privileges and responsibilities and an appreciation of the concepts of vocation, enterprise, and leadership

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

As a College, we will pursue our mission through a commitment to excellence in the provision of theological education, applying the following principles of teaching and learning:

1. We will provide all our students with high-quality, research-informed learning opportunities which encourage reflective practice and growth and have practical relevance to the contemporary world.
2. We will develop and maintain a research-active community that produces original contributions to the study of Christian Theology of relevance to the Church and wider society.
3. We will foster an inclusive learning community that supports students and enables them to flourish and develop both academically, spiritually and emotionally.
4. We will work in engaged partnership with students, external experts, collaborative partners, and stakeholders to achieve these aims.

KEY ENABLERS FOR THE STRATEGY

- Learning opportunities which are well-designed, innovative and inclusive
- Academic staff who are experts in their field, developed in their pedagogy and resourced and supported by the College
- Professional support staff who are pro-active, skilled and committed
- A clearly defined and mutually agreed Student Partnership
- A growing and vibrant learning community
- Research-informed Teaching

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Retention and achievement metrics
- Positive student feedback
- Positive staff feedback
- Demonstrable student engagement
- Successful student recruitment



PRINCIPLE ONE

We will provide all our students with high-quality, research-informed learning opportunities which encourage reflective practice and growth and have practical relevance to the contemporary world.

Rationale

Students who are successful in their application to the College should expect to engage with learning opportunities which will enable them to develop skills that allow them to get the most out of their College experience and prepare them for their future working lives.

Each programme will have clearly defined learning outcomes with teaching and assessment methods chosen to enable students to demonstrate achievement and skills. The growth of the College's research community will contribute to programme content.

Ministry students will be stretched academically and provided with the tools to flourish in their vocation.

By 2022 we will have:

- A validated undergraduate degree which provides opportunities for students
- The first cohort graduating from the MDiv
- The addition of a MTh in OT to the suite of online Master's programmes
- An active research community
- A new Student Information System
- A network of practice/support
- Support for students on their transition to higher education
- Support for online students who are returning to study following a break

By 2025 we will have:

- The first cohort graduating from the BA Hons Theology
- The introduction of a Graduate Diploma in Theology
- Some teaching shared with SMU
- A growing and vibrant research community providing input to the undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes
- Peer learning and mentorship opportunities for our students
- Partnership agreements with cognate institutions for student and staff exchange

Key enablers:

- Flourishing relationship with St Mary's University Twickenham

- Active involvement with fellow providers in sharing best practice
- Well established administrative infrastructure
- Well qualified staff and pool of adjunct staff
- Student access to professional Careers Education, Information and Guidance (CEIG)
- Placement/Study Abroad opportunities
- Digital capabilities

Measures of success:

- Meeting student recruitment numbers
- Achievement of first cohort
- Positive Student Feedback
- QAA Commendations
- Positive and constructive feedback from the Church



PRINCIPLE TWO

We will develop and maintain a research-active community that produces constructive and original contributions to the study of Christian Theology of relevance to the Church and wider society.

Rationale

The College has potential to develop as a research-active community with expertise in key areas of Theology such as Biblical Studies, Systematic Theology, Church History and Practical Theology.

The College will use researchers as teaching assistants to enhance the undergraduate degree and also present to the Church in general.

The College will also network with other institutions in joint research projects.

By 2022 we will have:

- An active research community
- Research links with other institutions including St Mary's University, Twickenham
- UG Modules which include guest lectures by research experts
- Research workshops and seminars for online and residential students

By 2025 we will have:

- The first (PTFI) PhD graduates
- An established PhD programme attracting international students
- A reputation for relevant theological research and expertise
- A pool of fully trained supervisors and mentors
- A joint research project with at least one other institution
- Regular research-informed public engagements

Key enablers:

- Academic staff who are experts in their field, developed in their research skills, and resourced and supported by the College
- Pool of appropriately qualified internal and external supervisors
- A well-established and effective administrative support infrastructure

Measures of success:

- Successful PhD students
- Minimum withdrawals
- Research-informed modules on PG and UG programmes
- Student Feedback
- Seminars for public square
- Faculty research output



PRINCIPLE THREE

We will foster an inclusive learning community that supports students and enables them to flourish and develop both academically, spiritually and emotionally.

Rationale

Our academic programmes are open to all, irrespective of faith commitments. A mix of ideas and life experiences provides for a dynamic, mature and reflective experience.

A holistic approach means that our undergraduates will develop the graduate attributes listed above. The College will provide a framework for holistic development with a Christian ethos.

By 2022 we will have:

- A programme of student support activities
- A Personal Tutor for each student, with a clearly defined role
- Student community bubbles (online and ministry)
- Revised equality and diversity policy
- Revised disability policy
- Student access to a counselling service
- Student-led volunteering activities supported by the College within the context of the Graduate Attributes Framework

By 2025 we will have:

- A fully developed student resilience and wellbeing programme
- Student peer mentors

Key enablers:

- Fully resourced student support team
- Links with a range of organisations, both community and faith-based
- Revised Personal Tutor guidance to reflect the needs of both the on-campus and the online student communities

Measures of success:

- Retention and completion rates
- Student Feedback
- Student engagement
- Positive and constructive feedback from partners



PRINCIPLE FOUR

We will work in engaged partnership with students, external experts, collaborative partners, and stakeholders to achieve these aims.

Rationale

As a small specialist institution, Union will take the opportunity to forge links and develop relationships with others to enable students to flourish.

We will listen to our students and our other stakeholders to develop our teaching, learning and research and our student community. We will provide a learning hub for the wider Church from which to disseminate knowledge, research

and practice which is relevant to the Church in society. We will partner with other similar institutions in order to identify and share best practice and relationships of benefit to all parties.

By 2022 we will have:

- Begun two-way conversations with our partners in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI), towards identifying needs, taking opportunities and providing collaborative solutions.
- Established mutually beneficial relationships with other Christian faith-based institutions
- Initiated our relationship with St Mary's University, Twickenham
- Engaged students in developing a student partnership policy

By 2025 we will have:

- Established collaborative relationships with key partners and begun mutually beneficial endeavours
- Developed a mature and mutually beneficial relationship with St Mary's University, Twickenham
- Implemented a formal communication strategy which includes social media
- Established a regular programme of events/podcasts/teaching for the wider Church
- Put into effect a student partnership policy

Key enablers:

- Staff Resources
- Student engagement
- Network of key partners

Measures of success:

- Student Feedback
- Feedback from the Church
- Increasing engagement from the Church
- Feedback from partners



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*Training men and women for
Christian ministry*