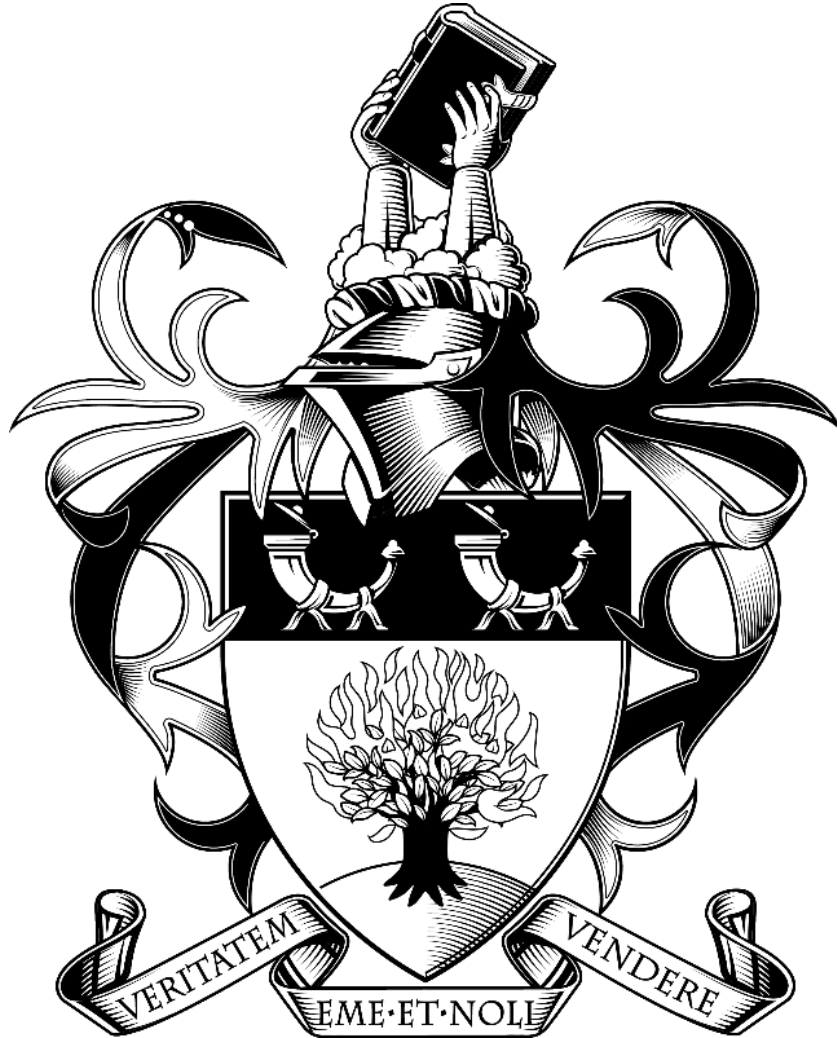


Union Theological College



Teaching and Learning Strategy 2020-2026

Interim Report



Preface

The Teaching and Learning Strategy was due to be updated for 2025-2030. In 2024, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland initiated a review of the General Assembly Structures and Resources Review which includes Union Theological College. It has been agreed by the Faculty and the College's Management Committee in December 2025 to extend the current 2020-2025 Teaching and Learning Strategy for an additional year (2026) as an interim measure to accommodate for the ongoing review.

Introduction

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 and on-campus postgraduate student community. The postgraduate degrees are awarded by the Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland (PTFI). The College has put in place a Teaching and Learning Strategy which establishes the parameters and context for development in the next number of 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

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.

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

By 2026, we will have:



- Amalgamated the MTh OT and MTh NT into one programme - the MTh in Biblical Studies. This will significantly enhance the module offering for Biblical Studies at Master's level.
- The addition of a MTh in Theological Ethics to the suite of online Master's programmes.
- Enhanced the MA in Theology, adding additional modules to the programme to give students greater choice within their pathway.
- Reviewed the MDiv following the successful graduation of the first MDiv cohort following the programmes restructuring in 2023.
- Explored options for delivery that have greater flexibility/accessibility: Micro-credentials, access modules, etc.
- Reviewed the digital tools and resources available to Faculty and teaching partners.

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

Measurements for 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

By 2026, we will have:

- Appointed a Director of Postgraduate Research
- Reviewed the College's partnership agreements
- Reviewed the PhD provision with special attention given to the Code of Practice for PhDs
- Developed and embedded professional development opportunities for students within the PGR programme.
- A mature programme of training and professional development for Research Associates.
- Developed a recruitment strategy which focuses on the recruitment of Postgraduate Research Students.

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

Measurements for 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

By 2026, we will have:

- Reviewed the College's Safeguarding Policy.
- An embedded student resilience and wellbeing programme which includes planned opportunities for student feedback and enhancement throughout the academic year.
- Opportunities for student led activities via the Student Welfare and Support Committee.

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

By 2026, we will have:

- A mature General Students Council. The Council will have capacity to fulfil its partnership activities, to make progress on its priorities and to make effective long-term plans.
- Enhanced opportunities for online students to participate in student representative roles.
- Developed and implemented a schedule of recruitment and marketing activities, including internal (Open Days) and external (UCAS, School Career Fairs) activities.
- Explored cross-partnership opportunities to collaborate with partners for teaching and other student support activities.
- Hosted a programme of public lectures for the wider church.
- Engaged with PCI's General Assembly Structures and Resources Review and the Ministry Training Review.

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