# Formation for ministry in the Scottish Episcopal Church

*Michael Fuller*

The formation of people for authorised ministry in the church has never been more essential than at the present – the churches are facing challenges from within and without as they witness to the Christian faith in word and deed in twenty-first century Scotland. At the same time traditional models of formation, which have involved candidates for ministry spending time together in learning communities in the Anglican tradition,[1] are under acute pressure in terms both of financial viability and numbers called to full-time ministry.

The Theological Institute of the Scottish Episcopal Church (TISEC) is charged with the Initial Ministerial Education (IME) of those called to serve as authorised ministers (that is, Priests, Deacons and Lay Readers) in our church. In fulfilling that charge, we have attempted to set out fundamental theological, ecclesiological and educational principles to shape our formational provision. We have taken due note of the practical constraints and challenges which must shape the form which that provision must take. The purpose of this article is to set out those principles, challenges and constraints, and to articulate the particular solutions to them which we have found appropriate for the present time.

Those solutions are, of course, highly contingent. They are shaped by the particular tradition which we have inherited. They are shaped around the particular requirements of the present day. In other words, the model articulated below has been developed according to the particular needs of the Scottish Episcopal Church today, and it is to be expected that it will change and develop further as requirements for our church's ministers continue to change and develop. This model is not 'one size fits all', nor is it something which is engraved in stone so far as the Scottish Episcopal Church is concerned. Nevertheless, our

current solutions to the particular training and formational needs we have identified are offered to a wider readership in the hope that they may offer some insights which are of value.

## Theological, ecclesiological and educational principles

The Scottish Episcopal Church shares the widespread perception of God's mission (*missio Dei*) being at the heart of the Church's self-understanding and life. This is a task in which all church members are called to participate; but some are called by God to undertake specific representative tasks, on behalf of all. In the services of ordination for Bishops, Priests and Deacons, this is expressed as follows:

> The Church is the People of God, the Body of Christ and the dwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone. In baptism every disciple is called to make Jesus known as Saviour and Lord and to share his work in renewing the world. Some by ordination are given particular tasks.[2]

The Ordinal goes on to elaborate further regarding the tasks appropriate to each order of ministry. Each, though, is explicitly said to share in their work with other ordained ministers. As team ministries become increasingly common, so the importance of leading and managing such teams has become a key part of the role to which those in authorised ministry are called.

Additionally, the ministries of Lay Readers and of Deaconesses are canonically recognised by the church, although vocations to the latter ministry have not been forthcoming since the point at which the ordination of women to the presbyterate became possible. Ordained clergy and Lay Readers are collectively referred to as 'authorised ministers' in the Scottish Episcopal Church. They train alongside one another. There is a reason for this: close collaboration between those in authorised ministry is expected to be a characteristic of that ministry. It is felt appropriate, therefore, that there is a sharing in formation for

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we have developed, and which is described below; but this is seen as revisable, and by no means as the last word on the matter.

**Practical constraints and challenges**

From the outset, when setting up a training programme at TISEC, it was thought essential that the course should be capable of academic validation by a university. This allows the Institute to make a formal academic award to those who have fulfilled the course's requirements, thereby honouring its students' achievements; and it enables students to continue in academic study, building towards higher academic awards with other institutions, through the availability of credit transfer arrangements at those institutions.

The Scottish Episcopal Church is not able to support students routinely through full-time programmes of study, so most students study on a part-time basis. Part-time students may undertake a maximum of 80 credits per academic year. This enables students studying with TISEC to complete a Diploma programme (240 credits) over three years of study, and this is the general requirement of those who are to be ordained. Those who are to be licensed as Lay Readers are required to complete sufficient modules for the award of a Certificate (120 credits). Of course, some students come forward who already possess theology degrees. Special provision is made for such students, who may study for higher degrees at a Scottish university and/or undertake extended placements alongside attending TISEC's residential events.

TISEC's IME programme was set up from the outset in a modular form, benchmarked against the criteria for levels 7 and 8 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). This has enabled us to present our programme in such a way as to have it academically validated, initially through a partnership overseen by the University of Wales, Bangor, and now (following the discontinuation of that partnership) by York St John University. These arrangements permit us to award a Diploma in Theology for Ministry (DipTM) to those who complete the full three-year programme. This is equivalent to the first two years of a degree, and credit transfer arrangements have enabled a number of TISEC's students to receive degrees through the

continuation of their studies at other universities.

In addition to academic validation, we have ensured that our course is validated through the Churches Validation Framework. This is a scheme which is administered by the Ministry Division of the Church of England on behalf of the Anglican, Methodist, URC and Baptist churches of the UK as a means of quality assuring courses not simply in terms of their academic level, but also in terms of their overall suitability as formational programmes for those entering authorised public ministry. Not only does this offer us a valuable external check on our processes, it also ensures transferability of ministers between the Anglican churches of the UK, and is an important 'kitemark' on our provision from the point of view of our ecumenical partners.

Of course, it would be disingenuous not to allude to the financial circumstances of the church as a factor shaping its provision of formation for ministry. Increased costs and (in some quarters) falling income means that provision of residential training in a traditional college setting is no longer possible, and the maintenance of a substantial staff devoted full-time to training the ministers of the future is also no longer realistic. Reliance on non-residential training, with significant input from volunteers and those given small honoraria for their services, has been a necessary response to these financial constraints.

A further issue has been to ensure coverage of the whole of Scotland, catering to a student body which may be spread from Aberdeen to Ayr, and from Gairloch to Galashiels. The whole student body meets together for learning in a residential setting, through the provision of five residential weekends and a week-long Summer School every year. In addition, a network of local tutors and seminar convenors delivers centrally-produced material in as many locations as the distribution of students requires. This in turn requires careful monitoring, in order to ensure parity of provision for all students. In addition to this, it needs to be recognised that the student body in any given year will never be large: over the last decade it has varied in number from 12 to 26. Subdivision of cohorts of this size into year groups is not viable, which generates the logistic problem of teaching side-by-side students who are at different stages in their progression through the curriculum.

## Workable solutions

This article so far has set out a number of the principles and constraints which have shaped the provision of formation for ministry in the Scottish Episcopal Church, and in its ecumenical partners. It remains to sketch out the ways in which these have integrated into workable solutions in our programme for training ministers for twenty-first century Scotland.

As stated above, partnership with York St John University enables us to award properly-validated Diplomas to those who complete our course. This partnership also offers training opportunities to our staff, for example in the use of IT; and it offers us the use of the Moodle e-learning platform, used by York St John University, to broaden the teaching and learning experience of our students. Use of Moodle to augment the delivery of three of our modules has been piloted in the academic year 2010–11, and we anticipate expanding our use of it in future years. This is one way in which we have been able to use IT to help students throughout Scotland to have closely similar experiences, regardless of their location. Another has been through the use of Skype audio-visual conferencing, which enables us to link students who are distant from centres of population to seminar groups convened where there are sufficient numbers of students to make them viable: for example, in recent years a student in Shetland has been linked to a group in Aberdeen by this means, and a student in Kinlochleven to a group in Arbroath.

Nine subject specialists, many of them teachers at Scottish universities, contribute their expertise to the production of teaching materials for the TISEC curriculum. Each of these nine Module Co-Ordinators, as they are known, deals with a traditional theological subject-area (Hebrew Scriptures, New Testament, Church History, Doctrine and so on), and each subject-area is subdivided into three modules, as follows:

| | Modules | | |
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| Subject areas | Year A | Year B | Year C |
| Hebrew Scriptures | Pentateuch | Wisdom | Prophets |
| New Testament | Synoptic Gospels | Johannine writings | Apostolic writings |
| Doctrine | Doctrine of God | Christology | Doctrine of the Holy Spirit |
| Spirituality | Local context | Practice | Everyday life |
| Missiology | Mission: | Understanding local context | A global view mission |
| Liturgy | History | Practice | Theology |
| Contemporary Issues | Ethics I | Ethics II | Science and Theology |
| Western Church History | History 1400–1688 | History 100–1400 | Modern |
| Ministry | Church life | Preaching | Pastoral care |

These modules are taught on a rotating basis through years A, B and C of the programme. Modules are sufficiently discrete in the topics they cover that they may be taken in any order; thus a student who starts the programme in year C will take them in the order C, A, B without

this being problematic. The potential difficulty which arises through having people at different stages in their courses of study taught using the same basic materials (i.e., the problem of student progression) is solved by assessing students differently. Thus, for each module there are two assignments, one marked against each of the criteria for SCQF levels 7 and 8: students select the assignment on which they will be assessed depending on the stage they have reached in their studies. Similar arrangements are in place with the Placement module, which most students undertake in each year of their studies. All modules are set up in such a way as to carry ten credits, according to generally-recognised criteria of contact hours, hours of study, and so on. In any one academic year, then, ten modules are presented to the students (nine from the table above, plus the Placement): each student chooses eight in which to be assessed, and thus each student completes 80 credits in each year of study.

It is important to note that the word 'staff' signifies in our context rather more than a gathered 'faculty' located at a single centre of excellence. In addition to these module co-ordinators, each diocese in the Scottish Episcopal Church provides staff who fulfil a number of functions (as do the training arms of the Methodist and United Reformed Churches). These 'dispersed TISEC' staff members convene regional seminars, act as mentors to students on a one-to-one basis, and take care of the practical arrangements around placements. In many cases, such work is seen as itself an expression of the Continuing Professional Development of the staff member involved. Each diocese also has a co-ordinator (who may him- or herself also take on other roles) in order to ensure that all this work is carried out effectively. TISEC's central staff takes care of the residential programme, the processing of students' assignments and records, and the ongoing work over the dual validation of the programme. This naturally involves exercising a Quality Assurance role in terms of the provision made for students by each diocese.

Regional members of TISEC staff also take care of the Ministries Reflection Course. This is an important part of our programme which allows a particular focus on our competencies framework, this being an important tool in fleshing out our understanding of formation for

ministry. Eight competencies are defined: these are reckoned to be key qualities required of those exercising ministry today, which are in constant need of honing and reflection. The Ministries Reflection Course offers one session on each competency, at roughly monthly intervals throughout the academic year. Students convene for these sessions in diocesan groups.

The competencies framework underpins all other aspects of TISEC's curriculum, and is dealt with in detail in the next section of this paper.

**Formation for Ministry: the competencies framework**

At the time when consideration was being given to the production of a new curriculum for TISEC, a report produced by the Clergy Personnel Commission of the Scottish Episcopal Church had recommended the consideration of competency-based training. As thought was given to this idea, a framework emerged of competencies not as a set of skills to be acquired, but rather as *attributes* required of anyone in authorised ministry – 'soft competencies', as they have been labelled. Eight such competencies were identified as crucial: two of them were subsequently amended in the light of a curriculum review in 2008–09. Each student is expected to be a:

1. Critical and creative theologian
2. Theological resource
3. Leader and enabler (originally: Servant)
4. Communicator
5. Prayerful person
6. Team worker and manager (originally: Collaborative worker)
7. Critically aware person
8. Effective self-assessor.

It will be noted that the 2009 revisions stress more the role of authorised ministers as leaders and managers, reflecting the changing perceptions of needs in our church. An articulation of what is expected of students in developing these competencies, and descriptors of

attributes at levels 1, 2 and 3 (SCQF levels 7, 8, and 9), is supplied to all students. (Level 3 definitions are given for the benefit of students who may already have theology degrees and who wish to align their appropriation of the competencies with their theological capabilities.)

The competencies framework is embedded in the TISEC curriculum in two ways: through the Ministries Reflection Course alluded to above, in which the students reflect on their developing understandings of the competencies; and through the 'pegging' of all written assignments against one of the competencies.

When students undertake an assessed piece of work at the conclusion of a module, they are required to write a short essay designed to test their knowledge and understanding of the topic covered, and also a short exercise designed to test their application of that knowledge and understanding in a particular ministerial context. They might, for example, be asked to write (and sometimes to preach) a short sermon, or to produce notes for a study group, or to write an article for a magazine. This exercise is pegged against a particular competency. Assignments are set up in such a way that all competencies are offered at both level 1 and level 2 in each year. In addition to ensuring that they take a balance of modules from each subject-area, students are required to ensure that they are assessed in each competency as well. Marking criteria have been developed against the appropriate SCQF levels for each competency, as well as for knowledge and understanding, and these are applied by markers and moderators for assessing the assignments.

It was observed that Competency 8 is rather different to the others, and that it ties in particularly to the philosophy of lifelong learning which underpins the curriculum. It was therefore decided that it should be assessed formatively for all assignments. Students are expected to complete a short response to the question: 'Identify and reflect on an area or areas that challenged/interested you in doing this assignment. How is this related to your understanding of ministry, and what areas for further learning do you perceive?' This exercise allows students to pause at the completion of each assignment to reflect on what they have learned, and on what more they would wish to learn, concerning the subject they have been studying.

For each assignment, therefore, students submit three pieces of work:

(i)   An essay testing knowledge and understanding (75% of the total mark)
(ii)  A competency-based exercise (25% of the total mark)
(iii) A 'Competency 8' reflection (assessed formatively).

It is hoped that this structure stresses the formational nature of the students' studies, and truly makes the award which they eventually receive a Diploma in Theology *for Ministry*.

**Conclusion**

A number of factors have shaped the Scottish Episcopal Church's provision of formation for those called to its ministry. As discussed above, these have included the necessity of providing a part-time, fully validated programme that is pedagogically and academically sound, and capable of delivery using dispersed groups around Scotland; of providing a foundational competencies framework which gives the programme assessable formational content; and of providing a system that is robust enough to withstand small student numbers, spread over a huge geographical area. The solutions we have found to the dilemmas we have confronted work well, in our present context; as that context changes new challenges will need to be faced and new solutions found. The evolving nature of our provision is illustrated by the changes already made in our competencies framework (see above). But we believe both that the programme described here is robust enough to be able to respond flexibly to those challenges, and also that it makes optimal use of the resources available to us.

An article of this kind is necessarily sketchy in its coverage of many important issues. Any reader who is interested in finding out about our IME programme in more detail is invited to consult the TISEC pages of the Scottish Episcopal Church's website.[3]

## Notes

1 Usually in residential, quasi-monastic theological colleges.
2 Scottish Ordinal 1984 (amended 2006), pp. 2, 9, 16.
3 At: www.scotland.anglican.org. Downloadable materials may be accessed through this site, including our IME Handbook, which gives full details of our IME programme.