

WHAT REALLY MATTERS ABOUT TEACHER EDUCATION AT CATHEDRALS GROUP UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES?



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SUMMARY REPORT

The Cathedrals Group is an association of sixteen universities and university colleges with Church foundations. It is the only grouping in the UK higher education landscape based on ethical principles informed by faith-based values. Members share a common faith heritage and a strong commitment to values such as social justice, respect for the individual and promoting the public good through our work with communities and charities.

Within Cathedrals Group institutions there is a strong commitment to providing a high quality education for students, supporting personal and spiritual development within a challenging learning environment.

Our faith-based values:

- Contribute to a 'whole person' student experience
- Support a positive working environment for staff
- Link with research and knowledge exchange activities, and
- Shape our partnerships and community engagement.

Our member institutions make a significant contribution to the intellectual, cultural, social, spiritual and economic life of the communities they serve.

(Cathedrals Group, 2018)

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Introduction

An investigation into [perceptions of] the features of Christian foundation universities' Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes that are particular to the university's Christian foundation.

We are grateful to the Cathedrals Group of Universities and Colleges, for funding the first stage of this project and the Church of England University and College Fund for funding the second stage, through grant funding.

This report contains a summary of the research which took place between November 2016 and January 2018.

Two separate documents, *What really matters about teacher education at Cathedrals Group universities and college? Volume 1: The Final Report* and *What really matters about teacher education at Cathedrals Group universities and college? Volume 2: The Case Studies*, are available from www.canterbury.ac.uk/nicer

Project aims

1. To investigate why ITE trainees choose Christian foundation university teacher training programmes
2. To investigate why schools choose Christian foundation universities as training programme partners
3. To investigate what Christian foundation universities claim is particular to their Christian foundation, what is particularly or deeply Christian about their ITE provision with a focus on:
 - the underpinning values
 - the content and methodology of ITE training
 - how trainees are supported and challenged in the partnership aspects
4. To investigate what Christian foundation universities, ITE trainees and partnership schools claim about ITE trainees at the point of qualification, that is particular to the institutions' Christian foundation

Project Outline

The project, *What really matters about teacher education at Cathedrals Group universities*, sought to understand better how teacher education staff, partnership schools and student teachers perceived their teacher education institutions and programmes including specific reference to the Institution's Christian foundation.

The National Institute of Christian Education Research at Canterbury Christ Church University led the research project. The project took place over two years with a pilot and qualitative phase and a quantitative phase.

Altogether, 285 school teachers, 376 students and 147 university teacher educators from 6 universities were involved in the project:

- Canterbury Christ Church University
- Chester University
- Chichester University
- St Mary's University
- Leeds Trinity University

Bishop Grosseteste University participated in the quantitative phase of the project.

Findings

1. Initial teacher education has gone through an enormous change over the last fifteen years with the emergence and mainstreaming of school-led provision. Historically the vast majority of teachers were trained in higher education institutions, many of them with a Church or Christian foundation. In the current context, teacher education is now an open market project with many providers, though this is coupled with chronic shortages in recruitment to teacher education courses and school shortages.
2. After a period of change it is apt to review the nature and purpose of higher education in public professional life, and to consider the case for its future in the development of educators. A key contribution to that might come from reflection on the nature of teacher education in higher education institutions today, and in particular in those that make a claim to work with principles informed by faith based values, something that members of the Cathedrals Group claim (The Cathedrals Group of Universities 2018).
3. Behind the formal questions and aims of the project emerged a fundamental conceptual question: to what extent is the idea of teacher education expressed by a University, shared by its staff, students and schools? Can the particular strengths of such provision be clearly expressed and identified by these key stakeholders? Are there aspects of the teacher education that are significant to and discernible by those stakeholders?
4. Our findings suggest there are and that these make a difference to how schools view those students from the outset and also how they view applications from those students who apply to work at those schools. There is a high degree of trust shown by schools in students trained on courses with the local Cathedrals Group institution and this is in contrast with a lower level of trust shown by schools to out of region school based trained teachers. Students trained on school-led courses from outside of the local area, are not viewed in the same way as those trained by traditional local providers, and in particular, universities.
5. Although this study is essentially a study of perceptions and interpretations, based on interviews with schools, students and university tutors, collective perspectives from these three key groups emerged very clearly. This study has therefore become focused on organisation, mission articulation and communication.
6. From the outset it was apparent that the universities' conceptualisation of their link with their Christian foundation, and the ways in which this related to their professed values and curriculum decisions, varied. Some made explicit their relationship to a religion or denomination and framed their purpose through that language. Others emphasized shared values and shared concerns in their curriculum, but still identified values that were arguably implicitly Christian or compatible with a Christian worldview. Some institutions lay between these two markers. This study is, therefore, also a study in how 21st century universities make sense of their Christian / Catholic /Anglican foundations.
7. Whether a university has an implicitly Christian identity, associated with values, or an explicitly Christian identity, a coherence between those principles and the curriculum provision was a clear strength. Some institutions clearly understand their identity as having a particular role to ensure teachers are provided for religious schools and others see themselves as essentially serving the common good.
8. Participants demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of these identities and missions. In one case students of different religions saw strength in their institution's religious identity. Elsewhere a commitment to the support of all religions was seen as a positive identifier in a Christian institution by a student who was not religious.
9. The research also revealed how individual members of staff understand and negotiate their identity in relation to the institutional ethos. In some cases, it was apparent that for staff, this was the first time they had sought to articulate their own understanding of this connection, as well as their interpretation of their university. They saw themselves in different ways: sometimes as institutional dissenters; sometimes undecided; sometimes positive leaners towards the ethos; and sometimes out an out active promoters of the ethos.
10. University tutor participants sometimes had absolute clarity on the religious dimension of the institution they worked in, and this was sometimes seen as the source of the shared values. Particular religious identities could sustain values that were shared across the religion and belief spectrum. For some, their personal and life journeys had a complex relationship with the religious foundation. In some cases they struggled to explain a sense or feeling that they had.

Recommendations for the future

1. CG institution staff and school partners have strong feelings about faith and values in relation to their institutions. All CG institutions are encouraged to find further opportunities for an ongoing conversation about the relationship between individual staff and the institution's community and corporate ethos and identity. It is clear that the participants valued the opportunity to explore their thinking on this and that inviting conversation on these topics reveal significant and sometimes unexpected responses.
2. In addition to encouraging spaces for conversation, CG institutions are encouraged to look at the vocabulary and narrative of that conversation, in particular seeking to shape more precisely the language of values, actions and virtues in the provision of teacher education, and its relation to the narrative around the Christian foundation. This might also include references to implicit and explicit dimensions and the contribution of specific insights from particular traditions to shared or overlapping values.
3. CG institutions should be confident in articulating an identity and a community space that is positive towards public expression and dialogue about faith and belief of all kinds. Whilst some will prefer to associate with a more secular identity, there is a clear preference for open inclusion of faith talk, rather than any de-religionised exclusion. This might help students make sense of the value their schools and university place on the Christian dimension of the work (whether that is expressed in terms of religion or values). This requires a confident articulation of how plural and diverse spaces require the particular to be valued, as well as a good understanding of the different ways spaces might be secular, be they open and inclusive, or closed and totalising. To be willing to celebrate and welcome diversity, there is a necessity to be able to identify the value of different expressions of belief and what they bring. Sometimes these are seen as an oppositional binary, which they are not.
4. CG institutions are encouraged to reflect more deeply about the person-centred, service ethos in teaching, and the implicitly Christian values which clearly underpin philosophies many in education use. The dignity of the human person as a being of worth beyond price, the hope of the possibility of the next generation of those taught, and the hope of the possibility of change for the good, all seem to underpin the work of teacher education, and have a particular resonance with a Christian narrative. This is perhaps more clearly seen when one considers what might have been expressed; the biological determinism found in some educational regions was noticeably absent, for instance, as were proponents of elitism in schooling. There is some vulnerability in how Christian foundation universities engage in 'customer' or 'consumer' language, given the rise of individual student fees.
5. It is clear that for many CG institutions there is significant support from the Church schools sector, and some have a clear idea of where and how they support teachers in preparation for that sector. Others have less obvious provision for preparing teachers for this sector. The need to balance general preparation for work in any school and preparation for work in the Church sector needs to be carefully judged but there seems to be scope within the pathways available for a clearer identification and articulation of the pathway to work in the Church school sector. Anglican foundation institutions should review opportunities for a nationally recognised accredited component within ITE in collaboration with school and diocesan stakeholders.
6. All CG institutions should reflect on how they are seen as the source of experts and expertise which was more strongly expressed by schools and students than university tutors or course documentation. There is an intellectual academic justification for the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom in the university and there is also a Christian justification. We suggest that CG institutions be bolder in their own claims about their pursuit of knowledge to find the best ways to educate teachers and the best ways to help learners learn. The value of knowledge and knowing the best ways to teach is clearly a motivation for schools and students. It might be this presents some degree of challenge to the more individual notion of teacher that was more commonly present. Should CG institutions be encouraging new teachers to discover the teacher they want to be, or be the best kind of teacher? Should the definition of 'best' engage with questions of who is taught – who deserves it most: the most needy, everyone, a particularly valued sub group, those who can afford it?
7. CG institutions should review where in their curricula they locate and explore their philosophy of education. This could be more strongly asserted and communicated. When these curricula components were explicitly and strongly identified, stakeholders were positive. Schools, university staff and students expressed strongly their care about values, key ideals and principles but they were not always articulated clearly in public documentation and curricula.

About NICER

The National Institute of Christian Education Research is a centre in the Faculty of Education at Canterbury Christ Church University. Our aim is to develop world-leading research in areas of interaction between Christianity and education.

We promote research to inform the contribution of faith to the public understanding of education. We support and conduct research and development in order to strengthen the work of Christians in education together with the mission of Church schools and Christian universities.

We enhance evidence research-based policy decision-making in Church and faith-based national education policy. We collect and analyse research data on Church and faith-based educational and training institutions, particularly on admissions, academic performance, religious education and inspection reports. Our work seeks to develop a theology and philosophy of Christian education and research the mission and identity of schools, colleges and universities.

Read more at www.canterbury.ac.uk/nicer

