

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. A review of St Chad's College was undertaken in Easter Term 2017 in accordance with the published College Review process approved by Senate.
- 1.2. The team would like to thank the staff and students of St Chad's College for their participation in the review process and the hospitality shown to the team throughout the day.
- 1.3. The Review Team was:
  - Mr Owen Adams, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Colleges and Student Experience (Chair)
  - Professor Keith Lindsey, Head of the Department of Biosciences
  - Mr Michael Parks, Head of Scholarships, Student Funding & Student Immigration
  - Mrs M Marlow, Asst. Head of Colleges (Student Experience)
  - Professor David Harper, Principal, Van Mildert College & Professor of Palaeontology
  - Mr Chris Shelley, Kings College, London
  - Mr. M Deakin, Head of Operations (Colleges) (Secretary)
  - Mr Dan Fox, Undergraduate Student, St Cuthbert's Society
  - Ms Jackie Small, Research Postgraduate Student, St Mary's College
- 1.4. The Review Team considered the documentation presented by the College and over the course of the day held meetings with College Officers, other College staff, Student Representatives from Junior Common Rooms (JCR), other undergraduate and postgraduate students, College Tutors and Senior Common Room (SCR) members.
- 1.5. In reaching the conclusion and recommendations detailed below, the Review Team drew its evidence from the documentation provided and from the discussions held with staff and students in the College.
- 1.6. **The following are headline commendations for the College:**
  - 1.6.1. There is an evident sense of community of both staff and students which is amplified by the College's location and estate. There is definite cultural warmth throughout the College.
  - 1.6.2. The College has a very clear idea of identity, values and purpose that is expressed at all levels.
  - 1.6.3. The level of engagement from the students is impressive with a high proportion involved in representative bodies and other College societies. The College has an enviable level of engagement from staff and other parties involved as Tutors.
  - 1.6.4. The College has been through a challenging phase in its history following the death of the previous Principal. However, the College has led changes that have

resulted in a positive and inclusive manner. There is a renewed and positive relationship with the University.

1.6.5. The ratio of staff to students is high and plays an undoubted part in fostering a positive experience for students. The level of engagement is impressive and this encourages a positive spiral.

1.6.6. The College's values based, community culture has lots to offer the wider University. The inclusivity and awareness of the international student challenges should be shared as good practice.

1.6.7. It is clear that the small size of the College is playing its part. However, the positive culture hasn't happened by accident and the Review Team felt that it was not necessarily at risk from a modest growth in student numbers.

### **1.7. The following are headline recommendations for the College:**

1.7.1. There is a feeling that the international cultural exchange is moving one way. International students are receiving an introduction to and experience of British culture but the British students are not really receiving experience of international culture.

1.7.2. Within the boundaries of a small college there are larger groups of European and Chinese students who are accommodated. However, international students of other nationalities can be overlooked.

1.7.3. The College should reflect on the pastoral involvement of Wardens, Welfare reps and Tutors ensuring that the role they play in enhancing the student experience does not become onerous and over involved.

1.7.4. Some students had less awareness of the wider university support that is available. A lot of students are getting what they need from the College but perhaps there is a perception that the College will sort any and every issue out.

1.7.5. The College should ensure it is reminding students of what is taking place with regard to cultural exchange.

## **2. College Management and Strategy (as they pertain to the student experience, support and welfare within the college as a scholarly community)**

2.1 The College Officers are;

- Dr Margaret J Masson – Principal
- Revd Dr Ashley Wilson – Vice-Principal & Postgraduate Director (Acting Chaplain)
- Dr Eleanor Spencer-Regan – Vice-Principal and Senior Tutor
- Mr Alistair Jenkins – Vice-Principal and Bursar

2.2 St Chad's College was established in 1904 as an independent hall with an Anglican foundation. It is an independent, recognised college of Durham University. It operates as both a private company limited by guarantee and a registered charity.

2.3 A memorandum of understanding with Durham University defines the relationship between the two parties and is characterised by respect for each other's commitment to the purpose, values and aspirations held in common and a mutuality in which independence and interdependence are recognised. The Memorandum binds the parties to specific commitments to each other.

- 2.4 The University and the College each acknowledge the particular character, values and principles of the other, including the religious character of the College as an Anglican Foundation (serving people from all backgrounds and beliefs and of all faiths and none), and the secular nature of the University, and the respective Statutory responsibilities arising therefrom.
- 2.5 St Chad's has a Governing Body that reflects its Anglican foundation.  
[https://www.dur.ac.uk/university.calendar/volumei/committee\\_membership/college\\_councils/chads/](https://www.dur.ac.uk/university.calendar/volumei/committee_membership/college_councils/chads/)
- 2.6 The structure of College Officers has recently changed. There are now three Vice-Principals (Vice-Principal - Senior Tutor, Vice-Principal - Postgraduate Director and Vice-Principal - Bursar). The Principal explained that this restructure had the following purposes;
- a) To share responsibilities following the death of the previous Principal
  - b) To better reflect the working of the College in particular reflecting collaborative team work.
  - c) To formally recognise that the Vice-Principal – Bursar was a student facing role.
- 2.7 There is a degree of flexibility between the Vice-Principal Senior Tutor and Vice-Principal Postgraduate Director to best meet the needs of students.
- 2.8 The relationship between St Chad's College and the University is positive following the signing of the MoU in 2015. Communication with the University was reportedly much easier. The Principal reported that there has been positive feedback from external auditors and this is enabling the college to move forward with a more long-term strategy. The college is now able to plan to make future investments.

Mechanisms for ensuring effective communication relating to the student experience across the management of the college.

- 2.9 Most students at St Chads have expressed a preference for the college. There is an open door policy for students wanting an appointment. In the words of the College, "where they can pop their heads in". Students can also use e-mail to book an appointment.
- 2.10 In addition to this, the College holds twice weekly, office hour days at certain times of the year, for example the beginning of term and exam times. The approach is informal and the College feels this is in keeping with a "family system".
- 2.11 St Chads has a high student satisfaction rating. The College feels that this is due to the small size of the community, enabling officers to get to know students as individuals as well as the high staff to student ratio.
- 2.12 The College states that it encourages and enables students to make their own decisions. Students who need a higher input of help are worked with to help develop their decision-making skills. This work was developed by the Principal in her former role as Vice-Principal.
- 2.13 The College has Tutors who provide a certain level of academic and pastoral support. Each student is allocated a College Tutor and the College puts time into matching students with Tutors. The team of College Tutors is made up of academics from a range of departments, professional services staff, and professional members of the local community, including the NE business, public services and voluntary sector communities.
- 2.14 Students are also encouraged to contact Senior Common Room (SCR) members if they are interested in their field of employment or practice. Profiles of SCR members are made available. The Review Team felt this was good practice. There is good interaction

between the SCR and the student common rooms. The College feels that it is important to include non-academics in the SCR.

- 2.15 The SCR organise social events and dinners giving further opportunities to integrate with other College Tutors. SCR members regularly take meals in college, where there is no high table at normal meals. SCR integration was given as an example of a key reason for one student's decision to undertake a PhD at Durham as the College was a safe space to present research.

Mechanisms for ensuring that student support and welfare are represented appropriately in the college strategy and that these are consistent with the University's strategy and relevant aspects of the Education Strategy.

- 2.16 The JCR Welfare Officer and team run campaigns across the College.
- 2.17 College Tutors are drawn from academic and professional support staff, with regular Tutor meetings and training provided. There is a ratio of around 10 – 15 students per College Tutor. All Tutors sign an agreement before becoming a Tutor to formalise the role.
- 2.18 Each Tutor has a mix of undergraduate and postgraduate student members. It was reported that most students turn up to arranged events, but those who do not wish to engage know that they can, as and when they want to. There is an opportunity to re-engage at Tutor Formal Dinners.
- 2.19 Throughout Induction Week, the College Tutors meet all Freshers both individually, and as a group. Tutors will text and call their mentees to keep in contact and to help engagement. The culture of engagement within the College helps. The Tutors understand and are respectful of a student's decision whether or not to keep in touch.
- 2.20 Tutors were aware of the support from the College and were clear on when to refer students with signposting to various avenues of support key.
- 2.21 It was felt that forcing students to integrate does not work. Tutors assess how, and if a student wants to integrate with particular attention paid to international students. Tutors reported that in every cohort there are students that will not engage. There are issues with one year taught postgraduates and under engagement and Tutors reported that it was sometimes hard to get international students to integrate. However, it was felt that having the student know that a College Tutor is there if needed is sometimes good enough.
- 2.22 St Chad's College are committed to events. Students can choose to be involved and there is a wide range of these available.
- 2.23 Each College Tutor gets an allowance of funding to enable them to take their students to events and to be able to meet with them in a less formal environment. Tutor groups also get together termly to get to know each other. Tutors reported that it was important to build trust and find ways to relate to each student, across year groups and across different subjects.

### **3. Support and Opportunities (Organisation & Enhancement)**

#### Policies for the effective support of students

- 3.1 The College feels that the University is placing them under pressure to grow in size. Their main concern is that this will dilute the family community feel that the College currently has and the College does not want to lose this. Growth had the potential to be detrimental to the student experience at Chad's.

- 3.2 The University is set to expand, which is recognized as a positive move and St Chad's College is reflecting on its own size but they want to be careful and to be in control with the scope of the growth. College space is a concern together with whether their current staff complement will be sufficient to support growth.
- 3.3 There is a great deal of mental health support for students provided within St Chad's. The student welfare system consists of male and female welfare officers and a campaigns officer (job share). The team is part of the wider support for students, which has fifty tutors. All of the team have some level of training.
- 3.4 The student welfare officers are trained to be confident to cope, but they are encouraged not to take on too much and to pass on elsewhere when appropriate. There were drop-in hours, but it was found unnecessary and there is now a Facebook page for questions.
- 3.5 Student welfare staff are not on call, which the College say is made very clear. Out of hours there is a Duty Officer rota. Porters are on duty from midnight until 8am and are the first responders, but they are not there to deal with welfare problems and they call the Duty Officer. The College also has four residential postgraduate "Night Porters".
- 3.6 However, from a discussion with the JCR, there was a suggestion that the Welfare Officer was occasionally being called on out of hours. The College should check to ensure appropriate boundaries are in place for student peer support in College.
- 3.7 The College would like to develop their kitchen and catering areas as a priority. The kitchen equipment is 20 – 25 years old and some of that was second-hand. The College is a listed building and it has had some difficulties making significant changes. As facilities within the College are improved, St Chads would like to share these more with the wider student community.
- 3.8 The College has some interesting and useful spaces despite the small size. In particular the bar space, cellar and quad can accommodate different functions of different types. There is a multi-functional chapel space and a dedicated Library and Librarian. The computer facilities were seen as limited but good.
- 3.9 The College has a high proportion of shared rooms and offers limited flexibility to move if sharing students do not get on. Initially, they are encouraged to talk to their room-mate and if that does not work, the college will try its best to relocate a student. During the first three weeks of the academic year 2016-17, there were four students wishing to change but after they spoke to their room-mates only one student continued to request a move.
- 3.10 The College is not very physically accessible for students with mobility difficulties or wheelchair users. Ramps are available for small flights of stairs but navigation between floors is difficult. It was recognised that there were restrictions on reasonable developments that could be made given the location and buildings.
- 3.11 There was a strong view expressed by the student body that the small size of St Chad's was an advantage and gave the student and staff body the chance to get to know everyone within the community.

#### Mechanisms for reflecting, reviewing and enhancing support

- 3.12 There was a view expressed that the International Student induction was unreflective of the wider St Chad's experience and was perceived by students as a "last-minute add-on" to the usual induction week. It may be that an issue was that students running the inductions are not international and are not fully aware of the priorities of international Freshers when starting university. Other students had a more positive experience of their induction and found the Freps to be very helpful.
- 3.13 It was suggested that more trips could be arranged for international students, as a good way for them to visit other areas of the country.

- 3.14 Most international students spoken to on the day by the Review Team said that they feel they have the opportunity to engage with UK students and get involved in normal Freshers' Week activities.
- 3.15 It was stated that some Erasmus students arrive in January and do not receive a proper induction, which should be improved.
- 3.16 There was less engagement with College by postgraduate international students. This was viewed as being mainly about whether or not the specific student wants to get involved rather than any failing of the College. The College provides activities specifically for postgraduate students, such as research trips.
- 3.17 Having said this, it was apparent that St Chad's College has a higher level of participation by international students compared to most other Colleges. There was a perception that this was focused around European and Chinese students. One student stated that there are "not many opportunities for black minority students and there is nothing in College to really to make them feel at home. The kitchen can provide European cooking (e.g. Italian and French nights) but no African.
- 3.18 The College does recognise that the kitchen is old and requires improvement and recognises that their food offering needs to be expanded, welcoming suggestions.
- 3.19 The relatively small number of international students in St Chad's has sometimes meant integration is difficult. The students did point to international students sharing a room with a British students has been very successful. The international students found this to be very positive and made good friends as a result.
- 3.20 The roommate matching process by the College seems to work well. The students felt that they are first, College members and then international students. No-one in the group felt that they had come across any major difficulties being an international student.

Mechanism for ensuring effective communication with departments, central support services and other bodies

- 3.21 The College feels that there is a good balance between College and central University services. The College's Governing Body receives positive feedback from the students regarding their sense of involvement.
- 3.22 The Vice-Chancellor was formerly on the Governing Body previously, but this was felt to be a conflict of interest. There are currently three University reps; Prof. Martyn Evans (Principal of Trevelyan College), Prof. Claire Warwick and Prof. Sarah Banks. The College feels this gives a good University perspective as well as one from another college. There had been a period of low attendance from University members, but this is no longer the case. The overall message was positive and St Chad's College feels it can move forward with the University mutually reinforcing the future changes.
- 3.23 St Chads is working to develop greater engagement with its alumni community. They stated that they have access to alumni and wider SCR community etc. who are keen to engage with the College.
- 3.24 The College is working on plans to work with local businesses as well as access internships for student careers development.
- 3.25 The College has focused on widening participation and a lot of activity has taken place. Its work with schools hit maximum capacity and the College felt that it needed to be more strategic in its approach seeking to develop relationships with schools further afield. St Chad's is keen to work with other colleges to undertake some student-led widening participation work.

#### Mechanisms for facilitating and monitoring student-led activities

- 3.26 Looking at the employability of its students, the College states that it can make helpful connections with the wider community for student careers' advice. The College was keen to do more but did not want to overlap too much with the Careers, Employability and Enterprise Centre.
- 3.27 The College has a Question Time within a "safe space", allowing freedom of speech with challenging topics. The College tries to choose speakers who have things to say, with different perspectives and who present representational challenges. At times, the MCR have been advised not to cover certain subjects but they circulated a carefully worded questionnaire about discussion subjects to create interesting subjects.
- 3.28 Discussions are held within College and across student communities about whether events are appropriate to go ahead, for example the the theme of The Orient for the Candlemas Ball, Gents Formal and Ladies Formal. The College is keen not to close things down but to challenge students to think about how to make them more inclusive.
- 3.29 There is a volunteering strand being developed within the College.

#### **4. Communication and Links**

##### Marketing and recruitment activities

- 4.1 The College has a long history of working with primary and secondary schools. It has been noticeable that the percentage of Independent school entrants to Chad's has reduced in recent years.
- 4.2 St Chad's now has increased its capacity to pick up more outreach work which includes visits for years 9 – 12, incorporating tours of the college, question and answer sessions, meeting students and academic lectures covering a range of subjects.
- 4.3 The College continually reflects on its position and is currently reviewing its web content as it was not felt to reflect sufficient diversity. By doing this the College hopes to encourage applications from a more diverse range of students.
- 4.4 St Chads has two annual scholarships valued at £3,000, which students can apply for if their household income is less than £25,000. In addition, there are a number of other scholarships with details available at <https://www.stchads.ac.uk/admissions/scholarships-bursaries/>

#### **5. JCR and MCR Executives**

##### Mechanism for ensuring student representation within the college

- 5.1 The Students' Presidents are very satisfied with the briefings that they receive from the College Principal on a regular basis. The students feel that they play an active part in any changes within the College.
- 5.2 The JCR and MCR both report that they work well together and have recently paid particular attention to joint working. There are joint events and each term one of the common rooms hosts an event for the other.
- 5.3 A high proportion of the student body at St Chad's were active both in college and across the University. Many are involved in the Executive or on other committees. There is usually a high voter turnout for decisions showing good representation.

The extra-curricular opportunities provided for students and the mechanisms in place to ensure equality of opportunity.

- 5.4 The 'Perspectives' common room meetings are well attended, with interesting topics, and is a starting point, but there is room for more, with the boundaries being pushed further.
- 5.5 There is at least 15 minutes or break out groups to discuss the topic, and another 15 minutes of audience questions and comments. Perspectives is not designed as a Union Society-style debate in which speakers are expected or briefed to take opposing views; rather it is a discussion event in which academics from different departments expound on their diverse disciplinary perspectives, allowing the audience members to see these complex topics from new 'perspectives'.
- 5.6 The topics for Perspectives are selected based on consultation with both the JCR and MCR and via an online poll. There have been some controversial subjects but on some panels, the majority agreed which resulted in less audience participation (this could have been due to the wrong brief being given to the panel or perhaps the wrong choice of panel). More rigorous debates would be welcomed by students.
- 5.7 The MCR has been recently refurbished and the Executive were closely involved. The current space is light and airy and it was stated that there is a good atmosphere.
- 5.8 The MCR reported that most of their members live within Durham and the MCR space is well used by both livers-in and livers-out.
- 5.9 Students living out of college are integrated into college life by means of Facebook, e-mails, a PG research forum, a variety of events, fun things such as pizza and painting mugs and events connected with national holidays. The MCR stated that there is a good mix of attendees.
- 5.10 The MCR was consulted on plans for the build of multi-use space.

Communication with the wider student community

- 5.11 The Review Team spoke with students on the day who were very positive about the two-way communication flow between the College and the student body as well as between the Common Rooms and their members.
- 5.12 It was perceived by both Common Rooms that St Chads could do more to develop alumni engagement. It was recognised that the College is seeking to work more on this area and there have been some improvements.

Communication with the college

- 5.13 Staff and college officers are viewed as extremely friendly and approachable.
- 5.14 Common Rooms are always evolving, with some parts working and other areas which have not worked as well. The students reported that the College is always open to feedback from students, takes this on board and helps students take ownership of their own direction and decisions. In their view, the College does not just pay lip service to comments, but makes things happen.
- 5.15 The JCR work with the College on the room allocations of Freshers. They consider factors such as tidiness, sports interests or whether the incoming student is a morning or night-time person. Information is gathered from incoming students via questionnaires.



- 5.16 The MCR has membership on the College Governing Body with a free hand to deliver constituent messages. Most decisions are achieved with good consultation and there is the perception that only very few were made without any consultation.
- 5.17 The accommodation for postgraduates is an area of dissatisfaction. There are problems with maintenance, roof and boilers. It was also reported that maintenance appears to be slower in the separate PG accommodation than elsewhere. These issues are reported to college staff at termly meetings and are perceived, by PG students, as a significant issue.
- 5.18 There is general welfare support from senior staff in the College. The College feels their small size contributes to a cohesive atmosphere. For example, seeing members from all three common rooms and all levels of staff everyday about the College. The support systems are seen as mutually enforcing e.g. peers, tutors, Vice-Principals, University.

**November 2017**