**The shape of Initial Teacher Education in a Christian foundation university**

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***Abstract:*** *This paper provides one case study from a wider research project undertaken by representative universities of the Cathedrals Group in the United Kingdom (Bowie et al. 2018; Benton et al., 2018). The research set out to investigate why trainees and partnership schools choose church foundation universities, as well as what is particularly or deeply Christian about its provision. This paper reports the shape of Initial Teacher Education in one Christian-foundation university in the South East of England.*

*Document analysis, survey outcomes and focus group interviews, reveal a complex picture. Whilst the Christian foundation of the university is not evidenced through articulated religious preferences or practices within its teacher education programmes, the implicit values and spiritual beginnings are omnipresent. Tutors, school partners and trainees are happy to talk about: moral imperatives in the form of social justice education; the importance of a teaching philosophy; the educational community within the university and across its family of partnership schools; a commitment to children’s holistic development; and the caring supportive network around both the student teacher and the children that they teach. The University has a strong reputation for developing teachers. It has been argued that a transmission of historical and Christian values can be identified within current training programmes, and therefore, the spirit of the University, and by association its Christian foundation, continues to shape the teachers of the future.*

**What really matters about Teacher Education at Cathedrals Group universities and colleges?**

This paper is taken from the second volume of the above study by Bowie et al. (2018). The project sought to find out what is distinctive about teacher education within the Cathedrals Group of universities (a mission group in United Kingdom comprising institutions that have church foundations). Five members of the Cathedrals Group produced case studies detailing the distinctiveness of their initial teacher education and the extent of church identity / ethos. To investigate this an inductive analysis of documents-in-use was carried out initially to explore emerging themes. This was followed by a wave of interviews and surveys involving students, university staff and key personnel from partnership schools. The case study here is an amended version of the one presented in Volume 2 (Benton et al., 2018) and details the case of University of Chichester, a small institution in South East England.

**Chichester’s historical and contemporary context**

The University of Chichester can trace its origins back to 1839 when, what later became known as Bishop Otter College, was founded as one of the first church training colleges in the country. Bishop Otter College was named after Bishop William Otter whose vision and values of education were influential in its inception prior to his death in 1840. For Bishop Otter, the church was seen as being morally intertwined with the education of citizens at a time when secular and religious teachings were of great debate (McGregor, 1981). For the Bishop of Chichester, polemic debates about church and state education were perceived to be unhelpful and so he put forward a vision for the expansion of educational provision in a way that continued to maintain some of the traditions of religious instruction:

Let it not be thought illiberal, if, convinced of the paramount importance of religion over everything earthly […] whatever advancement may be made in other subjects, Christian instruction shall still hold its first place and its due proportion in their schools (Otter, 1841).

In particular, the church was conceived as having a duty to educate all citizens, including the poorest in society who were ‘still brought up on darkness and ignorance… at a moment when the light of knowledge is spreading rapidly through all classes of society above the poor’ (Otter, 1841). As a response to a call for more teachers, a college in Chichester was formed, initially for the instruction of Masters, and so the present-day University of Chichester’s Christian foundation was established.

Bishop William Otter was an early pioneer of developments in the training of teachers and the University of Chichester can be proud to associate itself with many more innovations in teacher education across the centuries. Following the 1870 Forster Act, renowned feminist Louisa Hubbard campaigned for women from the middle classes to train as school mistresses. A revived Bishop Otter College then developed an innovative curriculum for training women teachers using methods unlike those used by the predominant pupil-teacher schemes. By doing this, Chichester was once again at the forefront of developments in teacher training and the success, and reputation, of Bishop Otter College as an exclusive training college for women teachers continued into the 1960s.

Today, University of Chichester has two campuses with teacher training situated in Bognor Regis. The Bognor Regis Campus centres around three Georgian buildings used as an emergency training college for teachers in the post-war period. Documenting this history, Barbara Smith, a former head of the Bognor Regis College details how tutors and trainees made the most of their programmes: English involved trips to the theatre; Geographers trekked across the South Downs; History students excavated around Roman Chichester. Much of the content was arranged around ‘themes to meet student needs and interests’ (Smith, 2014, p.87). Whilst the Bognor site does not have church foundations in quite the same way as Chichester, it is evident from Smith’s account that there was a strong teacher education community with trainees being encouraged to think about the fullness of life, and by association, the richness of opportunities bestowed to children.

Bognor transitioned into a permanent college before merging with Bishop Otter to form the West Sussex Institute of Higher Education. This new institute had ambitions for a broader academic portfolio and latterly evolved into the Chichester Institute of Higher Education, then University College Chichester and finally, University of Chichester today. Teacher education, and the education of children locally, continues to be a vital part of the university’s work. For example, aside from Initial Teacher Training, the university established its own Multi-Academy Trust in 2012 with a vision for ‘all young people to be inspired by an excellent education that raises their aspirations and enriches their lives’. Whilst it is not an overtly Christian trust, the vision is befitting for the university’s Christian heritage: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly (John 10 10).

The university’s Institute of Education provides a wide portfolio of teacher training programmes. Pathways include undergraduate, postgraduate and School Direct, and the university offers routes to become early years, primary and secondary teachers. This case study refers to group interviews with students, tutors, and school-based mentors. It also draws upon an analysis of documents taken from the different teacher training programmes, university website and alumni materials, and further analysis of questionnaires provided to staff, students and partnership schools.

**Why choose Chichester? The significance of its historical reputation**

With 180 years of teacher training history, it is not surprising that the University of Chichester has accrued a well-respected reputation amongst students, tutors and partnership schools:

Whenever you go in [to schools] and you say you’re training at Chichester a lot of them are like ‘oh it’s renowned […] you must be good if you’re training at Chichester.’ (Student)

Students choose Chichester, in part because they had heard of ‘the reputation of the teaching degree itself, as well as the reputation of the staff who deliver those teaching degrees’. Similarly, school partners are keen to work with Chichester as ‘when you find out that you are going to get a Chichester student you already know what you are going to get’ (Mentor).

The questionnaire data reveal that the university’s reputation and tradition for training teachers helps to attract both students and school partners. Factors rank, on average, to be ‘extremely important’ when students choose to study at Chichester included ‘It has a good reputation’. The only factor ranking higher than this was ‘The institution has a friendly environment’. For school partners, ‘the long tradition of effective Teacher Training’ ranks as the most important motive for working with the university (see fig. 1):



Fig. 1: Why school partners choose to work with University of Chichester (5 = most important)

Owing to the heritage of the institution, it is found that many mentors and head teachers that work locally are Chichester alumni. As a result, there is a sense of a life cycle: Chichester graduates become teachers in partnership schools and then become mentors for new trainee teachers. This works to reinforce the university’s reputation:

It’s been here a long time and has a good reputation and all the dealings I’ve had since then have done nothing other than support that view. (Mentor)

You know what you are going to get [from Chichester trainees] because so many of your colleagues in school have been there. Obviously there are going to be changes but the core of it remains the same. (Mentor)

The mentors recognise strong performance from trainees and this reinforces their desire to work in partnership with the university. Indeed, University of Chichester trained teachers are identified in the questionnaire results as a ‘safer choice’ for employment by partnership schools when compared with other Higher Education Institution partners or school-based routes. In part, this becomes self-affirming as Chichester alumni who are now mentors and senior leaders are keen to uphold the reputation of the institution: ‘There’s a sense of pride having come from Chichester’ (Mentor). Document analysis also reveals that former students continue to have a connection to the university and hold a sense of pride over its continued success. For example, a retired teacher, who trained to teach in the late 1950s at Bishop Otter College, commented:

the values, opportunities and friendships are common to everyone who has been fortunate enough to have been a student at Chichester […] hearing from [former Vice Chancellor] as to how well the university is placed in various educational “lists” made us all immensely proud. (Bishop Otter College Guild newsletter contributor)

It is apparent that the history of the institution is significant for building both a positive reputation and a sense of pride. This is congruent with a perception that Chichester has successful outcomes for teacher education. As one student commented, ‘We get the sense that they know what they’re doing; they’ve been doing it for years’. Furthermore, the strength of Chichester’s initial teacher training partnership can be evidenced by its positive Net Promoter Scores. For example, on a Net Promotor Score, more than 75% of school respondents would highly recommend the teacher training provided at University of Chichester (see fig. 2):

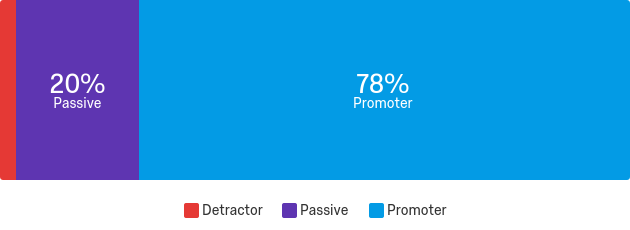


Figure 2: Net Promotor Score for University of Chichester

**The Church foundation: forgotten but not gone?**

As with all Cathedrals Group universities, University of Chichester has built upon its church foundation. Yet, when questioned about its Christian foundation, stakeholders were unable to articulate how this is relevant to the work of the university today. For example, a student commented ‘I’d never clocked onto it really. It’s never crossed my mind.’ Furthermore, the questionnaire sample indicates that the ‘Christian ethos’ of the university ranks (on average) as ‘not important’ for students’ motivation in selecting University of Chichester.

The questionnaire responses also reveal that the majority of school partners (76%) and students (68%) are most likely to feel ‘indifferent’ or have ‘nothing to say’ about the Christian foundation of the university. However, a larger number of staff (52%) are more likely to suggest that they are ‘proud’ or ‘positive’ about the Christian foundation (see fig. 3). Very few respondents across all sample groups reject the Christian foundation. Despite this, the larger percentages for indifference suggest that the Christian foundation is not overtly identified as salient to the way that different stakeholders value Chichester’s Initial Teacher Training provision.

Fig. 3: Personal attitudes towards the Christian foundation

Tutors credited the university’s ethos with its general history of teacher training, rather than specific religious foundations:

I’ve never considered the link with the cathedral […] I have always attributed the ethos much more down to a primary school ethos […] I’ve always put it down to the fact that we’re in a very caring profession. (Tutor)

This lack of awareness may be borne out of developments in the university’s designation: ‘it isn’t called Bishop Otter anymore’ (Tutor). ‘University of Chichester’ does not carry the same religious connotations and school participants were more likely to refer to ‘Chichester’ students as opposed to the ‘Bishop Otter’ appellation. This is a recent phenomenon as within living memory, the Bishop Otter College Guild newsletter provides evidence of a stronger sense of the Christian foundation and how this was appreciated, even by those without religious belief:

Bishop Otter College had a Christian ethos. I was so lucky to be made welcome in its benign embrace for I was, and still am, an atheist (Bishop Otter College Guild newsletter contributor)

A further reason for the lack of awareness of the university’s church foundation may be due to its dual-campus structure. Teacher education is housed mainly in the regency buildings of Bognor while the chapel and university’s ‘Bishop Otter’ spiritual home resides in Chichester:

We very rarely go over to the Chichester campus, but actually the chapel which is a significant building is smack bang in the middle […] on a day to day basis people pass that building, [so] there’s much more of a feeling when you’re over there that this has some sort of Christian basis (Tutor).

Tutors with experiences of other church foundation universities identified the significance of a central chapel or strong presence of a chaplain. Whilst this may be true of the Bishop Otter campus in Chichester, the Bognor Regis campus does not contain the same level of physical space dedicated to Christian worship, celebration or symbolism.

A systematic analysis of documentation in use within the teacher training programmes at the university also found very little explicit mention of the church foundation. Reference to Bishop William Otter exists on the university website as part of the history of the institution but day-to-day documentation and reference material for students and school partners is devoid of an overt Christian message.

The university tutors that responded to the questionnaire similarly do not place value on teaching ‘sessions that specifically address Catholic / Christian /religious aspects of education’. This is seen as ‘optional / extra’ by the majority of respondents and was one of the lowest ranking categories for curriculum content. This is clearly a significant shift in the teacher training curriculum from the vision of education espoused by founder, Bishop Otter.

However, whilst it may be stated that the Christian foundation of teacher training at the university has been ***forgotten***, it is not the case that is is has ***gone*** in spirit. Firstly, a transmission of values may have been passed on through the generations of tutors that have worked at the university in its various guises:

its foundations and its long history has meant that it’s created this environment where we step into it or we appoint people that fit with the way we work and that ethos is maintained and sustained (Tutor)

Secondly, document analysis and interviews with stakeholders elucidate an alignment between the culture of teacher training, the Cathedrals Group values and by association, Christian messaging. This will now be explored in an attempt to define the ‘Chichester Teacher’ and the learning environment that grows these future professionals.

**The ‘Chichester Teacher’ and their training environment**

Despite teacher education developments at the university, it is believed that ‘the core of it remains the same’ (Mentor). The aforementioned reputational capital emerges from a belief that there is a particular brand of Chichester teacher. What constitutes a ‘core’ set of values, mission, ethos and culture within Chichester’s teacher education programmes can be gleaned from document analysis, questionnaire responses and comments by interview participants. One of the documents analysed identifies an explicit criteria for a ‘Chichester teacher’ that is trained for the primary classroom. However, this list of attributes was only created within the last five years and yet, the reputation of Chichester teachers precedes the document’s creation. So what does a Chichester trained teacher bring to the partnership?

Firstly, the Chichester trained teacher understands that they are agents for societal change. Like founders Bishop William Otter, and later, Louisa Hubbard, tutors on the programmes are committed to the transformational potential of education:

There is definitely a sense of a moral purpose about training people for teaching as doing something worthwhile for society, something that is going to make life better for people - the whole widening participation agenda here is enormous. (Tutor)

Indeed, one of the values of Cathedrals Group universities is ‘supporting social justice for all people, at home and abroad’ (Cathedrals Group, 2018) and this notion is not lost on those who train at University of Chichester:

I think it all falls under the umbrella of social justice. Everything is: racial inequality - that feeds into social justice. Doing your best by EAL learners - that’s social justice. Ensuring that children who are underprivileged have the same access - that’s social justice. This university shows you how all these implications are all to do with social justice and how we could turn this around for children. (Student)

The document analysis sheds further light on the social justice agenda at Chichester. Specific modules on different programmes make reference to: education for social justice; challenging injustice; equality and diversity; and global citizenship. On one programme, the vision for a ‘Chichester Teacher’ is overt in it expectation that teachers should be ‘globally aware, courageous and committed to social justice’ (Document: Primary vision for a ‘Chichester Teacher’).

The students see their own commitment to social justice as integral to meeting children’s individual and holistic developmental needs: ‘that’s something I felt has been taught very well’ (Student). This is reinforced by tutor expectations that make their own moral purposes as teacher educators clear:

despite the grade that they might get […] I want them to know that the key thing is […] they need to go and have a love of learning and to make a difference in children’s lives […] and what an important job they’re going into […], what a privilege it is to teach and to be in education. (Tutor)

I think it’s really about humanity. I think that what we do …. is to sort of counter a rather Ofsted-driven, data-driven, assessment-driven philosophy… education is about more than that (Tutor)

Tutors have an educational vision and mission that goes beyond current English policy context. Open ended questions on the questionnaire, suggest that university tutors believe that students should leave with ‘a strong sense of social justice’, ‘a positive belief in the power of education to improve the lives of children’, ‘global awareness’, understanding of the holistic needs of the child’, and an understanding that ‘every child is different’. In the Cathedrals Group publication, *World Class Teachers, World Class Education,* Genders (2017) states that ‘good education promotes life in all its fullness’. It is evident from tutor comments and a document analysis of course content that the University of Chichester considers children’s holistic needs in a global context, and this can be seen as a way of supporting young people to flourish as human beings.

Training logs completed while students are on placements and collected as part of the document analysis, indicate that student teachers have bought into the concept of educating the whole child:

[Pupil] is always hard working and he is a motivated pupil who wants to do the best he can at all times. This week I’ve seen [pupil’s] self-belief and confidence […] He has been confident enough to contribute, ask me questions and help others […] Hopefully [Pupil] can continue to believe in himself as this can help to progress his learning even further. (Extract from student’s school-based log).

However, whilst tutors may model and value a child-centred pedagogy, students are also given time to discover their own teaching philosophy.

The opportunity to develop a personal philosophy for teaching is an important component of training at University of Chichester, particularly on its university-led routes. Questionnaire responses from school partners, university tutors and students all recognise that students develop a ‘clear philosophy of teaching’ on these routes. However, there is one small anomaly in the data set for students engaged in school-based training where school partners are less likely to suggest that this is an important characteristic.

Students on university-led programmes comment that they have the freedom to explore their own identities as teachers:

You develop your own pedagogy and your own philosophy and with the help of the tutors […] you can get that down to a fine point […]

It’s allowing you to be what you want to be […]

they haven’t criticised that passage either […] it’s like, that is you, and that’s lovely.

(Extract from group interview with student teachers)

Analysis from students’ questionnaire data highlights a belief that development in ‘professional identity’ is one of the most likely ways that the University adds value.

The Christian value of respecting others is evident in the way that trainees feel that they can find their own path as opposed to conforming to particular ways of thinking. This is integral to programmes and accentuated in many places, including academic assignments:

Be duly cautious and not over-sweeping about your own experience, but on no account should you discount it, because part of the philosophy of this course is to value the expertise and knowledge student teachers bring to the programme. (Document: Extract from School Direct PGCE handbook)

It is therefore an expectation at University of Chichester that students will develop their personal philosophies both formally and informally across their teacher training programmes.

Another important aspect of training to teach at Chichester derives from its community and fellowship:

We’re like one big family. (student)

It’s good in that everything we need is right here, it’s quite a small campus, it’s nice, you get to really know everyone and your lecturers are just up the road you can just have a chat to them whenever you need to. (Student)

It’s very student-facing; it’s all about the students. It is about ensuring they have a really good experience and that they get the most from their time here … I think that is down to the support we give and that sort of family atmosphere because of our small size that we can maintain or develop. (Tutor)

The small size of the university and avowal that it is a ‘family’ are evidently reasons why students and staff enjoy being part of the university. This is further qualified by questionnaire responses in that its ‘friendly environment’ is cited as the most important motivation for choosing Chichester for teacher training. Similarly, when asked to write the ‘first thing that comes to mind when you think of the University of Chichester’, nearly a third of students wrote comments that related to its small, friendly and supportive campus.

The university family, or community, is not just about the student experience on campus but also imperative to the strength of the partnership:

I have had students from different universities […] from Chichester, they are a lot more involved, they care a lot more about, not only their students, but about the school. Other universities have not been there as much – they put their student in and leave them, whereas with Chichester we have had a lot of involvement from the university […] The University really seems to care. (Mentor)

The university’s empathy and care for students is evident in the way that mentors and students speak about the support they have received. For example, interview participants mentioned how a tutor had voluntarily met a student on their weekend in order to provide further pastoral support and teaching guidance. Mentors also value the responsiveness of tutors when they have concerns or questions. One mentor explained how the extent of support that their student received resulted in a ‘rejuvenation’ of practice.

Document analysis also reinforces the high level of support available to student teachers. For example, there are a number of documents about the pastoral role that tutors have as ‘Academic Advisors’ who guide students through assignments, signpost them to services and help set professional development targets. School partnership documentation makes clear the supportive measures that can be put into place if a student is having difficulties and interview data suggest the university provides interventions ‘straight away’ (mentor) in order to ensure the partnership remains successful. If generosity is perceived as a Christian value, then the generosity of time and support given to students and schools can certainly be interpreted as being compatible to the university’s Christian foundation.

**Summary**

This research set out to investigate why trainees and partnership schools choose Chichester as a Christian foundation university, as well as what is particularly or deeply Christian about its provision. This case study of University of Chichester has shown a complex picture. Whilst the Christian foundation of the university is not evidenced through articulated religious preferences or practices within its teacher education programmes, the implicit values and spiritual beginnings is omnipresent. Tutors, school partners and trainees are happy to talk about: moral imperatives in the form of social justice education; the importance of a teaching philosophy; the educational community within the university and across its family of partnership schools; a commitment to children’s holistic development; and the caring supportive network around both the student teacher and the children that they teach. The University of Chichester has a strong reputation for developing teachers. It has been argued that a transmission of historical and Christian values can be identified within current training programmes, and therefore, the spirit of the university, and by association its Christian foundation, continues to shape the teachers graduating from Chichester.

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