DISTINCTIVENESS AND IDENTITY IN A CHALLENGING HE ENVIRONMENT:
A Unique Opportunity for Cathedrals Group Institutions

Full Report

THE CATHEDRALS GROUP
Distinctiveness and identity in a challenging HE environment: a unique opportunity for The Cathedrals Group institutions

Full report

By Ewart Wooldridge and Eddie Newcomb

The Cathedrals Group
This study was undertaken for The Cathedrals Group by Ewart Wooldridge and Eddie Newcomb of the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education

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FOREWORD

At a time of turbulence and change in every area of our core activities, it is important for every institution to recognise and re-affirm the values and activities essential to their identity. This means looking hard not just at an institution’s mission, brand and marketing, business model, but how its organisational character distinguishes it from others. It means listening to the community’s heartbeat and identifying what elements are built into its individual DNA.

The Cathedrals Group is an association of 15 universities and university colleges with Church foundations. Originally established as colleges of teacher education, each has expanded and diversified their provision into a wide range of subjects (including the arts, humanities, social sciences, business, management, sciences, professional health and social care) while maintaining a strong focus on teacher education. All our Members have teaching degree awarding powers. Several also have research degree awarding powers. Although our member institutions vary in terms of size, academic portfolio, denomination and their membership of the HE representative bodies and sector groups, we 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 third sector organisations.

I am delighted that HEFCE recognised the value of this study not just to our member institutions, but also its relevance to the wider academic community. We thank the Council for its support and for selecting Ewart Wooldridge and Eddie Newcomb from the Leadership Foundation as consultants to the project. They were both challenging and sympathetic in working with us to reflect on how an identity and distinctiveness arising from our foundation and character could be demonstrated in our activities today.

Professor T J Wheeler DL
Chair of The Cathedrals Group and Vice Chancellor of the University of Chester
1. KEY MESSAGES

From the very large number of conversations we held with students, staff, senior leaders, Vice Chancellors, Chairs of governing bodies and stakeholders, the consistent message we distilled was an absolute commitment to the quality of the student experience, built around respect for the individual, a strong sense of a caring community, and a profound values-based understanding of the wider purposes of universities in their immediate communities, in society, and the wider world.

These values contrast strongly with a vision of the future of HE which is market-focused, with the student as consumer, and a less central focus on the wider purposes of universities.

In a complex landscape of HE sector representative bodies, The Cathedrals Group is the only grouping which is overtly based on shared ethical beliefs and values. The new climate of change and competition in HE offers the institutions (individually or collectively) the opportunity to promote their strongly values based distinctiveness and identity focused on highly supportive approach to students and staff alike.

Many of these institutions are understandably reluctant in an essentially secular and multi-faith society to focus too much on their specific Christian traditions in their promotional material. On the other hand, there was a clear indication from talking to senior leaders that they saw opportunities to be grasped both in terms of positioning in a competitive student-centred market place and shaping their public stance on the wider role of universities in society against then backdrop of the new agendas for HE.

Cathedrals Group institutions may make use of this report and its findings at various levels:

(a) As individual institutions, they can put the evidence of distinctiveness to the best possible use in these challenging times, focusing on the key elements of distinctiveness and definable identity that emerged:

- ‘Lived out’ core values which reflect the history and provenance of the institutions
- A special approach to students, centred on the development of the whole individual
- A particularly strong tradition of volunteering and external community engagement
- A strong sense of internal community based on personal values of trust and respect
- Vibrant Chaplaincies which are an integral part of the university or college structure and which have a very positive effect on both staff and students
- An acute sensitivity in handling change
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- An approach to staff reflecting core values of individuals in a supportive community
- A distinctive approach to partnerships with other faith-based institutions

This evidence may be put to use in many ways, ranging from positioning their institution in a highly competitive world around the positive profile of their student experience, to using it in the continuing process of opinion shaping and lobbying government on the detail of legislation to enact the ‘Browne formula’.

(b) As a collective group of like-minded institutions they have an opportunity to update pre-existing guidance about the leadership and governance of their institutions in the light of the changing operational environment facing higher education, and to that end, we specifically suggest the updating the excellent guidance in the ‘Guide to governance in Church higher education institutions’ prepared by Michael Wright in 2007, whilst there is likely to be pressure on the governance arrangements across the sector, the group is in an excellent position to move more quickly than other institutions.

(c) As a collaborative force for change and influencing society’s views of the role of HE in society, they could incorporate these findings into an updating of the framework developed by Lord Dearing into the distinctiveness of the Church colleges, set in the context of the new challenges facing higher education over the next few years.

(d) We also tentatively suggest that that it might be helpful if there was an annual meeting between all the faith-based institutions and the relevant national bodies. We think that this would buttress the unique constituencies which the institutions have and strengthen their voice.

Institutions outside The Cathedrals Group in UK higher education may find the elements of distinctiveness and the characteristics of student, staff and community engagement a useful benchmark as they reassess their strategies and practices in challenging times.

2. THE PROJECT

2.1 The project is supported by a grant from HEFCE through its Leadership, Governance and Management Fund. The grant has been supplemented by funds from The Cathedrals Group itself.

2.2. The aims and objectives of the project were defined at the outset as follows:

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Aims and objectives

‘This project will enable and facilitate The Cathedrals Group of institutions to develop a clearer understanding of the potential for their distinctiveness as follows:

- Their distinctive contribution to the **student** experience through faith based values and ethical stance
- Their capacity to create a culture of values which contribute to a positive work environment for **staff**
- Their ability to engage with surrounding communities (not just faith-based) and to develop a strong form of **civic and community engagement**
- Their ability to make a major contribution to **economic and social cohesion** and sustainability in their surrounding communities, in uncertain times
- Their ability to respond positively and credibly to the potential scepticism about the relevance of such an institutional culture in a multi-faith society dominated by secular institutions and values.’

2.3. The outcomes were defined as follows:

**Outcomes**

**For The Cathedrals Group institutions**: a much deeper understanding developed by themselves, of their distinctiveness in relation to students, staff, surrounding communities and stakeholders.

**For the sector more widely**: a model and set of benchmarks that may offer non-faith based institutions the opportunity to seek insights into distinctiveness and differentiation.

2.4. The project has been undertaken on behalf of The Cathedrals Group by the Leadership Foundation. The consultants have been Ewart Wooldridge (Chief Executive of the Leadership Foundation) and Eddie Newcomb (a Key Associate of the Foundation and formerly Registrar and Secretary of the University of Manchester). The methodology used by the consultants was as follows:

- Preparation, meeting set-ups and literature search
- Initial scoping meeting with The Cathedrals Group Executive
- Visits to eight of the 14 institutions in the Group, nearly all of which included interviews with the Chair of the Governing Body and the Vice-Chancellor or Principal and all of which included focus groups usually consisting of staff (both academic and managerial), students, and representatives of the Chaplaincy; the institutions concerned were Bishop Grosseteste University College, the University of Chester, Canterbury Christ Church University, the University of Chichester, Leeds Trinity
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University College, Roehampton University, St Mary’s University College and the University of Winchester.

- Telephone or face-to-face interviews with others with a particular interest in the project:

  Rt Reverend John Saxbee, Bishop of Lincoln and Chair of both of the Church of England Board of Education and of the National Society Council
  Reverend Jan Ainsworth, Chief Education Officer & General Secretary of the National Society
  Reverend Dr. Stephen Heap, Church of England National Adviser for Higher Education
  Dr Oona Stannard, Chief Executive and Director of the Catholic Education Service for England and Wales
  Professor Margaret Noble, Vice-Chancellor of University College Plymouth (St Mark and St John)
  Professor Michael Wright, author of the book *Leadership in Christian Higher Education* and previously Vice-Chancellor at Canterbury Christ Church University
  Professor Gerald Pillay, Vice-Chancellor and Rector of Liverpool Hope University

- Report to the steering group and all CCUC Vice-Chancellors and Principals (November/December 2010)

- Dissemination to sector – Headline Report and event (January 2011)

- Concluding facilitation session of all CCUC Vice-Chancellors and Principals plus appropriate follow-up

- Final report to sector

During the project there were regular meetings and teleconferences with the steering group for the project chaired by Professor Tim Wheeler (Vice-Chancellor of the University of Chester), and comprising Professor Freda Bridge (Principal and Chief Executive of Leeds Trinity University College) and Reverend Dr Stephen Heap (Church of England Higher Education Advisor), with Sue Boorman (General Secretary of the group).

2.5. The consultants wish to express their warm appreciation to all those who participated in the project and who gave willingly of their time. Their readiness to discuss faith-based issues may in itself be a distinctive feature of this group of institutions. The consultants are also very grateful to members of the steering group for their helpful guidance and unfailing support during the project.
3. RELATED PROJECTS AND RELATED LITERATURE

This is by no means the first study of the particular qualities and characteristics of the UK universities which are Christian foundations. In the last 10 years, there was a specific contribution by the Church Schools Review Group chaired by Dearing\(^2\) and Michael Wright and James Arthur brought together a set of very perceptive essays in their recent studies on Church universities.\(^3\)

A summary of the recent literature is at Appendix A and some key themes emerge from it.

Firstly, these qualities and characteristics of the institutions arise naturally from a set of creative tensions. As Dame Janet Trotter, previously Vice-Chancellor of the University of Gloucestershire, suggested, the institution had to be:

- Excellent but not inaccessible
- Christian but not exclusive
- Nurturing but not constraining
- Proud of its locale but not parochial

Secondly, there is the significance of the genuine occupational requirement (GOR) - that key appointments on the senior executive team, the governing body and some senior academics should explicitly be filled by practising Christians. This appears to be a gradually eroding position, except for the most senior appointments, and even at that level there are now exceptions.

Thirdly, the centrality of the Chaplaincy is critical, both as the focal point of worship and a critical underpinning role in relation to student support, staff welfare, and the overall culture and feel of the institution.

Fourthly, there are the dilemmas facing institutions which are at financial risk over the choices of merger or collaboration partners. Dearing was very explicit in his advice about the desirability of seeking a like-minded institution as partner in preference to other (maybe more geographically logical) secular liaisons. The pressures for such mergers are bound to increase as the events that follow the Browne report and the autumn 2010 Government Spending Review put institutions under severe financial pressures.

Much of the literature contrasts the strong ethics and values-based leadership of the Christian-based institutions with the rhetoric of increased marketisation of universities, students as consumers/customers, and an overtly secular focus on learning.

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The apparent secularisation of universities comes at a time when faith issues in society (and indeed within university campuses) are increasing in significance. A HEFCE funded project on ‘Religious Literacy Leadership in HE’\(^4\) came to completion at the same time as this project.

It uses the term ‘religious literacy’ in the same way as ‘computer literacy’, encouraging in leaders an innate feel for/sensitivity to matters of religion and belief. Responding to the challenges facing universities of economic pressure and difficult social choices, the project encourages universities to engage thoughtfully and positively with faith, focusing on:

- **Complying with and broadening policies for equalities and diversity relating to religion and belief**
- **Ensuring that people from the widest range of cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds – at home and internationally – are attracted and supported by HE institutions resulting in the best possible student experience which is responsive to the religious needs of students (and staff) from all faith backgrounds (and none) and sustaining a culture which can draw on the potential for religious faiths to enrich the learning environment**
- **Addressing the challenges of hard debate about religion, including the possibility of radicalism on campuses**
- **Working with faith communities as one part of meeting the personal and collective challenges of unemployment, growing poverty and the stress associated with cuts in funding and resources**

The Religious Literacy Leadership Project is based on the assumption that universities help shape society and its future leaders, and have a key role to play in leading thoughtful informed debate and practice in relation to religious faith across society. The programme created a national network of university leaders underpinned by 10 Vice-Chancellor ‘champions’. Many of The Cathedrals Group universities participated actively in this project, and our Report raises the question of whether The Cathedrals Group should play a more overt and active part in that network.

Another related project is that of the Healthy Universities Network.\(^5\) Although having a secular dimension, it focuses on the issue of well-being in universities, whether of students or staff – physical, mental and spiritual. Well-being is increasingly a key focus of organisational study, and links to research by Professor David Guest\(^6\) and others into the

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‘psychological contract’ within organisations – that set of reciprocal expectations of leaders, staff, students and stakeholders that – if in the right balance – optimises organisational performance and well-being.

Our own report is consistent with this earlier work and certainly as financial pressures increase the issue of ‘what are universities for’ will command greater attention. At their best, they are unique coalitions of learning communities, underpinned by shared values of teaching, research and contribution to civic society. It is for this reason that they are usually described as ‘institutions’ rather than ‘organisations’, a useful distinction clarified in Sir David Watson’s book\(^7\) in 2000 by the following quote from the Dean of Westminster:

‘An organisation exists to get something done and requires management while an institution is less concrete and is largely held together by people in the mind as part of their frame of reference. An institution is composed of the diverse fantasies and projections of those associated with it. These ideas are not consciously negotiated or agreed upon, but they exist’.

The values espoused by Cathedrals’ Group universities to uphold the more holistic sense of an inclusive, values-based learning community positions them firmly as institutions.

4. **FINDINGS AND MAIN THEMES**

4.1. In this section we set out our main findings and the key themes that arose during the project. Two points should be made at the outset. First, as would be expected, it is very difficult to generalise about the 14 institutions which constitute The Cathedrals Group in England. Although they have shared values and characteristics, they naturally differ in style, approach and emphasis. Two examples will illustrate the point. In terms of their foundation the institutions in the Group range from Roehampton which one senior member of staff there described as ‘a secular university informed by the ethos of the different university Colleges’ (three of the four Colleges being faith-based: Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist) and Liverpool Hope which is proudly ecumenical in approach. To take another example, the Chair of one Governing Body was clear that the faith basis of the institution played a part in the way the Governing Body went about its business (meetings started with prayer and there was always a Chaplain’s report on the agenda) whereas another Chair thought there was no difference between meetings of his Governing Body and those of (non faith based) institutions elsewhere in the sector. Our own view is that members of the Group do have distinctive features and a definable identity which we seek to set out in the remainder of this report. Second, as we examined the areas listed in 2.2. and sought to compare the Group with other institutions in the sector, we became aware that in certain areas at least, the differences were matters of degree rather than substance. To take one

example, other institutions could no doubt argue with some justification that a rich student experience was their key priority. In this respect, as in others, we have therefore sought to capture the nuances which mark out the faith-based universities and colleges.

4.2. Our overall finding is that faith-based institutions do indeed have distinctive features and a definable identity which may be summarised as follows:

- ‘Lived out’ core values which reflect the history and provenance of the institutions
- A special approach to students, centred on the development of the whole individual
- A particularly strong tradition of volunteering and external community engagement
- A strong sense of internal community based on personal values of trust and respect
- Vibrant Chaplaincies which are an integral part of the university or college structure and which have a very positive effect on both staff and students
- An acute sensitivity in handling change
- An approach to staff reflecting core values of individuals in a supportive community
- A distinctive approach to partnerships with other faith-based institutions

These are not the only elements of distinctiveness. They – and other – features are addressed in more detail in succeeding sections of this report but it is worth saying at this stage that the degree of distinctiveness is largely determined by the quality of the institution’s leadership: the Chair of the Governing Body and, above all, the Chief Executive. During the study we encountered many excellent examples of individual and senior team leadership which had had a significant effect in terms of developing and demonstrating the core values of the institution.

4.3. At this stage we develop in more detail the key themes which have influenced the distinctiveness and identity. The first of these is the history of the institutions and their ‘story’. The importance of education for its own sake runs deep in Christian thinking: Church schools, for example, were established well before the state became involved. The origins of all of the faith-based institutions lie in teacher training and service to the community; these roots run deep and form the ‘provenance’ which makes the link between the past and the present in terms of ethos and values. The character and culture which have developed are not easily defined but during the project were twice described – once by a Chair of Governors and the other by a member of staff – as being ‘in the air’ of the community.

4.4. In nearly all of the focus group meetings the question was raised as to the extent to which size plays a part in the ethos of the institutions; is it easier to instil in a small institution a particular ethos and a firm sense of community? The answer to that is probably ‘yes’ and indeed one of the Vice-Chancellors was clear that if his institution exceeded
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10,000 students it would be difficult if not impossible to sustain the notion of community. At the same time, not all of the institutions in The Cathedrals Group meet this criterion and so other factors, which must include high quality leadership, play their part. So size is helpful but is not in itself sufficient to make an institution distinctive. Put another way, it is not just size and history which makes the institutions what they are but the Christian notion of the importance of community and service to others.

4.5. At the beginning of this section reference was made to the range of institutions and their different approaches. It is not surprising therefore to find that there is a spectrum of difference among the Group in terms of the extent to which the faith-based foundations are prominently displayed in marketing tools such as the Prospectus and the institution’s website. It has to be said that the impression is that the Roman Catholic institutions are more confident in making their history and heritage known to prospective students. This may well have the effect of attracting potential students who are generally sympathetic to Catholic traditions and values. Other institutions in the Group appear to be more reticent in their marketing, perhaps because, as one Chair of Governors put it, ‘We should be seen like any other institution, not seeking any special privileges and accepting competition from other institutions with different histories and cultures on their own terms’. They are perhaps being too coy about emphasising their value sets in their website content and other marketing materials. One could argue this can be done without over emphasis on the Christian provenance, and focusing on the importance of how they are welcoming to all faiths. This difference of emphasis is reflected within the institutions: all have chapels but Christian symbols have varying degrees of prominence.

4.6. Underpinning these various aspects, we found a very powerful distinction made was between ‘espoused’ values and the ‘lived’ values as practised by these institutions and the sense of a journey from one to the other. That is undoubtedly different from one to another but so often what underpinned the distinctiveness was an awareness of the provenance of, history of, or reasons for, such positive behaviours. There is an authenticity of these values which can be a key building block for good leadership. In this context a special part is played by the Chaplaincies in the institutions; this was universally stressed in our visits and discussions. One marked distinction between this group of institutions and others is that the Chaplaincy is an integral part of the organizational structure, with the Chaplain usually responsible at a higher level, reporting either to the Vice-Chancellor/Principal or a Pro-Vice-Chancellor. Such arrangements provide a powerful link between faith-based values and the day-to-day activities of the institution, especially in terms of links with its student services. This is hugely valuable to the institution and is a key influence on the student experience. More than this, the Chaplaincies are invariably the source of a wide range of activities and events for students, both within the institution and outside. In the course of our visits, students regularly paid tribute to the work of the Chaplaincy staff and the way in which they enriched community life, taking a personal interest in individuals and their development. This is a process which starts from the student’s arrival with the Chaplains playing an active and welcoming role in ‘Freshers’ Week’ and working harmoniously with the Students’ Union.
4.7. Sustaining and developing a particular culture or set of values does not, of course, happen by itself. Leadership is very important, particularly by the Governing Body and its Chair and especially the Vice-Chancellor/Principal. We identified specific cases when the advent of a new Vice-Chancellor/Principal, supported by the Chair of Governors, had a profound impact in re-stating the faith heritage of the institution and increasing its prominence both in terms of presentation to the world outside and of lived out values within. Although the GOR (genuine occupational requirement to be a practising Christian) – referred to elsewhere – may in a small number of institutions be eroding for the most senior leadership positions, other contractual routes seem to have been satisfactorily found to ensure new VCs maintain a commitment to the faith-based tradition and values of the institution. We found evidence too that the institutions in the Group regularly reviewed their mission, values and ethos at Governing Body level. These are important distinctions between this group of universities and colleges and others in the sector. Finally, whilst good communications are a feature of other kinds of institution, there was a consistent endorsement in the focus groups of the principle of openness which they saw in their senior management.

4.8. All faith-based institutions have had to adapt to changes in society and have faced – and continue to face – the challenge of being successful 21st century universities and colleges whilst seeking to retain their core values and ethos. Our clear impression is that they are rising to this challenge: all are now welcoming to students ‘of all faiths or none’, for example, and it is particularly striking that Muslim students and their parents are happy to favour faith-based institutions where they know that faith is valued and where their faith will be respected. More will be said later about partnerships but, as part of the process of adaptation, many, if not all, of the institutions in The Cathedrals Group have developed links with institutions which have other histories and cultures, some purely secular. The University of Chester, to provide another example, successfully merged with Warrington Collegiate Institute, an institution without a religious foundation. Such embracing of a ‘wider’ or ‘no faith’ position have taken place without undermining the Christian heritage and this flexibility of purpose allied to tenaciously sustaining core values should prove to be a great strength in the difficult times ahead.

4.9. At a time when the ‘market’ is likely to dominate thinking about higher education and when that education is seen as a commodity to be bought and sold, the values of the faith-based institutions may, if clearly presented, enable them to take the high moral ground. That will give them a distinctive edge in the coming years and one which is likely to very attractive to many students and parents who are uneasy about the current direction of HE policy.

5. LINKS WITH DIOCESAN AND NATIONAL CHURCH BODIES

5.1. We explored whether the institutions’ links with diocesan and national Church bodies contributed to their distinctiveness and, if so, in what way. It is clear that all the institutions
have a close relationship with their diocese, often reflected in the presence on the Governing Body of the Bishop or another diocesan officer such as the Director of Education or the Diocesan Secretary/Chief Executive. Two differences were observed: in addition to close links with the local diocese, the Roman Catholic institutions also had links with local parishes and, in addition, appeared to be more closely associated with the national Church hierarchy. Dr Stannard, Chief Executive and Director of the Catholic Education Service for England and Wales, told us that the Service maintained a strong relationship with the higher education university colleges. She arranges termly meetings/seminars which are attended by the Principals and Chairs of the Governing Bodies (and sometimes others). Currently, the Service is preparing a statement for the Bishops’ Conference, in consultation with the four HEIs, on the likely impact of the Government’s decisions on the Browne Report and related matters. Thus there is a readiness to help RC HEIs, partly because of their importance to the provision of teacher training and to their local communities, but also because of a wish to support to the common good of students. It should be added that Liverpool Hope University, uniquely ecumenical, is also invited to the termly meetings. The Rt Reverend John Saxbee, Bishop of Lincoln and Chair of both the Church of England Board of Education and of the National Council, confirmed that the national Anglican organisations also had close links with the institutions though it appears that the Roman Catholic arrangements are rather more structured.

5.2. From these discussions we suggest two possible actions: first, that it might be helpful if there was an annual meeting between all the faith-based institutions and the relevant national bodies. We think that this would buttress the unique constituencies which the institutions have and strengthen their voice. Second, for the same reason, there may well be value if the national Anglican organisations met regularly with the institutions on the lines made by the Catholic Education Service.

5.3. The importance of these links, locally and nationally, is that this is an additional constituency for the institutions concerned. This is not insignificant in current circumstances when universities and colleges will be looking for external support. It is, moreover, a constituency rather different from those of other institutions in the sector.

6. THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

6.1. It has already been stressed that a key – perhaps the key – distinguishing characteristic of Cathedrals Group institutions lies in the nature of the student experience. In the wake of the Browne Review and the major shift in emphasis to the student as customer, consumer and funder, the major evidence in our discussions of such a high value placed on of the student relationship must be a critical factor in distinctiveness to which The Cathedrals Group of institutions should play strongly. A consistent theme throughout the discussions was of the way in which the university, working so well as a community, supported individuals and was concerned about personal values of **dignity, trust and respect**. Reference was made in a number of institutions to the ethos being sustained in a day to day
manner through the language used – between members of staff and between staff and students. To underline the point, one Vice-Chancellor emphasised that no one in the institution referred to students as ‘clients’ or ‘customers’; on the contrary students were seen as central to the notion of a ‘learning community – a real community and not a virtual one’. It was pointed out too that the notion of ‘alma mater’ was a real one; a mother knows her children as individual persons with different characteristics and different needs. This approach is highly relevant to what is said in 4.9 above.

6.2. Education – part of the Group’s heritage as teacher training colleges – is aimed at developing students ‘in the round’, to foster their intellectual, personal and spiritual growth. There is, as one participant put it, an emphasis on ‘formation’ as opposed to ‘information’. The aim is to nurture students in preparation for becoming responsible ‘global citizens’ in a complex world with a sense of fairness and social justice. Other specific priorities mentioned more than once were the value of diversity and equality, not just in this country but internationally too. Expressed in different ways by senior staff at different institutions, these sentiments were echoed in the focus groups. Reference was made too to the warm staff-student relationships and to the caring environments provided through various forms of pastoral and welfare support.

6.3. A number of examples were given of the opportunities provided to students to think about their own belief systems and values, some provided via the Chaplaincies, others by the institutions. One Chaplaincy, for example, provides a course in Catholic teaching. Another university provided a particularly striking example. Every Wednesday at 13.00 the place stops for a ‘Foundation Hour’ (no lectures or other activities) when there is an opportunity to listen to/attend something inspirational, not necessarily religious. This provides a time for students and staff to reflect on issues other than those relating to their programmes of study. These important examples could no doubt be replicated in the other institutions and it is important that such elements should be emphasised in institutions’ publicity as a mark of their distinctiveness.

6.4. Together with these elements is a strong volunteering tradition. Other universities have now developed volunteering programmes but in the faith-based institutions these activities go back rather further. Volunteering arises from the notion of service to others associated with the Christian ethic, covering activities not simply in the local community but further afield too, including overseas. It is a way, so to speak, of adding to society’s social capital by those in whom social capital had been invested. Of course, such volunteering may, as elsewhere in the sector, be driven in some cases by a humanist ethos, rather than a specifically Christian, but the contribution to the community is valuable – and no doubt encouraged by the institutional environment.

6.5. It is interesting to note the performance indicators quoted by the institutions to demonstrate the quality of the student experience. One, for example, pointed out the fact over the last five years, there had been only 10 references to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator and the institution had been vindicated in nine of these. It was thought that,
quite apart from the level of student satisfaction this showed, it possibly indicated that with regard to student issues, the institution was more forgiving and more inclined to reach an amicable settlement. Others referred to their scores in the National Student Survey and to the extraordinarily positive attitude of international students. Another again quoted a recent OFSTED report which had commented favourably on its diversity and equality across both staff and students.

6.6 Finally, one other feature which arose in the focus groups should be noted. Students who came to the institution with little or no faith background commented very positively on their experience and on the institutional atmosphere. Two anecdotes from different colleges are perhaps worth mentioning: one student who was unaware of the faith basis of the institution when she applied and was surprised that the first person to welcome her to the campus was the Chaplain: she has since become one of the stalwart supporters of the Chaplaincy. Another student came to the institution as a postgraduate, having spent her undergraduate years at a non faith-based university, and noticed immediately the difference in atmosphere and approach.

7. **THE STAFF EXPERIENCE**

7.1 In our interviews, many of the factors affecting the student experience impinged equally on the staff experience. Above all, there was a strong sense of inclusive values, and regular mention was made of a culture of respect, dignity and trust. The importance of symbols of the faith background such as the chapel were mentioned, as was staff awareness of the history and provenance of the values.

7.2 However, the interviewees were very clear that their institutions were universities in the fullest sense of the word, serving the full spectrum of society – ‘all faiths and no faith’. There was a very clear view that the core curriculum had to stand on its merits as in any other university. Whilst some had a particular focus on theology, the Christian tradition did not distort the overall academic offer of the institution. Educational quality was of profound importance. The shared background in teacher training, with a relatively smaller role for research, may have contributed to the concentration on high quality teaching and pastoral activities.

7.3 In terms of the staff and organisational culture, much discussion took place on the relevant importance of size. All but one institution visited were at the smaller end of the spectrum. However, at the one much larger institution, (Canterbury Christ Church University), all interviewees were clear about the importance of ‘lived’ values, and the efforts to embed an inclusive culture across a complex set of campuses. The closeness to such significant Christian symbols as Canterbury Cathedral, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, was quoted as important.
7.4. On the human resources (HR) side, the general view was that policies were not framed around the Christian values, but reflected generally accepted principles of sound HR. These happened to align with a staff culture associated with very positive values. More than one interviewee was keen to demonstrate the ways in which they were perceived as an employer of choice. What was also stressed was the way in which the HR policies were implemented reflected the traditions of the institution. As noted earlier, it appears to be fairly common practice for senior staff at interview to be asked whether they sympathised with the faith-based values of the institution concerned and what they might contribute. This is important but there may be scope to carry through a similar line of questioning in staff satisfaction surveys and the like. What current staff are thinking about the values of the institution is as important, if not more so, than the interview discussions.

7.5. The role of Chaplain was important in relation to staff, but not as overtly as in the case of the student experience, although in at least one institution the Chaplain had a role in the staff induction programme. In addition, their general support provided an added dimension to welfare and well-being, particularly helping staff through personal difficulties and crises.

7.6. There was some awareness that the overall culture of staff relations in some institutions might almost be too ‘cosy’, and that low levels of staff turnover might be ‘unhealthy’ for the organisation. This was raised in the context of the major financial and organisational pressures facing HEIs following the Browne Report and Government Spending Review. There was a concern that it would be difficult to maintain current expectations of values in dealing with staff against the backdrop of major reorganisation and potential job losses. By contrast, there was a recognition that this scenario could provide a useful challenge to a rather complacent, and overtly supportive, climate.

7.7. At the top leadership level, there was a general recognition that the tradition of Christian values provided a helpful ‘compass’ or ‘filter’ for making decisions affecting staff. Whatever the strength of view about the faith-based tradition, all senior managers approached were adamant about the values-based philosophy of the institution.

8. COMMUNITY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

8.1. All the institutions reported on the specific commitments which they had to external Christian partners and stakeholder institutions – such as diocesan, cathedral, and parochial. In addition, they had explicit links with Church schools and colleges and an outreach responsibility (Christian and secular) into their communities. A number of institutions were involved in the founding of academies, often in partnership with the diocese and others. Again, we see this as a key link with the community as a whole. Church schools continue to be popular with parents because of their standards and values. This is another way of giving expression to the ethos of the institutions at a time when there is a sense of the commercialisation of education.
These formal links gave added weight to the general outward-facing role of the institutions. They could even ‘soften’ the negative impact of their institutions on community (e.g. noise, drinking etc) but not to any great degree! Indeed, there could be an unfortunate dissonance between student behaviour and perceived institutional values!

8.2. The ethical values espoused by the institutions were generally reported as useful when deciding on the nature of external partnerships. There was a powerful focus on social justice, human rights and citizenship. These values underpinned a strong emphasis on student volunteering, with a particular stress on philanthropy, supporting deprived groups and engaging with the arts. With the institutions’ significant teacher training background, the community benefit of teaching practice in local schools was stressed. The long history of students undertaking teaching practice in denominational – and other – schools has resulted in the development of community support for the institutions by a constituency of parents and ex-pupils.

All the institutions made a significant economic impact on their surrounding community/region, but no direct link appeared to be made with their Church/ethics based foundation except for the valuable profile of being linked to high visibility institutions such as Cathedrals! It was noted that Cathedrals were valuable venues for degree ceremonies.

8.3. There was generally a real concern to be open to all faiths in the community and there were some excellent examples of where the faith-bases of the HEI paved the way to strong partnership projects with other faiths (e.g. Muslim and Hindu). To give just one example, Bishop Grosseteste University College has developed links with Muslim schools in Leicestershire. Equally, many interviewees were careful to stress that they wanted to be perceived in line with other secular institutions, rather than aligning too closely with the Christian tradition.

8.4. Whilst there are overlaps with the activities undertaken in other kinds of HEI, the evidence we gathered suggested that it is different in nature if not in scale. There are two reasons for this which are consistent with what we say elsewhere in the report:

(a) Community engagement is an integral part of the philosophy and ethos of the faith-based institutions and is seen as a core part of their holistic approach to making the world a better and fairer place. This has a strong influence on the kind of community activities undertaken – some examples are given below.
(b) The importance of community involvement is encouraged by the Churches themselves, again as an integral part of a coherent approach.

8.5. So far as (b) above is concerned, we can turn to the Church of England Board of Education’s report *Mutual Expectations* published in 2005. This sets out a possible relationship between the CoE and Church (or Anglican foundation) HEIs. Annex 3 of the report sets out 10 ways in which the Church can offer the partnership with ‘its’ HEIs and 10 ways in which the HEIs can offer the partnership with the Church. The first group includes:
Distinctiveness and identity in a challenging HE environment

- ‘to learn from the experience of the HEIs in developing networks of influence and support and to see them as partners in the work of transforming society
- to share the insights and commitment of the HEIs, for example, in the promotion of the inclusion of people who are socially disadvantaged and of international students’

The second group – ways in which HEIs can support the partnership with the Church – includes, for example:

- ‘to be actively involved in the development of local, regional, national and international communities, with a continuing regard for sustainability
- through active dialogue with those of other faith traditions, to promote the spiritual and religious development of individuals and communities
- to foster the moral and human integrity of individuals and the communities to which they contribute’

This guidance was reinforced in the Church’s Higher Education Strategy of 2007.

8.6. Similarly, we might draw on the Joint Statement of Trinity, Newman and St Mary’s about their Catholic identity. The statement includes, for example:

- ‘As Catholic colleges, we strive, through developing our unique identity and mission, to serve the whole of society and its peoples
- A Catholic university...is called on to become an ever more effective instrument of cultural progress for individuals as well as for society
- Our mission and work testifies to the Catholic Church’s ongoing commitment to the service of society in this country and internationally, offering its resources for the good of all’

8.7. This relationship between Church and HEI in developing the notion of service to the community has quite different roots from the Third Leg work of other HEIs and appears to be driven by a distinctive moral imperative. A particular feature is that international community activities are driven by the same motives as those for local community engagement. Given that the work in the community locally and internationally is undertaken in a faith-based belief of service, it may well be that the outcomes of such work are different qualitatively from those undertaken in other institutions but it is beyond the scope of the current project to test this hypothesis.

8.8. Finally, it may well be that the institutions could make more of their service to communities in their marketing strategies. Again, this might be very appealing to those who see current education policy as forcing universities down a very economic and instrumental road - as opposed, say, to Newman’s idea of a university.
9. THE FUTURE

9.1. This study examines distinctiveness and identity not by reference to the curriculum offered or the nature of academic research undertaken but to the seven aspects set out in 4.2 above. These aspects, repeated below, confirm that the faith-based institutions are different, at least in degree from the rest of the sector:

- ‘Lived out’ core values which reflect the history and provenance of the institutions
- A special approach to students, centred on the development of the whole individual
- A particularly strong tradition of volunteering and external community engagement
- A strong sense of internal community based on personal values of trust and respect
- Vibrant Chaplaincies which are an integral part of the university or college structure and which have a very positive effect on both staff and students
- An acute sensitivity in handling change
- An approach to staff reflecting core values of individuals in a supportive community
- A distinctive approach to partnerships with other faith-based institutions

9.2. Moreover, we suggest that, taken together, these elements – qualitative and value driven and not quantitative – could be developed for the rest of the sector into a new model and benchmarks for determining distinctiveness as universities seek success in a highly competitive world. Ethos and value systems are likely to be more important in future as prospective students ask themselves what different institutions have to offer and what kind of service they will receive. As is stressed throughout this report, these can be highly persuasive features in a finance dominated world.

9.3. In particular, all institutions in higher education will be going through major processes of change, creating new policies, working practices and other procedures, aimed at being leaner, slimmer and more agile. What came from our discussions was a ‘distinctiveness’ based upon the values by which staff were treated, a sensitivity of handling change and an approach that, whilst having a conventional set of HR policies and procedures, paid much regard to these values in the implementation of those policies.

9.4. Distinctiveness is, however, not just about individual institutions. It was interesting how the Catholic-only foundation institutions we engaged with were very much a national/international coalition had had agreed a common statement of mission. Also, three of the Anglican foundation institutions (Canterbury Christ Church, York St John and Chester) had formed an alliance during the year, and it would be interesting to see whether this itself (constituting between 30,000 and 40,000 students), could be a new form of non-geographically based cluster, focusing around values and culture.

9.5. At a time when the percentage of the UK population actually worshipping is falling, there is no doubt that faith is becoming more prominent as an issue in society. In the course of this project we engaged actively with the Religious Literacy Leadership project led by
York St John, and there are clearly many parallels that will need to be maintained. Indeed, Cathedrals Group institutions are particularly well placed to take a lead on the continuing development of the Religious Literacy Leadership process.

9.6. The Cathedrals Group of institutions appears to be in a good place to respond to the challenges now facing higher education; they are well placed to stress their particular distinctiveness and identity, particularly in terms of the value placed on each individual student and the holistic approach to their development. They have a clear vision and purpose for acting as they do. Some other institutions may well find it more difficult to adjust.

9.7. Faith remains of continuing importance in a secular world. In his address to both House of Parliament in September, His Holiness the Pope emphasised this and argued that ‘the world of reason and the world of faith – the world of secular rationality and the world of religious belief – need one another and should not be afraid to enter into a profound and on-going dialogue for the good of our civilisation’. Faith-based institutions are in a strong position to contribute actively to such a dialogue and, in doing so, they will continue to earn the support of Government, the Funding Council, the Churches, public opinion and perhaps, above all, their students, past, present and prospective.

Ewart Wooldridge CBE
Eddie Newcomb OBE
Leadership Foundation for Higher Education

February 2011

The executive summary and full versions of this report are available on The Cathedrals Group website: http://cathedralsgroup.org.uk
APPENDIX A: LITERATURE SURVEY

Leadership of Christian HEIs – The question of ‘Distinctiveness’

About the Institutions

- Today there are 14 publicly funded Church higher education institutions (HEIs) in England and one in Wales
- Half of the HEIs are universities, awarding their own taught or research degrees, and the others are university colleges with teaching DAPS (degree awarding powers).
- The Council of Church Colleges and Universities (CCUC) – The Cathedrals Group – is a national body bringing together the leaders of these 15 institutions and linking with representatives from the Anglican, Methodist and Roman Catholic Churches.
- History of the Church HEIs
  - The Church was a large provider of education (primary and secondary) long before the government became the predominant provider
  - In the early 19th century, the Church of England recognised the need to establish teacher training colleges for those who would work in the schools
  - All of the Church HEIs began as teacher training colleges.
  - They remained predominantly concerned with teacher training right up until the 1970s, and were also small in comparison to other HEIs (which were growing in number and size at the time)
  - The 1970s saw a sharp decline in the number of teacher training places generally. During this period many teacher training colleges (Church and secular) were subsumed within larger, more diverse, universities and polytechnics
  - Those Church HEIs which remained after this point, have generally grown and diversified in curriculum terms, offering a broad range of subjects
  - Teacher education does remain an important part of the curriculum and many church HEIs are also strong in health and social care, as well as in clergy and lay training.

Distinctiveness

Many of the Church HEIs are now not immediately distinguishable from secular universities. For example, by visiting the website you often do not get the impression that the university or university college is in any way different to a secular HEI – they offer a wide range of subjects with no particular Christian emphasis in the curriculum, the student body and staff body are diverse and not predominantly Christian, and only some universities allude to their Christianity on their mission page. This has led many people to ask whether the Church HEIs
are losing their distinctiveness. In what follows I draw together several authors’ ideas about what Church HEIs can and should do or be in order to maintain their distinctiveness. Some of the suggestions are things which already happen to a large extent, and others could happen more, or are at risk of changing. I start by mentioning concrete, fairly practical, suggestions which different authors refer to, and go on to discuss the more nebulous subjects of values and leadership, and ways in which Church HEIs can offer something unique in this area.

Before this, it is worth briefly reflecting on some of the tensions a Church HEI college today has to hold, which go some way to explaining why they may be having some kind of a crisis of identity. Janet Trotter, the then Head of the College of St Paul and Mary in Cheltenham, suggests that the institution had to be:

- Excellent but not inaccessible
- Christian but not exclusive
- Nurturing but not constricting
- Proud of its locale but not parochial

These show the dialectic or tensions in being true to the past while also being open to the future, and are worth considering in light of how a Church HEI today can remain distinctive.

The literature identifies a series of reflections about the distinctiveness of church HEIs:

- A formal committee composed of members of the governing body and staff of the institution should be set up with the particular aim of enhancing the college’s distinctiveness and responsibility for taking steps to do this
- In order to share best practice a series of regular visitations should be established, every 4-5 years, involving senior people drawn from the Church and from Church HEIs other than the one being visited
- Several appointments should explicitly be for practising Christians, as well as others for people in sympathy with and willing to support the mission of the university or university college as Church HEIs. These include:
  - Several members of the governing body
  - The Vice-Chancellor/Chief Executive
  - Others in senior positions (there may be disagreement over how many)
  - A significant core of academic staff (again, this is less clear)

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• If an institution has a GOR (genuine occupational requirement) in their hiring, it is important for them to be clear and open about it

• The Church HEIs should continue their legacy in terms of making substantial contributions to meeting the needs of Church schools, and training religious studies teachers for secular schools. In both of these aims, programmes should be developed with the needs of the schools in mind (including, for example, professional development courses for head teachers, teachers and governors of Church schools)

• More generally, recognising the responsibility for fostering special relationships with Church schools, theological education, and effective education scholarship and research contributions to Church bodies

• The Chaplaincy should remain a central position, important in college governance, in reviewing the health of the whole institution and its structures, and in dialogue with scholars – the role should reach far beyond maintaining the chapel and services of public worship

• Church HEIs should try and avoid merging with other institutions, particularly secular institutions, as experience has shown that when this has happened Christian distinctiveness tends to be gradually lost. When the viability of a Church HEI becomes in doubt, it is recommended that the institution gives serious consideration to a merger or partnership with another Church HEI

• The Church HEIs should keep strong ties to the dioceses and parishes – for example, the dioceses should draw the institutions to the attention of Christians considering teaching as their vocation

• The Church should also consider what long-term role the church HEIs might have in the pre- and post-ordination training of the clergy and other workers

• The Church HEIs should provide the opportunity and space for Christian worship, and public celebration of faith – and should also provide provisions for the practice of other faiths

• Prayers should be said at occasions such as degree congregations and meetings of the governing body

Challenges

There are several particular challenges which the leadership of Church HEIs face, especially concerning maintaining their distinctiveness. These include:

• Finding candidates of a suitable quality for the governing body and senior posts who meet the faith requirements set by the institution’s constitution
Distinctiveness and identity in a challenging HE environment

- Fostering the mission of the HEI and maintaining those features that make it a distinctively faith-based institution, including chaplaincy, while respecting the diversity of society
- Maintaining the genuine occupational requirement (GOR) for its Chief Executive and senior staff, if it chooses
- Maintaining close relationships with the Church with which it is linked – good communication systems characterised by mutual trust and close continuing cooperation and continuing dialogue are essential to the maintenance of this relationship
- Operating a modern governance structure while maintaining the faith dimension
- Church HEIs will need to work hard to maintain the value and currency of their own pay and conditions packages viewed against sector comparators

Leadership and Values

The question of whether Church HEIs do or should embody values which are distinctive to other colleges is complex. On the one hand, there is no clear specific ‘Christian’ view on leadership, there is no stereotypical Church HEI, and several ‘values’ which Christians might claim as distinctive also exist in other faiths and among secular people. However, there are certain ideas and values which are very Christian in origin, and which have implications for higher education which Christian HEIs can and do draw on to articulate and build on their distinctiveness. Some of these ideas and values, and how they impact Christian colleges and universities, are discussed below:

**Transformational**: The idea of transformation is deeply embedded in Christianity. The Gospel transforms individuals and situations through Christ’s redemptive love and God’s transforming grace. The idea of a powerful and transformative experience can inform education, even without it being explicitly about a Christian transformation. However, it does usually involve an individual discovering some kind of ‘meaning’ – as Janet Trotter points out, transformational learning has been described as ‘the process of making meaning of one’s experience’ and is often traced back to Paulo Freire’s consciousness raising in the middle of last century.\(^9\) It includes critical reflection, reflective discourse, and action. An example today for an HEI of transformational learning might be study abroad trips, especially to places with histories and challenges vastly different to our own. Seeking to make transformational learning a cornerstone of education is something Christian colleges can aspire to.

**Vocational emphasis**: The idea of a vocation (calling) is a deeply Christian idea, one which differs in many ways from the currently predominant idea of a career. Emphasizing vocation

and helping students to develop and sense of vocation and find their vocation – or way in which they can flourish and in so doing contribute to the world – is mentioned by several authors as something central to Church HEIs. It is not incidental that they teach many vocational subjects, or ‘caring professions’ (teaching, healthcare, social care, etc) – as this is in line with the Christian ethos.

**Service oriented/ promotion of social justice**
The idea of being ‘in service’, both to God and to people in the world, is also very strong in Christianity. It goes hand in hand with a sense of social justice, and in terms of education it means prioritising issues of social justice and making these central to thinking and learning at the university. This surfaces in Church HEIs in different ways – for some it is about ‘recognising that we are all global citizens and taking a responsibility for sustainability seriously’, for others it involves making special provision for ‘students from developing countries and from sections of society which have been traditionally underrepresented in higher education, including those with disabilities and from minority ethnic groups’, and for others it is about encouraging voluntary service projects. It also can influence the curriculum, putting social justice at the heart of what is taught, how it is taught, and why it is taught.

**Style of leadership:** Janet Trotter argues that the Christianity of the leadership should inform the style of organisational leadership: ‘Heroic, authoritarian and bureaucratic styles of leadership are inappropriate in an organisation which claims a Christian foundation. The Vice-Chancellor and the senior team always need to act in the light of the Christian values espoused, devolving power, developing healthy relations, seeking organic sustainable growth and fostering corporate responsibility: in effect, supporting the transformation of the organisation and those associated with it by providing opportunities for God’s grace to flow through its life and work.’ Michael Wright also touches on Christian conceptions of leadership – for example, ‘servant leadership means that I should never forget that all my colleagues have needs which are no different from mine, hence, for example, there is no justification for me to expect to travel first class if standard class is the norm’.

**A challenge to the dominant scientific/economic paradigm**
This is arguably the most profound way in which Church HEIs can draw on their perspective to offer something distinctive in today’s world – and it encompasses all of the preceding points and more.

The challenge in articulating or explaining the scientific/economic paradigm is that we are so much in this paradigm that most people would not recognise it as a paradigm, lens, or perspective, but as the only possible ‘objective’ reality. What follows is only the most

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10 Ibid.
12 James, A and Wright, M (Eds), Leadership in Christian Higher Education. Exeter: Imprint Academic, p 76.
curious discussion, as it is too big a subject to go deeply into in such a short paper, but hopefully it can provide food for further thought.

Arguably, the ‘scientific paradigm’ can be traced back to the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the scientific revolution and enlightenment, and Descartes’ separation of the material and spiritual realms of human existence. The ‘scientific paradigm’ which arose at this time and has dominated the academy (and indeed society more generally) since, emphasized cause/effect relationships in the material world, and was concerned only with that which was observable and empirically measurable. Terms which have been used to describe this paradigm include ‘logical empiricism’, ‘objectivism’, ‘positivism’, ‘determinism’ and ‘reductionism’. The latter implies that everything can be understood in terms of, or is reducible, to its parts.

More recently, the ‘scientific paradigm’ has also become intertwined with the ‘economic paradigm’, and ‘where once the language of science usurped that of theology as the dominant mode of discourse in society, now the language of economics seems to hold that position’. 14 Jeremy Law describes the ideology of neo-liberalism as the idea, predominant in our time, that ‘what is good for business is good for us all’. 15 In terms of our understanding of people, at the extreme the guiding neo-liberal ideology conflates the person with the consumer and ‘fragments the self into a concern for immediate satisfaction of desire, and this outside of any clear account of how the self relates to others and to the wider environment.’ 16 However, as Law points out, ‘while a consumer society holds out the tantalising prospect of being able to define one’s own goals in life through one’s own choices, what degree of freedom is actually on offer in an environment where the manipulation of desire (not just through advertising but via its contribution to a seductive tale of ‘life-style’) is common-place and where the range of choices is already pre-defined?’ 17

In terms of higher education, the scientific/economic focus is influential in many profound ways. Below are a few examples of this:

- The audit culture: Law argues that this is a result of neo-liberalism: ‘if all is competition, then one must be on guard against being cheated. This may go some way to explaining the ubiquity of audit processes. Unchecked we must assume that the other is lazy, unproductive and not to be trusted.’ There is no doubt that the audit culture is very much a part of higher education today – for example, the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in the UK, where research output on institutions and individuals is measured and ranked.

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17 *Ibid*. 
• The language of the ‘knowledge economy’ forms the basis of a new academic propriety. A major goal of higher education (the major goal, some would argue) has become to produce graduates who can contribute knowledge which will make the nation or region economically competitive. This, at its most simplistic, reduces knowledge to having only a ‘utilitarian value’ and undermines knowledge for the sake of knowledge, learning, growth or betterment. More concretely, it also means that subjects that are seen to aid economic competitiveness also tend to attract more funding, thus influencing what is taught and why.

• The academic subjects themselves are heavily influenced (although perhaps more by the scientific paradigm than the economic paradigm) – for example, the social sciences have been attempting to legitimize themselves by moving towards more ‘empirical’ and ‘evidence based’ approaches which make them more acceptable to the scientific community. In so doing, however, they often cease to focus on bigger and perhaps more important questions which cannot be empirically validated.

• ‘Students, who might have formerly understood themselves as primarily members of an academic community are now encouraged to view themselves as customers of a ‘higher education outlet’. Accordingly, pedagogy becomes constrained to the popular, to the marketable. Academic disciplines, formed by long tradition, are raided to procure attractive morsels served as easily digestible modules.’

• Students are uncritically initiated into secular ways of thinking by using secular categories of explanation that exclude or ignore alternatives. While the belief may be that what is objective is being taught, it fails to examine critically and deeply one’s own starting points and premises, and recognising that everyone, even so-called ‘objectivists’ are coming from a certain view. As Rollo May, an existential psychologist, observes, ‘it is a gross, albeit common, error to assume naively that one can observe facts best if one avoids all preoccupation with philosophical assumptions. All he does, then, is mirror uncritically the patriarchal doctrines of his own limited culture.’

So, if this is the currently dominant paradigm, how can Church HEIs offer something distinctive? In straightforward terms, they can allow ‘meaning’ back into the academic community. This does not necessarily entail pushing a particularly Christian conception or world view (although it can do; this, of course, is the decision of the individual institutions to make). However, it entails rejecting scientific or economic reductionism as the only way in which to make sense of the world, and allowing values-based enquiry back into the academy. Church HEIs, because of their heritage, are in a good position to do this. In this regard they may have more in common with other religious organisations than with mainstream secular organisations.

18 Ibid, p 186.
19 Arthur, p.14
Pillay talks about the ‘long view’ of education – and argues that the ‘long view’ requires more than a purely empirically driven university can provide. He says that Christian HEIs can make a distinctive choice to provide a community of learning that educates ‘in the round’ – body, mind, and spirit: Philosophy and science are nurtured alongside each other, and the hope is to produce rounded citizens with a global sense – not just specialists in their field.\textsuperscript{21}

Law suggests that today’s ‘ecological crisis’ is fundamentally a ‘crisis of values’, and that ‘a fundamental recognition of our radical dependence upon the ecosystem of the earth combines with the need for international cooperation at an unprecedented level to demonstrate the hopeless fantasy of the autonomous agent of desire that is the anthropological model at the heart of neo-liberalism.’\textsuperscript{22} He argues that education is, or should be, ‘about coming to understand one’s existence within a total ecology.’ As Rowan Williams says (cited by Law) it is fundamentally about relationship: relationship with others, with the whole environment, and with God. Law goes on to say that ‘one knows not in order to dominate or control, to manipulate and turn into profit (the more modern sense), but rather to participate in the world and to understand oneself in relation to God.’\textsuperscript{23} This vision is a compelling vision even if one were to replace ‘God’ with ‘the world’ or ‘existence’ or even ‘nature’ – and thus has a lot to offer even to non-Christians. With regards to the economy, Law makes the powerful point, against the current economic focus that:

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In one sense there is nothing wrong in preparing students to take their place in the economy. But we must ask: Which economy and for what ends? An unreflective emphasis on the ‘employability’ of our graduates might mean preparing them to contribute to an existing economy that is working against the long-term interests of life. Do we not rather wish them to have the critical ability to call the present in question, the courage and vision to strive for an alternative future even as they have to cooperate, to some degree, with the status quo. Our students need to be able to inhabit ‘both this world and the next’ – the present world of work and the new world of work which, we can at least hope, will be better in its relation to the ecology of life and social justice. In other words, such critical preparation provides a set of ‘transferable skills’ that are likely to have a longer period of relevance than those tightly constrained to the alleged needs of the present moment.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

Clarity and openness will strengthen the vision
Finally, it is an important point that in order to offer something distinctive in this regard, Church HEIs should not hide their position, but rather be open about it and highlight the ways in which it offers an alternative vision for people of all beliefs and backgrounds. As

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\textsuperscript{22} Law, p 191.

\textsuperscript{23} R Williams cited by Law, p 200.

\textsuperscript{24} Law, p 200.
\end{flushright}
Pillay points out, ‘the language of faith has become defensive, apologetic and often incoherent increasing the discomfort that people of faith feel within the modern, secular Academy’.  

As Jay Ogilvy, not a Christian but a futurist, says about futures studies: ‘Rather than defensively placing futures studies on the firm foundations of science, I want to pursue an offensive strategy... Rather than dragging futures studies over into the camp of the sciences, I want to show how the so-called human-sciences are moving in the direction of futures studies. We futurists (including all human beings trying to shape their own futures) don’t have to learn how to play their game of objective, value-free science; they are learning to play ours.’ The Church HEIs might do well to adopt a similar attitude with regard to their Christianity and the type of education they offer.

Interestingly, in this regard, Christian organisations could perhaps learn from some of the more modern multi-faith or integral institutions which are not Christian but also reject the purely secular worldview. For example, the California Institute of Integral Studies is explicit about its intentions, stating on its website: ‘CIIS is a unique institution where education is rooted both in great traditions of knowledge and in the most forward-looking visions of the future. Creative, curious, mindful and socially aware—these are just a few of the words that describe the people of CIIS. Embracing diverse worldviews, every program recognizes that spiritual discovery and practice contribute to academic rigor and professional growth.’ This is a compelling vision, which is strengthened by the emphasis on spiritual discovery – and would be weakened by trying to hide behind purely secular language.

**Whitehead: An interesting perspective**

Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) was an English mathematician, philosopher, theologian and educator. He wrote extensively on mathematics, philosophy of science, physics, metaphysics, and education. His is most recognised for his ‘process philosophy’, which was a major contribution to Western metaphysics. Whitehead’s philosophy is profound and complex and it would not do it justice to attempt a short summary here.

However, Whitehead also wrote extensively on education, and this writing – animated with his philosophy and theology – offers a lot to educators, particularly religious educators, or simply those wishing to infuse education with meaning and discovery. Dr Brennan Hill, Professor Emeritus in Theology at Xavier University, Ohio, wrote an article in 1990 called ‘Alfred North Whitehead’s Approach to Education: Its value for religious education’. Although Dr Hill focuses on religious education specifically, which the Christian colleges and universities go far beyond in terms of their subject offering, he draws attention to aspects

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25 Pillay, p 45.
of Whitehead which could offer inspiration and food for thought to Church HEIs contemplating their identity and distinctive offering.\(^{28}\)

\((NB. \ What \ follows \ is \ drawn \ largely \ from \ this \ article)\)

**Education as self-creation:** Whitehead conceived of the whole of reality as being ‘a process and that process is the becoming of actual entities’.\(^{29}\) In line with this view of reality, he viewed each individual person as a living organism that carries within the self the principle of creative change. Importantly, in Whitehead’s philosophy all individual entities are related to the rest of the universe. He speaks of the ‘togetherness of things’ and points out that each happening is a ‘factor in the nature of every other happening’.\(^{30}\) As such an important aspect of self-creativity is that it does not occur in isolation, but in the context of connectedness – self-identity consists in a network of relations which stretch through the entire universe.

The implication for education is that education should take place through interaction with others, with nature, with the universe, and with reality and meaning itself. This is similar to the emphasis by Law (earlier) on *relationship*. In the modern, secular worldview, many dichotomies are set – between the secular and the sacred, the material and the spiritual, and the natural and supernatural. For Whitehead, by contrast, all of reality is a unified process of becoming, and in this light education is a process which prepares individuals to experience and contribute to the creative process. Interestingly, the root of the word religion means ‘tied into’ – and, by allowing, even encouraging, the depth dimensions of reality to be part of a students’ creative process of learning, and tying their learning into reality in all its dimensions – education as self-creation is perhaps possible. This does not entail imparting specific beliefs (which may not be appropriate in the university as a whole), but, ‘each tradition can benefit from his (Whitehead’s) ‘long view’ on the creative process, his unified perspective on reality, and his challenge to education to inculcate reverence for the creative process’.\(^{31}\)

**Education as a holistic experience:** For Whitehead, holistic education is ultimately a discipline for living. Knowledge must be connected with life, just as actual entities are connected to the universe. All life is a unity, a totality, and thus all human reflection should begin and end in the experience of this totality.\(^{32}\) This is in stark contrast to the scientific reductionism of today, which founds education on the breaking of things into their parts. ‘Humans are part of a universe in which all actual entities are in the process of becoming through experience. All growth, including human growth, demands an experiential participation in this universal process of becoming... In a very real sense, we are our experiences, and our experiences are one of the components of the world itself. There is an


\(^{29}\) Whitehead (1941), p 33, quoted by Hill.

\(^{30}\) Whitehead (1938), p 225, quoted by Hill.

\(^{31}\) Hill, p 64.

organic unity in Whitehead’s universe, a kind of organic life and experience in all of reality. Humans best link themselves to reality by participating as fully as possible in reality. Educational institutions, then, are ‘homes’ where young and old can participate in the adventure of reflecting on and experiencing life in all its manifestations. Education is a holistic experience, an experience that is physical, intellectual, emotional, aesthetic and volitional.\(^{33}\)

For Whitehead, an important aspect of learning was application or action. Ideas and knowledge which are not alive and becoming, and being applied, are simply ‘inert’. As he once commented, ‘a merely well-informed man is the most useless bore on God’s earth.’\(^{34}\) As such knowledge and learning must take place in living relationship – to what it means to the learner, to others, to community, to what it means for social justice and the earth, and as it links to the whole cosmological process.

Several aspects are important in Whitehead’s view of learning – wisdom (the way knowledge is held; the way it is employed to add value to our experience), affectivity and emotion (it is imagination which has given freshness and vitality to ideas, and the initial stage of learning involves romance, characterised by discovery, wonder and curiosity), aesthetic experience (there is no substitute for the direct perception of the concrete achievement of a thing in its actuality), and freely chosen action (action moves us beyond thought, and even beyond self, and thus enables us to be linked with transcendence.) ‘Thus for Whitehead education is preparation for living, a holistic experience that heightens the participants’ awareness of their link with, and their participation in, the process of reality…. He leads us into a deeper reflection on our experiences of the beauty and creativity in the world… and… gives us a sense of unity with those around us, as well as with the entire process of becoming.’\(^{35}\)

The Christian tradition, in so far as it is ‘alive’ and not simply ‘a box of doctrines’\(^{36}\) can offer a lot through its symbols, imaginative rituals, and perhaps most importantly in allowing a space for profound questions regarding mystery and meaning alongside science and other kinds of learning – and as such in educating in a holistic way.

This part of the discussion (in a large part a reproduction of Hill’s essay) has not offered any concrete recommendations for Church HEIs in terms of their distinctiveness. However, it is hoped that this brief introduction to some of Whitehead’s ideas and philosophy may have provided some inspiration, and starting ideas and new frameworks for considering the question of distinctiveness of Christian HEIs, which those interested can follow up further.

\(^{33}\) Ibid, p 66.

\(^{34}\) Whitehead (1929), p 1, quoted by Hill.

\(^{35}\) Hill, p 69.

\(^{36}\) Ibid, p 70.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE CATHEDRALS GROUP

The Council of Church Universities and Colleges, known as The Cathedrals Group, is an association of fifteen higher education institutions with Church foundations. Originally established as colleges of teacher education, they have developed into universities and university colleges offering a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses especially in the arts, humanities and social sciences, with a particular focus on professional training for the public sector, including nursing and midwifery, social work, youth and community work, probation work and training for the health professions. We also offer programmes in subjects such as business and management, the performing arts, art and design and the sciences.

We are the only grouping in the higher education landscape overtly based on ethical beliefs and values. We continue to have close links with the three Christian Churches responsible for establishing our universities and university colleges: the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Methodist Church. 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 third sector organisations.

Our institutions maintain a strong focus on teacher education at both primary and secondary levels. As well as providing initial professional training routes for teaching, Cathedrals Group institutions are active providers of continuing professional development. Our teacher education departments are consistently rated among the very highest categories by Ofsted and are already extensively involved in the kind of partnerships with schools that deliver the mix of academic rigour and practical skill-based training necessary to develop teachers of the highest calibre.

In 2011, a consortium of 11 members of the Cathedrals Group bid successfully to purchase the Teacher Learning Academy (TLA) from the General Teaching Council for England (GTCE). This secures the future of the TLA’s resources, providing classroom-based support for teachers to develop and evaluate their professional practice, after the expected closure of the GTCE in March 2012.

We welcome equally those from the faith communities and those of no faith. As denominational providers, we attract significant numbers of students from the Christian Churches, Islamic and other faiths. Cathedrals Group institutions wish to continue to recruit trainees who are able to become effective teachers in faith schools, including denominational schools. More than thirty per cent of all schools and colleges in England are denominational schools. One in four of all primary school teachers are trained by Cathedrals Group institutions.
There are fourteen members of The Cathedrals Group in England

Bishop Grosseteste University College
Canterbury Christ Church University
Leeds Trinity University College
Liverpool Hope University
Newman University College
Roehampton University
St Mary's University College
The University College Plymouth Marjon
University of Chester
University of Chichester
University of Cumbria
University of Gloucestershire
University of Winchester
York St John University

and one member institution in Wales

Trinity Saint David University