

UNION SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY – STATEMENT ON CONTRIBUTION TO THE PUBLIC GOOD (for HEFCW)

Union School of Theology (UST) is a non-denominational theological college, part of the ministry of Union Foundation, the charitable body which owns the school. It is a trusted and well-established provider of theological education which has been serving the churches and Christian communities of Wales since it was founded in 1936. UST has been offering validated degree programmes since the 1990s, working with validators including the University of Wales at Lampeter, and more recently the University of Chester. In August 2018 it became a Partner Institution of the Open University, and its BA, Graduate Diploma and Master of Theology courses are validated by the Open University. Its PhD programme is delivered in partnership with the Free University of Amsterdam, one of Europe's leading research universities in theology. UST is the only theological college in the Evangelical and Reformed tradition in Wales, otherwise students would have to travel to England to find a similar provision.

Union School of Theology is committed to widening participation and accessibility to full-time and part-time theological studies in Higher Education. It encourages access to its programmes by individuals who might not otherwise view Higher Education as an option, or who may be discouraged from studying theology at Higher Education level by social, cultural, economic or institutional barriers. The School offers support to disabled students through the provision of accessible facilities, such as access ramps, timetabling lectures in accessible rooms, etc. This strong commitment to widening access to theological education is in terms of mode, level, location of study and diversity of student population, and has been furthered through the creation, alongside its Bridgend Campus, of a series of local Learning Communities (in the UK, Europe, and North America) where students in small groups study learning materials produced by the UST faculty. These allow access to the programmes of UST for as wide a range of students as possible, especially for those who face financial and

other barriers to study. Courses are locally delivered, at convenient times and locations for students. This strong focus on flexibility and accessibility means that students from under-represented backgrounds can benefit from the programmes.

During the Academic Year 2017-18 there were 151 registered students, over 70 of whom were studying in our off-campus Learning Communities. Union School of Theology is the largest alternative provider of theological education in Wales.

The School of Theology serves the public good by preparing its students for various kinds of Christian and community-based service in Wales, other parts of the UK and overseas. Other student outcomes include preparation for careers in teaching, or work with a range of Christian agencies. Some students undertake a period of study before returning to secular employment. Union School of Theology operates by means of a strategic partnership with voluntary bodies, especially local churches in Wales, to promote the benefits of higher education and promote a culture of learning amongst clergy and laity, many of whom have not been able to benefit from study at higher education level.

Union School of Theology programmes are designed to promote students' employability, and develop their ability to articulate knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. Many current students undertake their studies concurrently with their vocational employment, meaning there are high levels of employability, or continuance in employment. Union School of Theology provides a practical and integrated theological training that builds academic skills and potential in students, develops them as critical thinkers and reflective practitioners, and equips them for employment. All the BA graduates from 2017-18 progressed to further studies or employment. Campus-based BA students undertake two work-based placements with employment providers, which are an integrated and compulsory element of the programme. During these, students develop skills that enhance their employability. Students can claim the costs associated with undertaking such placements, such as travel costs, from Union School of Theology.

Students are on average in their late 20s for BA (Hons), and early 30s for Graduate Diploma and Master of Theology, with students able to access higher education later in life and some for the first time. Others have been in employment subsequent to their previous studies, and are now returning to enhance their professional development.

The School works closely with its student body in developing its provision. Student representatives sit on all programme committees, the Quality Assurance Committee and the Academic Board. The student President meets with the Provost fortnightly to discuss student perspectives and student-related materials. Students with additional learning needs are supported by special provision tailored to their specific need, and a Student Welfare Officer provides further support for students.

Generally, amongst the churches that UST serves, opportunities for women to undertake theological training have been limited. UST is committed to increasing student numbers in this under-represented group, and in September 2018 it introduced the Priscilla Programme designed specifically for women seeking to undertake theological study. This is delivered in partnership with the Church Society (an Anglican ministry), and led by Dr Ros Clarke. She promotes the course to women through her ministry with churches and Christian leaders, and through website and virtual media presence.

Union School of Theology has an extensive library of theological resources (around 35,000 books). This is an important resource for theological learners in South Wales, providing access to on-line journals, e-books, and has extensive runs of academic journals.

It serves Welsh-speaking students, and the wider Welsh community, by maintaining a significant collection of around 5,000 books in the Welsh language, which are largely theological and historical in nature. These collections can be accessed by external readers by means of a membership

scheme. Remote access to the National Library of Wales's unique on-line collection of journals, historical newspaper and Manuscript resources is also available to all our students resident in Wales.

Union School of Theology also makes its buildings available for hire to local community groups, including a local church which meets in the hall each Sunday, and runs a successful work for children. Other organisations regularly hold conferences and local meetings on the premises, including the Evangelical Movement of Wales, and local groups of ministers from churches in the area. Conferences regularly use the premises during the summer months.

The commitment of Union School of Theology to the public good is measured in terms of successful student graduations (meeting their career development requirements); student attainment levels (enhancing intellectual capacity and sense of self-worth); student satisfaction surveys (which indicate high levels of relevance and usefulness of courses); reports from placements in local churches and Christian organisations throughout Wales (which provide feedback on how local communities are impacted by the work of our students); the amount of funds for supporting students from under-represented groups *via* bursaries; and student employment statistics.

Union School of Theology is committed to serving under-represented groups or students suffering from financial hardship by operating bursary and scholarship schemes for students, based around fee waivers, hardship funding, and provision of free or discounted accommodation and meals. Our vision is to enable any who have a commitment to study theology at HE level with a view to vocational Christian ministry to be able to access our courses.

Union School of Theology is also an employment provider for the Bridgend community, employing catering, cleaning, estates, administrative and academic staff throughout the year. Its main building dates from the mid-

nineteenth century and is of historic interest. It is surrounded by extensive gardens, maintained in keeping with the period of the construction of the house. Its students, from a variety of social and cultural backgrounds, contribute to the diversity of the local culture of the area.