

A Strategic Plan for Higher Education Chaplaincy

Introduction

The Free Churches Group's Higher Education Working Group published its report "*Hope in Higher Education*" in April 2015. The report outlined the key areas of engagement for the Free Churches in the Higher Education Sector and made recommendations for future work. One of those recommendations was: "That the FCG works with its member bodies to develop a strategic approach to chaplaincy and student work".¹

The report goes on to identify the expectations universities have of the chaplains on their campuses:

- "Help with preventing violent extremism being fostered in the name of religion on campus.
- Contribute to 'student satisfaction' which will be measured through a focus on 'performance' and 'outcomes'. This may include pastoral care for students and staff, community building on campus and creating links between the university and the wider community.
- Manage religious diversity, including the university's statutory obligations in this regard.
- Act as purveyors of ritual on university occasions (such as degree ceremonies) or, for example, to mark a student death."

The report further outlines the roles chaplains play within HE institutions, noting the variations in practice and the commonalities: "Most [chaplains] will be expected to serve all students and staff irrespective of faith commitments, to work in a collaborative way with chaplaincy colleagues of all faiths and with staff colleagues across the university, and within the university's equality and diversity policies."²

It is not possible to quantify the number of Free Church chaplains in HE in England and Wales as most of the FCG member churches do not keep comprehensive records. Most FC chaplains are part-time, many alongside work in a local church. There is a small number of chaplaincy posts designated specifically as Free Church posts, and funded by two or more Free Churches, and some posts funded by an FC denomination, where the chaplain works on behalf of other FCs. There are also some ecumenical posts.

The recent report, *Chaplains on Campus*, explores the nature of chaplaincy posts in UK universities, examining funding sources, lines of accountability, the chaplain's position within the university structure and perceptions of effectiveness. This

¹ Free Churches Group *Hope in Higher Education. The Free Churches and Higher Education: a report and recommendations from the Free Churches Group Higher Education Working Group*, 2015, p.2

² *Hope in Higher Education*, p.25, point 82.

research provides valuable insights into some of the issues regarding the deployment and support of HE chaplains, which are relevant to the FCs.³

Hope in Higher Education summarises the situation thus:

“...whilst some FCG members are putting some resource into higher education chaplaincy, this is not a ministry the FCG member bodies as a whole are resourcing in a significant way.”⁴

Furthermore, many HE chaplains, in common with chaplains in other sectors, find themselves somewhat isolated from other ministers and leaders in their churches. In some cases this may be because the church has not directly deployed them in a chaplaincy role and the post is not funded by the denomination. Some will be ordained ministers, others will be lay people, and it is difficult for the central administration of churches to deal with a category of ministry that incorporates so much variety. The outcome of this is that some chaplains experience a lack of support and/or, at times, pressure to engage with their denomination over and above their chaplaincy responsibilities, in ways that may be unrealistic. There is a need for training, support and encouragement for those who are engaged in this valuable work.

The context of work on HE chaplaincy within the wider strategies of the Free Churches Group

The Higher Education Working Group reports to the Free Church Education Committee and its work is part of the overall education work of the Free Churches Group, managed by the Education Officer.

The Free Churches Group has a strategic plan, and within that there is a strategic plan for education. The strategic plan for Higher Education Chaplaincy is part of this latter strategic plan.

Whilst there is much potential for developing the FCG work in HE chaplaincy, this has to be held in tension with the limited resources, both financial and in terms of personnel, of the organisation.

Strategic aims of the Free Churches Group:

1. Strengthen our core competence of endorsing and supporting Free Church chaplains in the core sectors we currently cover and wider afield where it is strategically right to do so and there are gaps to fill.
2. To promote the Free Church voice in the public square in support of the poor and

³ Aune, K., Guest, M., and Law, J. (2019) *Chaplains on Campus: Understanding Chaplaincy in UK Universities*. Coventry: Coventry University, Durham: Durham University and Canterbury: Canterbury Christ Church University.

⁴*Hope in Higher Education*, p. 26, point 89.

marginalised so that they can share in the economic growth and prosperity of the nation.

3. To raise the profile of FCG with member churches and provide information and support to local churches so that they can increase their scope and reach of ministry to communities across the nations.

Within the FCG's key objectives, there is explicit mention of HE chaplaincy:

Free Churches Group key objectives relating to chaplaincy:

A. Free Church Voice in Public Square

- Prepare statements based on expertise in areas such as Chaplaincy that can be used in public square to speak to topical issues.

D. Chaplaincy

Build on FCG's core competence in supporting Free Church Chaplains by developing appropriate provision in the following sectors:

- Education – explore the various ways Free Church chaplains are appointed in Universities, FE Colleges and Schools and the scope to provide support to Free Church Chaplains.

E. Strategic Partners

Identify key strategic partners with whom FCG can work to improve:

- Chaplaincy provision in Higher and Further Education establishments.

Strategic aims in FCG education

The FCG aims to:

INFORM FCG members about the opportunities to
ENGAGE with educational institutions and issues in their communities
and **SUPPORT** them in their mission.

FCG key objectives in education:

- To build strategic relationships and partnerships with relevant organisations across the education sector
- To identify common themes and concerns with other areas of FCG work e.g. mental health, chaplaincy, and explore areas of joint working.
- To inform, engage and resource FCG member churches about issues and opportunities in education by making available relevant publications, publishing introductory leaflets and inspiring case studies, publishing articles on the FCG website, attending conferences and seminars, and offering to work with FCG members by providing training, workshops, seminars etc.
- To strengthen and broaden the Free Church Education Committee as a source of expertise, serving as the co-ordinating point for education matters for the Free Churches.

- To raise the profile of chaplaincy in education by developing a strategy for chaplaincy in each sector, building relationships with relevant organisations and working with colleagues in healthcare and prison chaplaincy to explore possibilities for cross-sector training.

Strategic aims for FC chaplaincy

The Free Churches recognise that the ministry of chaplaincy is transformational. God uses the person giving care, who may themselves be changed by the experience, to enable transformation in the person receiving care, the community from which they come and the institution in which they find themselves.

Chaplaincy works at the margins, having an empathy for those who are vulnerable. Chaplains, being people of faith, enable hope and faith to be manifest in an institution, where others can't or don't. They ensure that the values that faith brings are rooted within the life of the community in which they serve. Chaplaincy is about being connected – with other people, and with *the* other. It is a horizontal and vertical ministry, spanning all institutional hierarchies.

Chaplains earn a place at the table: they are not there by right, but they serve the aims of the institution, enabling it to be inclusive, caring and compassionate, and prophetic.

The following strategic aims address some of the key areas of work highlighted in the FCG and education strategic plans. They take into account the work and thinking done by the HE Working Group, iterated in *Hope in Higher Education*. They fit within the education strategy: inform, engage, support.

Key themes:

- Training and support
- Networking and linking
- Collaboration

INFORM

1. To inform Free Churches about the varied nature of HE chaplaincy, equipping them to recognise chaplaincy as a vocation and to form supportive relationships with chaplains in their communities.
2. To inform HE students about how to make links with the chaplaincy in their university.

ENGAGE

3. To explore ways in which HE chaplains can contribute to the Free Churches' thinking about mission and ministry.
4. To explore ways in which HE chaplains might form networks and enjoy mutual support and encouragement.

5. To build relationships with partner organisations (e.g. CHELG, SCM) to support chaplains and maximise the use of resources.

SUPPORT

6. To provide opportunities for cross-sector introductory training for those with an interest in HE chaplaincy and for those who are just starting out in chaplaincy.
7. To provide opportunities for ongoing cross-sector training on key issues, exploring links with healthcare and prison chaplaincy, but also with town or city centre chaplaincy and chaplaincy in other settings.

Objectives:

(these correspond with the strategic aims, above)

INFORM

- a. To produce a factsheet about HE chaplaincy, with discussion points, for Free Churches (possibly part of a series about chaplaincy in general).
- b. To include information about chaplaincy as part of the support materials for HE students and churches.

ENGAGE

- c. To encourage FC member churches to develop registers of their chaplains and to report on the work of chaplains at denominational gatherings/assemblies.
- d. To develop a Facebook page for HE chaplains and use other social media to promote it, using it to identify appropriate ways in which to provide networking opportunities and support.
- e. To discuss opportunities for collaboration with appropriate organisations, for example, CHELG, SCM, developing an understanding of the particular expertise of those organisations and signposting their resources/services to Free Churches.

SUPPORT

- f. To work with colleagues in healthcare and prison chaplaincy to develop the training concept.
- g. To offer regular (at least once a year) events that provide cross-sector training and development opportunities for chaplains and other Christian leaders (for example, the mental health and wellbeing conference in October 2019).