**External Examiner Comment (June 2024)**

‘In my opinion, the MTh offers an excellent pathway for forming people for ordained ministry due to its comprehensive focus on the intellectual, practical and spiritual dimensions of ministry. The programme integrates rigorous biblical, theological and ministerial studies, preparing students to engage with contemporary challenges in ministry contexts. It fosters a rich understanding of Christian identity, particularly within the Church of Ireland’s diverse denominational tradition, while encouraging reflection on, and reasoned articulation of, ministry practices grounded in both scripture and theology. The emphasis on leadership and collaborative learning prepares students to serve effectively in parish and other ministerial settings, promoting healthy models of leadership that empower others. The programme also prioritises students’ personal growth through lifelong academic and pastoral development, ensuring that graduates are equipped for ongoing reflection, learning and professional development. By combining academic rigor with pastoral sensitivity, the MTh provides a well-rounded foundation for ordained ministry in the Church of Ireland.

‘The focus on integration of ministerial, theological and biblical strands as exemplified in the dissertation ensures that students do not take a purely academic approach in their studies and encourages them to keep their biblical and theological studies relevant for ministry. The dissertation as capstone project allows them to work with a topic that is both relevant and of interest to them as they demonstrate their ability to integrate the various strands of their formation. I was impressed by the sheer range of topics chosen, indicative of the diversity of backgrounds and theological outlooks of the students themselves. Students clearly receive the support they need to be able to succeed at this level irrespective of the educational path that led them to the Masters.

‘A master’s degree as a route to ordination ensures that clergy are thoroughly equipped for the intellectual, spiritual and pastoral demands of ministry. The complexity of modern ministry requires deep theological understanding, critical thinking, and the ability to engage within diverse social and cultural contexts. A master’s degree offers a structured, in-depth education that goes beyond foundational knowledge, allowing future clergy to engage critically with scripture, theology, ethics, spirituality, and models of leadership.  The residential and placement components of the programme foster the development of essential skills in pastoral care, homiletics and spiritual formation. By requiring a high level of academic and personal reflection, the master’s route promotes lifelong learning and professional development, which is critical in adapting to the evolving needs of church and society. This level of training enables graduates to become theologically-grounded, reflective practitioners who can provide thoughtful leadership within their congregations and the wider community.

‘CITI takes very seriously the task of supporting the students with academic and writing skills to ensure success at this level, as evidenced in the quality of the students’ capstone dissertation. Although ordained clergy do not need to be ‘academic’ in the traditional sense of the word, they do need the analytical and integrative skills that this level of academic attainment requires. The Masters route to ordained ministry, would, however, be problematic if the entry requirements excluded gifted applicants. This danger can be offset by, for example, Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning routes to admission. The CCTP as an entry route to the MTh provides a good foundation for further theological study.’