



Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies
Research Project | Final Report

CCRS TWENTY FIVE YEARS ON

One Size Fits All?

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Special thanks must go to the individuals who participated in the both the phase one survey and the phase two interviews. Many of you remain anonymous but others are known and much appreciated. Thanks, too, must go to all schools, universities, parishes, dioceses or other organisations involved in any way in this research. This includes my own colleagues at Liverpool Hope University.

Finally, there are always unseen others in any project who, in their own unique ways and often away from the public gaze, offer sound advice and unconditional support. Thank you.

Ros Stuart-Buttle
October 2018

Note to Reader: Throughout this report, the *Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies* is referred to by the commonly used acronym CCRS.

Executive Summary

Overview

The CCRS has provided adult theological education across England & Wales since 1991-92. This research project was set up in light of its twenty-fifth anniversary to provide an opportunity to enter into theological conversation and reflection about CCRS in changing religious, political, socio-cultural and educational contexts and in conjunction with other current research studies into Catholic education.

Aims

The research project set out to seek a systematic exploration of the CCRS to take account of course participant, sponsor and stakeholder expectations and experience. The project aimed to gather rich and robust evidence about the CCRS on which to base future directions and initiatives.

Four core questions lie at the heart:

- What is the role and purpose of CCRS?
- What sort of (theological) learning occurs?
- Why do people study CCRS?
- What impact (difference) does CCRS make?

To this can be added a fifth question:

- What is needed for CCRS in the future?

Project Oversight

The project has been led by Dr Ros Stuart-Buttle with support from Peter Flew (quantitative data) and Dr Kate Williamson (qualitative data). A steering group met on five occasions to advise and oversee the research process between November 2015 and September 2017. Regular reporting was made to the Board of Religious Studies, the CCRS northern region, and to National Review gatherings in 2016 and 2018.

Research Design

The research design consisted of two phases. The Phase One online survey for past and present CCRS students ran from November 2016 – March 2017 and attracted a pleasing response rate, giving both longitudinal and current perspectives from the sample population. The survey gathered quantitative data for statistical analysis as well as qualitative data which was coded and categorised for thematic data analysis purposes.

Phase Two interviews were carried out with those representing CCRS as sponsors and providers of the course. These included Bishops, Diocesan Education Directors, CCRS tutors and Catholic Head Teachers in primary and secondary schools. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for data analysis purposes and reported anonymously. The aim was to balance the student data with a fuller picture of the role, opportunities and challenges facing CCRS as identified by those leading and providing the course around the country.

Main Findings

The overall findings from the Phase One course participant survey are very positive and demonstrate that there is much to value and celebrate in the contribution of CCRS to adult formation across England and Wales. For example, over 75% course participants study CCRS in order to gain knowledge and understanding about the Catholic faith. A clear majority agree that CCRS supports both their personal and professional development. Over 89% of survey respondents state that CCRS is relevant for today while 83% say that the course has met or surpassed their expectations, with 89% saying they would recommend the course to others. This is good news for a course that has run since 1991-92 and indeed there is much to be celebrated and continued into the future.

At the same time, the survey outlines a number of tensions and challenges evident from the qualitative responses which sound out the CCRS student experience. This holds significance for the future provision and delivery of CCRS at national, regional and local centre level. Findings from the Phase Two interviews add further valuable insight into the research conversation about CCRS. They confirm that both the perception about and uptake of CCRS varies considerably around the country. Issues over the relevance and practical application of module content emerge as do concerns over workload and the financial cost of undertaking the course, the specific demands on teachers, and questionable standards of course delivery, learning and teaching methods and curriculum resources.

From both sets of data, a number of overarching themes emerge as relevant for the future direction and development of CCRS. These are listed as follows in no particular order and given further discussion in the report:

- There is clear affirmation and high regard for the role and value of CCRS.
- CCRS provides sound evidence of the continuing need for adult theological literacy in England and Wales.
- CCRS can make a considerable impact in terms of providing opportunities for personal, spiritual and professional growth.
- CCRS is seen as both ‘Cinderella’ but also ‘jewel in the crown’ and this varies across the country depending on any number of local factors.
- There is some lack of consensus and thus some ambiguity over what is the core identity, purpose and ‘currency’ of CCRS.
- Questions remain over what sort of theological learning and curriculum is needed for teachers in Catholic schools but also more generally for lay adults today.
- CCRS must seek to provide a sound adult learning experience to all participants.
- Quality assurance across a nationally awarded CCRS course that is delivered at local level remains both a challenge and a priority.

Recommendations

The report concludes by making fourteen recommendations to the Board of Religious Studies. These call for clearer positioning about the role and identity of CCRS, further support from church leaders and supporting bodies, new publicity and promotion, and greater working with educational and diocesan partners to advance CCRS in schools and parishes. Additional recommendations invite consideration over finance and course delivery patterns in local centres as well as calling for revisions and new national (online) resources for curriculum and assessment purposes. Final recommendations ask for enhanced opportunities for CCRS tutors, consideration of sector specific formation pathways within CCRS, and better quality assurance processes.

1. Introducing the Research Project

1.1 Background to CCRS

History

The CCRS is awarded by the Board of Religious Studies on behalf of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. The course was introduced in 1991-92 to replace its predecessors, the Catholic Teachers' Certificate and the Certificate in Religious Education. The CCRS is open to any person wishing to deepen their formal knowledge of the Catholic faith. This has included teachers in Catholic schools as well as parish catechists and lay pastoral ministers wishing to gain an understanding of Catholic faith and theology as a foundation for their role or ministry. Other adults have also taken the CCRS for personal interest or faith formation. For some people, the CCRS has provided a route into further study. Thus, the CCRS has been both a vehicle and a benchmark for adult theological formation across England, Wales and beyond since the early 1990s.

Numbers and retention

Formal statistics for CCRS registrations and certificates across England and Wales do not go back as far as 1991. More recently, records have been supported by Catholic Education Service and suggest that there have been in excess of 20,000 course registrations since the year 2000, with over 11,000 completion certificates awarded. This does not take account of the number of individual modules undertaken by people around the country. However, it does indicate a lack of retention between those who register and those who complete the CCRS award. For example, registrations on a five-year rolling average from 2013-2018 show that there were 1198 registrations per annum with only 766 certificates being awarded. A similar pattern is echoed across previous years although the gap has been closing since 2008.

Course delivery

Delivery of the CCRS is offered by diocesan centres and Catholic universities across England and Wales and through two distance learning options, Life Light and CCRS Online (see below). Course requirements, as laid down by the Board of Religious Studies, can be achieved over any period from between two to five years. The CCRS is structured around eight modular components, each requiring ten hours fixed contact time and carrying mandatory assessment under a range of options. Six core compulsory modules cover Old and New Testaments, Christology, Church, Sacraments and

Morality while two elective specialist modules adopt a more practical application as determined by local interest and specification. Any specialist module offered at local level must meet the approval of the Board of Religious Studies. Many focus on educational, catechetical or liturgical subjects but a wide range of modules exists across the centres and these are listed in the national Course Handbook and Centre Manual.¹

Distance learning provision became available for CCRS initially through Life-Light Home Study Courses, who gained accreditation as a course centre in 1991-92 and have offered distance learning ever since, including provision in Northern Ireland. In 2001, the Board of Religious Studies accepted a proposal for development of an online version of the course and since 2004 the CCRS Online has offered further distance learning provision through flexible online learning. This has seen growing interest and participation from both local centres and course participants.

Oversight

The CCRS awarding body, the Board of Religious Studies, is comprised of serving members who represent Catholic Education Service, Diocesan Schools Commissioners, National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisers, Catholic universities, CCRS regional representatives and the two distance learning providers. Full Board meetings take place twice a year in central London alongside regional meetings across the country where local centres meet for business and moderation purposes. A National Centre Directors and Review meeting has been held every two years since 2004 to which all local centres are entitled to send representation. Prior to this, regular series of day meetings were held for centres to attend. A current list of Board of Religious Studies membership and local centres can be found at the CCRS website <http://www.brs-ccrs.org.uk/>

1.2 Rationale underpinning the Research Project

Previous surveys

During 2003-05 a survey 'Ten Years On' was undertaken by then St Mary's College Strawberry Hill to assess the pedagogical coherence and experience of CCRS among course tutors and participants. This consisted of a 2003 review of local CCRS centres which culminated in a 2004 conference at Ushaw, followed in 2005 by a survey of CCRS students sampled from 17 centres across the country via printed questionnaire. This yielded a variety of insights that embraced theological, educational, assessment and pastoral concerns and represented a

1) Latest versions of both documents are available at <http://www.brs-ccrs.org.uk/>

clear attempt to go beyond local anecdote to ascertain the common experience of CCRS across England and Wales.²

Subsequent research was carried out among CCRS Online tutors and participants during 2009-10. The aim here was to inquire more specifically into the tutor and student experience of doing CCRS through online learning and to evaluate the pedagogy that underpinned this particular mode of delivery.³

Both of these previous surveys affirmed the role of CCRS and its contribution as a way for adult learners to engage in theological thinking and faith formation. Although concerns were raised over such things as drop-out rates, level of study, accreditation, pedagogy, assessment and distance learning, there was a clear and shared sense of CCRS being a unique and valuable instrument for adult theological literacy.

Changing context

Since its inauguration more than twenty-five years ago, CCRS has continued to develop its' policies, curriculum enhancements and teaching and learning strategies while the Board of Religious Studies membership as well as local providers and student audiences have changed over time. The wider educational, religious and cultural contexts in which the CCRS is situated have also moved on and the many challenges facing the contemporary Church can be noted. Diverse currents characterize contemporary post-secular society and a wide mix of (non)religious, intellectual and cultural worldviews and values exist side-by-side. Theology as 'faith seeking understanding' is situated within this plurality of shifting social, political, economic and technological landscapes. In the world of education, a focus on marketplace competition, standards, professionalisation and performance has become the norm. This is the wider context in which CCRS now sits.

2) See Towey, A. (2006) "Theological Literacy and the CCRS" *Pastoral Review*, January issue, pp. 22-26. The student survey comprised four sections each containing a number of questions as follows: Section A Your Origins of Faith Understanding; Section B Your Experience of CCRS Teaching and Learning; Section C Your Experience of Core Modules; Section D CCRS in your Personal and Professional Journey.

3) See Stuart-Buttle, R. (2013) *Virtual Theology, Faith and Adult Education: An Interruptive Pedagogy*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, UK. This research gathered data on CCRS Online participant demographics, online learning process, student learning experience, tutor role and pedagogy, and how tutors and students evaluated the CCRS Online in terms of enabling adult theological education and faith formation.

Recognised need for adult formation

The Catholic Bishops Conference of England & Wales (2000) *The Priority of Adult Formation* highlighted a need for national and diocesan initiatives for adults to receive education for Christian maturity proper to their stage and situation in life. The Bishops called for provision for ongoing formation for those responsible for leading others into faith, which includes parents, catechists, teachers, parish ministers and lay leaders. The document noted a lack of research in the area of adult formation and asked for this to be addressed.

Meanwhile, sponsoring practitioner bodies for teachers, governors, chaplains, catechists, youth leaders and lay pastoral workers have also continued to speak of the need for laypeople to be formed in the language of faith and theology. However, there are contested understandings and differing expectations about the scope and level of formal competency required, the theological frameworks to be adopted, which skills should be taught, which curriculum presented, whether different roles call for different sorts of theological knowledge, and whether personal spiritual conviction or practice of faith is required.

Today it is accepted that there are declining levels of religious knowledge, understanding, and experience of faith, even among those brought up in church schools and families and among those presenting for professional or pastoral roles (see Gallagher, 1998; Rausch, 2006).⁴ If it is no longer possible in the western world to assume a common religious culture or prior knowledge, understanding or acceptance of the normative theology of the Church, or a personal experience of faith, then this challenges those charged with delivering theological education and formation as to what can best help support and equip laypeople for educational roles and pastoral ministries.

Teachers in Catholic schools

Particular concerns over how to maintain a commitment to the educational mission of the church given the diminishing numbers of committed or actively practising Catholic teachers in schools has also occupied recent attention. Some form of theological formation is seen as desirable both in preparing new entrants for the profession and as continuing development for those already serving in Catholic schools (see, for example, Robinson, 2002; Engebretson, 2014; Stuart-Buttle, 2017).⁵ Teachers in church schools need to be professionally qualified and pedagogically skilled, not just

4) Gallagher, M. P. (1998) *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture*, Paulist Press; also Rausch, T. (2006) *Being Catholic in a Culture of Choice*. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press.

5) Robinson, M. (2002) "Continuing Professional Development" in Hayes, M. & Gearon, L. (2002) *Contemporary Catholic Education*. Leominster: Gracewing; Engebretson, K. (2014) *Catholic Schools and the Future of the Church*. New York: Bloomsbury; Stuart-Buttle, R. (2017) "England: Vatican II and Catholic Education" in Whittle, S. ed. (2017) *Vatican II and*

in their own discipline but also to enable their participation in and contribution to the distinctive nature and mission of the Catholic school (McKinney & Sullivan, 2013).⁶

Congregation for Catholic Education documents point to the importance of the teacher and their preparation in both professional and religious knowledge. *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965 #8) foresaw that the Catholic school depends upon teachers “almost entirely for the accomplishment of its goals and programmes” and called for them to be “...very carefully prepared so that both in secular and religious knowledge they are equipped with suitable qualifications and also with a pedagogical skill that is in keeping with the findings of the contemporary world.” *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982) recognised the professional status, activity, preparation and formation of teachers in Catholic schools and stated forcefully that the teacher is not just a professional who transmits knowledge of an academic subject but one whose personal faith and vocation inspires and characterises their role (#37-38). This was promoted further in *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988) and repeated in *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997). More recent documents including *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools* (2013) and *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion* (2014) also express clear recognition of the challenges facing Catholic schools and universities and call for an authentic professional and spiritual Catholic teacher education.

The issue of ‘how to’ theologically equip teachers and lay adults for their role, and ‘what sort’ of theological formation this might involve, continues to demand attention. Since 1991, the CCRS has attempted to meet this need but has attracted both supporters and critics. For some people, CCRS is more than ‘just a course’ as it is the one constant and national provision for lay Catholics supported by the Bishops since the early 1990s and there are countless individuals who testify in support of what they, or others, gained from personally studying or teaching it. But the CCRS has also faced criticisms and challenges. Is it too theological? Is it sufficiently rigorous? Does it speak to today’s Catholics? What impact does it have? Does it help prepare for the professional demands of the contemporary Catholic school or for a ministry role in a local parish? Does it fit with a changing church in a complex and multifaceted world? Is the CCRS still relevant to those who teach and study it?

New Thinking about Catholic Education. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

6) McKinney, S. & Sullivan, J. (2013) *Education in a Catholic Perspective*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate.

New research project

For these reasons, a new research project for CCRS was proposed in 2015 and set underway in 2016. This was to coincide with the twenty-fifth anniversary since inauguration. It was hoped that the research project would provide an opportunity to enter into theological conversation and reflection in light of changing religious, political, socio-cultural and educational contexts and in conjunction with other current research studies into Catholic education.

1.3 Project Aims

The research project set out to seek a systematic exploration of the CCRS that would take account of past and present participants' experience of the course as well as sponsor and practitioner body expectations and engagement. The project aimed to gather rich and robust evidence about the CCRS on which future directions and initiatives might be based. The aims of the project, which developed as key research questions, were as follows:

- 1) To investigate what course participants and sponsoring bodies see as the role and purpose of CCRS
- 2) To investigate what sort of (theological) learning occurs in and through CCRS
- 3) To investigate why people study CCRS
- 4) To investigate what impact or difference CCRS makes
- 5) To determine what is needed to support CCRS in the future

A number of subsidiary reflections underpinned the thinking and planning behind the research project:

- Do CCRS aims, outcomes, structure and curriculum hold relevance for today? Is CCRS appropriate or useful for participants and course providers? In other words, is CCRS still fit for purpose after twenty-five years?
- Who are the people involved in teaching and learning in CCRS? What sort of 'literacy' does CCRS support? Are there varying 'levels' or 'types' of theological education being offered by the CCRS, both normative and experienced?
- Does professional development and/or faith formation occur through CCRS? If so, then how?

- What teaching and learning pedagogies are being offered or experienced through the CCRS? Do they foster genuine adult learning? How are CCRS providers and tutors teaching, administering and delivering the course? Does this vary at local levels?
- How is the CCRS viewed/understood/valued/evaluated by wider stakeholders and practitioner bodies?
- What opportunities and challenges does the CCRS face twenty-five years on? Could a re-focusing of CCRS help shape future provision of adult lay formation? What future directions might open up?

1.4 Research Team

The CCRS research project has been carried out in consultation with the Board of Religious Studies and Catholic Education Service and in collaboration with Catholic HEIs, diocesan personnel and CCRS local centres. The project has been led by Dr Ros Stuart-Buttle (Liverpool Hope University) with support from Peter Flew (University of Roehampton) and Dr Kate Williamson (previously University of Brighton).

A steering group was drawn up to advise and oversee the research process, with a series of meetings held at Catholic Education Service for this purpose in November 2015, January 2016, September 2016, March 2017 and September 2017. Steering group members were:

Andrew Barron	Hexham & Newcastle Diocese
Gerry Bradbury	CCRS Online
Eamonn Elliott	Newman University
Peter Flew	University of Roehampton
Paul Mannings	Archdiocese of Liverpool
Rita Price	Wrexham Diocese
Philip Robinson	Catholic Education Service
Bernard Stuart	Board of Religious Studies
Ros Stuart-Buttle	Liverpool Hope University & CCRS Online
Anthony Towey	St Mary's University
Eileen Williams	Catholic Education Service
Kate Williamson	CCRS Southern region

An initial request made to the Board of Religious Studies for permission to carry out the research project was given approval at the May 2015 meeting. The Board subsequently agreed to support the cost of undertaking the project at the October 2015 meeting. Financial accounting was handled by Eileen Williams from Catholic Education Service. Research project costs related to travel and meeting expenses for the researchers and steering group, the survey licence software for Phase One of the project and transcription services for the Phase Two interviews.

1.5 Ethical Statement

The CCRS research project has been conducted in accordance with British Educational Research Association (BERA 2011) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*.⁷ Prior consent to take part in the research project was sought from all parties involved. The participation of any individual person, school, diocese or CCRS centre has been recorded and reported with care and anonymity. Storage of research data complied with safe ethical practices while careful effort was made to limit any potential issues arising from power relations or insider-researcher activity. Full ethical approval for the research project was secured from Liverpool Hope University prior to any research activity being undertaken. On completion of the project, formal reporting will be made to the Board of Religious Studies for purposes of dissemination and determination of future action.

7) See <https://www.bera.ac.uk>

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design

Following an initial literature analysis undertaken by the project leader and the discernment of key research questions in conjunction with the steering group, a two-phase research project was agreed, with the intention of gathering empirical data, both quantitative and qualitative, about the CCRS. After twenty-five years and despite the two smaller-scale research projects previously mentioned, much of the conversation surrounding CCRS relied on local rather than empirical evidence from a national perspective.

In designing the research project, it was felt essential by the research team that the process should be conducted in dialogue with wider CCRS stakeholders in order to secure acceptance among the practitioner community as well as to provide opportunities for shared theological and practical reflection on the findings. To support this, regular reporting was made to the Board of Religious Studies biannual meetings in May and October each year, while major presentations on the research project were made in January 2016 and March 2018 at the CCRS National Review gatherings at Hothorpe Hall, Leicestershire, UK.

The research design was set up in two phases. Firstly, in order to try and reach as many past and present CCRS course participants as possible, an online survey was seen as the best way forward for Phase One of the project. Recognising that the overall target population of CCRS students since 1991 was both unknowable and unreachable due to the limited availability and often local nature of records going back so far, it was decided that the most feasible method to invite past and present students was through the local CCRS centres across England and Wales and through the Board of Religious Studies website with an invitation to take part in an online national survey. Dr Ros Stuart-Buttle, research project leader, had previous experience in designing and conducting an online survey for research purposes and so the decision to use this research tool for Phase One was made.

The need to collect both quantitative and qualitative data about the CCRS was held as key to the research design of Phase One. It is recognised that online surveys for research purposes carry their own advantages, such as ease of time, access and ability to reach participants across locations but they also bring disadvantages, such as sampling and access issues together with ethical and methodological concerns.⁸ These factors need to be taken into account. There was also a decision to be reached about which online survey software would best support the project. Having undertaken a comparison of online survey software and services, it was agreed by the research team that a SurveyMonkey annual license would be purchased as this pro-

8) For example, see Kevin B. Wright (2005) Researching Internet-Based Populations: Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Survey Research, Online Questionnaire Authoring Software Packages, and Web Survey Services, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Volume 10, Issue 3, 1 April 2005.

vided features to aid data collection and analysis processes as well as web authoring tools and technical consultation.⁹

The research design for Phase Two of the project set out to gather data through semi-formal interviews with a range of CCRS sponsoring and practitioner bodies across the country. These included Bishops, Diocesan Directors of Education, CCRS course providers and tutors and Head Teachers in Catholic schools. The aim of this second phase was to counterbalance the student data with a fuller picture of the role, scope, nature, opportunities and challenges facing CCRS as identified by those responsible for leading and providing the course around the country.

The semi-structured face-to-face interview was chosen as the research tool for this phase of activity. This is a well-tried and tested qualitative data collection method in educational research, whereby the interviewer decides in advance the ground to be covered and the main questions to be asked but listens carefully and enables a conversation to unfold, with the person being interviewed able to express their response and explore issues they feel are important. Although challenges in conducting semi-structured interviews can also be noted, they are important for enhancing the research design and for contributing towards triangulation in order to draw on different perspectives and sources in order to maximise understanding of the research context and questions.

2.2 Data Gathering and Analysis

Pilot Phase January – October 2016

Following presentation of the proposed research project at the National Review meeting in January 2016 and together with the ongoing support and feedback of the steering group, a set of questions was drawn up to act as a pilot survey for CCRS students. The purpose of the pilot stage was to clarify, test and confirm the design of the research survey.

The sample questions were taken to the CCRS Northern regional meeting in May 2016 for testing and evaluation and subsequent changes resulted from this. The pilot survey was then undertaken by a small group of CCRS participants from Diocese of Shrewsbury during June 2016. As a result, further improvements were made to both questions and rubric in an effort to bring about greater relevance, clarity and consistency across the survey.

9) SurveyMonkey <http://www.surveymonkey.com>

Phase One CCRS Student Survey November 2016 - March 2017

The online survey for past and present CCRS students ran from November 2016 through to March 2017.

The request to take part in the survey was disseminated during November 2016 through Catholic Education Service (CES) Newsletter to all Primary and Secondary Schools in England and Wales. Notice was also sent to Board of Religious Studies members, CCRS Coordinators and CCRS Administrators of all CCRS Centres as well as to Diocesan Schools Commissioners, Directors of Religious Education, and Principals of Catholic Higher Education Colleges and Sixth Form Colleges (see Appendix 1 and 2). These mailings were repeated during January 2017. Information and the request to participate in the survey was also publicised on the CCRS national website during this period.

A total of 1,474 participant responses were received for the survey, ranging from current course participants to those going back to pre-2005. This represents a longitudinal sample. However, the target population, despite being unknown to the researchers, would have included far higher numbers given all those who have participated in CCRS since 1991. Therefore, despite a pleasing response to the survey from across all dioceses and CCRS centres together with the wealth of data that emerged, there were logistical issues. This means that limitation must be acknowledged as to claims for representativeness and generalisation of survey results. It is also noted that the research team was dependent on CES and CCRS centres to disseminate the survey information to individuals and this inevitably resulted in variable impact, which should be taken into account.

The Phase One survey comprised 34 questions, structured under a series of sections as follows:

- Your CCRS Status: questions 1-6
- Purpose of CCRS: questions 7-10
- CCRS Learning and Teaching: questions 11- 19
- Impact of CCRS: questions 20 – 25
- About You: questions 26 – 34

The full set of survey questions can be found in Appendix 3.

Survey Data Analysis

The online student survey gathered quantitative data for statistical analysis as well as qualitative data, of which the latter brought over 9,000 individual comments. Quantitative data was analysed using the tools of the survey software to determine statistical significance as well as advanced features of Excel to sort, filter and compare the data. For the purposes of this report, descriptive statistics are used to state the key features of the survey data and to provide summaries of the results.

For the qualitative data, the analysis approach carried out a thematic analysis of the participant comments and responses from the online student survey. The research team assigned initial codes on a question by question approach in order to let the raw data initially speak for itself. Then as the data was distilled further, the team grouped the data into overarching themes and from this, specific coding categories were derived in order to interpret and report the data. First, larger categories were created into which similar data was grouped. Then data was further analysed and more precise codes generated where needed. This ensured that the survey data was scrutinised for patterns or relevance to the research questions. The team recognised the need to be open to their own preconceptions and interpretations but at the same time, strove to be true to the data and also open to any unanticipated themes that might occur.

The list of key codes and categories used to analyse the phase one student survey can be found in Appendix 4.

Phase Two Interviews with Stakeholder & Practitioner Bodies December 2017 – July 2018

The second phase of the CCRS research project involved Dr Ros Stuart-Buttle conducting a series of semi-structured interviews with CCRS sponsors, providers and practitioner bodies. The aim was to balance the student data with a fuller picture of the role, opportunities and challenges facing CCRS as identified by those leading and providing the course around the country. Bringing these additional perspectives into the research project, it was hoped would not only help to triangulate findings but would add another important layer beyond relying on just one perspective or set of data.

For Phase Two of the research project, a series of twelve interviews was carried out between December 2017 and July 2018. The interview sample included those who volunteered as well as those who responded to a general request to be interviewed. The group was chosen to be as representative as possible from across England and Wales in terms of role and geographical spread. This comprised two senior Church leaders, two Catholic Primary Head Teachers, one Catholic Secondary Head Teacher, five Diocesan Directors/CCRS Co-ordinators and two CCRS course tutors. In

addition to the interviews, two written responses were received from individuals who wished to be interviewed but circumstances prevented this from happening. These written responses were received from another CCRS course tutor and another Catholic Primary Head Teacher.

Each interview asked a number of pre-determined questions but given the semi-structured approach, also allowed room for conversation to develop so that interviewees could air their own experience and reflections concerning CCRS. Each interview was recorded using digital voice recording apparatus before then being transcribed and saved in electronic form for subsequent thematic coding and analysis. Key words, concepts and patterned meaning were highlighted and code validation was undertaken to ensure the analysis was coherent and consistent. Reporting of the interview data has been kept anonymous in keeping with ethical guidelines and good practice. It is our intention that no individual, school, parish or diocese should be identified.

The list of interview questions is found in Appendix 5.

2.1 Disclaimer

This research report presents the broad data that has emerged out of the CCRS research project. Inevitably, the findings represent the outcome from those who took part in the research. They are not representative of the total CCRS experience of every person who has taken or encountered the course since 1991. Indeed one of the challenges of any piece of social research is to discover the 'unknown' or reach the 'unreachable' participants.

The Phase One survey did include participants who started but then disengaged and/or withdrew from CCRS study but they form a minority. It is recognised that the voices of those who have not taken part in this research go unrecorded and unheard. Nevertheless, the rigour of the design and conduct of the research project means that the research team can articulate with confidence and credibility some important findings and insights about CCRS.

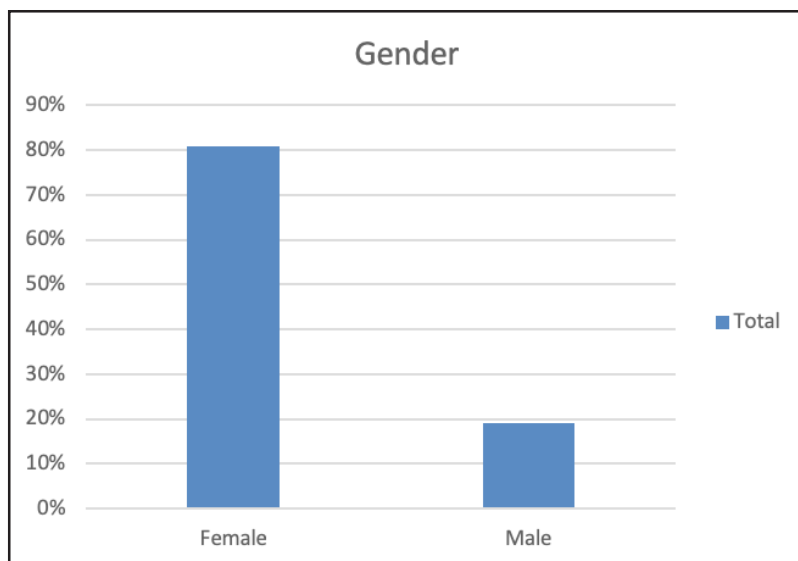
3. What CCRS Course Participants Say

3.1 About You

This opening section presents data about the CCRS student population. However, the questions on demographics (26-34) featured at the end of the online survey due to the fact that much of the research literature recommends this approach in order to reduce respondent stereotype and to ensure that key questions are answered before risk of survey alienation or fatigue sets in. In retrospect, this adopted approach did not take account of the fact that some respondents did not finish the whole survey. In reality, this meant that data concerning the survey population is missing from those who did not answer all the questions.

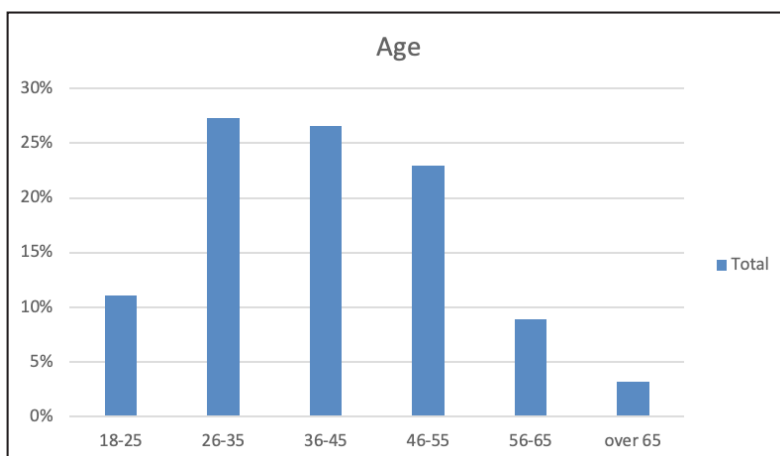
Gender

Survey responses demonstrate that 81% of those who take CCRS are female and 19% are male. When this data is filtered by school or parish role, then 83% of those in a school role and 65% of those in a parish role are female. This represents a gender imbalance in the CCRS student population.



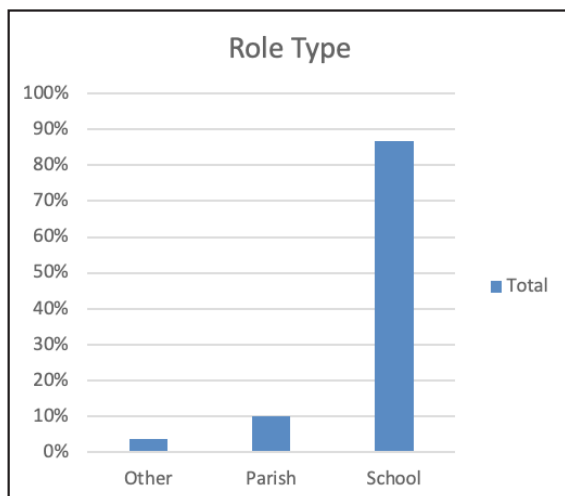
Age

The age range of CCRS participants runs from 18 years to over 65 years. The majority are aged between 26 and 55 years. There is some discrepancy between those in school and parish roles. For those in a school role, 60% occupy the younger 26-45 age group while for those in a parish role, 55% are aged over 55 years. This means that any given local CCRS cohort or study group may comprise different age groups, bringing variance in life experience, personal or professional expectations, and purposes for study.



Main role or ministry

When asked about main role or ministry, the large majority (87%) of respondents indicate that they have a school-based role with the remaining participants involved in either parish ministry or other roles.



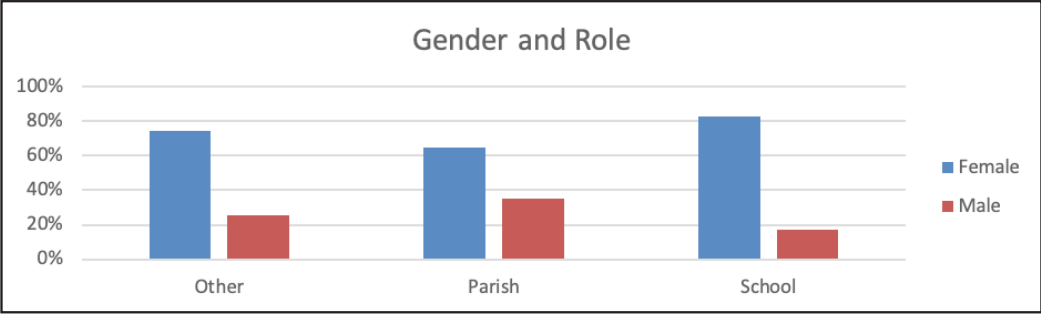
Those who declare a school-based role include the following:

Role	% of total respondents
Teacher Catholic school (primary)	41%
Catholic School Leader	16%
Teacher Catholic school (secondary RE)	6%
Trainee teacher (primary)	5%
Other Education role	4%
Teacher non-Catholic school (primary)	4%
Teacher non-Catholic school (secondary)	2%
School Governor	1%
Trainee teacher (secondary)	1%

Those declaring a parish, ministry or other role are as follows:

Role	% of total respondents
Other	4%
Parishioner	4%
Parish Catechist	3%
Chaplain	1%
Church agency or organisation	1%
Parish Lay Minister	1%

The following chart illustrates CCRS participants in terms of both gender and role. Men taking CCRS are more likely to be in a parish or other role rather than in a school-based role.



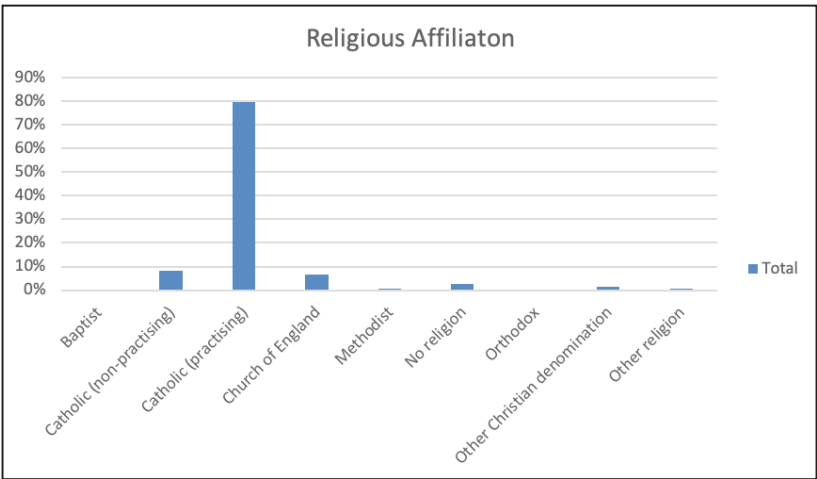
There were 130 comments in an open-dialogue box accompanying this question; mostly they offer further clarification about an individual’s specific role or situation. For example,

- I am a Lay School Chaplain (n51)
- Qualified teacher - currently not teaching (n57)
- Teacher Catholic Sixth Form College (n80)
- Higher Level Teaching Assistant - responsible for the Catholic Life of the school (n83)
- L’Arche Community leader (n90)
- Ordinary parishioner, ex- Reader and Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion (n95)
- Catholic Primary Governor and Catechist (n114)

Religious Affiliation

When asked about religious affiliation, 80% of survey respondents state they are practising Catholic. The survey rubric offered no criteria to define what is meant by ‘practising’ but left this to individual determination. For those in a parish role, 100% declare themselves as practising; for those in a school role, it is 75% of respondents. Thus the faith situation for most CCRS participants appears to be one where some identification with Catholic practice is present but this does not make clear the extent of being an active member of the faith community.

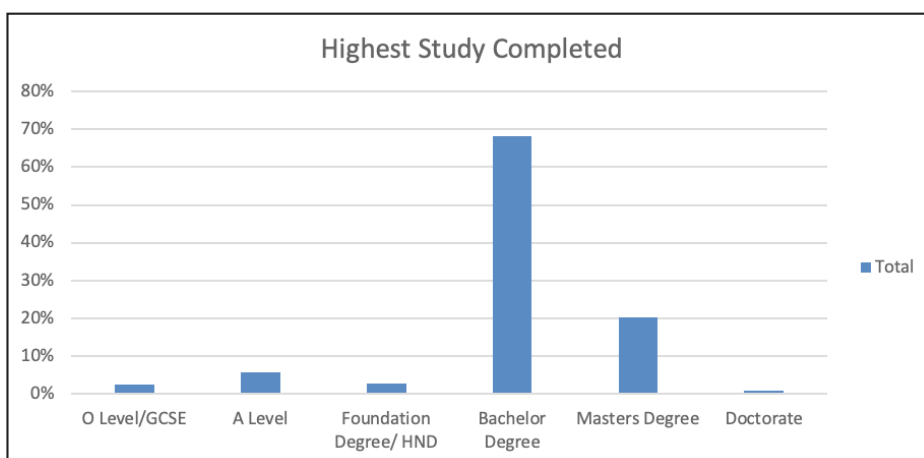
What can be noted is that the CCRS student population includes those who state themselves as ‘non-practising Catholic’ (8%) and also those from other Christian denominations (6% Church of England for example) as well as a minority of people from other religious backgrounds and those with non-religious worldviews.



Education

The survey shows that 89% of those who study CCRS are educated to degree level or above. When the data is filtered further, the breakdown for those in a school role is 90% and 60% of those who are parish-based. This means that the general CCRS population has undertaken some form of higher education.

However, for a minority of CCRS participants, this is not the case, which adds to the variance of local CCRS cohorts or groups. So, while it is noticeable that CCRS attracts participants from all educational backgrounds, in practice this suggests that CCRS study, which is broadly set at National Qualifications Framework Level 4, could represent an academic step up for some people.

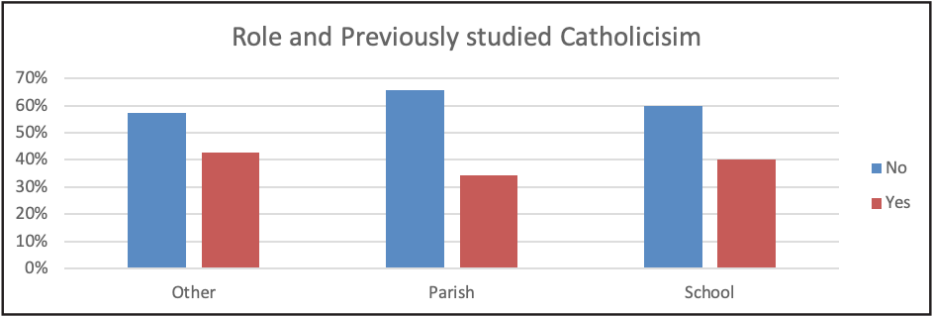


Previous Catholic study

Despite the high level of general education previously indicated, 60% of survey respondents indicate they have not studied Catholicism before undertaking CCRS. This was somewhat surprising to the researchers but the response may indicate variance in how respondents interpreted what was meant by 'studied Catholicism'.

The fact that 60% of the survey population state they are new to formal Catholic study is significant. It confirms the literature which calls for enhanced adult theological literacy for those in professional and pastoral roles and it affirms the views of many course participants themselves who acknowledge the need for knowledge and understanding of Catholic faith as a primary reason for undertaking the course.

This question attracted 325 comments in an open dialogue box. Most responses clarify the types of previous Catholic study had been undertaken. For example,



MA in Catholic School Leadership (n3)

Diploma in Catechesis with my Diocese. Also Pastoral Theology Diploma and various other study days/courses (n18)

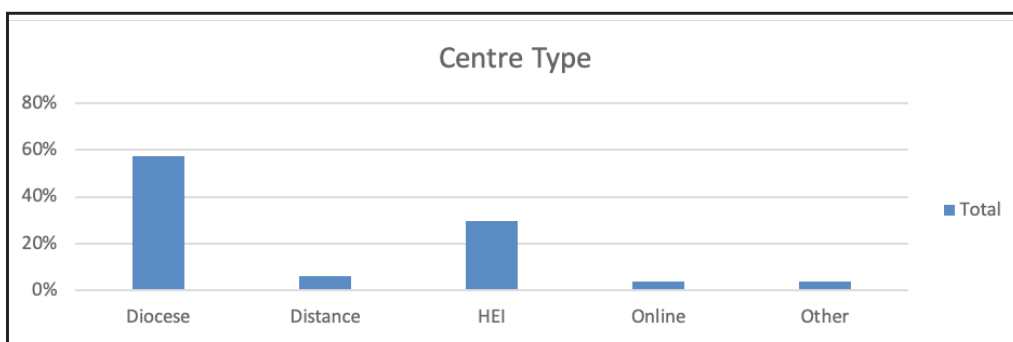
I followed the RCIA course (n51)

Other comments state that previous Catholic study was gained through attending a Catholic school or seminary, or by studying O-Level, GCSE or A Level Religious Studies, or by undertaking a theology degree at college or university. A very small minority of responses hint of undertaking previous study of Catholic faith through informal or non-formal means, for example within a parish prayer group or through private reading.

CCRS centre of study

All CCRS centres are represented by the survey population. A breakdown of the data shows the following: 57% study CCRS at local diocesan centres; 30% study with a higher education institution; 6% study through distance learning and 3% study online.

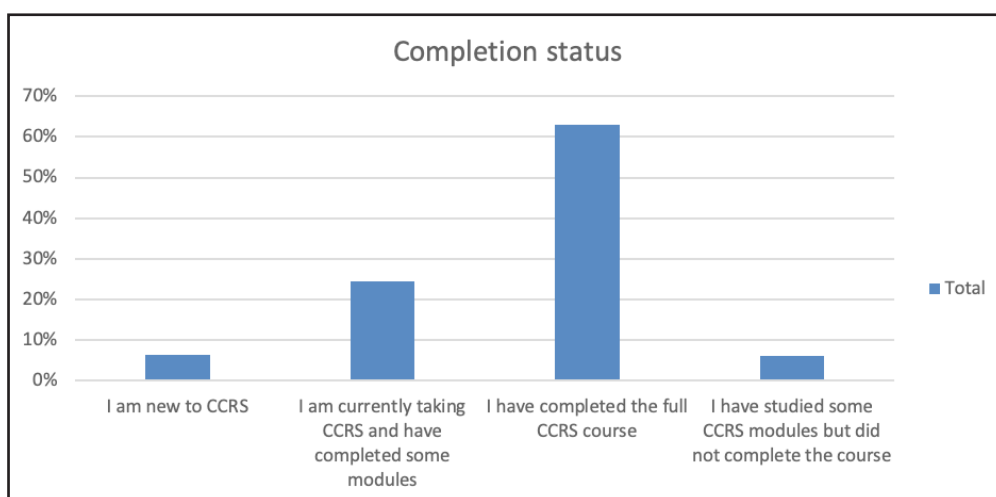
There is some discrepancy, however, in the data that emerges in the ‘Other’ category. For example, some dioceses run CCRS across satellite centres or approved provision through local school-based partnerships and these were named as the centre of study rather than the sponsoring diocese itself. In addition, a small number of responses indicated that CCRS was studied at a centre that is no longer in existence, such as Ushaw (which closed in 2010). Furthermore, there was confusion for some people taking the CCRS Online but classifying their centre as Liverpool Hope University.



3.2 CCRS Status

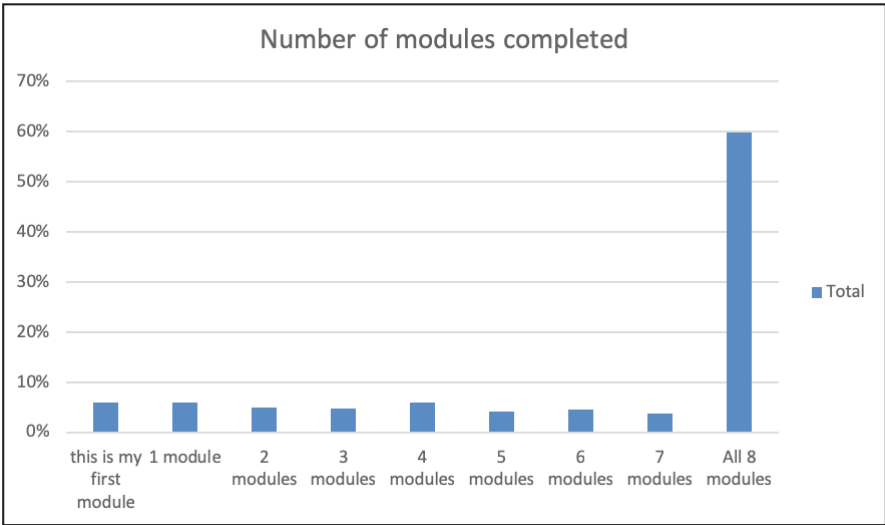
CCRS modules and completion status

The survey shows that 63% of respondents have completed the whole CCRS. This was interesting to the researchers, who had anticipated that a higher response rate would come from those currently undertaking the course. What it does mean is that the survey responses are made by a majority who have successfully achieved CCRS. On the one hand, this means that their evaluation can scope across the whole course with the benefit of hindsight and post-course reflection. However, it is important to bear this in mind and to compare their responses to those who are still undertaking the course as well as to those who started but subsequently withdrew.



When asked how many modules have been completed, 60% replied that all eight had been achieved. This tallies with the previous question but shows a slight discrepancy among those doing CCRS from one particular diocese where the course is structured around four integrated modules. A minority of these participants were

unable to relate their experience to the eightfold modular curriculum generally advocated by CCRS.



There is no gender difference in terms of those who complete the whole course. However, age factors do come into play. Those who withdraw or do not complete CCRS are mainly in the 36-45 age grouping. This coincides with the obvious demands of parenting, family life and work commitments so is perhaps not surprising.

Reasons for withdrawal from CCRS

For 93% of CCRS students, this does not apply. Only 6% survey respondents withdrew or left the course. Almost half (43%) of those who did so, withdrew more than five years ago.

When seeking reasons for why people start but then disengage from CCRS, there is the challenge of how to hear the ‘missing’ voices i.e. those who did not take part in the survey. However, what is evident from the data is that those in school roles are less likely to drop out than others. This could be for any number of reasons but it may reflect the professional expectations placed on many who undertake CCRS as part of their professional development or as a requirement of their school employment.

“It was a part of my contract and was none negotiable that I had to complete the course as part of my application for working in a Catholic school. Due to other circumstances I asked to opt out but was told in writing that I had to complete the course.” (participant quote)

Various reasons are given in the 91 accompanying open comments as to why individuals leave CCRS before completion. Coding of these responses indicates the following reasons:

Personal reasons/family circumstances

Time/workload pressures

Workplace/employment/school circumstances/professional demands

Centre location/delivery/timescale/organisation issues/poor tutor

Financial/ school paid/ could no longer afford

Finished university/ PGCE/Initial Teacher Training

Course not interesting/relevant/ too long/ too easy/too demanding/ran out of time

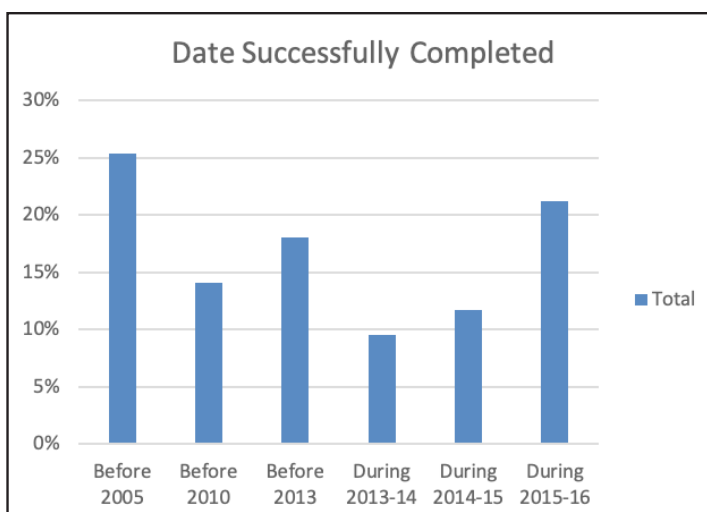
Only wanted particular module(s) not whole course/audit status only

Did not want/need/or understand academic aspects, including assessment

Moved on to higher study

Date of completion

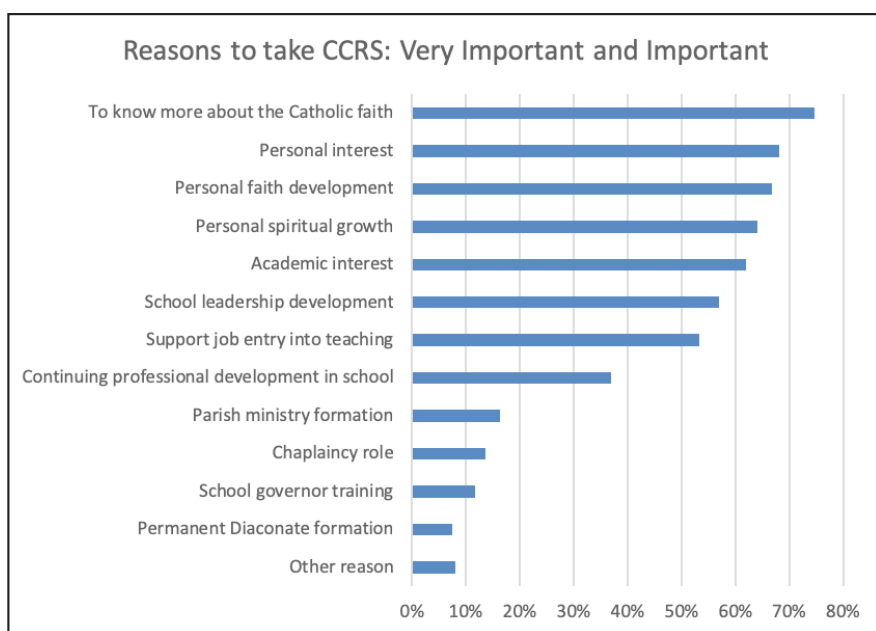
There is a range of course completion dates among the survey population and this enables both a longitudinal perspective about CCRS to be gained from the data as well as evaluation from current participant experience. The relatively high response rate (25%) from those who had completed before 2005 was surprising but the remaining 75% do reflect the views and experience of people who have engaged with CCRS since 2010.



Why study CCRS?

This key question offered a number of response options and invited a Likert scaled ranking order of Very Important, Important, Somewhat Important, Not Relevant. What emerges is that people primarily choose to study CCRS in order to develop knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith. This is confirmed over and over again throughout the survey.

Other reasons for taking CCRS are clustered around faith and spirituality (especially relevant for those in parish roles) and also around more instrumental or functional reasons concerning school leadership, professional development and initial teacher training for those in the education sector. The cluster of reasons around what loosely might be called formation for ministry is generally much lower.



Further filtering of this data suggests that for those in the parish, around 90% undertake CCRS for reasons to do with enhancing their faith and understanding. For those in school roles, 76% consider CCRS an important part of continuing professional development, with 75% seeking a more confident knowledge of the Catholic faith. For older retired participants, CCRS is mostly studied for personal faith development and personal interest.

This question attracted 103 comments in the accompanying open dialogue box. Many expounded why the 'Other Reason' option had been selected and this included a range of additional reasons that had not been specifically listed as options, for example:

Religious formation (n14)

To try and understanding the things I disagree with about the RC church (n20)

To support Deaf Community (n24)

Step towards priesthood and ministry (n54)

We are bringing up our children in the Catholic faith so we need support as parents (n65)

Began the course to help me with prison chaplaincy work (n71)

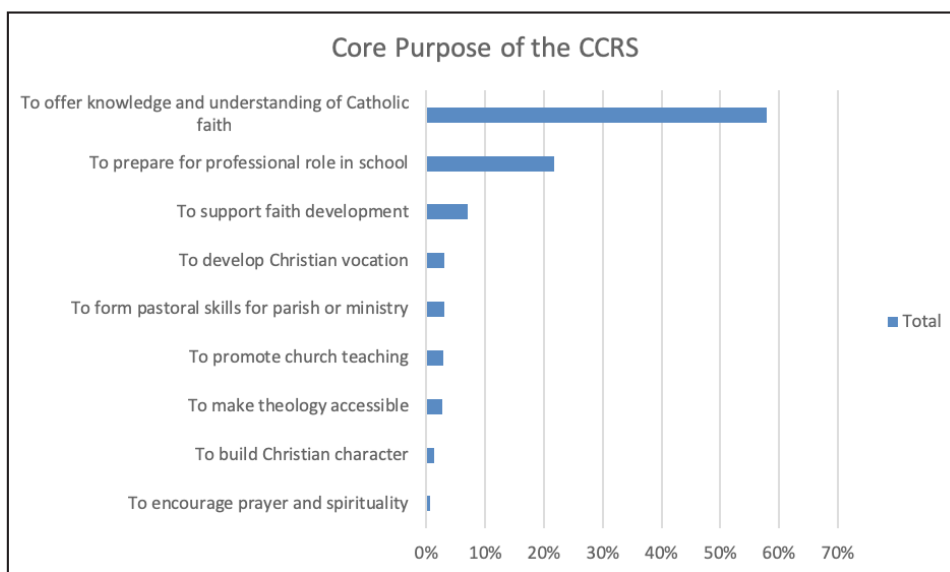
To help me make the transition to a Catholic school from a state school (n84)

Youth Ministry Team (n89)

3.3 Relevance and Purpose of CCRS

Purpose of CCRS

The next sequence of survey questions 7-10 asked what participants saw as the relevance and core purpose of CCRS. When asked to choose the core purpose underpinning the course from a list of options, the clear choice from 58% participants was for Knowledge and Understanding of Catholic Faith. This was followed by preparation for a professional role in school (22%). Here it is important to bear in mind that the majority of people (87%) who take CCRS are in a school role. Those in parishes (10% of the survey population) indicate the value of CCRS more in terms of supporting theological and pastoral skills for ministry and parish life.



The previous question had asked participants for their key reason for studying CCRS. The current question asked something different; what did they see as the main purpose of the course. Both sets of data responses are significant in demonstrating that the majority of participants regard CCRS as a means to gain knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith and that this is core to what CCRS is all about.

“Before embarking on CCRS, I would have said it was to prepare for a professional role within school. Having completed the CCRS, I would now say it was to offer knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith.” (participant quote)

A small number of 27 open comments accompanied this question and although they form a minority viewpoint, some make for disconcerting reading for how the purpose of CCRS is perceived by some participants:

To satisfy Governors that you are committed to Catholic Education (n8)

It’s a box ticking exercise to teach in a Catholic school (n10)

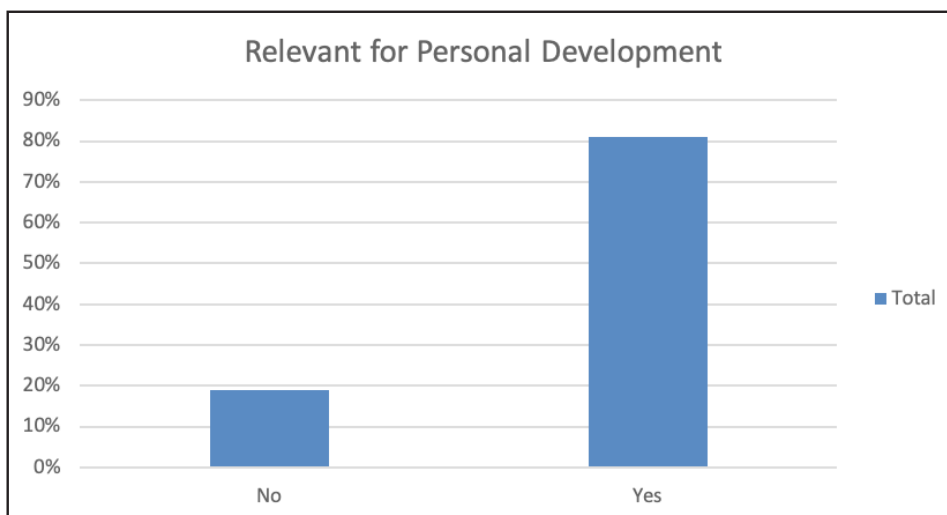
The primary remit of this course is to make money for the organisation (n2 and n13)

More positive appraisal for the purpose of CCRS comes in the comments that recognise CCRS as a qualification for lay people that is unique in the Catholic Church in England and Wales (n9); that provides a sound theological foundation (n20); that supports faith development and makes theology accessible (n24); and that extends thinking about faith into a way of life and real-world settings (n16).

However, the contrast among these 27 comments in how they perceive the core purpose of CCRS is noticeable. There is variation in how people evaluate what the CCRS is all about and this relates to their experience of doing the course. An underlying tension within CCRS concerning its core identity and purpose is apparent.

Relevance for personal development

CCRS participants regard the course highly in terms of its relevance for personal development. This is affirmed by 81% of participants, with an even higher percentage of 94% for those in a parish role. For those who do not complete CCRS then this lowers to 76%. However, 19% of the survey population do not feel that CCRS is relevant in this way.



The question rubric did not define what is meant by ‘relevant for personal development’ but left this to individual determination. It attracted a high number of 673 comments in the open dialogue box. The vast majority of the responses were positive and gave both cognitive and practical interpretations of impact. These were coded as follows:

Yes: CCRS gave broader knowledge / understanding of Catholicism / Christian theology / Scripture / allowing questioning

Yes: CCRS deepened my faith and /or my spiritual life / my personal faith journey

Yes: CCRS highlighted misconceptions, filled in gaps in knowledge, updated my knowledge

Yes: CCRS supported my role [parish, school, as parent, diaconate, priesthood training, youth ministry, Deaf ministry, and entry to further - higher level - theological study]

Yes: because CCRS fulfilled CPD requirements / job applications

Comments relating to the lack of relevance of CCRS for personal development formed a small minority (36 comments). They do not give a full picture of why a negative response was made but were coded as follows:

No: Learned nothing new from CCRS

No: Course was not relevant (no particular reason stated)

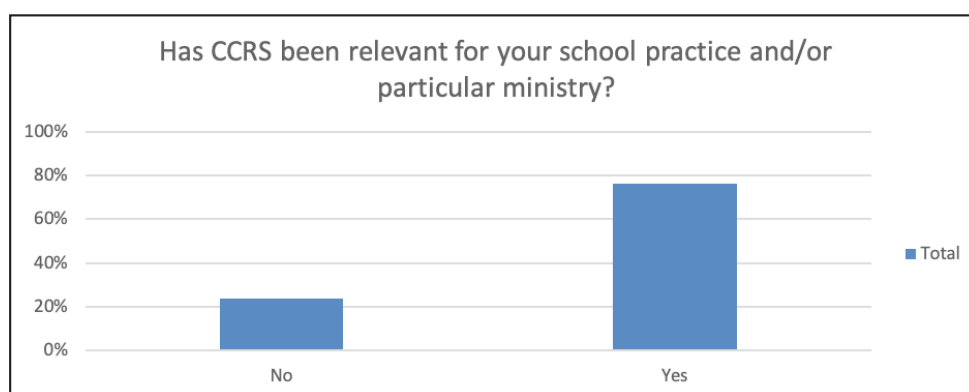
No: Course is too theological

No: Course is not practical enough

No: Did not help faith development or spiritual life

Relevance for school practice/particular ministry

In response to this question, 76% of survey participants find CCRS to be relevant for their school practice or ministry with 24% responding negatively. When the data is filtered, the positive affirmation rises to 80% from those in school roles, but drops to 60% from those in parishes and down to 54% from those who studied some modules but did not complete the course.



Qualitative comments accompanying this question show that some participants felt they had answered this previously, thus failing to distinguish between personal and professional development. The survey gave no definition of either term and so a lack of clarity in the question design may have affected the response.

However, a high number of 667 comments were raised for this question. The majority of the Yes responses indicate satisfaction with the CCRS for helping classroom teaching, Religious Education, collective worship, Catholic school appointment to role and school leadership development. Given the high proportion of Catholic teachers who completed the survey, perhaps these responses are to be expected but it is heartening to know that CCRS is supporting teachers and other education professionals in this way.

It is the negative response to this question that is particularly interesting as this expresses the dissatisfaction of participants who do not see CCRS as supporting or extending their professional development. Here, the content of CCRS is judged as too theological and lacking in relevance or application for school practice.

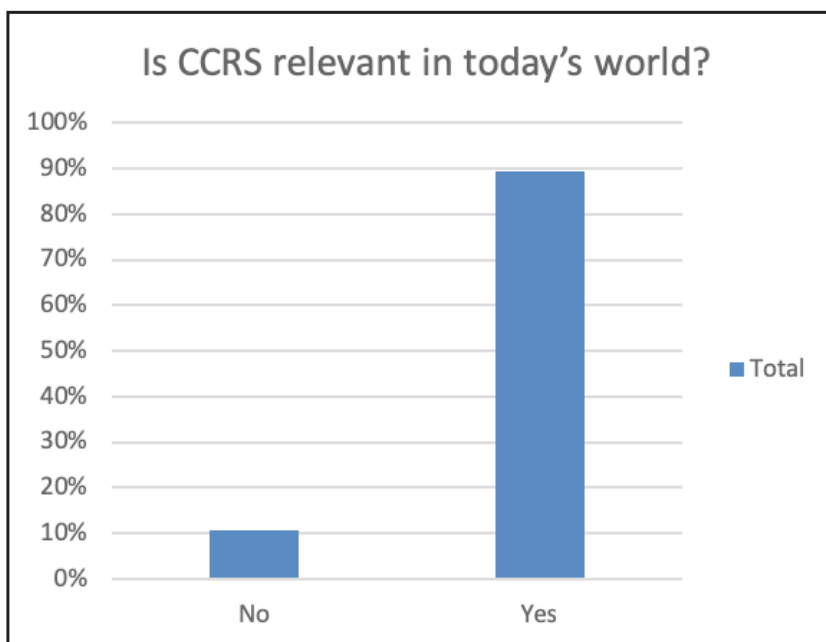
*"Not once in 17 years of teaching have I used anything covered in the course."
(participant quote)*

For those in parish ministry, CCRS is viewed by some as an essential foundation for their role. For others, the course is over-focused on teachers and schools and does not support faith or spirituality for a parish context. This sense of CCRS only as a professional course for teachers is seen as detrimental by many of those who take it for parish, personal or other interest.

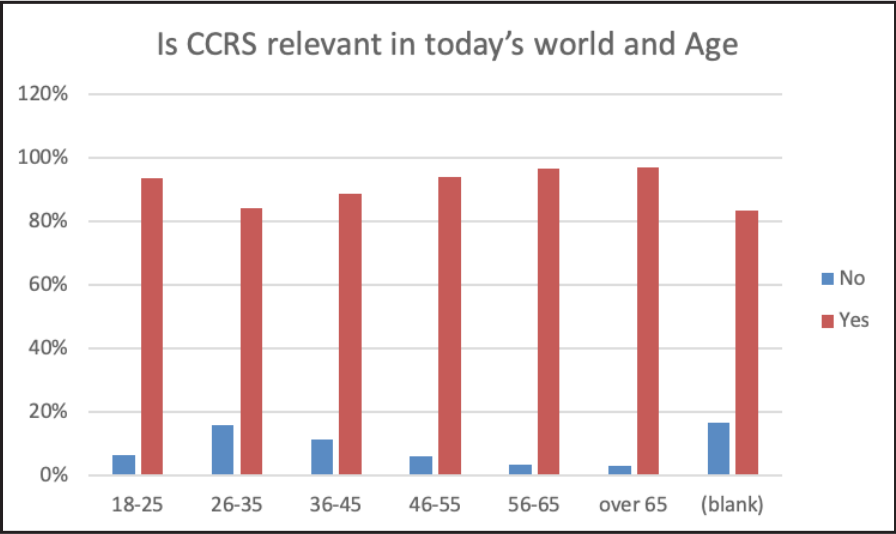
Relevance in today's world

The research project was set up in light of the fact that CCRS was twenty-five years old at the commencement of the project. Therefore, a question about relevance in today's world was felt by the researchers to be important given that the course has been in existence since 1991.

The response to this question is significant. Just over 89% of survey respondents say that CCRS is relevant for today.



Filtering this data shows that 99% of parish respondents affirm the relevance of CCRS in this way. Even taking account the different age groups among CCRS participants, the affirmative response does not drop below 80%.



Once again, a high number of qualitative responses accompanied this question, 628 in total. Coding and analysis of key words and terminology enable the responses to be placed into the following categories:

CCRS is relevant today - reason:

- For teaching religious education
- For Catholic school role, ethos, values
- In the contemporary social/cultural world
- To provide Catholic knowledge/understanding
- To promote faith in everyday action/life
- To support theological learning
- To allow adult learning, reflection, discussion
- To allow passing on our faith to others
- To help work with/understand other faiths
- Development of faith and spirituality

What is noticeable is the many individual responses that confirm the need for CCRS to enable or support a role in the contemporary Catholic school or parish. For those in school, this includes non-Catholic teachers and non-practising Catho-

lic teachers too. Other responses single out the opportunity given though studying CCRS to gain a theological vocabulary and understanding that helps an articulation of Catholic faith in the midst of the current societal context and demands of a contemporary secular world.

A small number of negative comments relay opinions about the outdated nature of CCRS; a sense that some modules are relevant but not others; that the CCRS ought to be entirely optional rather than a necessity for those in Catholic education; that a separate course should exist for teachers and catechists in light of changing school and parish situations; and that CCRS is not related sufficiently to school pedagogy or classroom practice.

While the negative feedback should not be taken lightly, nevertheless in overall terms, the very positive affirmation for CCRS as relevant for today is highly commendable for a course that has run since 1991.

“Not only is being a person of faith counter-cultural these days, knowing anything about faith, in its broadest terms, is frequently seen as an oddity. Misunderstandings about the Catholic faith support this viewpoint and secure professional knowledge can play an important part in countering this. Excellence within Catholic schools is also an important factor in protecting ourselves from an increasing vocal group who see no place for faith in education.” (participant quote)

“Is CCRS relevant? Absolutely! More so today than ever before. We live in a time when the role of faith schools is being questioned all the time. We cannot defend the importance of faith schools in our society if we do not understand our own faith which is what CCRS helps with.” (participant quote)

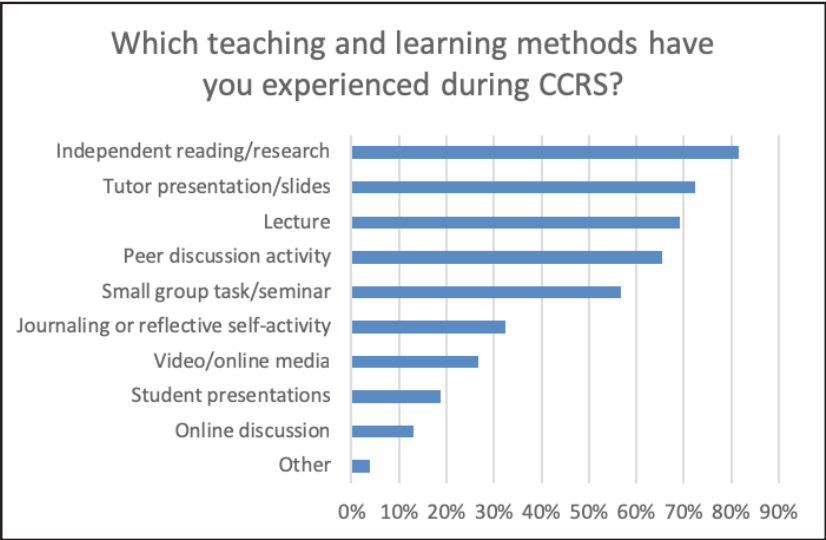
“Most Catholics are poorly catechised in their faith, so a course that helps them understand the deeper tenets of Catholic theology using both scripture and the teachings of the Church Fathers within their historical context and what they mean today is invaluable. It is also ideal for the formation of parish ministries and can strengthen Catholic understanding in teachers, who teach in Catholic schools. It is good at strengthening knowledge and understanding in Catholic lay people like myself.” (participant quote)

3.4 CCRS Learning and Teaching

Learning and teaching methods

In order to discern what sort of learning occurs in and through CCRS, the Phase One survey posed a range of questions relating to learning and teaching (11-19) and asked participants to evaluate their experience during their study of the course. The

most frequent methods were confirmed as independent reading, tutor presentation, lecture and peer discussion activity.



Data for this question was compared between diocese, distance, online and higher education (HEI) centres with some variation becoming apparent. In dioceses, small group work featured more significantly. For distance learning there is an understandable emphasis on independent reading and research. The HEI centres and CCRS Online have higher levels of online resources and discussion, which no doubt is a reflection on the available media platforms and online course infrastructure available to them.

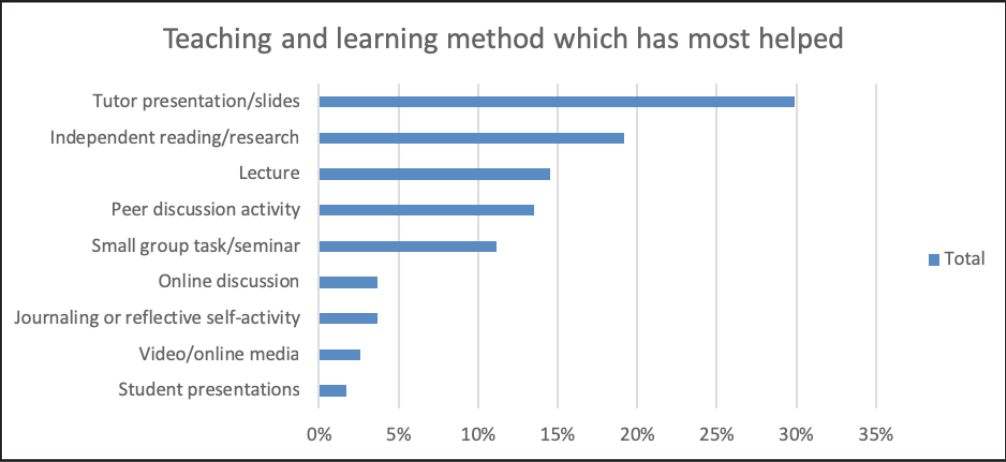
What can be surmised from this question is that a range of learning and teaching methods are being used across CCRS centres. A small number of 45 comments responded in the open dialogue box and pointed out that deaf signed delivery, role play, questionnaires and writing of assignments had not been included among the option choices.

Learning and teaching method most helped

The next pair of survey questions stipulated the same set of learning and teaching methods but asked which were the most and least helpful in terms of supporting an adult learning experience. For most helpful, almost 30% respondents opted for tutor input and presentation. This echoes an underlying regard and affirmation that runs throughout the survey among CCRS students for what the module tutor brings to the course.

All of the answer choices were selected by at least some respondents but the researchers note that the options with a low percentage score may simply reflect a lower number of CCRS participants who experienced that particular method.

For example, student presentations feature in a minor way but this does not mean that they are unhelpful, rather that fewer people may have experienced them while undertaking CCRS.



This question attracted 475 comments. In coding the responses, the researchers noticed some confusion between what was interpreted as lecture and tutor presentation and also between small group task/seminar and the peer discussion option and these are conflated in some responses which make coding more problematic. However, what can be construed is how the respondent experience of different CCRS teaching & learning methods enables or hinders their learning. What is also noticeable is that some respondents report a mix of methods while others are more critical of receiving fewer or only one pedagogical method during their study of CCRS.

The highest number of responses (409 comments) gives a positive appraisal for the learning methods encountered during CCRS and the reasons are shown in the following table:

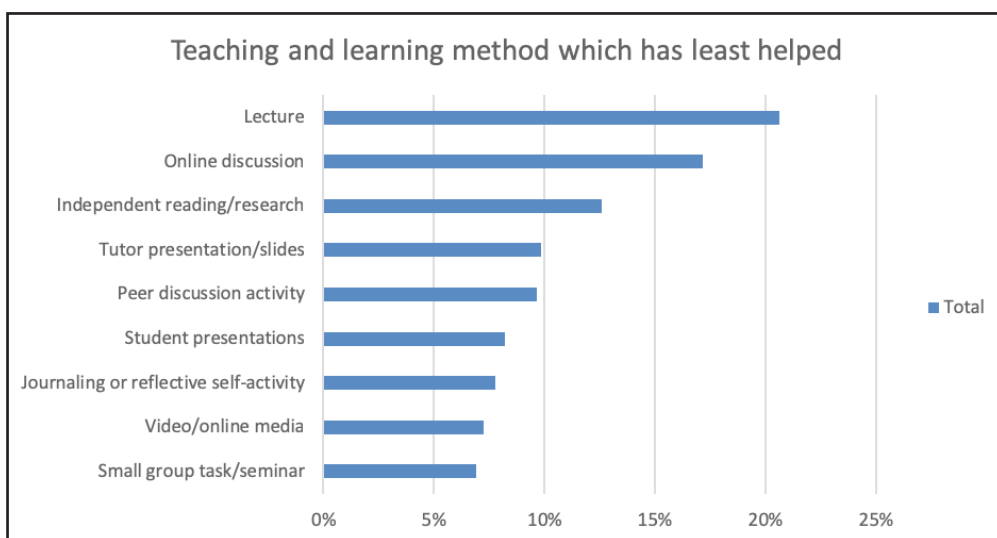
Pedagogy/learning processes – positive	Number of comments
Other student input, collaboration, sharing	118
Positive experience related to CCRS tutor	72
Variety of tasks, flexibility of approach, opportunities for varied approaches	45
Prompting further thought, required research, reflection, developed understanding	40
Increased secure knowledge, consolidation	29
Positive experience related to independent learning	27
Positive experience related to personal learning style	26
Focused reading	24
Coherence in course elements, appropriate levels, good resources, assignments relevant to course material	14
Promotes learning, reinforces	7
Enjoyable, motivating challenging	5
Feedback on understanding	2

What is noticeable here is importance of discussion and shared peer activity (118 comments); also the role of the tutor as evidenced in the high number of affirmative responses to this effect (72 comments).

“The tutor presentations are what ‘kick starts’ or ignites the passion to learn more. ... the tutor may also allow for discussion/participation to flow and bring the learning to life.” (participant quote)

Learning and teaching method least helped

A parallel question asked which method had least helped towards an adult learning experience of CCRS. The same set of response options was available and, once again, all options were selected by some respondents. The traditional lecture fared poorly among almost 21% of the survey population; this remained consistent across school, parish or distance based CCRS participants.



Qualitative comments (564 in total) accompanied this question but included a number of ambiguous responses that made coding rather problematic. For example, some responses stated that nothing had been ‘least helpful’ but the survey forced an answer before moving on and so a reluctant response had to be made.

Among the negative responses about pedagogy and learning methods, the following table indicates how the responses were coded and categorised:

Pedagogy/learning processes – negative	Number of comments
Poor levels/challenges of student input, discussion, collaboration, sharing	62
No variety of tasks, no interactivity, only passive learning	32
Not enjoyable, dull, boring, not inspiring, no engagement	31
No coherence in course elements, poor resources, not relevant to course material	25
Personal learning style not supported	17
Tutor related - poor quality input, performance	15
Specific response to Online learning	12
Does not help in prompting further thought, research, reflection or understanding	8
Does not promotes learning or reinforce	8
Does not lead to increased secure knowledge or consolidation	6
Does not support focused reading	5
Gives no feedback on understanding	3
Does not support critical writing or thinking, or assessment	3

What is disappointing in this set of data is the number of negative comments relating to peer interaction. This includes peer discussion, which is experienced by some people as intimidating due to a lack of theological vocabulary or self-confidence to join in. Sometimes peer discussion activity digresses into a completely unrelated topic or it puts pressure on someone to say the 'right' thing or agree with their colleagues. For others, the discussion is based only on personal viewpoint or dominated by those interested in pushing their own agenda or as one comment points out, by 'boorish, disinclined teacher colleagues'.

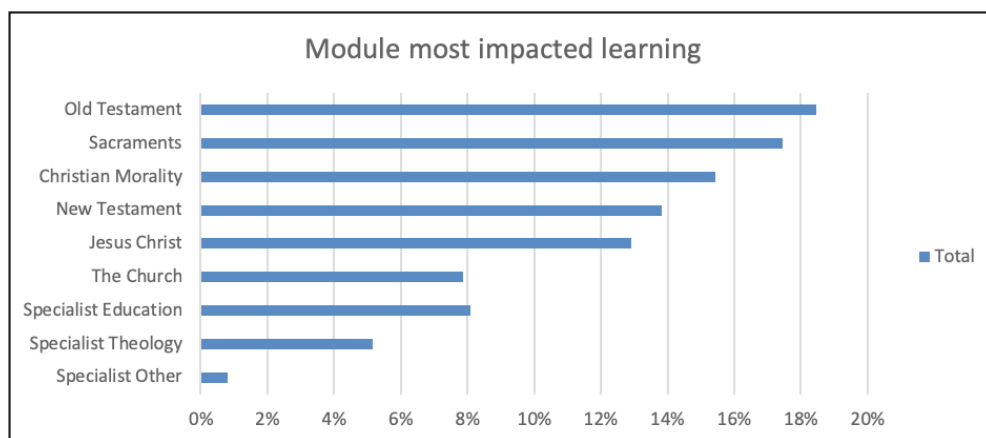
"Sometimes peers do not stay on task and the quality of outcomes for discussion is varied depending on the discipline of the group and its make-up. Sometimes one person can dominate. It works best when a structure for the discussion is given to the group to ensure best possible outcomes and purpose." (participant quote)

The set of negative comments also speaks of CCRS in terms of a passive learning experience, such as death by PowerPoint slides or being spoon-fed church teachings or theological information that bears no practical relevance. Such negative evaluation offers a challenge to CCRS providers and tutors in terms of ensuring that sound adult learning principles are followed as widely and consistently as possible in order to ensure a quality learning experience among all CCRS participants and across all centres.

CCRS module most impacted learning

The next set of parallel questions asked which CCRS module had most and least impacted on the participant learning experience. Respondents who had completed CCRS were in a better position to answer this compared to those still undertaking the course or those who had withdrawn. The six core modules were named separately in the question options but the specialist modules were unnamed and only listed as specialist one and two. In retrospect, this proved problematic in that some respondents were unable to recognise or name which they had taken as specialist module one or two. This is understandable as each local CCRS centre runs the specialist modules according to its own provision and specification.

Five of the core modules showed a fairly even spread of being viewed as most impactful for learning. The ranking order came out as follows:



From this it can be seen that the Old Testament module is ranked the highest with the Church module ranked as the lowest core module with only 8% participants viewing it favourably. This deserves further investigation but the data contains hints that many participants find it a real struggle to engage with ecclesiology, particularly when the focus of the module lies with Church history rather than engaging with present day realities. The low ranking for the Church module is consistent across centre types although there is some minor variation among the age groups, with younger participants ranking it more favourably than the over 65 years group.

Analysis of the 770 open comments that aligned with this question gave various reasons as to why specific modules had been chosen as most impactful for learning. Coding of the responses demonstrates the following sorts of reasons:

Growth of knowledge and understanding in Catholicism gained from the chosen module (sometimes from no previous knowledge base)

Increase in secure knowledge, consolidation (from some previous basis)

Relevance of specific content – applied to everyday life, relevant, topical, fundamental to Catholicism

Undetailed approval of learning processes

Module could be easily applied to school activities, helps RE teaching, sacramental programmes

Other student input, collaboration, sharing, discussion was appreciated

Module promotes/reinforces learning; prompts further thought; requires research; prompts reflection

Tutors were supportive/wonderful

Module brought development of faith, reflection, spirituality

Module was useful for gaining/maintaining teaching job

Individual modules are singled out as to why they are most impactful for learning:

I loved the Old and New Testament biblical studies, especially the covenant history, as it made me examine my own faith more in depth (n1)

An in-depth study of Christology had an incredible personal impact. It asked questions I had never really even considered before. It truly helped me understand better the person of Jesus Christ. (n176)

I came to understand the significance of the sacraments and how we can be living examples of God's grace in our everyday lives. (n209)

The morality module really and truly made me reflect constantly on my views and attitudes. I actively wanted to research more deeply and it I found myself engaging in quite in-depth conversation / debates / disagreements with members of the RE Department in my school. (n709)

I had no idea about the role and history of the Catholic Church so it was very informative. (n148)

The list of specialist modules named by participants as most impactful included modules relating to Catholic education, practical theology and lay ministry:

Catholic Education - a valuable module that encouraged me to consider the value and difference of Catholic Education and to consider the value of my faith as an educator. (n133)

Catholic Social Teaching made a big impact on me. I had decided to leave teaching by the time I was doing this module, but it was so relevant to life that this didn't matter. I gained a different sense of perspective about the Catholic faith. I have become much more 'outward looking' and have taken an interest in the issues facing the world, in politics, and in my parish. It really opened my eyes. (n504)

The Youth Ministry module was the ideal way to receive relevant training, to learn from others, to improve my own understanding, to be provided with

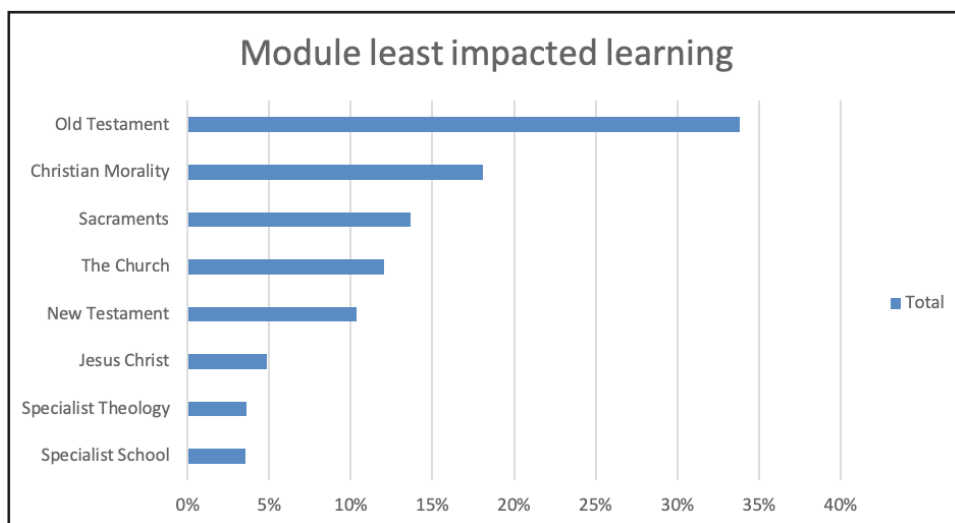
resources for further personal development, to motivate me, to help me grow in faith and to recognise my ministry as a call from God. (n96)

By way of summary of the feedback from across the range of CCRS modules, the following comment is by no means untypical with what many participants say about CCRS:

I'm amazed that I lived thirty years as a Catholic - and a well-educated one - without being taught this at some stage. (n352)

CCRS module least impacted learning

However, survey respondents are not shy about holding back in stating which CCRS module they found least impactful during their experience of studying the course. Here, it is the Old Testament module that is viewed as least impactful. This is reported by over 30% of participants and particularly by those in school roles and those aged between 18 -55 years. Although this is perhaps predictable due to the cultural and theological distance between the ancient Jewish writers and the contemporary world, it deserves further investigation.¹⁰



The previous question had showed the Old Testament as the highest ranked module by 18% respondents. This included Catholic primary and secondary teachers, who primarily acknowledged their own lack of previous biblical awareness and spoke of gaining enhanced scriptural knowledge and understanding. The following comment is typical and repeated across a number of responses:

¹⁰ See Stuart-Buttle, R. (forthcoming 2019) book chapter in Buchanan, M. & Gellel, A. eds *Global Perspectives on Catholic Religious Education Volume II: Learning and Leading in a Pluralist World*. Singapore: Springer.

I had never studied the Old Testament before. A lot of things I was taught as a child and previously believed were totally blown out of the water. I do not recall ever being taught how the bible came to be or understand exactly the journey of the Jewish people through the Old Testament. (n37)

In addition, respondents witnessed to greater professional confidence and pedagogical ability to introduce Old Testament texts into the religious education classroom.

The Old Testament is a collection of books that I enjoy and value, but if I'm honest, I have struggled in the past to bring the stories and teachings to the level of the age appropriate lessons in school. (n397)

However, despite some positive affirmation, the module was delineated as least impactful for adult learning and professional education by almost a third of the overall sample. The respondent age profiles demonstrate that it was primarily the younger generation who gave the module a lower ranking (76% 18-25 year olds as compared with 5% aged 65+ years). This suggests that difficulties with studying the Old Testament or finding relevance or meaning might be heightened for younger adults and indicative of their own lack of prior experience, engagement or exposure to the biblical text.

For Catholic primary teachers, 32% reported the module as least impactful for their theological learning and professional development while 28% of secondary teachers reported likewise. For Catholic school leaders, 30% said it was least impactful of all the eight modules. While there might be other reasons attributable for this low ranking, the data does indicate that including the Old Testament within professional education requires careful handling in terms of securing its potential to enhance adult biblical-theological literacy and enrich hermeneutical skills and pedagogical practice.

"The New Testament is the fulfilment of the Old Testament. I still struggle to see lots of killings and outright vengeance in the Old Testament. And how to make sense of this in the classroom?" (participant quote)

"It has most impacted my learning as it totally put me off Christianity. Having now read the Old Testament in a lot of detail, I have come to the conclusion that it is the most frightening piece of fiction that I have ever read." (participant quote)

This question on which module least impacted learning attracted 707 comments and responses mentioned the full range of core modules, not just the Old Testament. Comments were coded and included the following categories:

Didn't like / agree with the module content

Didn't learn or learn enough / or found the module confusing

Knew the module content already /was already familiar / felt confident about it beforehand

Experienced poor quality delivery: inferior teaching methods, poor teachers, limited resources; boring, dull, inappropriate level, or faced assignment issues

Evaluated the module as negative in instrumental / functional terms; as not relevant to role as a teacher

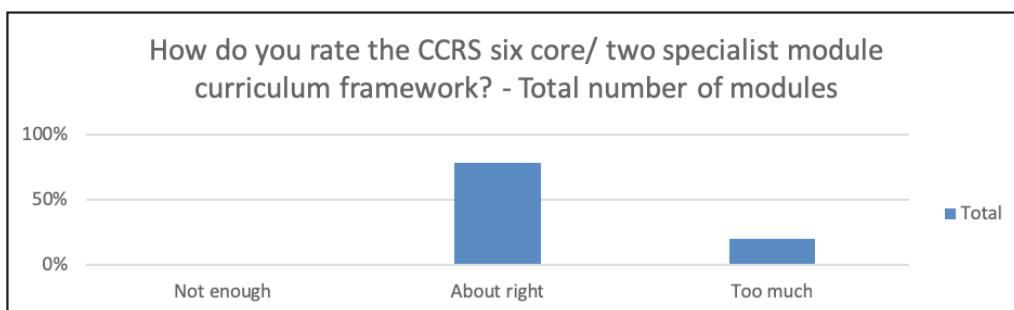
What emerges from this is that challenges facing the core modules are evident in terms of the level of their theological content and the quality of their delivery. It may be that greater clarity of content, further resourcing, shared support and teaching sensitivity is required.

The specialist modules also feature among the negative feedback although less significantly than the core modules. Where the specialist modules are not valued it is mainly due to reasons concerning an individual tutor, poor delivery, unengaging module content, or little discernible practical application or pastoral relevance for real life situations.

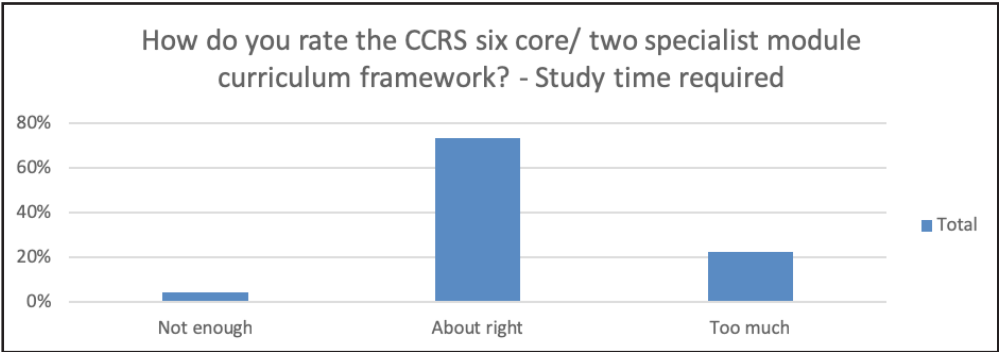
CCRS curriculum framework

When asked to rate the six core - two specialist module curriculum framework on a Likert scale in relation to a range of statements, the 'about right' category comes out each time.

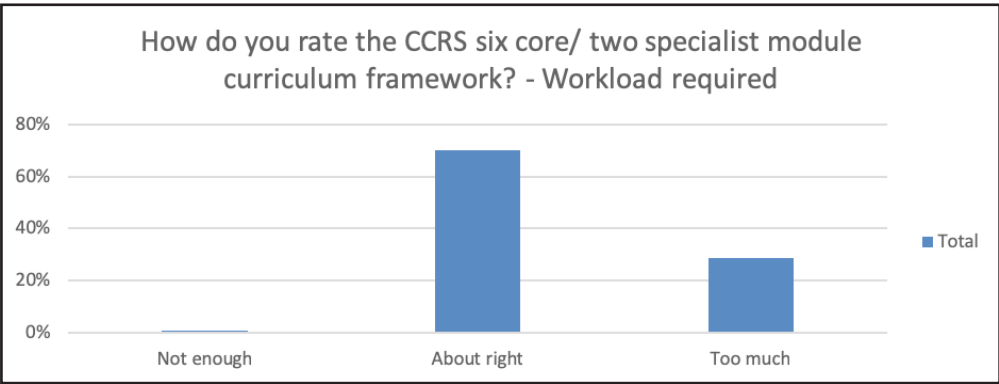
For example, in terms of the total number of modules required to complete CCRS, almost 80% survey responses feel this is about right. When the data is filtered, those in a school role and those aged between 18-45 years are more inclined to say 'too much' while 31% of those who are new to CCRS agree with this.



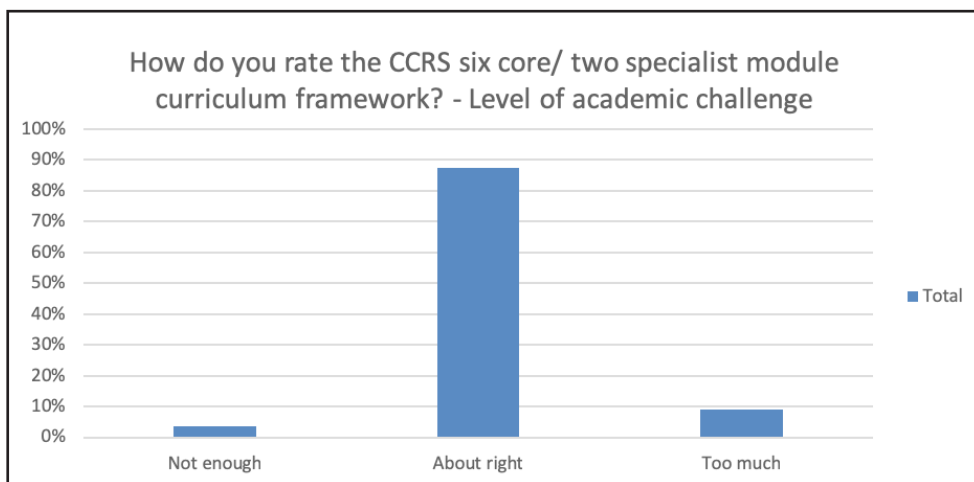
When asked in terms of the amount of study time required for CCRS, again the majority 73% state this is ‘about right’ with 23% saying ‘too much’ and 4% stating ‘not enough’. Those who state ‘too much’ time is needed are more likely to be in school roles and once again aged between 18-45 years and also those who are new to the course. The local centre type is less significant as is religious affiliation.



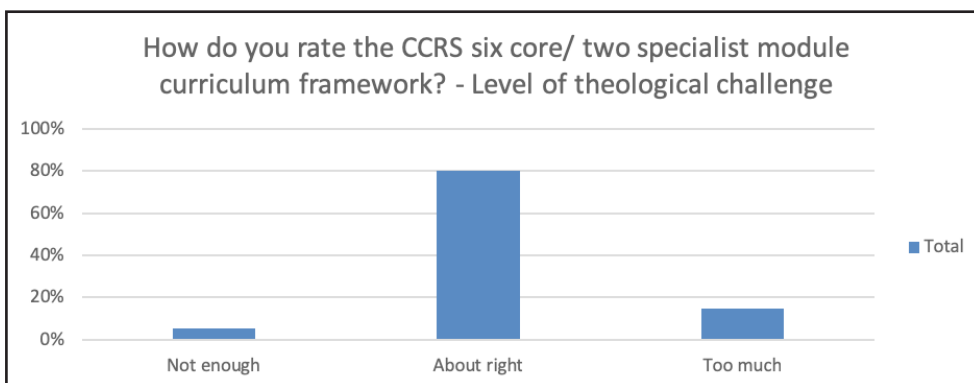
In terms of the workload required for CCRS, the data shows little change in the ‘about right’ (70%) but more people saying ‘too much’ (29%). Once again these are people in school roles and younger in age. Of those who are new to CCRS, 41% think the workload is too much.



The level of academic challenge within CCRS is seen as ‘about right’ by the majority of survey respondents. Those in school roles find CCRS more difficult and again, reflect the younger age spectrum.



In terms of theological challenge offered by CCRS, it could be surmised from both the literature and previous survey feedback that this one area is where a noticeable variation might be evident. However, the overall picture shows 80% saying the level is about right. The data from those in school roles and the younger age groups remains more or less consistent across this survey question.

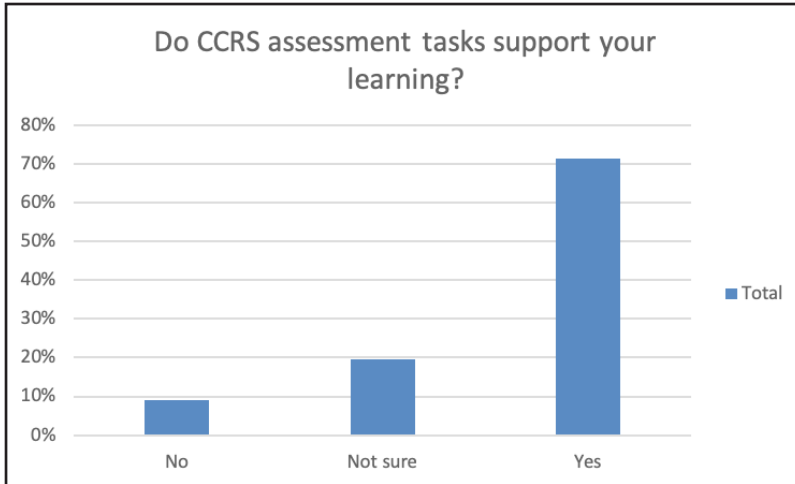


Qualitative feedback for this question brought 208 comments. Analysis indicates that feedback was mostly given by people who rated CCRS as ‘too much’ and their reasons state issues over time pressures, work commitments, workload for teachers, family life priorities, lack of flexibility of course timing, delivery and provision, lack of faith background to bring into the course, the amount of expected reading, and difficulties over assessment. These are all very real considerations that need to be heard and taken seriously by CCRS centres and course providers.

“CCRS is very useful but working full time and trying to complete this qualification is stressful and very taxing.” (participant quote)

CCRS Assessment Tasks

When asked whether CCRS assessment tasks support learning, 71% survey respondents replied yes and 9% replied no. This remains consistent across role type. However, the remaining 20% of the survey population are unsure. The ‘not sure’ responses are predictably higher from those who are new to CCRS.



A number of factors need to be taken into account when considering this data and the accompanying 427 comments. We note that some of the survey population had auditing or attendance-only status and so were not doing any CCRS assessment. Furthermore, the data does not account for the variety of assessment practices that run across centres and across modules. Comments mention oral assessment, individual presentation and slides, group assessment task, practical activity or portfolio, classroom-based task such as lesson planning, and reflective tasks such as diary or journaling as well as the more usual essay or formal writing exercise.

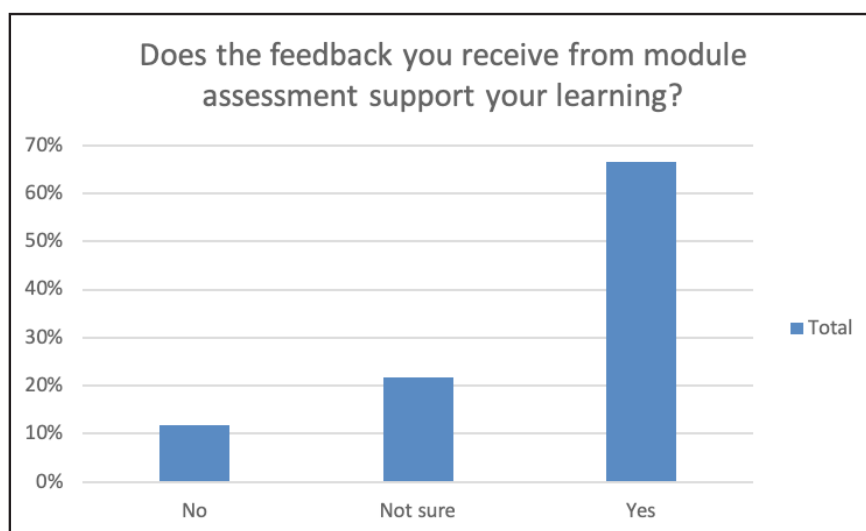
Qualitative feedback also spoke in terms of a mixed quality of assessment tasks as experienced by survey respondents. This quality ranges from dire to excellent. Examples of poor assessment tasks are those judged as boring, lacking relevance, requiring regurgitation of information, being only a paper exercise, having closed questions that allow no creativity or self-expression, and those that do not match the learning aims or outcomes of a given module.

The demands of CCRS assessed tasks can also be pointed out. Participants sometimes experience the assessment requirement as a time-consuming chore, that is too difficult in both academic practice and theological level, and that can act as a barrier to learning. The lack of any practical relevance and application of assessment tasks for some people in a professional role means that there is dissonance between what they see as a requirement to study theology as opposed to what they feel is relevant for a school or classroom role.

What emerges from this set of data is an inconsistency of assessment method and practice across CCRS centres, tutors and the modules themselves, even when offered by the same centre. How to ensure quality assurance in terms of assessment range and practice across a national course that is delivered at local level is a pertinent question for both course providers and the Board of Religious Studies awarding body.

Feedback to assessment

A supplementary question asked whether the feedback received from assessment supports learning or not. The response rate to this question is 67% who say yes and 12% who say no. The remaining 21% are unsure and this includes the majority of those who are new to the course.



The 413 comments which accompanied this question demonstrate variation in how survey respondents interpreted the term 'feedback', which was not defined in the question rubric. It is apparent from some responses that feedback is understood only as the summative marking/comment/grade received for a piece of module assessment (essay, presentation etc). Other participants view feedback in more formative ways such as the feedback and support they receive from tutors which encourages, motivates, or challenges their learning during or between modules.

190 comments report a positive response to feedback and so were coded as follows:

Feedback as Positive	Number of comments
General 'yes'	60
Promotes learning, reinforces	38
Enjoyable, motivating challenging	29
Prompting further thought, required research, reflection, developed understanding and skills	21
Supports future assignments / feed forward	12
Increased secure knowledge, consolidation	10
Tutor related	9
Coherence in course elements, appropriate levels, good resources, assignments relevant to course material	4
Variety of tasks, flexibility of approach, opportunities for varied approaches	3
Feedback on understanding	2

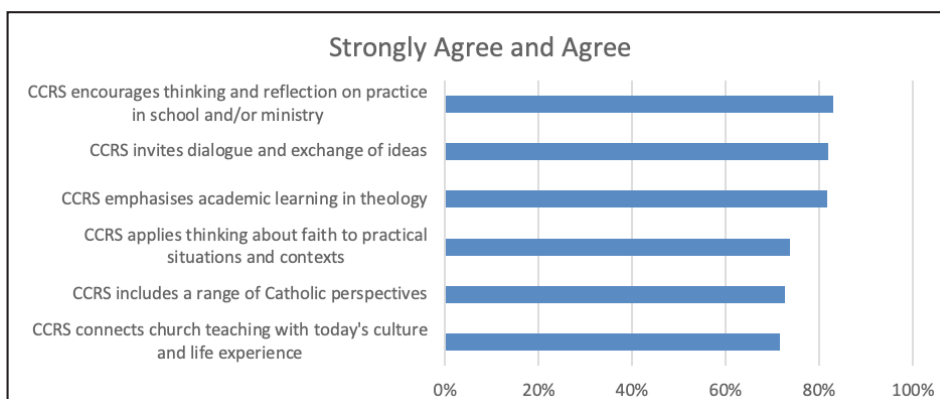
Those who indicate a less favourable response or are unsure about the feedback received, express areas of dissatisfaction that include unsatisfactory marking processes, poor quality feedback by tutors, variance in feedback between modules and among tutors, too slow a timescale in receiving feedback, feedback not contributing to learning in any valuable sense, feedback not being related to performance or progression, and in some cases very limited or even no feedback being received at all.

There were also a high number of 'don't know' responses that were coded as those who have not yet received feedback; those who can't remember/too long ago; responses that stated 'not applicable' but gave no reason; and responses that simply did not make sense.

From this dataset it can be surmised that not all participants can draw a connection between the module assessments they undertake, the feedback they receive (regardless of what form this takes) and how this supports or contributes to their learning within CCRS.

Rate the following statements

Question 19 gave a number of statements about what sort of learning and teaching occurs in CCRS and asked participants to rate each of them along a Likert scaled measurement spectrum of Strongly Agree, Agree, Not Sure, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The chart below demonstrates the responses from the majority position of those who Strongly Agreed and Agreed.



The following can be noted:

- 82% who Strongly Agree / Agree that CCRS invites dialogue and exchange of ideas. A higher response to this (88%) comes from those in parishes.
- 73% who affirm that CCRS includes a range of Catholic ideas and perspectives. Again there is a higher response (82%) from those from parishes but a lower response (67%) from those who left before completion.
- 83% who Strongly Agree / Agree that CCRS encourages thinking and reflection on practice in school and / or ministry.
- 72% who Strongly Agree / Agree that CCRS connects church teaching with contemporary culture and life experience.
- 82% who affirm that CCRS emphasises academic learning in theology. Here a lower response (69%) from those in parishes is evident.
- 74% who affirm that CCRS applies thinking about faith to practical situations, with 82% of those in parishes Strongly Agreeing / Agreeing with this.

There were 77 comments received for this question. However, this was a difficult section to code and categorise as it isn't always clear which statement the respondent is responding to. The majority are general comments and some repeated themes

emerge. These include the crucial role of tutors, where a number of comments point to the tutor as an essential element in making the module successful. Some of the ‘Unsure’ or ‘Disagree’ comments, even though they form a minority opinion, refer to a lack of practical application of faith and, in particular, give a sense of the inadequacy of the CCRS to support application in the classroom or parish. Finally, some comments point to the usefulness of CCRS for non-Catholic participants and outline a corresponding, but sometimes lacking, need for their particular support during the course.

However, in summary, the overriding response to these statements affirms the positive experience of learning and teaching encountered within CCRS among the survey population.

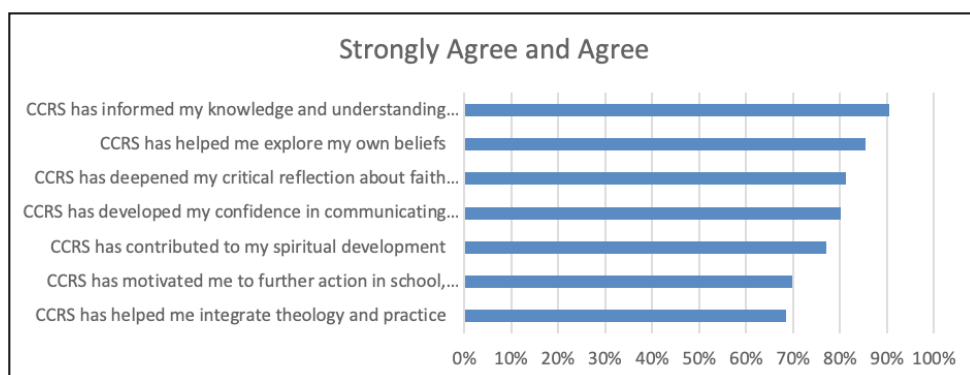
3.5 Impact of CCRS

The final set of participant survey data presented in this chapter is built around one of the key aims and question sets (20-25) underpinning the research project, which was to investigate what impact CCRS has on those who study it. Attempting to measure impact is recognised as fraught with difficulty as impact can be interpreted differently and depends on the context in which it is being considered.

In hoping to capture something of the overall impact of CCRS, the Phase One participant survey presented a range of indicators that sought to uncover the effectiveness of CCRS in terms of its effect on people’s personal, academic, faith and professional lives, as well as to benchmark against adult theological literacy, and to give sight of where further development and future improvements might be made. In gathering both quantitative and qualitative data, the hope was to avoid too narrow an approach in this section. However, the researchers recognise that making any causal claims about the impact of CCRS is both complex and challenging.

Impact of CCRS

Question 20 asked ‘what impact does CCRS have?’ and used a Likert scale measurement to specify levels of agreement or disagreement across a series of statements. The first chart below indicates the majority Strongly Agree and Agree percentage responses while the second table outlines the overall results for this question.



	Strongly Agree and Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
CCRS has informed my knowledge and understanding of Catholic teaching	90%	48%	42%	4%	5%	1%
CCRS has helped me explore my own beliefs	86%	40%	46%	6%	7%	2%
CCRS has deepened my critical reflection about faith matters	81%	35%	47%	11%	7%	1%
CCRS has developed my confidence in communicating faith and theology to others	80%	32%	48%	11%	7%	1%
CCRS has contributed to my spiritual development	77%	32%	45%	11%	9%	2%
CCRS has motivated me to further action in school, church or personal life	70%	29%	41%	15%	12%	3%
CCRS has helped me integrate theology and practice	69%	24%	45%	20%	10%	1%

In terms of capturing the significance of CCRS across a number of aspects relating to matters of personal belief, Catholic knowledge and understanding, reflection about faith, communication of faith to others, integration of theology and practice, spiritual development and motivation to further action, then the overall data suggests that CCRS is making a strong and positive impact for most people who undertake it.

“CCRS literally changed my life.” (participant quote)

“I find that the process of studying and the subjects of the modules and style of tutoring has helped me to have a deeper, more personal relationship with my God, faith and Church.” (participant quote)

“CCRS has been a very positive experience for me and has encouraged me to widen my reading and learning about the faith.” (participant quote)

There is little variation in ratings from those in a school role. Those in parishes gave each statement a marginally higher Strongly Agree / Agree rating. Respondents who withdrew or left CCRS before completion gave marginally lower ratings to each statement with the exception of a much lower score (46%) to the statement about the integration of theology and practice.

While the Not Sure, Disagree and Strongly Disagree results are in the minority, they do invite further investigation. However, the 58 comments in the open-dialogue box shed no further light on why the minority of participants responded negatively to the impact statements. Some comments reinforce the positive impact gained from CCRS while the few who indicate otherwise, do not particularly expand on their reasons.

“I have disagreed with the above statements as I feel that I didn’t benefit from the course.” (participant quote)

CCRS as adult theological literacy

CCRS has long been positioned as a course to support adult theological literacy. The concept of theological literacy was broken down in Question 21 into three statements. Participants were asked to select all that were applicable according to their experience of doing CCRS. Implicit in the design of this question was a scaffolding of how adult theological literacy might be understood, beginning with gaining a theological foundation to further developing theological vocabulary and concepts and then to an application or integration of theology with everyday life and/or work/ministry situations. Options were also given for all or none of these statements to be accepted and reasons for answer choice were invited.

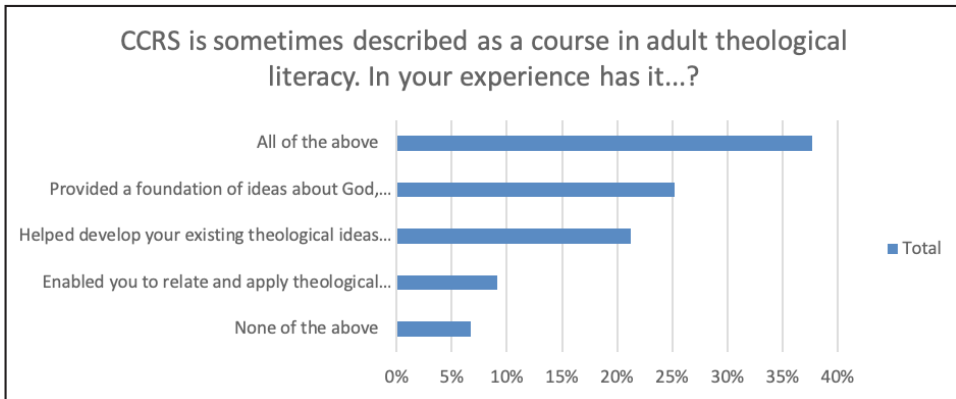
CCRS has provided a foundation of ideas about God, scripture, tradition, church, sacraments, human experience etc.

CCRS has helped develop existing theological ideas further, for example about Trinity, Incarnation, Revelation etc.

CCRS has enabled you to relate and apply theological language and way of

thinking to real life professional or pastoral situations.
All of the above
None of the above

The data set for this question is interesting as the chart below indicates:



The highest category is the 'All of the above' with 38% respondents answering this way, suggesting that CCRS is acting in a range of ways to support and enhance adult theological literacy.

Next comes the 'Providing a foundation' category which occurs among 63% of all participants (specific category plus those who said 'All of the above'). This affirms the many people who take CCRS with little starting or even no previous theological background and it broadly allies with CCRS describing itself as a basic course in adult theological education.

"Before CCRS all I had was a bias towards church teaching or an atheist angle with nothing really in between." (participant quote)

The 'Developing existing theological ideas' category subscribed to by 59% of participants affirms that CCRS does help to develop and deepen levels of theological knowledge and understanding among lay people. This fits well with those who see CCRS as a useful part of continuing professional development for school or parish ministry.

"CCRS actually taught me things I did not know. It helped me understand how certain doctrines, taken for granted, evolved. Before CCRS I had pockets of knowledge about my faith. CCRS provided that much needed foundation layer, on which pillars of faith could stand with meaning." (participant quote)

"CCRS is more a way of developing childhood knowledge and understanding into a deeper adult perspective." (participant quote)

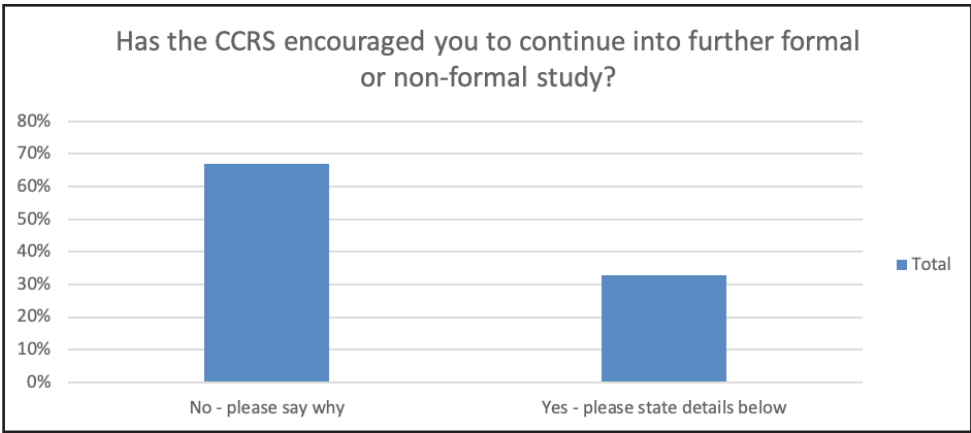
However, the ability to relate and apply theological thinking to professional/pastoral situations is experienced by less than half of the survey population. Critics might point out that this goes beyond what CCRS sets out to do, being a basic course in Catholic theology that is open to anyone who wishes to study it. But others might point out that theology for lay people must go beyond ‘knowing about’ to seek personal interpretation, critical correlation and practical application. This once again hints of the challenge of articulating theology in praxis and expressing faith in vocabularies of both scholarship and vocation/service. This is played out in an underlying tension between CCRS viewed as theological knowledge for its own sake and those who want or expect a more practical approach or professional direction.

The 171 open comments that accompany this question indicate a concern that whatever is learned in CCRS must relate to real life and professional/ pastoral situations. Many comments speak of a need for a basic development of faith knowledge but also want opportunities for the application of this knowledge to school (predominantly) or parish contexts.

The negative comments refer to CCRS as ‘unhelpful and unnecessary’ and are made by those who feel they knew the course content already, either through their upbringing or through prior theological study and so nothing was gained in terms of enhancing their level of theological knowledge and understanding.

Progression to further study

When asked if CCRS encouraged participants to progress into further study, a Yes/No answer was sought. The majority response (67%) replied negatively to this.



The remaining 33% declare that CCRS led to further formal/ non-formal study. Variation occurs among those from parish or other roles (rather than a school role) as these participants tend towards a higher Yes response as do those aged 65 years

and above. This could be due to pragmatic reasons as these people are likely to have more time, opportunity or inclination for study.

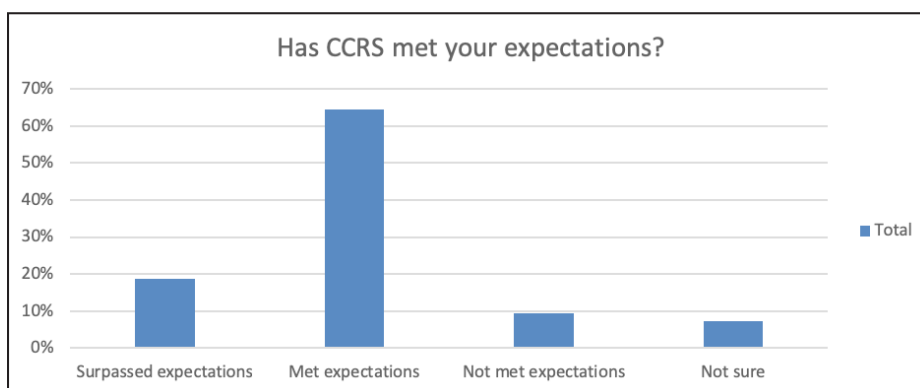
This question also asked for the reason behind why a specific answer option was chosen and resulted in 662 individual comments. In retrospect, the question design was at fault and carried too wide a scope. For example, for many participants the CCRS is an acquired qualification in the teaching domain, which once gained does not need further effort or study. Other participants simply enjoy the process of learning for its own sake, and say things like ‘I enjoy learning so wanted to do something else afterwards’. Other respondents answered this question when they are doing/have done CCRS as part of a full-time Higher Education programme, and so the idea of being encouraged to progress into further study by CCRS does not make sense. Other respondents say specifically that their further formal study was not related to CCRS, for example ‘I am an RE teacher and for a variety of reasons continue to study but this is not necessarily due to CCRS’ (n213). This means that drawing causal attributions in this dataset is suspect. While some respondents are doing or went on to do further study, it is not clear if or how this relates to CCRS.

One thing to note is that those who stated ‘No, I don’t need further study’ largely belong to those whose approach to CCRS is instrumental/functional i.e. to achieve a job or to fulfil a condition of employment in school. This brought to the fore some surprising negativity. Some people feel happy with the idea of doing CCRS but resentful of the implied idea that they should be doing something else after it has been achieved.

A few people say that they would like to do more study but have no local opportunity for doing so. This raises questions about the availability and provision of post-CCRS options, a matter that has come to national and regional attention over recent years.

Met expectations

Another Likert-type scale of measurement was used to ask if CCRS has met participant expectations with response options for Surpassed / Met / Not Sure / Not Met. The majority response from 65% respondents confirms that CCRS has fulfilled what people expected of it. When put together with the next highest ranking of Surpassed Expectations then this rises to 83% of the whole population sample. For those in parish roles this rises to 91% while it is still 61% even for those who do not complete the course.



Respondents who are unsure or who state that CCRS has not met expectations (17% of the sample) include people still taking the course and therefore not able or wishing to evaluate accordingly.

Coding of the 273 accompanying qualitative comments indicate that the majority (167 comments) were received from those who agreed the course had surpassed and met expectations. For example:

I had low expectations before attending as I have been on many pointless workshops in my time. The CCRS was enriching and surprisingly thought provoking. I really enjoyed it. (n81)

I thought I would simply learn more about Catholicism but it has been much more than that, I would even say it was life-changing as it gave me such understanding and confidence in my faith. (n123)

I initially began the course because I was interested in applying for a leadership position in a Catholic school. I was not looking forward to studying on Saturdays, but soon found I looked forward to my CCRS days very much! I met some lovely people and had great tutors. I went to three different venues to complete my course and two of them provided lovely lunches, which was a real treat. However, the best thing was the interesting academic material and the spiritual journey I made. I wish I'd done the course years ago, as I could have been a better RE teacher. I already had what I thought was a thorough knowledge of my faith, but I learned so much more. My own Catholic identity is much stronger and I have a greater joy in the practice of my faith than I ever did. (n180)

I didn't realise how different and enlightened I would feel about my own faith journey. (n264)

Those who stated that CCRS had not met expectations made 57 comments to this effect. For example:

I didn't realise I was hoping it would help my understanding for Primary teaching which was not really the case. I feel a separate course of CCRS aimed specifically at Primary school practitioners which allows for personal faith development whilst looking at application in a Catholic Primary School setting would be an excellent development for the course. (n83)

Having seen my feedback copied and pasted, it has led me to believe that this is simply a money grabbing scheme. A box ticking exercise that is irrelevant in this day and age. (n115)

I was expecting it to be more relevant to teaching in school - like how to communicate ideas to pupils. A lot of the course content such as Vatican II would never be relevant to a primary classroom setting. (n144)

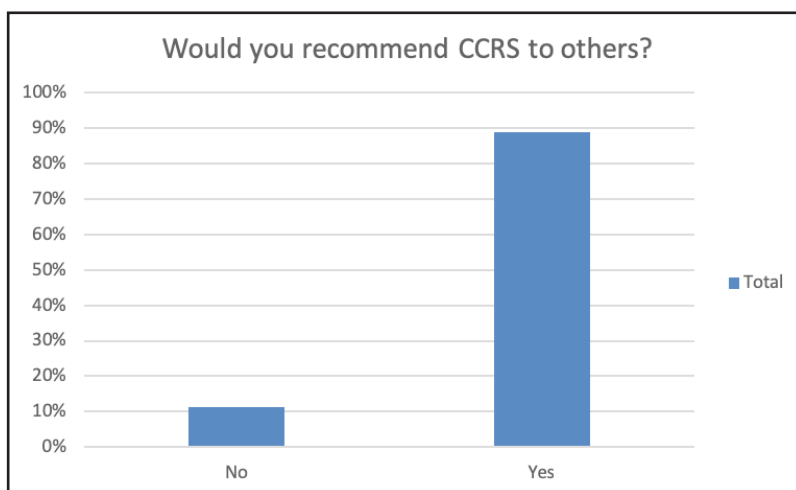
It did what I expected in developing my knowledge, but I feel it could have done so much more had it connected more with my faith and life as a Catholic in education. (n146)

Too time consuming to attend with very little payback. (n242)

Among all comments that responded to this question, often it was general statements about the quality or usefulness of the course that were made. Occasionally, the teaching process was commented on both, positively and negatively. The remaining comments were coded as Don't Know or Not Relevant, mostly received from those who felt they had not covered enough CCRS to comment.

Recommend CCRS to others

When asked if they would recommend the CCRS to others, a clear majority of participants (89%) replied yes. This raw data can be broken down into 88% from those in school roles, 97% from those in parish roles and 94% from those in other roles. Even for those who withdrew or did not complete the course, the percentage response remains high (82%).



Qualitative feedback brought 424 comments that were coded under the agreed amalgamated categories (Appendix 4). The majority of comments are positive, offering a range of reasons as to what participants had themselves gained from the CCRS and suggesting why others should take the course. For example:

It is an excellent course that every teacher in Catholic schools should complete. (n16)

I think it should be a mandatory part of induction for NQTs in Catholic schools. (n71)

It's certainly not for everyone, but I think anyone showing an interest in lay-ministry should be encouraged to do it like I was. Teachers definitely. (n37)

Gives a good foundation for those wishing to teach in a Catholic school and also for those who wish to deepen their theological knowledge. (n396)

My misconception was that it was a qualification for young teachers. Actually, for me it's a structured journey through learning about and deepening my Catholic faith as a critically aware adult. (n269)

However, other responses questioned what CCRS is really all about and, once again, point out the demands and commitment involved:

Not for someone wanting personal development. It is a 'going through the motion' exercise aimed at teachers. (n11)

I completely agree with the principles of the CCRS but the expected workload for teachers to embark upon alongside their role in school is far too much. (n395)

Yes for professional and personal spiritual development but no in terms of work demands, time of class, and length of course. (n27)

Yes if the person wanted to understand scripture more for their job. Yes if they wanted to progress more into the Catholic Education system. No if they are being made to go by their head teacher as a requirement for a job in a Catholic school. It fostered resentment and apathy in some of the other people that attended from my school. (n387)

Yes if you are Catholic and are looking for that deeper knowledge and understanding and if you have the time and drive to complete academic study. No if you are wanting to learn the basics/ foundations of the Catholic faith because the level of depth and language used was far too advanced and was at times difficult to follow. No if you need something to support you in a specific area practically because the areas studied are rarely translated back into a format that will be relevant for use in day to day life. (n194)

So, while the overriding data for this question evidences high satisfaction with the CCRS in terms of meeting expectations, there are also significant underlying currents of concern and critique about the role, nature, level and provision of the course. These are based on variations of how individuals perceive and experience the CCRS as both nationally awarded course of study but one that is delivered and experienced through a local centre. Given that CCRS is open to all and taken by a wide spectrum of participants across the country from school, professional, parish and personal study backgrounds, this means that sometimes CCRS can feel like 'one size fits all'.

What changes could improve CCRS for future participants

The final dataset from the Phase One survey asked what changes would improve CCRS for the future. 1,003 respondents answered this question of which 139 comments state that no improvement was needed while 726 comments make suggestions for change. The remaining comments are classified as Don't Know / Not Relevant. These can be mostly explained as coming from participants who felt that considerable time had passed since their completion or felt unable to comment as they were not familiar with current arrangements or sufficiently far along their CCRS course of study.

A more detailed breakdown of the data indicates that 122 respondents gave unqualified approval for CCRS and an additional 17 people asked for the provision of a supplementary course or course element, possibly to include Masters accreditation.

Other respondents felt that some aspect of CCRS could be improved and gave a wide variety of areas to consider. The popular choices can be clustered around the following aspects:

Issues associated with learning	107 comments
Time commitment/workload	100
Assessment	90
Course organisation	76
Greater focus on the classroom	75

Comments here included specific suggestions such as providing peer support from past students and providing exemplars of sample assignments. There was a reverberating request for more discussion, more reflection, more group work, and more interactive learning within the delivery and pedagogy of CCRS by local centres.

An almost equal concern reflected the time commitment and workload required by CCRS but there were several conflicting viewpoints here. Many respondents felt that the timings of sessions were problematic (some wanted Saturdays while others were horrified by this idea); some thought a two-year completion period was excessive while others felt it wasn't long enough; modules of ten contact hours similarly were either too long or too short. The consistent thread was recognition of the (over) workload needed for CCRS, especially among teachers. This was connected to a common request that CCRS be pursued in school time as continuing professional development rather than expected of individual's own free time and money.

Assessment was another fruitful topic. Several themes ran through this: fewer (or no) written assignments; a clearer link between the module content and teaching and the assignment; a variety of assessment tasks and greater flexibility in submission options; the inclusion of more practical assessment tasks; more detailed feedback from tutors and this delivered sooner. People who did not want to do written assignments at all were clearly concerned about their workload and felt that – rightly or wrongly - written tasks were more onerous than alternatives such as presentations. Nobody indicated that they had been offered a choice of assessment task which seems contrary to good practice in adult learning.

Course organisation issues, involving whole course concerns rather than curriculum issues, were plentiful. Course structure, arrangement and ordering of modules to achieve a coherent whole, the overall presentation of the course, arrangements for paying fees (financial support), suitable venues, greater flexibility in the delivery of sessions including repeat sessions were all requested. Many students asked for a shorter programme, questioning whether it needed to be a two-year process consisting of eight separate modules.

A number of responses reflected a desire for greater focus on the Catholic school classroom. Lesson plans were mentioned here, in particular for Religious Education. More practical content was a common request. Clearly many respondents felt that the CCRS course was part of the teacher training process, either formally or informally. Aligned with this was a plea for specific support for non-Catholic teacher participants.

This thinking continued into the responses about course aims, where some commented that there should be two courses: one for teachers and another for catechists with focused, relevant material for both.

There were also comments about CCRS tutors (56 in total) most of which related to the need for them to be 'more engaging' and this was linked to didactic, boring, passive lecture delivery styles. Several respondents mentioned that the course organisers should ensure a better and consistent standard of tutoring across the module and for tutors to be more confident in their articulation and presentation of Catholic teaching.

Responses relating to delivery modes clearly preferred more online versions, linking this to convenience in terms of time and travel to teaching venues. But to balance this, a few respondents questioned whether online processes lost something provided by the face-to-face delivery. Better curriculum resources were also requested: library for distanced learners; accurate reading lists; more online resources accessible for all.

A small number of responses spoke of the need for a wider participant audience for CCRS. This included calls for better recruitment to the course, especially in parishes and aimed at more lay people, as well as specific calls for greater accessibility for the deaf community and others with special educational needs and disabilities.

Some responses related to the provision of specialist modules and requested that specific modules be added to the CCRS curriculum as part of the supplementary elective provision. Here it is difficult to discern the extent to which this reflects individual and possibly idiosyncratic interest as opposed to authentic options for augmenting the CCRS curriculum.¹¹ Some already exist as specialist modules in other centres and so it may be that better communication and sharing of them is all that is required. More fundamentally, however, what emerges from comments concerning the specialist modules suggests levels of discrepancy over such things as their role, purpose, provision and congruence in relation to the six core modules and to the overall CCRS curriculum framework.

11) Specific suggestions were made for new specialist modules to include the following: Catholic social teaching, Mariology, Religion and Church in today's changing society, Pastoral use of scripture and gospels, Engaging with different forms of prayer, Faith formation in schools, Passing on faith, Changing world views about religion, modules connected to modern Christian values and lives, Using the homily, The Reformation, Other Faiths, Parish observation (other than own), Charismatic movement, Modern saints, Bible study, Stigmata, Marian apparitions.

3.6 Summary

The Phase One survey for CCRS participants asked about the role and purpose of CCRS, what sort of (theological) learning occurs, why people study CCRS, what impact CCRS has and what is needed for CCRS in the future.

The survey ran from November 2016 to March 2017 and attracted a pleasing response rate, giving both longitudinal and current perspectives from the survey population. It brought a wealth of quantitative and qualitative data that was subsequently coded and analysed by the research team.

The survey results are overwhelmingly positive about the CCRS and its role and contribution to adult theological formation across England and Wales. This is good news for a course that has run since 1991-92 and indeed there is much to be celebrated and continued into the future.

At the same time, the survey offers food for thought in outlining tensions and challenges from the perspective of the CCRS student experience. This holds significance for the provision and delivery of CCRS at both national and local centre level.

It is important to remember that while the survey offers a 'slice' of CCRS from those who have studied it, inevitably the views of those who did not access the survey are not reflected.

4. What CCRS Course Providers and Sponsors Say

4.1 Phase Two Interviews

This chapter presents qualitative findings from the Phase Two interviews held with stakeholders and practitioner bodies. To recap: a series of twelve semi-structured interviews were held between December 2017 and July 2018, conducted by the project leader Dr Ros Stuart-Buttle (interview questions are listed in Appendix 3). The intention was for a representative sample in terms of role, geography and experience of CCRS to include senior Catholic clergy, Diocesan Directors of (Religious) Education, Primary and Secondary Head Teachers and CCRS tutors. It was originally hoped that a larger sample of up to twenty interviews would be carried out but this was not possible for unforeseen reasons. Two written statements about CCRS were also received from individuals who were unable to be interviewed but wished their views to be recorded; these were another CCRS tutor and another Primary Head Teacher.

Despite the potential challenge of aligning data from different methods across the research phases, the research team are confident that the interviews offer rich complementary material to the Phase One student survey. Mixed methods often go together in social and educational research. Given the accepted limitations of each method, they nevertheless are an important means of gaining responses from participants; the survey to collect data from a large cohort while the semi-structured interview acting as an opportunity to gather more in-depth insights about individual participant attitudes, thoughts, and experience.

Presentation and analysis of the interview data is not intended to form a direct comparison or benchmark to the Phase One participant survey but rather to bring further valuable and complementary material into the research conversation by adding the voice of those responsible for sponsoring and providing CCRS from around the country. This adds to a more complete picture of CCRS twenty five years on.

4.2 Interview Analysis

Interviewee Role and Experience of CCRS

All interviewees have personal experience of CCRS gained from either a previous or current role. Seven have carried direct responsibility for the provision of CCRS in their diocese or centre. All the Head Teachers stated that encouraging staff towards CCRS was part of their role as leader of a Catholic school. Seven of the interviewees disclosed that they had achieved the CCRS themselves, although this was not specifically asked as part of the question set.

The following table gives a summary of the interviewees' role, status and involvement with CCRS.

Interviewee	Role	CCRS Involvement	CCRS Certificate
1	Senior church leader	Past role	Not stated
2	Senior church leader	Past and present role	Not stated
3	Primary Head Teacher	Supporting staff in school	Yes
4	CCRS tutor	Diocesan CCRS team	Not stated
5	Diocesan leader	Tutor and diocesan co-ordinator	Yes
6	CCRS centre director	Tutor and centre co-ordinator	Not stated
7	Diocesan leader	Tutor and diocesan co-ordinator	Yes
8	Primary Head Teacher	Supporting staff in school	Yes
9	CCRS tutor	Diocesan CCRS team	Not stated
10	Diocesan leader	Tutor and diocesan co-ordinator	Yes
11	Diocesan leader	Tutor and diocesan co-ordinator	Yes
12	Secondary Head Teacher	Supporting staff in school	Yes

Perception of CCRS in school or diocese

The interviews confirm that perceptions about CCRS in terms of what it is, who it is for and what it offers, vary considerably across different centres and localities. Some centres (interviews 4, 7, 12) strongly encourage people to take CCRS, which is regarded in very positive terms and either mandated or heavily supported by the diocese and its schools for both teaching / school leadership roles and parish lay ministry.

Other interviews indicate a more mixed perception and profile for CCRS in their locality and state a number of reasons for this (interviews 1, 3, 8, 9, 10, 11). CCRS is viewed as very worthwhile by some, including those who have undertaken the course themselves, but this view is not shared by everyone. "Some say it is vital; others say what's the point" (interview 3).

One issue that seemingly influences how CCRS is perceived relates to the differing organisational structures under which CCRS is situated at local level. For example, when CCRS is located in an Education, Religious Education or Schools department within a local diocese or university, then CCRS risks being identified as only belonging to and relevant for that particular sector. When CCRS sits under a Pastoral, Evangelisation or Adult Formation department then there can be a challenge in seeing it as something that can cross over and also be relevant for teachers and those working in professional education. A recent initiative by the Board of Religious Studies to gather data relating to CCRS centres and the departments in which they are located at local level, bears out the range and diversity of structural and organisational settings affecting CCRS.¹²

Following on from this, in some centres, CCRS is primarily regarded as a professional development course for in-training and serving teachers working in Catholic schools, especially the primary sector. In these centres, teachers can form the sole participant group. Interviews 9 and 12 confirm this is the case in their locality. They include a negative perception of CCRS seen as a 'box ticking exercise for teachers', which also features in some student survey responses.

However, other interviews (10 and 11) state that the perception of CCRS in their centre is that it is for parish catechists and lay ministers as well as for those in a teaching role. Here, CCRS is promoted accordingly across both groups and it can sometimes be teachers who form the minority participant group, a reversal of the national trend from the Phase One survey. This is partly due to diocesan structures as mentioned above but also to the fact that in some CCRS centres, the course has traditionally been viewed as more akin to adult lay formation rather than to a professional development course for teachers to undertake. This may be something of a false dichotomy but it is clear that there are tensions between linking the academic and professional dimensions of CCRS with its pastoral perspectives.

Historically, there has been a separation between dioceses who offer CCRS primarily through pastoral approaches and universities who offer CCRS within academic programmes or teacher training. Recent years have seen steps taken by the Board of Religious Studies to overcome this, for example by agreeing that CCRS is set at Level 4 on the national qualifications framework and by heightening regional moderation of assessed work to try and further ensure standardisation of quality and marking across centres. However, evidence from the interviews suggests that variation remains in place, according to whether CCRS is perceived primarily as a course for teachers or those in parishes or lay ministry.

12) This data was collected by the Board of Religious Studies during 2018 and found that CCRS is located in a range of organisational settings that include Education; Religious Education; Schools; Pastoral; Theology; Adult Formation; Theology and Religious Studies; Christian Education; Theological Teaching; Further Education; Adult Formation and Evangelisation; Adult Education; Evangelisation and CPD, Education, Theology and Leadership; and Intellectual Formation.

Uptake of CCRS in school or diocese

The uptake of CCRS across local centres is linked to the previous question. Uptake varies considerably due to a number of factors.

Interviews 1, 7, 8, and 9 state that their local CCRS uptake is highest among teachers, largely due to a strong push from the diocese as already mentioned, with the result of a much lower take-up from those in parish ministry or doing CCRS for personal reasons. This largely corresponds with the Phase One survey data that shows a school-based majority population taking CCRS.

Interviews 2 and 4 confirm that a low (disappointing) uptake for CCRS in their area occurs from both teachers and those in parishes, due largely to geographical factors and challenges of location, with people unable and/or unwilling to travel to local course venues. Additional factors concern the scheduling of evening and weekend classes, which is seen as restrictive for those in employment and with busy family lives and commitments. This is cited as one key reason why people start but then fall away from the course. However, this is offset by Interview 6 which states that distance learning provision of CCRS is steadily increasing in demand and bringing rising numbers of people registering and completing the course.

Four of the interviews (3, 7, 8, 10) confirm that it is particularly among teachers and school cohorts that the uptake of CCRS is adversely affected by anticipated or experienced levels of pressure in terms of time commitment and extra workload. This connects with interview responses to the next question.

Better support or enhance CCRS provision

When asked what would better support or enhance CCRS in their school or diocese, an interesting range of interview responses emerged. One set (interviews 2, 3, 8, 10) took a clear stance about the need for CCRS centres to improve their provision for teachers in particular, by giving recognition of the workload required to do CCRS, through organising support in school time, with additional remote or online learning opportunities and flexibility of course scheduling to include sessions during the school day and also twilight sessions after school.

Some interviews (2, 3, 5) focused their response around the need for CCRS to be paid out of school or parish budgets or through diocesan funding. In raising the question of who should pay for CCRS, the interviews point to the fact that for some people who take CCRS, their course fees are paid for while others are expected to be self-financing throughout the duration of the course. This is something of a lottery depending on which centre or school one is taking CCRS with.

Yes, and of course some dioceses are starting to do that around the country, which I think adds up to a varied delivery and a varied experience of CCRS,

because you've got some people who are paying for it themselves, you've got some people who the whole thing is being paid for and they're given a day-release from school to go and do it, like on a Wednesday afternoon, or a twilight session in their school. So I think the reality is, the experience of people doing CCRS, is it's very varied according to where they are. (interview 2)

The issue of funding is seen as a "hot potato" that needs to be addressed. As one primary Head Teacher put it,

If heads are going to say that it's worth doing, then they have to put their money where their mouth is and they have to give the staff the time to do it. And equally, if at any point somebody is saying that they have to do it i.e. a head or any sort of manager is saying they have to do it, they should be funded for it. (interview 3)

Others agree:

I think possibly it might be funding because it is difficult to get schools to send people out now, I'm talking in the last few years, it's a big investment on behalf of the school and certainly in a diocese which is spending a lot of money on education as it is there's quite a tension there between who should be paying for it and to what degree. We have mooted doing something with teaching schools to share the cost between schools and diocese and again in terms of remuneration of speakers, in terms of providing facilities the funding arrangements there are under review, but that seems to be the hot potato for improving it at the moment. (interview 5)

And from one senior church leader:

I think maybe we, as bishops, ought to be saying to our governors and head teachers what I said to you before, if we believe this is good, and from the statistics, the vast majority of teachers think it is good, it's the right thing to do, it's profitable to them, and if we believe all that, then we should somehow go out of our way to facilitate that our teachers are able to undertake these courses by making sure we pay for it out of budget, that we give them the time to do it etc., otherwise it's not going to happen. (interview 2)

Other interviews provide different responses to the question as to what would better support or enhance CCRS in their local context. Some responses centre on raising the profile of CCRS as a recognised qualification for lay ministry, to include

teaching and chaplaincies, by awarding externally recognised academic credits as part of a national initiative to give greater recognition and currency to the course. Two interviews (1, 11) mention the lack of formal academic credits towards a higher education qualification as a rate-limiting factor against attracting people into doing CCRS.

However, for one primary Head Teacher it is more a scaling down of CCRS that is seen as necessary, particularly for those in Catholic schools:

... a something in-between, where there could be an understanding of teaching in a Catholic school, which is not necessarily an accredited thing....perhaps Catholic schools, within for instance, clusters could look at arranging some of these, where it is talking about, like, how do we develop our faith within our schools. (interview 3)

The variation between those who wish to link CCRS with external accreditation and thus gain transfer value for the course within the currency of higher education is at odds with those who see otherwise. The question of what qualification the CCRS gives to those who successfully complete it, however, remains a pertinent concern and relates to ambiguity over its perceived role, identity and purpose that has never been fully resolved.

For other interviews (4, 9) enhancement of CCRS would come about through better central support for tutors such as training and conference opportunities, provision of shared curriculum and teaching resources, and improved standardisation and quality assurance across centres. The challenge of each local CCRS centre appointing a coherent and connected team of tutors across modules and satellite venues was noted while the need for the provision of national and regional shared online and media resources for CCRS was pointed out by interview 11 who spoke of the advantages this could bring to the course, rather than “always having to reinvent the wheel at local level.”

Meanwhile, other interviews called for greater support and new publicity for CCRS across the country. Interview 6 asked for more deliberate support from clergy across England and Wales to incentivise both teachers and those in lay ministries to undertake the course. Interviews 7 and 11 both stated a need for more extensive publicity and targeted marketing of CCRS, both locally and nationally.

Current curriculum framework

All twelve interviews agree that the CCRS modular curriculum framework is relevant and generally fit for purpose in terms of serving current course aims and outcomes but there are some reservations and recognition of challenge here as well.

A number of interviews emphasise the distinctive role yet cohesive relationship that exists between the six core theology and two specialist-practical modules (1, 2,

7, 8, 9, 10, 12). This is seen as important for understanding and appreciating what CCRS is all about. Interview 6 takes a strong position on this and points out that the relationship between core and specialist modules was set in place right from the start of CCRS in 1991-92 precisely to cater for teachers, non-teachers and those in parish ministry. Therefore, this interviewee is clear that the six core modules should not be pedagogically or practically orientated as this is the specific role and purpose of the two specialist modules. There is concern that there is risk today of this being misunderstood by those who over-stress the need for practical application throughout all core theology modules. The core modules are seen as “necessary” for all those working in Catholic schools and lay ministry who “need to understand and speak from a knowledge base” (interview 8). The specialist modules give opportunities for local expertise and interest and bring a broader perspective and practical application for both catechist / parish ministry and education roles.

However, the challenge of the CCRS core theology-two specialist module curriculum for those working in Catholic schools is called into play by the Head Teachers interviewed for the research project (interviews 3, 8, 12). While stating that teachers in Catholic schools need a confident knowledge of the faith for a role in Catholic education, the Head Teachers nevertheless question the relevance of CCRS in general and especially the core theology modules given the status of their current school staff, many of whom are not practising Catholics or in the case of the secondary Head Teacher, not teaching Religious Education in the classroom. This echoes some of the Phase One student survey responses that are unsure as to the relevance of the CCRS modules in terms of their function or usefulness for a school classroom or practitioner role.

Meanwhile, a Primary Head Teacher who was unable to be interviewed but instead sent a detailed written statement about CCRS, also raised the question about what was the ‘right’ level needed by teachers in school and suggested that while what is offered in CCRS might be interesting and thought-provoking to some, too often it missed the mark in terms of providing the core knowledge she wanted her teachers to have. This may explain why some interview responses link the curriculum framework to the need for appropriate presentation of course content at the right pitch and level for the specific CCRS participant audience.

In my opinion that would depend on how the different modules are presented to the students. I think that if a module is too academic then they will struggle with that and you’ve got to have the basic building blocks in place. It can’t always follow....but really one module should build on the other and I think that the more that those early building blocks are put in place the more other tutors can refer back to them and if we had an overall agreement of saying we’re not teaching post-graduates, we are not lecturing final year students at Durham, we really need to look after these people and not bombard them but give them very concrete ways of understanding what’s going on and then apply what’s going on then I think this would work better. (interview 4)

Interview 11 sees that the CCRS modular structure works well on the whole but reflects on the need to integrate knowledge and understanding across the core and specialist modules. This could help to “unlock all the potential of a course that’s got quite a lot of investment both from the students and from the centre.” By seeking a more implicit integration across modules, this interviewee explains:

... that for example New Testament works well with Christology not just with Old Testament; and we’re looking at how Church interacts with Christology and Sacraments. And you’re getting, if not exactly the same message, at least an integrated pattern then. That’s a bit more challenging to do in a modular approach.

Some of the interviews are aware of new integrated curriculum delivery patterns emerging in some dioceses but there is general caution about rushing into curriculum change without solid reason or clear evidence of need in the local centre.¹³

Specific demands on teachers

All the interviews agree with the Phase One survey data that shows that teachers, in particular, struggle with the demands of doing CCRS. They point out the fact that CCRS brings extra work, pressure, and time commitments which impacts heavily on those in school roles. The question of relevance for CCRS emerges once again:

Some teachers feel that the course doesn’t tell them how to then teach about the Catholic faith and they feel their time has been wasted, that studying the CCRS was unnecessary and a tick-box exercise. There is a difficulty felt amongst some teachers that the course does not directly link to their teaching practice and the requirement for it is not compatible with their experience of doing it. Some teachers are being appointed in Catholic schools with no knowledge of Christianity or Catholicism. There is a real sense of some schools not intrinsically supporting the teachers with CCRS. (6)

Two interviews refer to their own diocesan certificate course, which is less demanding than the full CCRS and which is offered to teachers in their schools (interviews 10 and 12).

...I think for a lot of teachers in Catholic schools who are maybe not practising their faith or engaged with their faith or who are not Catholics, the level sometimes has been too difficult. People have started and have just said, “No, this

13) Plymouth Diocese have recently restructured their CCRS curriculum around a new model of four integrated modules. This model is now also being followed by the Archdiocese of Cardiff.

isn't working for me," and so we do have a very simple diocesan course which just looks at the Catholic faith at a much more foundational level which people find helpful and maybe a stepping stone to CCRS. (interview 10)

Other interviews respond to this question by reiterating the need for centres to offer CCRS in a variety of delivery modes and more manageable timescales, to facilitate teachers with focused tutor support and to work with local schools to allow use of non-contact planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time, with financial support for course fees from school budgets rather than expecting people to self-fund (interviews 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11). There are also questions about whether it is relevant to expect initial training teachers (ITT) or those newly qualified (NQT) to take on the CCRS (interview 4) while other responses state that CCRS itself is not the obstacle, but rather that it is teacher workloads and external professional circumstances that are at fault, which is beyond the remit of CCRS to overcome (interviews 5, 7).

This question about whether teachers need to undertake CCRS and the particular demands this places on them, is a recurring theme throughout both the Phase One survey and the stakeholder interviews. One Primary Head Teacher poses the question in stark terms; should CCRS indeed be compulsory for those teaching in a Catholic school?

Core purpose and function of CCRS

One of the most significant areas of conversation to emerge during the semi-structured interviews was in response to the question about the primary purpose and function of CCRS. This was posed by the interviewer as three possible options: a) theological education i.e. CCRS is about gaining theological knowledge and understanding; b) formational purposes i.e. CCRS is about growing in personal faith or spiritual formation; c) professional application i.e. CCRS is primarily to enable one to become a better practitioner in school or parish. Each of these three aspects had become apparent during the Phase One student survey but with a clear majority of participants opting for knowledge and understanding of Catholic faith as their primary purpose and reason for taking the course.

The interview responses to this are varied. Some interviews (2, 4, 10, 11, 12) are strongly in agreement that the focus of CCRS is predominantly about enabling people into theological knowledge and understanding. They state that this is a real concern and need for today, thus echoing the literature mentioned in the first section of this report and also the survey responses of the majority of course participants themselves.

I think, again, it should focus on the theology part, because the other things are, in a way, they're the subjective use of what has been given to you. Because

if you're given the theology, you can then apply that to your own spiritual life and that will help you to grow. And if you're given the theology, your training throughout the years, your initial training, your training throughout the years in a school and your experience, it will help you to know how to apply that in the professional situation. So, personally, I would stick to the theology part, because the others will come from that, whereas if you just focused on the others, it might not work the other way around. (interview 2)

...the students on the CCRS need to engage for themselves before they can start to talk about how they're going to communicate to other people. For them to be able to do that they need to be able to have the [*theological*] language, the vocabulary a little bit more at their fingertips so they can have the confidence to have a discussion. And if they have that confidence to have that discussion then they have the confidence to be able to translate it into pedagogy in the classroom. (interview 4)

So I think the unique value I see is in the theological area. I would say it's partly theological knowledge but I think the idea of theological understanding is more important. It's not about giving people the full breadth of things that they can then repeat. It's about understanding I think. The great gift is understanding what are the riches of theology that they're entitled to access as part of their formation, as part of their job, as part of their thinking about being in the world that these are not things that are locked away to professional theologians and priests and bishops. (interview 11)

However there is also a clear sense that CCRS should never be just about information or knowledge for its own sake. This is echoed in the remaining interviews, with slight variations in emphasis, but each stating that the integration of theological learning with praxis is important when considering what CCRS is really all about.

I think the emphasis ...really is embedded with each other. It is gaining theological knowledge and understanding but more often than not it is for professional or practical purposes that you gain the theological knowledge and understanding. (interview 5)

To me the most important thing is that it's applied. And all there are ways of applying what we learn in the CCRS. But if it's not applied and if it stays theoretical then it doesn't bring to light the faith and we're involved in the kerygma and...we now live in a missionary country ...therefore we cannot assume that the teachers who are teaching in our schools have the language of faith or that depth of faith but we cannot assume that the children have that background. And the CCRS I think is very important for that. (interview 5)

In other interviews, it is the formational / spiritual focus of CCRS that is highlighted, both by those who support and those who question its place in what is essentially an introductory course in Catholic theology. One interview (5) put it like this: “we don’t emphasise personal faith journey but people might perceive or receive CCRS as such”. In one sense, this mirrors the thinking that underpins much Catholic educational philosophy and which sees that what one person receives as education may be received as catechesis or development of faith or spirituality by another person. The distinct yet complementary relationship between education, formation and spiritual capital is seemingly being played out within the different applications and audiences of CCRS.

I’ve always found it very interesting when you see the kind of young and old people in the room together having these discussions, you get real insight from both sides and I think that actually having a mix of people on the course for personal spiritual development and for professional development is always really nice. There’s always a really nice dynamic when that happens. (interview 9)

So I would say the knowledge, the formation and the helping people with their own ministries is all part of it and I would find it very hard to separate those things myself and I think most people on the course would be looking for a combination of those things and certainly would receive a combination. (interview 10)

For the primary Head Teachers interviewed, it was largely the faith / spiritual capacity of CCRS to enable “you to develop your own faith and your own relationship with God” that was the driving force to encourage people to take CCRS. Recognising that knowing about “deeper theological issues” or “how pedagogically do you teach RE within a Catholic school” was important, nevertheless as one Head Teacher put the main focus of CCRS as:

... knowing your Catholic faith and actually living it out, not just saying the right things. And to an extent, part of me worries that it’s back to this situation where it’s actually ‘Right, we’re doing exactly the right things and we’re not thinking about the spirit that’s behind it,’ and for me, that’s what really matters. And what we should always be after are people who are committed to spreading the gospel through the way in which they live and they react, through the way that they treat children, anybody and everybody who they meet. For me, that’s of a greater purpose than the CCRS. (interview 3)

Another primary Head Teacher echoes this:

...in my school my primary purpose for asking people and encouraging people to undertake it is so that as a teacher in school they’re better placed to meet

the needs of faith formation of the children and be able to talk to them in an informed way about their own faith, their religion etc. (interview 8)

For those interviewed it seems that one of strengths of CCRS is precisely that it serves different needs, purposes, audiences and contexts.

...that's part of why CCRS is so successful and so good is because it actually addresses all of those different areas in different ways... So I think what the CCRS does well is I think it probably stretches people depending on where the starting point is, so some people come from a faith background, really quite confessional and then they are challenged through the process in order to articulate their standpoint from an academic, unconfessional, more professional, theological point of view. Others have got the theology but actually it challenges them to reflect on other aspects of the process. I think for the practitioners the challenge for them is to recognise the value of...actually every programme springs out of theology and I suppose it's helping them to become more theologically literate. (interview 7)

Another interview (4) likened this ability of the CCRS to address different needs and purposes to "...Avery Dulles talking about models of church because there are different models and it's like holding up a diamond and it's got different sides to it depending on which you focus on at the time".

The interviews as a whole give no particular indication that CCRS should be delivered as a separate course or duplicated for different sectors or audiences. One interview (5) did use the phrase "one size fits all" and suggested that future teaching sessions might include some sector specific input to make it more relevant to primary and secondary practitioners and to parish catechists also taking the course. But far from implying that "one size fits all" is a negative feature, the interview celebrates the very richness and diversity of what the CCRS can bring to all who undertake it.

Why don't more people take CCRS?

One question for the interviewees, given the positive feedback received from the Phase One survey, asked why more people don't do CCRS. In many respects the interview responses repeated factors that were already reported by the survey participants themselves. Issues concerning timescale restraints, personal commitments, workload pressures, work-life balance, the busyness of contemporary living, a lack of school support and funding – these aspects were all reiterated. Once again, calls for more flexible pathways and manageable opportunities for people to access the course and fulfil its requirements in terms of attendance, curriculum and assessment were also raised.

Three interviews (8, 10, 12) spoke particularly about the stumbling block of poor perceptions of CCRS that lurk in some dioceses, schools and parishes. The question

of ‘what’s in it for me’ is a real and pertinent issue for many people and the benefit and value of CCRS as experienced by some people is not necessarily the same for everyone, as the student survey indicated. As the secondary Head Teacher (interview 12) said, the biggest challenge sometimes is for people to “step across the threshold and do it [CCRS]; only then will they realise how good it is, how important and what impact it can have on faith, work and life”. The question remains though, how to encourage people across that threshold.

In addition, the discrepancy between dioceses where schools, academies and local governing bodies seek CCRS as a priority role specification or condition of employment was seen as affecting course participant numbers and intake as compared to other centres where CCRS is not requested by schools or given any particular professional priority.

Some interviews report a general lack of drive and / or awareness among dioceses and parishes in terms of seeing CCRS as relevant for parish lay ministry and catechist formation. They cite this as a prime reason for more people not taking the course. At a time when the roles and responsibilities of lay people have increased but evidence suggests a declining identity and practice of faith in this country, then the need for theologically formed and confident lay people was articulated strongly across the interviews, with CCRS seen as having a real part to play in this.

Interview 11 makes an interesting point that given the longevity of CCRS running since 1991-92, many people in influential positions in diocese or school may well have done the course themselves in earlier days but no longer see how or accept that CCRS can fit with today’s immediate context in school or parish and so look instead for less structured, more experiential or more attractive alternatives.

CCRS and adult formation

In probing further the question of whether CCRS is viewed as an educational qualification or as adult formation opportunity, the interviews give contrasting viewpoints by those who see it firmly belonging in one camp but not the other. For example, the two senior church leaders disagreed on this: one placing CCRS in purely educational terms, the other saying that CCRS should fit into a broader understanding of lay pastoral formation (interviews 1 and 2). But trying to elicit where CCRS might sit within both professional and adult formation activities proved elusive and somewhat inconclusive.

What comes across throughout the interviews is a natural and inherent tension in CCRS as to what it is all about and who it is for. ‘One size fits all’ carries a certain ring of truth. The fact that the course serves many different needs, different purposes and different groups means that there are pulls in different directions, for instance between those seeking theological rigour and academic standards and those wanting more pastoral approaches. But this can be linked to a Catholic understanding of education that is about the whole person - formation, information and transformation - and so it is perhaps not surprising to see that reasons for taking or providing CCRS include those for personal growth as well as for gaining theological

knowledge and professional or pastoral skills. The challenge for stakeholders and course providers is how to articulate this diversity and richness for both the Catholic faith community and the professional world. The interviews are clear that in diverse ways, CCRS enables people to encounter Catholic faith and theology in the contemporary world and this is something to be celebrated and applauded.

Change for the future

Just like the Phase One student survey, the interview question framework included an open-ended question about what in CCRS might need to change for the future. By way of summarising the responses, the interviews spoke of the following:

- the need for improved course provision, curriculum and delivery (interviews 2, 8, 9, 11);
- openness to new pedagogy and new online technologies (interviews 2, 11);
- greater flexibility of delivery times and modes (interviews 2, 6, 8);
- enabling people with both funding and capacity to take the course (interviews 3, 12);
- acknowledging and responding to changing times and circumstances in schools and parishes (interviews 4, 6);
- providing national resources for tutors (interviews 5, 9)
- providing national resources for learning materials and course assessment (interviews 5, 11);
- more encouragement / recognition for people to do CCRS from different sectors and pathways (interviews 1, 7, 11);
- removing academic barriers for some people e.g. those from parishes or who simply wish to audit (interview 7);
- simultaneously to maintain academic standards and theological rigour (interviews 7, 9, 11);
- more support from diocesan teams and church structures (interview 10);
- a plea not to change things just for the sake of it (interview 11).

Final comments

The interviews closed with an opportunity to make any final comments about CCRS. Most of them gave heartfelt responses that affirm the role, value and impact of CCRS within adult theological education and faith formation across England and Wales. CCRS is alternatively described as a platform (interview 4), launch pad (interview 1), stable base and strong backbone (interview 11) for enabling lay people to gain a recognised formal qualification for a professional or lay ministerial role in the church. At a time of falling congregations and a shortage of clergy, this is seen as “absolutely necessary for the church to continue” (interview 1).

A number of interviews spoke of the privilege of being involved with CCRS and witnessed to its impact on their own personal lives. Some, who are recipients of CCRS themselves, speak of CCRS with gratitude as it has “...actually kind of challenged and defined and challenged my life, certainly professionally for more than 20 years” (interview 5).

For others, there is a positive affirmation of what CCRS has brought to those who have taken the course. “I’ve seen lots of people that have gone on to other things and looking back on it, I think the foundation they’ve received has been really significant for them” (interview 7).

This is echoed by a primary Head Teacher: “Just that I personally see it as very beneficial. I think it’s massively supported staff that I’ve worked with within my own school and the locality....and I think it’s a very worthwhile course and will be supporting it into the future” (interview 8).

One way or another, the interviews all refer either implicitly or explicitly, to the fact that the CCRS has stood the test of time and yet still is important and relevant for today. One interview puts the significance of this across in a noteworthy way:

I can’t really think of anything else that has endured in the same way in England and Wales. And so it’s been great. And just to finish, when we had a change of personnel in the centre and the CCRS director retired and also there was a period of change in the diocese more widely and I stepped in to help manage the transition, the one piece of, well not even advice, the one instruction I was given from the bishop in terms of looking at the wider issues of formation and adult education in the centre was ‘Don’t let the CCRS drop, everything else we can manage and restart. Don’t drop the ball on the CCRS. That’s the kind of jewel in the crown, that’s the thing we must hang on to.’ So there was a real sense of that’s the secure base we can build out on. I think that says where its value lies. (interview 11)

4.3 Summary

This chapter has presented the findings of semi-structured interviews held with CCRS course providers, stakeholders and practitioner bodies during the second phase of the research project. The interviews offer a rich seam of qualitative data to accompany the Phase One student survey. The purpose has not been to cross-validate the survey data but rather to capture further dimensions of the CCRS and to bring further insight and perspective into the research study in an attempt to present as full and accurate a case as possible. From both data sets across the two research phases, a number of significant themes have emerged concerning CCRS and these are now given further attention in the next chapter.

5. Overarching Themes

This penultimate section of the report summarises the overarching themes that have emerged from the data gathered from both the online student survey and the stakeholder interviews which comprised the two phases of the CCRS research project. Themes are presented in no particular order.

Affirmation of role and value

CCRS is a unique and valuable instrument and central resource for theological education and faith formation for individuals, schools, parishes and indeed for the church in England and Wales. It has long been recognised as a benchmark lay theological qualification awarded by the Catholic Bishops' Conference in this country. The reference to CCRS as a 'jewel in the crown' is not atypical for how many course participants and stakeholders view it. There is a sense that the Catholic community should not let this drop or diminish; indeed 'if not CCRS then what would there be in its place?' is recurring refrain.

Continuing need for theological literacy

There is a clear and undisputed need for lay theological formation today. The primary request from people who undertake CCRS as well as those who provide or support it is for knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition. Lay people in schools, parishes, chaplaincies, youth, family and other ministries are being asked to take on growing roles and responsibilities at a time when knowledge and understanding of faith and theology is declining.

Certainly there are formal opportunities to study theology at tertiary level across England and Wales and through distance learning from other institutions across the world. In addition, most dioceses run professional in-service for teachers and other courses for lay ministry, spirituality, faith formation and evangelisation etc. So CCRS is by no means the only avenue for adult theological education. However the research data indicates that it has stood the test of time and continues to attract a large number of participants from different backgrounds, giving those who complete it the only nationally recognised award of the Bishops Conference of England and Wales.

Evidence of impact

The impact of CCRS on individual peoples' personal, spiritual and professional lives is evident in the affirmation of the research data. This impact can be understood not just through the evidence of individual testimonies, some of which are

included in this report, but can also be heard through countless people speaking about the influence and contribution that CCRS has brought to those working in Catholic schools, parish communities and church/other organisations across the country. CCRS ‘makes a difference’ is a constant refrain.

A ‘Cinderella CCRS’

Despite the positive appraisal that emerges from both phases of the research project, CCRS is not always taken up by teachers, schools or, most notably, people in parishes. CCRS can be affected by poor awareness or perception of what it is all about, which inevitably results in limited course provision and take-up in some situations. This can be due to any number of factors, whether historical, geographical, or due to local diocese, parish or school circumstances. But limited recognition and lack of publicity, motivation or support from dioceses, parishes, schools, clergy or individuals means that CCRS gets overlooked or viewed as not suitable or no longer appropriate or relevant for certain needs. There is sense of CCRS sometimes being seen as a poor relation or ‘Cinderella’ that has been left behind by more recent, attractive or less formally structured activities. This is both challenging and detrimental to CCRS as it currently stands.

Ambiguity of identity and purpose

To some extent, CCRS suffers from an identity crisis. There is ambiguity in its overall purpose and identity. The richness and diversity of CCRS and what its various options can bring to those who take it is expressed positively in the research data on numerous occasions as ‘one size fits all’ but this fails to resolve a number of inherent tensions that remain either as a hangover from past years or else have emerged in light of changing socio-cultural and educational circumstances.

Clearly the motivation for doing CCRS varies from person to person and this will be reflected in their reasons and approaches to study. But such tensions are exemplified by CCRS being viewed by some solely through an instrumental / functional lens as that which is needed by teachers to secure a job in a Catholic school. Others see CCRS more as an opportunity to study the faith and grow in theological and spiritual acumen.

Further avenues of tension can be seen in the differing approaches to CCRS among different types of CCRS centres (university, school, diocese; face to face, distance, online) and whether CCRS is primarily conducted in academic, professional or pastoral ways. Indeed should CCRS be concerned with theology or praxis or both? Should it seek to foster cognitive or spiritual capital, epistemological or ontological development in each course participant? Critics may suggest that it is misleading to place these tensions as opposing forces and that they should rather be viewed along a spectrum of what it means to educate in the languages of faith.

But the research data does demonstrate that underlying and, at times, longstanding tensions over the identity and core purpose of CCRS remains a cause of misunderstanding and disagreement. This takes expression in some research data that hints of a need for different sector approaches to CCRS.

While a ‘one size fits all’ approach is open and inclusive to anyone and everyone, this does not determine or advance the specific value of CCRS for teachers, for catechists, for lay chaplains, for parish ministers, for parents etc. Key questions about CCRS as a national lay qualification must be addressed. If the Catholic community wants teachers, parish catechists, lay chaplains, those in parish ministries etc., to have CCRS then a clearer national articulation of this is needed, together with the support and collaboration of both ecclesiological and practitioner bodies to bring this about.

The research does not indicate that CCRS should focus on only one specific group or separate into different sector-based cohorts or courses. Indeed this could be viewed as disadvantageous and diminishing of what CCRS has traditionally been all about. But it does suggest that clear recognition, communication and even possible curriculum re-positioning for different groups could accommodate various pathways within CCRS and make for greater relevance for all concerned.

Nature of theological learning

The CCRS research project brings to light a number of concerns over what sort of theological learning should be offered to adult Catholics today in order for them to take up a role or share responsibility in their school or parish or to address questions about faith and culture in the contemporary world. While gaining content knowledge and understanding of the faith tradition is seen as really important, there is risk of ‘theology-overload’ that does not integrate or correlate with personal, spiritual or professional growth – in other words, a risk of growing big heads but narrow hearts and hands.

There are deeper questions to be asked here about what sort of theology CCRS should offer and how to relate theology to human experience. Such questions go beyond the remit of this report. However the data suggests that a theology that only seeks personal assent, or baton-relaying of church teaching, or limits opportunities for critical engagement and personal interpretation, will not reach people where they are in their real lives and contemporary situation.

Therefore, if the theological topics and theological methods that underpin CCRS modules do not act as a bridge discourse with other cultures and worldviews or invite dialogue with one’s own views as well as other (non)traditions, then there is risk that the theology of CCRS remains an ancient language, distanced from personal life or faith experience or from contemporary professional circumstances. In this case, CCRS might well be seen as merely a box ticking exercise for a bizarre, obtuse and disconnected theology.

Data emerging from the research project strongly indicates that theological formation for lay people should integrate something of the practical (knowing how to) together with the critical (knowing about and knowing why). While the research affirms that there is clear need for core knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition, there is equally a sense that theology must also engage in dialogue and interpretation with contemporary life and praxis. For some people this is fundamental to the whole CCRS curriculum and should be evident throughout all modules; for others it can be best handled or left to the practical nature of the two specialist modules. This is a matter of some debate.

Authentic and effective adult learning

There is a clear sense in the research data from both phases that adult learning involves ‘journey’. The phrase ‘learning journey’, ‘faith journey’, and ‘professional journey’ occurs over and again. This may inherently have something to do with research participants recognising and naming the length of time it takes someone to complete CCRS or the effort, commitment and cost involved. But the metaphor of ‘journey’ is also indicative that authentic learning does not happen immediately, as recognised in Piagetian thinking as well as James Fowler’s work on the stages of faith. Development, growth, change or transformation in self and worldview is a process and not an outcome or product to be easily measured. For many people, the experience of doing CCRS has been a genuine adult learning process and this is something valuable that deserves to be acknowledged.

But identifying what makes for an effective and authentic adult learning experience is not an insubstantial matter. To a large extent the positive evaluation of CCRS as a learning experience as found in the research data largely speaks for itself. However there are concerns that arise over such things as limited opportunities for interactive or engaged learning during CCRS modules as well as recognition of the challenges and difficulties that can be posed by say working with one’s peers. Meanwhile, the role and delivery methods of CCRS tutors also come under scrutiny. The more typical student experience is to affirm and value the contribution made by CCRS module tutors to the learning enjoyment and achievement gained during the course but this is not always the case. Comments about poor tutor pedagogy and teaching styles cannot be ignored. At the same time, the challenge of continuing to recruit people to administer and teach CCRS is fully acknowledged.

Likewise, CCRS assessment practices hold clear significance when evaluating CCRS as an adult learning facility. The research data shows some mixed results and it seems that there are questions not just about the overall consistency and quality of feedback and assessment across CCRS but that this also ties in to what is perceived as the core aim and motivation for undertaking the course. Whether module assessments encourage repetition, surface skimming or deep diving is

open to debate. There are calls for improvements in assessment and feedback practices and further national resources such as descriptors and exemplars to assist this.

Curriculum provision

The overall evaluation of the current CCRS modular curriculum gains a largely positive appraisal. The six core modules give a systematic and structured presentation of the Catholic faith tradition and this is seen as a key strength of CCRS. At times however, there is risk of too much content being attempted, at too complex a level, with recognition of limited contact time and general acknowledgement of minimal guidance about key module topics/syllabus and a lack of provision of shared local and national resources.

The place of the two specialist modules within the overall curriculum framework comes under more questionable examination in the research data. There are mixed views about the core-specialist module split in terms of theology versus practice-based application. Some specialist modules are viewed in favourable light but not all. There are also calls for additional sector specific or interest-based modules to be created in order to expand the range of options. But while this might be one way forward, the challenge of unnecessary duplication and randomisation of modules must also be taken into account. Another viewpoint sees a better way forward is to consolidate and condense the specialist module range into a coherent and cohesive portfolio that can be recognised and shared nationally and properly resourced for more specific sector groupings.

Quality Assurance

What emerges forcefully from both phases of the research data is a strong need for quality assurance across CCRS both nationally, regionally and within each local centre itself. CCRS currently is a nationally managed and awarded course that is moderated regionally but primarily delivered and experienced at local centre level. This leaves wide open the question of whether and how existing structures can guarantee a rigorous and robust quality assurance across all dimensions of CCRS in order to affirm consistency of academic level and standards across the country.

The current system of relying on regional and local centre self-moderation seems inadequate for the task of ensuring quality across the administrative, teaching, curriculum and assessment functions of CCRS. The appointment of a specific role or small team to take co-responsibility for promoting and helping to ensure standards could improve the academic standing and provision of the course but without removing local flexibility and determination, which is an important principle to uphold.

Question of Accreditation

Calls for accreditation of CCRS within a more formally recognised tertiary provision are present in the research data but generally remain limited in scope. This has been an issue for debate by the Board of Religious Studies over recent years but has been left to the discretion of each local centre, some of whom have aligned CCRS with undergraduate or postgraduate degree courses. Accreditation could help to ensure a common credibility and recognised standard of education and training for CCRS but associated issues of costs, funding, quality control, flexibility of local provision etc. would require careful attention.

What seems to be a more fundamental underlying issue, however, is the question over what status or 'currency' the CCRS holds or gives to the person who achieves it and how this might be linked to more formal ecclesial recognition or qualification for a particular role or ministry. How CCRS fits into a wider national vision or framework for adult formation or contributes to professional development for a school or parish role remains unclear. There is a need for greater clarification and consistency over exactly what CCRS can offer to different sectors and pathways of formation. This is both challenge and opportunity.

The Catholic educational community should be clear about whether and why its teachers should take CCRS. If this is agreed as important for the future of Catholic education in this country, then there needs to be more resources and greater support from within the educational sector. If CCRS is accepted and recognised as valuable for fostering theological capacity for parish and other lay ministries then there needs to be greater recognition and promotion of this within parishes, dioceses and church organisations. This does not mean that CCRS should lose the flexibility and richness of a provision that, at times, has been deemed an awkward treasure. CCRS has the capacity to offer a 'one size fits all' for adult theological formation in our times that can encompass both an articulation and application for different component groups and sectors. The way forward looks to be challenging but also exciting.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The CCRS research project Twenty Five Years On was set up in light of changing educational, pastoral, and sociological circumstances and due to the fact that no research had been carried out on a national scale for at least the past decade. As a result, a two phase research project to gather empirical data and present a 'thick' case study was begun in 2016 and completed in late summer 2018. This carried the backing of the CCRS Board of Religious Studies and sought the collaboration of CCRS colleagues and practitioner bodies by inviting involvement in the research team and steering group and through regular updates and presentation made at regional and national meetings.

The phase one online survey attracted a wide-ranging longitudinal response from past and present CCRS participants but inevitably must be viewed as limited in its representation of the total CCRS cohort since 1991 as this is largely unknown. The rich data that did emerge in the student survey, however, demonstrates an overarching positive regard and appraisal of CCRS according to its role, purpose, impact, learning experience and meeting expectations among those who undertake the course. This is good news and cause for much celebration.

The semi-structured interviews that formed phase two of the research project were conducted with CCRS sponsors and providers who might together be termed stakeholders in one way or another. The interviews represent different ecclesiological contexts and professional positions from across the country. The data they yielded adds to the resonance and complexity of what is known as the CCRS and emphasises the unique role and contribution it continues to make to adult theological formation and professional development today.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered to the Board of Religious Studies for their consideration. No timelines, budgetary or resource implications are provided. The recommendations may need to be prioritised and working parties established as needed for further development and implementation.

- 1) CCRS needs a clearer positioning as to its core identity, role and purpose alongside a more explicit *raison d'être* as to who the course is for and how it serves both individuals and the various constituencies who undertake, support and deliver it.
- 2) Further affirmation and public commitment for the role and contribution of CCRS to adult theological formation across England and Wales should be sought from senior church leaders and their representative bodies.

- 3) The Board of Religious Studies should generate new publicity, greater advertising and possible rebranding of CCRS at national, regional and local levels.
- 4) Recognising that the majority of participants are in a school-based role, the Board of Religious Studies should seek greater consensus with dioceses, universities, schools, academies, head teachers and training partnerships about the specific nature and value of CCRS for teachers and the requirement to undertake it for a role in a Catholic school.
- 5) CCRS should be given greater prominence and promotion as relevant and useful for those in parishes and lay ministries. New creative ways to do this should be sought from diocesan bodies and other church or lay organisations.
- 6) The inequality of the financial situation whereby some individuals pay for CCRS themselves while others are funded by school, parish, diocese or other employer, should be explored to see how this can be mitigated as a barrier to participation.
- 7) CCRS centres should be encouraged to review how their scheduling and delivery of modules meet local needs and circumstances. This should better recognise peoples' workloads and commitments and enable sessions to be provided in more opportune and flexible ways.
- 8) The creation of new resources to enhance learning and teaching across both the core and specialist modules is recommended. These should include greater specification of the syllabus and topics to be taught across each module as well as additional supporting materials in text, audio and video formats. All new resources should be made available as online web links on the CCRS website and/or downloadable PDFs for ease of use by any local centre.
- 9) New resources should also be created for CCRS assessment practices for quality improvement purposes. These might include such things as shared databanks to rotate assignment titles, sample assignments for benchmarking and exemplification purposes, and provision of software for checking plagiarism. All new resources should be made available as online web links on the CCRS website and/or downloadable PDFs for ease of use by any local centre.
- 10) In line with the previous two recommendations, the addition of a password protected section on the CCRS website could host materials and resources on a shared basis for all centres.

- 11) The Board of Religious Studies and/or regional groups should provide resources, mentoring, support, networking and possible future conference or training days to encourage the recruitment and support the continuing development of CCRS module tutors.
- 12) Further evaluation and possible overhaul of the specialist modules within the CCRS curriculum should be given attention. This needs to take account of duplication and randomisation of the current list of specialist modules across the country to consider whether a more clearly delineated national range of specialist modules might be a better way forward.
- 13) The Board of Religious Studies should consider how and whether specific pathways within CCRS might be provided for course participants who align with a particular role, sector or ministry. This could mean that future participants follow a named pathway by focusing their core module assessments and specialist curriculum options according to a particular pathway e.g. The Catholic School, Religious Education, Parish Ministry or Lay Chaplaincy etc. Specific pathways could be named on the CCRS final award.
- 14) An enhanced structure and/or system for quality assurance at national level should be put in place in order to ensure consistency and quality of administration, course delivery, curriculum, teaching and learning, resources and assessment across all CCRS centres.

Appendix 1 | Board of Religious Studies Letter to CCRS Centres

From: ccrs@catholiceducation.org.uk

Date: 11/11/2016

To: All CCRS Centres

CCRS National Research Project: Student Survey

At the National Review meeting at Hothorpe Hall in January 2016, a new collaborative research project was presented. This project has the full backing of the Board of Religious Studies.

In the twenty-five years since it began, the CCRS has developed policies, curriculum initiatives, delivery modes and learning and teaching strategies. However, the wider educational, religious and cultural contexts in which CCRS is delivered have changed significantly. This research project gives an opportunity for a wider current conversation to explore CCRS through both participant experience and stakeholder expectations. The aim is to examine the role and purpose of CCRS in enabling knowledge and understanding of Catholic faith and theology among lay adults and to ask about the learning that occurs and its relevance or impact for today.

Phase 1 of the research project includes an online survey for CCRS participants, past and present. I now ask for your support in order to disseminate the survey as widely as possible to all who have studied CCRS with your centre. This includes those currently taking the course as well as those who have completed in previous years.

The link to complete the survey is <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/ccrsstudentsurvey>

Please can you communicate this link to your CCRS students before the end of term and encourage them to complete the survey. Email might be the best way to do this and we hope that this will be possible through your centre administrative records. A copy of this letter will be available on the Board of Religious Studies website and the survey link will also be clearly displayed. The survey will be repeated again next term and you will be contacted again about this in due course.

The research is being carried out in accordance with BERA research and ethical standards (British Education Research Association). Ethical approval has been given for the project but if you have any questions about this then please email Dr Ros Stuart-Buttle, project leader, at stuartr@hope.ac.uk

Thank you in advance for your co-operation. Please help make this student survey a success by distributing the link as widely as possible throughout your CCRS centre.

Best wishes,

Fr Des Seddon

Chair of the Board of Religious Studies

Appendix 2 | CES Letter to Diocesan Directors, Schools and Colleges

From: ccrs@catholiceducation.org.uk

Date: 11/11/2016

To: Diocesan Schools Commissioners
Directors of Religious Education
Principals of Catholic HE Colleges
Sixth Form Colleges

CCRS National Research Project: Student Survey

At the CCRS National Review meeting at Hothorpe Hall in January 2016, a new collaborative research project was presented. This project has the full backing of the Board of Religious Studies.

In the twenty-five years since it began, the CCRS has developed policies, curriculum initiatives, delivery modes and learning and teaching strategies. However, the wider educational, religious and cultural contexts in which CCRS is delivered have changed significantly. This research project gives an opportunity for a wider current conversation to explore CCRS through both participant experience and stakeholder expectations. The aim is to examine the role and purpose of CCRS in enabling knowledge and understanding of Catholic faith and theology among lay adults and to ask about the learning that occurs and its relevance or impact for today.

Phase 1 of the research project includes an online survey for CCRS participants, past and present. I now ask for your support in order to disseminate the survey as widely as possible to all who have studied the CCRS course in your dioceses. This includes those currently taking the course as well as those who have completed in previous years.

The link to complete the survey is www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/ccrsstudentsurvey

Please can you communicate this link as widely as possible and encourage CCRS students to complete the survey before the end of term. A copy of this letter will be available on the Board of Religious Studies website and the survey link will also be clearly displayed. The survey will be repeated again next term and you will be

contacted again about this in due course.

The research is being carried out in accordance with BERA research and ethical standards (British Education Research Association). Ethical approval has been given for the project but if you have any questions about this then please email Dr Ros Stuart-Buttle, project leader, at stuartr@hope.ac.uk.

Thank you in advance for your co-operation. Please help make this student survey a success by distributing the link as widely as possible throughout your diocese.

Paul Barber
CES Director

Appendix 3 | Student Survey Questions

Section: Your CCRS Status

- Q1 I consent to taking part in this survey
- Q2 What is your CCRS status?
- Q3 Please state how many CCRS modules you have already completed
- Q4 If you withdrew from or left the CCRS course then when did this occur?
- Q5 If you have completed CCRS and received your certificate then when did you finish the course?
- Q6 Why have you chosen to study CCRS? Please give your reasons.

Section: Purpose of CCRS

- Q7 What do you see as the core purpose of CCRS? Choose the option that best fits from the list below
- Q8 Has CCRS been relevant for your personal development?
- Q9 Has CCRS been relevant for your school practice or particular ministry?
- Q10 Is CCRS relevant in today's world?

Section: CCRS Learning & Teaching

- Q11 Which teaching and learning methods have you experienced during CCRS? Select all that apply.
- Q12 Which CCRS teaching and learning method has most helped you as an adult learner and why?
- Q13 Which CCRS teaching and learning method has least helped you as an adult learner and why?
- Q14 Which CCRS module has most impacted your learning and why?
- Q15 Which CCRS module has least impacted your learning and why?
- Q16 How do you rate the six core/ two specialist module curriculum framework?
- Q17 Do the CCRS assessment tasks support your learning?
- Q18 Does the feedback you receive from module assessment support your learning?

Q19 Please rate each of the following statements

Section: Impact of CCRS

Q20 Please state whether you agree or disagree with the following statements concerning the impact of CCRS

Q21 CCRS is sometimes described as a course in adult theological literacy. In your experience has it ...

Q22 Has the CCRS encouraged you to continue into further formal or non-formal study?

Q23 Has CCRS met your expectations?

Q24 Would you recommend the CCRS to others?

Q25 Looking ahead, what changes could improve CCRS for future participants?

Section: About You

Q26 Your gender

Q27 Your age

Q28 Your main occupation

Q29 Your religious affiliation

Q30 Education – select all that apply

Q31 Highest study completed

Q32 Have you previously studied Catholicism before taking CCRS?

Q33 Please name the Centre with whom you are currently studying/or have completed CCRS

Q34 Are there any final comments about CCRS that you would like to make?

Appendix 4 | Amalgamated List of Codes for Student Survey Analysis

DKNR	Don't Know/ Not Relevant
Pd	Pedagogy/learning processes
PdQ	Pedagogy qualified or negative
Inst	Instrumental approach for teaching
Xpost	Extended positive
Xnegt	Extended negative
Spl	Spiritual learning
Thl	Theological learning
CSR	Catholic school role
CSL	Catholic school leadership
TRE	Teaching RE
CSW	Contemporary culture/society/world
FA	Putting faith into action
CKU	Catholic knowledge & understanding
AL	Adult learning
MF	Formation for ministry
OF	Other faiths/religions/worldviews

Appendix 5 | Phase Two Semi-Structured Interview Questions

- 1) What experience do you have of CCRS and where does CCRS fit into your overall role?
- 2) What is the perception (and uptake) of CCRS in your school/diocese? Who or what influences this?
- 3) What would better support or enhance CCRS in your school/diocese? Would this be desirable and, if so, to whom?
- 4) Does the current 8 module curriculum framework serve (or meet) current needs of teachers and/or those in parish/ lay ministry/catechists?
- 5) The student survey data shows that many teachers find the course to be hard work, challenging, and will do it if pushed into it. Does this prevent teachers from doing CCRS? Have you any ideas about overcoming this obstacle?
- 6) In the CCRS, should the primary focus lie on a) theological knowledge and understanding b) formation of the person c) pedagogical aspects for the classroom?
- 7) Given the overall good news from the student survey, why don't more people in our schools and parishes do CCRS?
- 8) How do you see CCRS fitting in to the provision of adult formation more generally?
- 9) In the CCRS what might need to change for the future?
- 10) Are there any final comments that you wish to make?

The Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies (CCRS) is a course in adult theological education across England & Wales which has been in existence since 1991-92. It is open to any person wishing to deepen their formal knowledge of the Catholic faith and has included teachers and others working in church schools as well as parish catechists and lay pastoral ministers seeking a theological foundation for their role. Other adults have taken the CCRS for personal reasons or spiritual formation. The CCRS has thus been both vehicle and benchmark for adult theological formation since the early 1990s.

This Report is the result of a two-phase research project set up in light of the twenty-fifth anniversary since the course began and in recognition of changing religious, cultural, political and educational contexts. The research project undertook a systematic exploration of the CCRS among course participants, providers and stakeholders and gathered a wealth of quantitative and qualitative data. Core research questions asked about the role and purpose of the CCRS, the nature and scope of adult theological learning, the reasons why people want to study, the impact the course has made, and the new directions or initiatives needed for continuation in the future.

Research findings give clear affirmation and high regard for the role and value of the CCRS and provide sound evidence of the continuing demand for adult theological literacy. They show that the CCRS makes a considerable impact in terms of providing opportunities for personal, spiritual and professional growth. At the same time, however, there are concerns and questions about what sort of theological learning and curriculum is needed and how best to enable adult learning with clear theological purpose and practical relevance for today.

The Report concludes by summarising the main themes that arise from the research project and by making a series of recommendations to the CCRS awarding body, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales Board of Religious Studies.