BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

SUPPLEMENTARY INSPECTION
CHANGE OF MANAGEMENT
(Independent Higher Education)

INSTITUTION: St Stephen’s House

ADDRESS: 16 Marston Street
Oxford
OX4 1JX

HEAD OF INSTITUTION: Reverend Dr Harri Williams

ACCREDITATION STATUS: Accredited

DATE OF INSPECTION: 17 December 2025

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: Continued accreditation, 26 March 2026

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the institution

St Stephen's House (SSH/the Institution) is an Anglican Theological College offering qualifications in theology validated by Durham University. SSH was founded in 1876 by members of the Oxford Movement, a group of High Church Anglican members. SSH was incorporated as a guaranteed limited company in 2018 and is registered as a United Kingdom (UK) charity.

The Institution enrols students, including ordinands, ordained ministers of religion and independent students, who wish to study for the Common Awards programmes validated by Durham University. SSH also provides support and accommodation for students, including those exercising lay ministry on University of Oxford theology degrees. The University of Oxford theology provision does not form part of the British Accreditation Council (BAC) accreditation.

SSH is located in Oxford in the UK and since 1980 has occupied the former monastery complex of the Society of St John the Evangelist. The site includes large accommodation blocks, teaching rooms, and a library, office space, two chapels, and a Grade I listed church with cloisters.

The Institution's main objective is to further the education and training of university graduates to prepare them for mission and other ministerial work within the Church of England and its associated churches. SSH aims to provide ongoing theological formation and education to ordained and lay students.

The governing body, known as the House Council, consists of three life-appointment trustees and up to six other appointed trustees who oversee the work of the Institution. The Institution's day-to-day work is managed by the Principal, who is supported by the Vice-Principal, who is also Director of Pastoral Studies, the Senior Tutor and the Bursar, who form the Senior Management Team (SMT). The Academic Committee is responsible for monitoring academic standards and includes the Senior Tutor and senior academic staff. Financial matters are overseen by the Finance and General Purpose Committee which reports to the House Council. The Common Award Management Committee is responsible for monitoring teaching and learning on the Common Awards provision and includes student representation.

SSH has expanded its provision through offering online access to its courses via the Edward King Centre (EKC) online hub at St Stephen's House and through the Institute of Sacred Music (ISM). The online teaching includes synchronous teaching sessions with resident students.

A new Principal and Senior Tutor have been appointed since the last inspection.

2. Brief description of the current provision

The Common Awards qualifications offered by SSH are taught both online and in person. The undergraduate programmes include the Common Awards at Foundation at Level 4, Certificate at Level 5, Diploma at Level 5 and Bachelor of Arts (BA) (Hons) in Theology, Ministry and Mission at Level 6. The online provision is provided by the EKC, which forms part of SSH.

The graduate qualifications offered include a Graduate Diploma at Level 6, Postgraduate Certificate, Diploma and Master of Arts (MA) in Theology, Ministry and Mission at Level 7, and an MA in Church Law at Level 7.

The Institute of Sacred Music offers a hybrid Postgraduate Diploma and MA in Worship and Liturgical Studies. These are delivered online for two terms, with a third term delivered in person in Oxford.

Currently, the Institution has 24 students, 10 studying full time on site and 14 studying part time online. The students are aged between 23 and 50 years, and the majority are male. The majority of students are from the UK, with a minority from Canada, Australia and the United States of America (USA). The Institution does not recruit students under 18 years of age.

Students are enrolled at the beginning of the academic year in October. All entry requirements for individual programmes are clearly shown on the SSH website, including required English language proficiency for overseas students.

3. Inspection process

The supplementary inspection was carried out remotely in one morning by one inspector. Meetings were held with the Principal and senior managers, including the Senior Tutor. A range of documentation was scrutinised in advance of the inspection. The Institution engaged positively with the inspection process.

4. Background to the supplementary inspection

A new Principal and Senior Tutor were appointed to SSH in September 2025. The supplementary inspection focused on the implications of the changes at senior management level on the strategic direction, priorities and management of the Institution.

5. Inspection history

Inspection type	Date
Full Accreditation	26–28 April 2023
Interim	12 November 2024

PART B – JUDGEMENTS AND EVIDENCE

The following judgements and comments are based upon evidence seen by the inspector during the inspection and from documentation provided by the institution.

1. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements

1.1 Governance, Strategy and Financial Management

The numbers below refer to the standards as presented in the Independent Higher Education scheme document and main full inspection report

1.	**The institution is effectively and responsibly governed**		
1.1	The overall organisational structure, including the role and extent of authority of any owners, directors or governing body, is clearly defined, documented and effectively communicated to stakeholders, including governors, management, staff and students.	☒ Yes	☐ No
1.2	There is an identified senior committee, with decision-making authority on academic matters, in order to protect the integrity of academic freedom.	☒ Yes	☐ No
1.3	The link between governance and management is clearly articulated and documented.	☒ Yes	☐ No
1.4	Internal stakeholders develop and implement policy through appropriate structures and processes while involving external stakeholders.	☒ Yes	☐ No
1.5	An explicit procedure for risk assessment is implemented, producing a risk assessment statement that is regularly reviewed and updated.	☐ Yes	☒ No
1.6	Effective action is taken by the governing body and senior managers in response to the outcomes of regular risk assessments.	☐ Yes	☒ No
1.7	All relationships with other educational organisations are defined formally and are fully transparent with those organisations' requirements	☒ Yes ☐ NA	☐ No
1.8	There are clear channels of communication between the governing body, the executive, academic management, staff, including those working remotely, students and other stakeholders.	☒ Yes	☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☐ Met ☒ Partially Met ☐ Not Met

Comments

SSH has a clear and well-documented organisational structure detailed in the Articles of Association and the SSH handbook. This is readily available to all stakeholders, including the Trustees, staff, students and partner institutions, including the University of Durham.

The roles and responsibilities of the House Council as the governing body are clearly articulated and provided to all staff, students and Trustees as part of their induction. Thus, all stakeholders effectively share a common understanding of the roles, authorities and responsibilities governing the Institution, thus ensuring transparency and clarity.

Appropriate senior academic committees are in place and have the authority to take decisions on academic matters, as set out in the terms of reference and a governance diagram. These remits, including those of the House Council as the senior committee, the Senior Management Team (SMT) and the Academic Committee, are made available to staff, and as appropriate to students. This structure ensures academic decisions are taken through an established process led by qualified academic staff and that academic integrity and academic freedom are protected.

The link between governance and management is clearly articulated and documented. The SSH handbook, which is available to all staff, students and Trustees, clearly shows the links between governance and management. This information is also covered as part of staff and student induction to provide additional clarification. All internal stakeholders therefore have access to the required information.

Internal stakeholders contribute effectively to the development and implementation of policies and procedures through established committees such as the Common Awards Management Committee and the House Council, on which staff and students are represented.

The Principal has weekly meetings with the President of the Common Room, which represents the students views, and to which all students belong. The weekly meetings ensure that the Principal gains regular feedback on student concerns and opinions. He is able to share these with the SMT and the House Council, as appropriate, to inform policy reviews and developments. Student representatives are consulted on initiatives and their views inform ongoing reviews and developments through both formal and informal consultation.

Policies and information are also available to external stakeholders through the SHH website. The regular formal and informal meetings with students support the review and development of policies, along with meetings that involve external stakeholder through representation on the House Council. As a result, policies are developed and implemented through appropriate structures and in consultation with stakeholders.

Risks are regularly discussed as part of House Council, SMT and other committee meetings and records of such meetings are shared with staff and students. As a result senior managers and other stakeholders are aware of the risks that the Institution faces and can take actions to mitigate the identified risks.

1.5 The discussions do not result in a documented risk assessment that can be regularly reviewed

1.6 There is no record that effective actions are taken by the governing body and senior managers in response to the outcomes of regular risk assessments.

The relationship with the University of Durham is clearly set out in the formal agreement signed by both parties. The agreement clearly sets out the University's requirements as the validating body and SSH's duties to comply with the partnership expectations. The documentation and associated policies and procedures are available to staff and students, as appropriate. The partnership agreement is formally defined and transparently sets out the University's regulations for the management of provision and reporting of outcomes.

Clear channels of communication are in place between the House Council, the SMT, the Common Room and academic and support staff. Records of meetings and updates are shared online. Online notifications and forums ensure that students studying remotely receive updates and take part in discussions.

The website also allows SSH to share information more widely, and a social media platform is used to advertise events and to raise awareness of opportunities to engage with SSH. Thus, all internal, remote and external members of the Institution's community have ready access to information and communications that are relevant to them.

2.	**The institution has a clear and achievable strategy**	
2.1	The institution has a clear strategy for the development of its higher education provision, which is supported by appropriate implementation plans and financial management and takes into account the quality of the student experience.	☒ Yes ☐ No
2.2	There is provision for stakeholder input, including governors, management, staff and students, to inform the strategic direction of the institution.	☒ Yes ☐ No
2.3	The strategy is well communicated to all stakeholders within and outside the institution.	☒ Yes ☐ No
2.4	The governing body and senior management conduct a regular and systematic review of their own performance and the institution's overall performance and each is measured against strategic targets.	☒ Yes ☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met ☐ Partially Met ☐ Not Met

Comments

The Institution has a clear strategy for the development of its higher education provision, which is supported by appropriate implementation plans and financial management and takes into account the quality of the student experience. At the time of the inspection, a review of the SSH strategy was in progress following the appointment of the new Principal.

The revised SSH strategy will continue to focus on the development of provision to attract more students, enhancement of its financial position and improvements in the quality of the student learning experience. The new strategy will aim to ensure and strengthen the position of SSH as a respected provider of qualifications within the Common Awards framework.

The revised strategy is being developed with input from all stakeholders, including members of the House Council, staff and student representatives. Student and staff input is based on their operational experiences and is seen to be important in ensuring that the strategy meets the needs of current and prospective students as well as the domestic and international Anglican community. As a result, strategic development is being shaped by a broad range of stakeholder perspectives.

The strategy is well communicated to all stakeholders within and outside the Institution. The Institution's strategy documentation is made available online, ensuring accessibly and visibility for internal and external stakeholders.

Reviews of the Institution's performance are undertaken by the SMT, which meets regularly with the House Council to review the performance of the Institution. An annual report is produced for Durham University that considers student retention, progression, achievement and satisfaction rates.

Regular oversight by the House Council and the SMT ensures that the performance of the Institution is kept under review and assessed against both the expectations of the University of Durham and the Institution's own strategic targets. This allows the Trustees to monitor the SMT's and SSH's performance across the year.

3.	**Financial management is open, honest and effective**	
3.1	The institution conducts its financial matters professionally, transparently and with appropriate probity.	☒ Yes ☐ No
3.2	The institution's finances are subject to regular independent external audit.	☒ Yes ☐ No

This standard is judged to be: ☒ Met ☐ Partially Met ☐ Not Met

Comments

Appropriate policies and procedures are in place to ensure that financial matters are conducted professionally and transparently. Financial reports are produced by the Finance and General Purposes Committee and shared with the House Council, which reviews the reports against spending targets and revenue projections.

The reports are clear, managed with probity and shared with relevant stakeholders. This ensures that decisions are made with integrity and accountability.

External accountants are employed to audit the accounts annually and to provide reports to the House Council. Audit reports confirm that the financial management of the Institution is appropriate.

1.2 Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated. ☒ Yes ☐ No

PART C – SUMMARY OF ACTION POINTS

ACTIONS REQUIRED

1.5 The Institution must produce a suitable risk assessment statement that is regularly reviewed.	☐ High ☒ Medium ☐ Low
1.6 SSH must ensure that risks are regularly reviewed by senior managers and that actions taken as a result are evaluated.	☐ High ☒ Medium ☐ Low

RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT *(to be reviewed at the next inspection)*

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS – FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE

BAC OFFICE USE ONLY:	**THE INSPECTION WAS CARRIED OUT BY:**	
	Miranda Hobart	Lead Inspector