

THE FRUITFUL FIELD

The Fruitful Field is a project of the Methodist Conference. It's about formation, learning, training, theological education, scholarship, research and development. It's about the future of the Methodist Church's connexional learning resources. It's about equipping the Church and its ministries, equipping the Methodist movement in all of its contexts and formational communities, and equipping God's people for discipleship and mission.

An interim response to The Fruitful Field consultation

From the Ministries Committee of the Methodist Conference to all those who have responded to the consultation, and to all of our partners, colleagues and friends

February 2012

The **Methodist Church** 

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Preface | Romans 12:1-18 (NRSV)

“Be transformed”

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God** – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. **We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.**

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. **Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.** Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Summary | Reflections and future explorations

Having undertaken an initial assessment of 580 submissions made during *The Fruitful Field* consultation period, we, as the Ministries Committee, have prepared an interim response. A comprehensive report to the 2012 Methodist Conference is still our goal. However, drawing on the consultation submissions, we can now share the following summary of our key reflections and our future explorations.

Note | * indicates that the underlined word or phrase which precedes it is included in the glossary at the end of the document

Part one

Pathways: Opportunities, programmes and resources

The consultation submissions have helped the Ministries Committee to discern the importance of pathways, opportunities, programmes and resources* which:

- a. have at their heart a commitment to the formation* of transformed and transforming disciples*, ministries* and communities*
- b. are drawn from a deep understanding of the missiological and ecclesiological purpose of the Methodist Church
- c. are focused on equipping God's people to be Christ-like disciples in an often un-Christlike but never Christless world
- d. are focused on equipping those called to a wide range of ministries within the Church
- e. support change, growth and organisational development* within and across circuits and local churches
- f. encourage widespread participation by being accessible, contextual, responsive, well-communicated and excellent
- g. are developed through interactive relationships and dialogue with local communities – their diverse and continually developing contexts, needs and aspirations

- h. are coherent and comprehensive, incorporating the breadth and diversity of Methodism
- i. can be experienced and delivered through a range of methods and in diverse contexts, including within and across circuits and local churches, and in virtual learning environments*
- j. enable practice-based formation* for a significant number of ministerial students preparing for ordained ministry
- k. emphasise ongoing* (as well as initial*) formation within a wide range of ministries
- l. nurture apt and excellent scholarship and research, in partnership with the Higher Education sector
- m. can be developed alongside and shared with ecumenical partners wherever possible
- n. are authorised* in an appropriate manner

The committee will therefore:

- o. oversee work to identify and develop the principles and values of such pathways
- p. oversee work to identify and develop a framework and scenarios for such pathways, with an emphasis in the first instance on contemporary discipleship formation, formation for accredited lay ministries (including local preachers and worship leaders) and initial ministerial formation
- q. oversee work to develop these principles, values and frameworks in collaboration with ecumenical partners

Part two

People: A team of expert staff

The consultation submissions have helped the Ministries Committee to discern the importance of a team of expert staff*,

- a. which has at its heart a commitment to the formation* of transformed and transforming disciples*, ministries* and communities*
- b. which has an intentional impact within local churches and circuits

- c. with skills across the team in formation, learning, training, theological education, scholarship and organisational development
- d. which is connexionally coordinated and developed
- e. which has both a dispersed presence across the Connexion (including across and within the nations and jurisdictions of the Connexion), and a gathered presence across and within centres*
- f. which builds on current strengths and good practice across the Connexion

The committee will therefore oversee work to develop and cost a model for such a team.

Part three

Places: Centres and spaces

The consultation submissions have helped the committee to discern:

- a. the importance of places, centres and spaces which have at their heart a commitment to the formation* of transformed and transforming disciples*, ministries* and communities*
- b. the importance of nurturing learning churches and circuits* as beacons of excellence* in formation, learning and development
- c. the need for far-reaching changes to ensure viable, sustainable and excellent centres* which are able to focus on the formation of disciples, ministries and communities
- d. the importance of effective and intentional connections between centres and learning churches and circuits
- e. the importance of centres which can connect with partners across the World Church
- f. the importance of centres which allow deep sharing with ecumenical partners
- g. the importance of centres which can nurture apt and excellent scholarship and research, in partnership with the Higher Education sector
- h. the importance of centres which can appropriately house connexional archives and other historic resources
- i. the need for a shared and common governance framework for all centres

- j. the need for a range of spaces for formation, learning and development* across the Connexion
- k. the importance of learning from current strengths and good practice
- l. the importance of and demand for the work of Cliff College, especially in the field of mission and evangelism, and especially in the field of lay formation

The committee will therefore oversee work to investigate:

- m. ways of enabling learning churches and circuits* to develop as beacons of excellence* in formation, learning and development
 - n. the feasibility and configuration of two connexional centres* which (i) are communities of faith with expertise in formation, learning, training, theological education, scholarship and organisational development; (ii) have at their heart the formation of disciples*, ministries* and communities*; (iii) are interconnected with learning churches and circuits; and (iv) share a common governance framework and staff team
 - o. the feasibility and configuration of other appropriate and effective spaces for formation, learning and development* across the Connexion, also overseen within a common framework
 - p. the feasibility of enabling much greater use of virtual learning environments* as virtual spaces for formation, learning and development
 - q. ways of capturing and learning from current strengths and good practice
 - r. the ways in which Cliff College can be best resourced and developed in order to continue its work and take its place as one of the two connexional centres
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Part four

Change and transition

The consultation submissions have helped the committee:

- a. to discern the importance of a flexible yet stable overall framework, which is both responsive to the needs of the Church as well as being capable of nurturing deep and transforming experiences and communities
- b. to understand the pressures and insecurities which a number of colleagues and institutions are facing at this time

- c. to appreciate that the work of The Fruitful Field should not add any more insecurity than is strictly necessary to these existing pressures
- d. to discern that far-reaching changes, which will have a significant impact on current arrangements and partnerships, are nevertheless necessary
- e. to discern and appreciate the need for careful investigation of the implications of the changes which the committee will propose in this area

The committee will therefore oversee detailed work to investigate the financial and infrastructural implications of the changes implied in parts 1-3 above, so that transitional arrangements and timelines may be designed and clearly communicated.

Introduction | The consultation period

The Fruitful Field is an important project for the Methodist Church. It is a project about formation, learning, training, theological education, scholarship, research and development. These are matters of great significance for the Church, the Methodist people and for all those across the Connexion who work so diligently in the fields of formation, learning and development. In asking us, as members of the Ministries Committee, to oversee work on *The Fruitful Field* during the 2011/2012 connexional year, we are very conscious of the weight of the task entrusted to us by the Methodist Conference.

We are also conscious of the commitment we have made as a committee to oversee the project in a reflective, collaborative, ambitious and prophetic way. We were therefore extremely pleased by the sizeable response to the consultation document which we issued on 17 October 2011.^{*} Between October and the close of the consultation period on 23 December 2011, we received 580 consultation submissions, running to nearly a thousand pages and containing over half a million words.

We are conscious that a response on this scale is the result of much discussion and reflection across the Connexion and beyond. We are grateful to all who have spent a significant amount of time preparing considered, detailed, creative, impassioned and informative submissions. We are also grateful to all those who raised awareness of the consultation period and who encouraged others to share their views and experiences. A number of our committee members and

^{*} *The consultation document invited reflections on a vision for the future of the Church's "connexional learning resources." The vision itself contained three main components:*

Pathways

We should seek to establish high quality, flexible connexional pathways, which can be delivered in a number of different communities and contexts, and which meet the needs of a discipleship movement shaped for mission and the needs of the ministries of the whole people of God.

People

We should seek to establish a single connexional network of skilled and knowledgeable staff, including both regional staff (coordinated and resourced within regional teams) and tutorial staff based in a learning hub.

Places

We should seek to establish a single connexional hub on one site.

The consultation document remains available on the Methodist Church's website, at www.methodist.org.uk/fruitfulfield

consultants were able to support institutions and groupings as they prepared their responses, and we have criss-crossed the Connexion over recent months in order to do so. We have also been able to explore and share some wider reflections through a series of podcasts/vodcasts which were posted on the Methodist Church's website. *The Fruitful Field* concerns matters which are of great importance to the Methodist people, and we are grateful to all who have been part of the conversation, across the Connexion and beyond, over recent weeks and months. We hope and fully expect that conversations will continue for some time to come.

The deliberations of the Ministries Committee

Each submission made during the consultation period has been seen by every member of the Ministries Committee. We met residentially in late January 2012, along with the consultants to the committee, to share our reflections and our analysis of all that we had read in late December and early January. We proceeded carefully and by consensus, and we have sought to root all that we have done and decided in considered, collegial reflection, and in prayer.

The richness of the material which we have received was, at times, quite overwhelming. The consultation submissions have focused on a vast range of issues – mission and purpose; ecclesiology and theology; discipleship and witness; learning and education; scholarship and research; institutions and premises; due process and pastoral care; testimony, inspiration and grace. The submissions also identified examples of excellent practice in circuits, districts, regions and institutions across the Connexion, as well as identifying areas of weakness and a desire to change and improve. Through all of this, however, what comes across clearly is our yearning to be a Church which prioritises the growth in faith and learning of each one of our members, and a Church which wants to see those who exercise lay and ordained ministries within our common life well-equipped and well-supported. We can be proud of that passionate yearning, and proud of those who are already working hard to bring that yearning to fruition.

We have been asked to report to the 2012 Methodist Conference, meeting in Plymouth in late June and early July, and it is clear to us that we have much work still to do as we prepare our report, which will be drafted in the late spring. There is much that has been shared with us in the consultation submissions which merits further reflection and exploration. Our hope is that our report will be able to offer to the Conference a comprehensive picture of the issues at stake, a careful exploration of alternative ways forward, as well as our developed recommendations.

In order to ensure that our deliberations take full and fair account of the consultation submissions, we have asked a small number of past officers of the Conference for their assistance. These past officers will be given access to all of the consultation submissions, to the notes from our meetings and to preparatory papers drawing on the consultation submissions. We will ask these past officers to reflect on whether the key reflections which we have drawn from the consultation submissions are supported by their reading of the submissions. We will also ask them to identify any key reflections which they feel have been left out of our considerations so far. We are fully aware that the final responsibility for our recommendations to the Conference rests with us, but we are grateful in advance to those who are helping to support our deliberations in this way.

A comprehensive report to the 2012 Methodist Conference is therefore our goal, and we will continue to draw on material from the consultation submissions over coming weeks and months. However, having assessed all of the submissions, we also wanted to share some initial reflections at this stage in the process. This document outlines those initial reflections. It is a public document, but is intended primarily for those directly affected by our work and for all those who made submissions during the consultation period.

The following pages are divided into four parts. Each part contains (a) the committee's key reflections within that field, drawn from the consultation submissions, and (b) a summary of areas for future exploration.

The first three parts also contain relevant extracts from the consultation submissions to accompany each key reflection. The extracts are diverse and, occasionally, one extract contradicts another which appears under the same heading. In this respect, they echo the range of voices heard throughout the consultation submissions. The extracts are not a comprehensive account of all that was said in the consultation submissions about the topic in question, and the committee stresses that it will continue to reflect on and explore the full body of the submissions as it prepares its report to the Conference. However, the committee hopes that the provision of extracts in this way will enable our connexional conversation about *The Fruitful Field* to continue and to be enriched, and will help to root the committee's initial reflections in the contributions of those who have already invaluablely enriched our work.

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Reflections and future explorations

Part one

Pathways: Opportunities, programmes and resources

The consultation submissions have helped the Ministries Committee to discern the importance of pathways, opportunities, programmes and resources* which:

- a. have at their heart a commitment to the formation* of transformed and transforming disciples*, ministries* and communities*

Extracts from the consultation submissions

A circuit submission notes that, within the circuit, “there was support for the vision of the Ministries Committee with regard to the pathways envisaged for the delivery of training in order that Methodism can be better equipped to be a discipleship movement shaped for mission.” A circuit leadership team writes that “we appreciate the attempt to think strategically and long-term in the realm of training matters, and that the focus is on equipping and helping the whole church to be a discipleship movement shaped for mission.” A researcher and lecturer notes that “*The Fruitful Field* is a bold and ambitious [consultation document], which picks up where the Training Strategy and Resources Executive (TSRE) left off in the last round of discussions. In fact, the report picks up where TSRE started – with a major debate about the training and support of the Ministry of the Whole People of God in the World. This is a good place to start and it is good to see that this time around the battle has been won for a much broader approach to the training needs of the whole Connexion.” A regional forum notes the need for a “re-focussing [of] resources on the spiritual formation of lay people as disciples and evangelists, thus making concrete the Methodist commitment to the ministry of the whole people of God.”

However, challenges are also identified. A district management group notes that “at present we do not have a culture of being a learning people and that needs to be challenged.” Similarly, a district officer notes that “there is [a] task in inspiring everyone who attends one of our churches in their everyday discipleship and mission. This must also be part of the direction of our resources.... Generally, there is much work to be undertaken with local churches and circuits to help them to reflect on the nature of their current discipleship, on their engagement with mission in their localities, and on how the circuits and churches need to make changes to the way in which they

have operated in recent decades, in order to face up to the challenges of being Methodism in the current century.”

- b. are drawn from a deep understanding of the missiological and ecclesiological purpose of the Methodist Church**

Extracts from the consultation submissions

A district leadership team’s submission states that “*The Fruitful Field* has the potential of taking the Methodist Church back to the first principles of Methodism in regard to being a lay-led movement supported by the ordained ministries of the church.” A tutor writes that “the Ministries Committee is to be commended on its bold willingness to grasp the nettle of equipping the whole people of God for mission and ministry. It is clear that there is an attempt to make something which is by necessity budget-driven, theologically and missiologically vision-oriented too.” A submission from a circuit leadership team welcomes “the clear emphasis in the report on the missional nature of Methodism and the setting of whole church training within that context. It is encouraging to see the increased emphasis and focus of resources on the desire to spread ‘scriptural holiness’.”

Others do not agree. A district officer writes that “the report has little mention of mission, evangelism or contemporary culture.” A Local Preachers Meeting notes that “the drive of Methodism as a radical movement was the spread of scriptural holiness, and this was seen as being sidelined in favour of yet another fudge in not facing up to the challenges of the mission field as opposed to satisfying the institution that is the Methodist Church.”

Other submissions are concerned about the relationship between a focus on mission and a focus on institutions, structures and finances. An individual submission notes that “*The Fruitful Field* is a missional vision that requires missional approach rather than institutional methods and agenda of ‘on one site’ management shaped by fear of funding. We must be very careful that what is now painted as a vision has an undertone of human/institutional agenda.” However, a district officer writes of the need to ensure that the outcomes of the project embed this missional vision in a wide range of contexts. The officer writes that “many have picked up on the phrase ‘disproportionate amount of resources on evangelism’ from the general secretary’s report and I would like to endorse this. However, it will be in times like the working out of the practicalities of things such as regional teams that we will begin to see whether this is bold rhetoric or whether people will agree with their time, money and other resources that we need this greater emphasis on our weakest health indicator. An evangelism enabler/trainer (or similar) on each team will not be enough... As local churches are encouraged to ascertain what parts of mission and service they

can continue to resource, often difficult decisions are needed to contemplate what needs to be left un-done... I would encourage all who work on this to consider what good areas of work the Methodist Church is presently resourcing that are least pertinent to the hoped for Church of the future.”

Turning to consideration of the ecclesiological purpose of the Church, there are concerns that insufficient theological reflection is evident in the consultation document. A district submission notes that “there was some concern expressed that no attempt had been made in the document to engage in theological reflection and so root the vision in a sustainable theological framework.” Allied to this, a learning institution notes that “while the whole of the vision of the document is predicated on the Church as a discipleship movement shaped for mission this is in no place worked out or justified theologically within the document. While it is true that such a vision is based on a return to the charisms of Methodism when it was founded, this runs the risk of limiting our view of the Church to one particular model.” An individual submission notes that “I confess to some unease about the frequent reference to ‘a discipleship movement shaped for mission’. It is a fair description of early Methodism, but even within John Wesley’s lifetime it came to be contested as some saw the connexion not as a movement within the Church but as a church. I believe our general secretary has done us a great service in drawing attention to this aspect of our heritage. It is vital that we recover it for today and have the flexibility which the word ‘movement’ implies. That must have an impact on our priorities. But as the report acknowledges... it is not a complete description of Methodism – we do claim to be a church. It would be ill-advised for an incomplete description to be the sole determining factor in shaping the future. While some specific ministries can be categorised in terms of mission or discipleship-building, others, particularly presbyteral formation, must also give attention to the broader demands of ‘church’.”

- c. **are focused on equipping God’s people to be Christ-like disciples in an often un-Christlike but never Christless world**

Extracts from the consultation submissions

A district officer notes that “this vision is not just about ordained (or paid lay) development, but must enable development (especially discipleship, spirituality and mission) at the most local of levels.” A grouping of district chairs writes that “we affirm that we need to encourage all disciples to engage in life long learning.” Another district chair notes that “the stress on learning and training for all God’s people is a positive emphasis.” A district meeting notes that “it is important to equip people for ministry in the world and work place.” Another district management group emphasises the

“crucial notion of everyday discipleship; how do we and how can we equip people for their daily walk with God.” A district officer writes of the “need to ensure that there are pathways for people of all ages including children and young people through to the elderly. In reflecting on how we equip people for life in the world in which they spend most of their waking lives I wonder if there is a need to focus pathways on this element which has historically not been suitably resourced.” A District Policy Committee notes that “we strongly support the need for a coherent and holistic approach to learning and formation which equips the Methodist people to fulfil their vocation to be a discipleship movement shaped for mission.”

A grouping of superintendents writes that “it is important that the whole people of God are offered learning pathways. It is right to end any suggestion that only ministers matter. Equipping people to engage in ministry both in church but, even more importantly, in their everyday life and work is vital.” They go on to note that “such an emphasis may reduce the resources available to initial ministerial training. But it may also re-emphasise the importance of the local church and a regional centre in its delivery, rather than *The Fruitful Field* model of the Connexion and the circuit.”

A circuit meeting’s submission similarly notes the implications of such an emphasis on modes of learning. “While we value opportunities for formal learning, we are not convinced that it is necessarily associated with discipleship. We value and appreciate the experiential learning associated with small groups – Bert Bissell’s Young Men’s Bible Class has shaped our circuit for good – but we recognise some slippage from this kind of shared formational exploration to the talk of learning pathways. Learning the skills necessary for a specific ministry is not the same as learning to be a disciple.”

A connexional committee writes of a particular contemporary need in this area, and it is quoted here as one example out of many possible examples. “The principles and practice of engaging with people of different religions needs to be included in all the different pathways to enable the Methodist people to live as disciples in society today. We live in a society that is rich in its different cultures and religions and it is necessary that an understanding of it be included in the different training courses and pathways, e.g.: an understanding of... the different ways of engaging with people of different religions and the sensitivities in so doing.”

d. are focused on equipping those called to a wide range of ministries within the Church

Extracts from the consultation submissions

A circuit staff team writes that “we believe John Wesley is still relevant to today – he believed the education and equipment of preachers was essential so more money does need to be directed at lay people and Methodism has always had a strong and rich lay tradition and the ‘priesthood of a believers’ is central to the Methodist movement.”

A district officer notes that “I have noticed lay workers in the main to be grouped into five categories of ‘ministries’ (workers). These are (a) children’s and families workers (with a focus on families – requiring experience of working with young adults in the main as well as with children (under 12s)); (b) youth workers (working with 11-18s); (c) community development workers; (d) lay pastoral leaders (in larger churches, supporting the minister with pastoral support); (e) administrators (church, circuit, district and project level). Could these five clear areas of work/vocation be included in the pathways that are shaped – so that those already in these roles or looking towards taking up one of these ministries, are able to be trained/developed with ongoing training to grow these wonderful people in their discipleship?

Please note these roles are often taken up by volunteer posts too – and these often get missed for training because they are ‘volunteers’ which is a shame.”

A connexional grouping writes that “the [valuable] role of youth workers and other volunteers in facilitating small groups and encouraging young people in their faith needs to be recognised; how are these people supported and resourced both locally and nationally?”

A district leadership team writes of the need for “in-service pathways for lay employees working with children and young people, undertaking pastoral work, evangelism and community development.”

A district officers’ meeting writes of the need to support “a range of the roles currently fulfilled by Methodists, including stewards, doorstep greeters, local preachers, lay pastors, presbyters, deacons, safeguarding officers and VentureFX pioneers.”

A circuit staff team notes that the “areas of training that need to be strengthened are: (a) that for lay employees, outreach/development workers; (b) administrative staff (when was the last time anything was offered to them); (c) small group leadership.”

A regional forum highlights “training for class leaders as important role within Methodist structures.”

A district submission notes that “this is also an opportune time to look at the new emerging ministries and mission developments from the point of view of learning and training.”

A regional forum writes that “we rely heavily on volunteers of all kinds in order to deliver training, development and formation. All volunteers need to

be properly equipped for the task – and they need to be accountable for what they do.” A circuit leadership team notes that “resources for training church and circuit stewards and leadership teams would be very much appreciated.”

A superintendent writes of the link between equipping a wide range of ministries and the developing patterns of ministry within our circuits. “Sadly many discussions on the reorganisation of circuits almost completely ignored the role of lay and part time ministries. I am currently working within a team ministry that will from 1 September 2012 consist of three presbyters, one deacon and four half-time lay ministers with different specialties. That is likely to be the leadership pattern in many more circuits in the future, and the role and training of superintendents will need to adapt to that kind of mix.”

A regional forum writes of the need for “pathways for those who facilitate the pathways of others.”

A district officer notes that “Martyn Atkins’ report to Conference 2011 gives a range of lay roles which should be supported with training.”

A tutor writes of contextual challenges: “Methodism has always emphasised the ministry of the whole people of God, and ways of encouraging the learning and development of all Methodist people is to be welcomed. *The Fruitful Field* is maybe a little ambitious and optimistic in places about both the quality and availability of local volunteer resources, and also about the willingness of people to engage with connexional pathways (for example, the lack of willingness to engage in continuing development from some local preachers is a cause for concern).” A district meeting similarly notes the challenges of encouraging and enabling participation by those exercising a wide range of ministries: “How can we ensure that whatever is set in place does not become again skewed towards pre-ordination training and is genuinely training for the whole people of God? Re take-up of lay training/impact on use of resources: safeguarding, for example, is not optional, but other development opportunities, (pastoral/continuing development/leadership?) are/might be.”

The relationship between pathways for those preparing for ordained ministry and those preparing for or exercising other ministries is addressed. Some submissions focus on the proportion of expenditure on initial ministerial learning pathways. A district meeting writes that the “high cost of ministerial training [is] excessive and disproportionate especially when looking at the learning and development goals for the ‘whole people of God as a discipleship movement shaped for mission’.” A regional forum writes that it “senses that there is too much focus on training for the initial ministerial development, and not for the whole people of God.” A learning institution

writes to “welcome the affirmation of the ministry of the whole people of God and the recognition of the wider ministry and mission of the Church, with the accompanying re-assessment of distribution of resources.”

Other submissions saw the need to prioritise initial ministerial learning pathways. A circuit staff team writes that “we are convinced that training to fit a discipleship movement is important, and that all should be involved in this, both lay and ordained. We recognise that limited finance often means that training resources are withdrawn from lay courses first. However, unless ministers are sufficiently trained and equipped, the movement is unlikely to be sustainable in the long run.” A connexional grouping notes that “there is no indication [in the consultation document] of the value of the resource that the ordained are in the Church as a formational presence for lay people... there is an unreal rhetoric that Methodism is a lay led movement and there is a need to recognise that life-long training of the ordained is an essential use of resources.” An individual submission notes that “this [consultation document] does nothing to prioritise the training of presbyters and deacons. It surely must stand out that ministers are our trainers and we must encourage them to do that. I note that the number of ministers seeking full time training is higher than expected; that suggests something about the importance they attach to the value of their training.” A tutor writes that “if initial theological education of student ministers does its job properly, it will equip them as a theological resource for the whole people of God: they become those who can, as part of their role, enable the formation of disciples of Jesus Christ.” An individual submission notes that “For years (actually, for almost all my adult life) I have been frustrated by the fact that we invest in high quality theological education for our ministers yet, once trained and out in circuit, that learning is very rarely shared with congregations (and more rarely still, with non-churchgoers).”

A district officer writes that “it may be helpful in the pathways and people areas to consider separately the need for ordination pathways and the needs of those who are called to this particular form of service. Not doing so risks emphasising the needs of a minority group within the whole people of God on whom historically a large proportion of resource has been deployed. This group has particular needs which deserve particular consideration but which potentially merit different pathways to the majority. If the Church is to become a ‘learning community’ the recognition of our need to learn, and the opportunities for learning, must be much broader. This is consistent with the consultation proposals and as the detail behind the vision is developed I hope this will encourage an understanding of how we can develop different pathways to provide for a range of callings.” A grouping of district officers similarly notes that “it would be valuable in this study to separate training

for the ordained ministry from life-long learning. Both callings are valuable and we need to recognise and encourage the wide range of gifts.” Other submissions see a possible synthesis of pathways. A learning institution writes to affirm “learning and formation for the whole people of God, of which those identified for ordained leadership within the Connexion are a small but strategically significant subset.” A circuit submission notes that there is, within the circuit, “particular appreciation for the understanding that such pathways should be broad enough to offer provision for ministerial and lay (and that there should be more connexional co-ordination in order to avoid duplication.)” A learning institution welcomes “the strengthening of collaboration between bodies of practitioners both within initial and other kinds of training for the development and delivery of effective programmes across the connexion which is broad enough and sufficiently well financed to meet the needs of lay officers, those in initial training for ordination, and ongoing ministerial learning; [and] the desire to create more effective structures for the coordination of the work of tutors and training officers such that local learning communities might be resourced by serious theological study and initial training might be resourced by those trained in skill development.”

e. support change, growth and organisational development* within and across circuits and local churches

Extracts from the consultation submissions

A district officer writes that “as a district development enabler I inevitably see development as something more than learning and training. Strategic development, the development of the life of the Church and its mission in the community, and organisational development do not stand out in the report. I hope these will be more than an extension of a vision for training and learning in the Church of tomorrow.” Another district officer writes that “circuits and churches have needed help to understand... the complexities which can arise when trying to look at future ministries for the new circuit on what is often a separate timetable to that which is needed for the stationing of presbyters and deacons. In addition, it is usually necessary for the reflection on forms of ministry within a new circuit to sit alongside supporting the development of new thinking and new ways of working and being Church in the local churches and existing circuits. Much work is needed in helping the churches and circuits to think through these issues, including encouraging reflection on their understanding (and expectations) of the various ministries within the church. The vision sets out the correct order for the focusing of connexional resources for development and learning. Putting pathways first emphasises the need for priority support for

a wide range of learning needs to support organisational and personal development as disciples and for the ministry of the whole people of God.”

A district submission notes that “the role of development is under-estimated. Our district in particular can witness to the huge value of district development enablers and to the added value this development work has brought to mission enabling and training. Here we have seen the importance of district development enablers, training officers and the mission enablers working together.” A district management group notes that “circuit reviews and healthy church reviews have encouraged churches in change management and capacity building, This developmental role will remain an important ingredient in *The Fruitful Field* project.”

A connexional grouping offers an example of the need for specialist forms of development: “We are, of course, aware that larger churches are only a part of the big picture of the Methodist Church in Britain. However, we would want to make the case that the ministry needs of larger churches should be taken seriously in their own right, just as should those of rural churches and inner-city contexts. Larger churches are not just small churches with large congregations. They are very different animals, with different opportunities and challenges, and with different skill-sets required of ministers to be effective and to enable continued growth and development.”

- f. **encourage widespread participation by being accessible, contextual, responsive, well-communicated and excellent**

Extracts from the consultation submissions

A district leadership team notes that “the report aims to create a national training model. We would want to applaud this but would hope that this will not mean a ‘one size fits all’ model of training disciples for mission and also start where individuals are.” A circuit leadership team notes that “an integrated network for delivery of training should be an advantage so long as it does not lead to centralisation which precludes people from accessing local and affordable resources.” A district meeting notes the importance of “accessibility – important to ensure a real understanding of regional need so that we don’t fall into the centralisation trap.” A district officer writes that “we need pathways that are: (a) varied in length and style, some meandering, some straight; (b) where possible/appropriate centrally coordinated and designed with local delivery flexibility.” A circuit leadership team notes that “we would want to ensure that the importance of the regional and local (the contextual!) needs to be recognised.” A circuit leadership team notes the importance of “flexibility of pathways to accommodate different backgrounds, learning needs and preferred ways of learning is desirable.” A district officers meeting notes “We also need to consider the differing local

contexts for mission and ministry and the impact they should have on the nature and content of courses and learning experiences.” A district leadership team writes of the need for a “pathway for local preachers and worship leaders that: (a) can be accessed by people from small congregations and circuits; (b) has the necessary rigour in content and assessment to improve the quality of Methodist worship; (c) provides a community of learning and is flexible.” A district officer writes that “to be a discipleship movement shaped for mission that will be here in 20 to 30 years time, the Church, and therefore its training and development, needs to be culturally and contextually relevant to the emerging cultures.”

A Local Preachers Meeting writes of the need to “recognise and facilitate a variety of models and styles of teaching and learning, recognising that people learn differently.” A tutor writes that “it would also be hoped that each element of a pathway would contain a sufficient range of alternative learning materials to ensure that different learning styles were taken into account. For example, the current *Faith & Worship* course tends to assume that all learners complete similar tasks and exercises. There is much potential for developing more creative and varied resources which give alternative ways for exploring each element of a topic, enabling people to engage with the material in a variety of ways, and helping people to relate their learning to their particular circumstances, contexts and needs... Whilst there is the potential for a rich and diverse bank of theological resources to be developed and widely used, there is also a need to produce more specific and focussed resources to serve pathways which meet particular needs. (The two are obviously not mutually exclusive.)” A grouping of district chairs notes that “these pathways will be defined by the ‘academy’, but need to be offered to the disciple as locally as is sensible depending on the need. It may be that different pathways will be possible to reach the same end, depending on the prior learning of the individual.”

A district management group notes that “we... need to make it attractive for people to learn how to be better stewards, treasurers, secretaries, etc.”

A circuit staff team notes that “pathways to training are essential, we applaud this if it will mean support for training at a local level that is well resourced, up-to-date and rooted in the Kingdom of God. We are seeing a cultural change with volunteer fatigue, commitment being given in small time frames and to that which is immediately relevant to the local context. Any pathway provision must take these changes into account.”

A respondent whose organisation has recently conducted a survey of resources to support rural churches writes to illustrate the importance of contextual and excellent opportunities, programmes and resources:

“Respondents [to the survey] frequently complained about the difficulty of accessing both information and material that were provided more centrally. This included reference to the absence of useful information about what was available, and the feeling that specific courses were designed for, and offered to, larger and more urban/suburban congregations. Alongside this were strong feelings about the means by which useful information and material were made available. While the use of the internet and national/district websites has become more widespread, there are large numbers of rural communities – and their churches – that have very poor internet access, and for whom this is a serious barrier. The creation of web-based resources, training and even networks assumes the ability of all to freely access such things – this is clearly not accurate in many rural areas. Alongside this was the experience that external facilitators were often lacking in knowledge or sympathy for the church & community circumstances faced by rural participants in such centrally-organised training. A frequent request was for material that was more attuned to the local (rural) contexts.”

A respondent with knowledge of the Methodist Collection of Modern Christian Art quotes from a *Church Times* report on the collection’s exhibition at Greenbelt festival, as an example of a contextual and contemporary learning experience. “The main feature of the Greenbelt visual arts programme, the Methodist Collection of Modern Christian Art, was something of a surprise package for many Greenbelters... More than 6,000 visitors surged through the exhibition, the highlight of which was a newly commissioned work by the Welsh artist, Clive Hicks-Jenkins. His subject was the woman taken in adultery, and in contrast to the ‘very beautiful, noble and contrite’ woman portrayed by 19th century painters, he depicted her as an ageing ‘ladette’ in a tight dress, drawn from revellers in Cardiff.”

A postholder in a partner organisation writes that “we... wish to affirm the emphasis on quality which is central to the report, at least as we read it. The Methodist Church has great riches to bring to the ‘Kingdom table’, riches which don’t obviously come from elsewhere.”

- g. are developed through interactive relationships and dialogue with local communities – their diverse and continually developing contexts, needs and aspirations**

Extracts from the consultation submissions

There is a link between this reflection and the extracts included above in f.

A Local Preachers Meeting writes: “Please ensure that the hub is responsive to the needs of churches and circuits, and [does] not dictate what training or style of learning people/churches will receive. Listen to the requests of the churches.” A district meeting notes that the “adoption of subsidiarity has

underpinned recent connexional thinking: decisions and delivery need to be made at the most appropriate 'level' and as near the 'grass roots' as possible."

Similar dynamics are identified within and across learning institutions. A learning institution writes that "we are also clear that in very different regions a one size fits all approach does not work. Institutions need also to be free to develop some models which work in their context but might not in others."

A connexional officer writes of the difficulties which the Church has encountered in the past in maintaining an open, interactive way of working. "The initial Standing Orders [regarding worship leaders] required a training course approved by the Local Preachers Meeting which allowed for flexibility and contextualisation. At some point some years later the adopted Standing Orders were changed to the current ones which stipulate that the training course for worship leaders must be one approved by the Methodist Council and hence all flexibility and contextualisation has been lost or at best severely reduced – central control/hub."

A cautionary note is sounded by a district officer. The officer writes that "it would also be really sensible to focus on connexionally produced materials which can be delivered locally so as to make better use of what will become limited resources both in terms of people and finances. I feel that this may well need to go further than just providing connexionally agreed learning outcomes as there remains the risk of duplication of effort if local programmes continue to be developed in isolation."

h. are coherent and comprehensive, incorporating the breadth and diversity of Methodism

Extracts from the consultation submissions

Again, there is a link between this reflection and the extracts included above in f and g.

A number of considerations of the breadth and diversity of Methodism focused on the issue of a single hub, but are relevant to a consideration of the content and delivery of pathways, opportunities, programmes and resources. A district leadership team writes that "we would want the hub to represent the breadth of our theology." A tutor writes that, through a single hub, "we will lose the rich diversity at present experienced through the variety of training possibilities currently available; the diversity of culture, ecumenism and the content of material studied. A 'one size fits all' model is not appropriate for the diversity of those training for ministry, whether lay or ordained. Diversity is necessary, beautiful and to be cherished." A tutor notes that "if the whole people of God (in all of our colourful diversity, dispersed

existence and contextualised expressions) are to be equipped then there is arguably no way that this can be done through a model which is centralised and homogenised in its location and expression. Indeed the [consultation document] seems to have let go of the importance of connexionalism that is hugely significant to our ways of working as a Church. To be truly connexional surely means to be diversely spread yet purposefully joined; loosely but vitally connected.” A connexional grouping writes that “there is a fear that it will not be possible for one hub to encompass the broad diversity of the Methodist Church – this is a key issue.” A tutor writes that “I suggest that the [consultation document’s recommendation] of a centralised [hub] could actually diminish the diverse ecclesial and theological training experiences we currently have across and within the Connexion. Rather than being able to draw on the broad theological strengths, insights and creativity, the [hub] could easily become a dumbed down centre of the lowest common theological and missional denominator. Some of the best theological thinking and resourcing that has taken place in the life of the wider Church has not come from the centre of institutions, but from marginal places.”

- i. **can be experienced and delivered through a range of methods and in diverse contexts, including within and across circuits and local churches, and in virtual learning environments***

Extracts from the consultation submissions

Again, there is a link between this reflection and the extracts included above in f, g and h.

A District Policy Committee writes that “the vision for high quality, connexional pathways, which can be delivered in a number of different communities and contexts is important and should be invested in.”

A circuit leadership team notes that “the reality is that, to be taken up effectively, training needs to be made available as locally and conveniently as possible. E-learning should be embraced. Resources for training local trainers would be most beneficial. The regional dimension proposed needs to be able to support the local situations of circuits.” A district officer writes that “I would also promote a massive, excellent online resource – a central virtual place with different streams.” An institutional submission notes that “the [consultation document] refers to Wesley’s educational vision and much of his work in that field was directed to producing educational materials that could be used nationally (the Christian library, his sermons, Charles’s hymns, etc). I am therefore sure that today he would be fully utilising online learning.”

A grouping of superintendents writes that “as the [consultation document] quotes Wesley’s support for book-based learning we feel emboldened to invite the Committee to include books and other media as ‘learning pathways’. The web is clearly useful for the dissemination of certain types of information, but for sustained attention to ideas and cross-referencing within a work, the printed text still has the edge.”

A district officer writes that “pathways do not depend purely on academic excellence, very important though that is. They also depend for many people on... giving people the chance to experience new and creative expressions of faith, and grow as disciples of Christ. [This was emphasised] as Methodism launched its laudable partnership with Greenbelt, but [we] could equally have been talking about ECG, Spring Harvest, Easter People, or Cliff College Festival.”

j. enable practice-based formation* for a significant number of ministerial students preparing for ordained ministry

Extracts from the consultation submissions

Some submissions draw out the place of initial ministerial learning pathways in the context of *The Fruitful Field*. A District Policy Committee writes that “we are concerned that one learning hub may actually lead to a reduction in the flexibility of pathways for ordination training and that this could have a detrimental effect on the number of people candidating for ordained ministries.” A regional grouping notes that “we hope that there will continue to be more than one mode of training, thus enabling a diversity of people to train for ministry.” A circuit leadership team writes that “we have a concern about the perceived bias shown to candidates for ordained ministry who display an academic bent and hope that new forms of training support all who have a call with training that is directed appropriately... Any change needs to bear in mind younger and poorer people who need to access training. We remember with regret Foundation Training and the huge disincentive for younger and poorer potential trainees (and also poorer circuits).”

Other submissions see ‘practice-based formation’ as providing a helpful way in which to approach these issues.

A tutor notes that “although we currently have three institutions offering full-time residential training, the reality is that few ministerial students live full-time in these locations. Increasingly, for a variety of reasons, those training for ministry are less willing to move for two years’ training in order to then move again. Whilst this raises questions about itinerancy (which need exploration), there is a need to more thoroughly critique ways of

training people in local contexts which also enable them to gain a breadth of experience and encourage formation as connexionally representative people.”

A tutor notes that “my suggestion is that all ministerial candidates are trained within appointments to the equivalent standard of university education but without the awarding of university degrees or involvement in university processes. The model is a more apprenticeship/mentoring approach. All such study would be part-time. This would be enabled by people in circuit/district/connexional roles to support this learning and formation.”

A district officer writes that they are “particularly interested in learning that happens in the local context: for both lay and ordained. Whilst there is always a place for academia and academics I do believe that we need more people learning and developing in the places where they live and work.” A district officer notes that “the most effective way of learning is through ‘doing’, so to learn/train while ‘on the job’ is the most effective method of training lay and ordained in all positions within the church.” An individual submission notes that “I see a vision of a church who has ministers skilled in training student presbyters and deacons within circuit. This training would involve an initial concentrated and intense period at a training establishment followed by working alongside a supervisor and being educated in circuit and being allowed to carry out tasks on their own as their confidence and skills developed. This approach would enable staff to move into circuit sooner, it would identify those who develop ministerial skills more quickly and allow them to be stationed more quickly. Obtaining a HE qualification, for me, does not hold any importance.” A District Policy Committee notes that “there is a greater need for more effective training on the ground. Placements with an effective mentor system and working alongside individuals seems a far more effective way forward.... Quality of in-circuit training was emphasised.” A circuit submission asks: “What about the further development of on-the-job training for the majority of students whereby circuits contribute to the cost of a bursary while receiving a contribution of hours worked?”

An individual submission notes that “I am deeply indebted to the Methodist Church for the funding, and the staff of [the learning institution which I attended] for providing the academic training I received whilst a full time student minister. However, I often felt (and this was shared by fellow students) that the academic rigours of [the university with which the learning institution was associated] were a hindrance to the overall learning experience that I had. The two years felt like a constant battle between the pressures [of] academic standards and deadlines and the opportunities to

participate in practical training and other formational learning experiences. My hope would be that *The Fruitful Field* project would allow the design of a balanced academic, practical and formational programme for student ministers, with accreditation from an academic institution that would recognise the value of practical as well as academic learning.” A district officer writes that “I feel very strongly that there is a real danger of two years or more of academic study in an institution of removing people from the rest of society into a Christian ghetto – no matter how hard staff try to remind those training of the ‘outside world’, in my experience it is hard to move beyond our own immediate concerns... I would suggest [the training needs of churches in a mission context] would be very different to what is on offer now and would include things like, training in debt counselling, community development etc as we seek to serve our communities in fresh ways.”

A district chair writes that initial ministerial learning pathways require “(a) a community, but not necessarily a residential one; (b) access to theological libraries; (c) awareness of contemporary theological writing and research: the academy; (d) breadth of theological strands of thinking; (e) supportive tutoring; (f) companionship – those who are travelling this journey together; (g) ecumenical relationship; (h) supportive placements in ‘real’ contexts. Do we really need to be able to provide any residential pre-ordination training? Could this be not as a ‘permanent community’ but as a gathering place for short periods of residence? If this were the case would it have more of the characteristics of a conference facility than an educational establishment?”

A learning institution notes that “we also believe that the development of non-residential, in-service models of training should be a high priority with regard to all forms of training and not only pre-ordination training. We are already exploring this with some of our diaconal and presbyteral students who work in appropriate circuits as paid lay workers, that is circuits where the student’s development in their ministry is as important as the outputs they give through their lay work.”

Other submissions express caution about this direction of travel. A connexional grouping notes that there is “a lot of work to be done to establish [the] best pedagogical model: How is this best evaluated? Are there a number of ways in which formation takes place? E-learning needs to be blended as formation needs some level of human interaction – this can be achieved through a balance of using local tutors and bringing students together?” A district chair writes: “How will we find ways of giving our younger students chance to be formed through a period of academic study? Will we find sufficient circuits in which to place ‘apprentice’ ministers? Could it be that each circuit or cluster of circuits would have a staff member who was the ‘learning enabler’, with a lighter pastoral load? In addressing

these concerns and I am sure many more, how will we use/develop more local paths, watering holes, etc?" An individual submission states that "the [consultation document] notes that 'a higher proportion of ministerial students have opted to follow full-time pathways than envisaged.' Clearly, there is a continuing desire for this form of training among those offering for the church's ministry and it is disappointing that there is no reflection on the reasons for this nor what might realistically be envisaged for the future. From my perspective, as a presbyter who completed a full-time pathway relatively recently, full-time pathways, while not being for everyone, provide the space and opportunity for a depth of theological education and pastoral formation that is much more difficult to achieve among the varied demands of a busy life to which a part-time course has been added. We must adequately (abundantly, actually) resource people for a life-time's ministry in and beyond the Church, both through initial formation and continuing formation." A tutor writes that "in an age when the trend is for professions to become all-degree professions (as nursing has become, for example), it seems both inappropriate and detrimental to reduce the opportunities for those training for ministry to undergo rigorous academic theological education and to gain recognised academic qualifications. I know this is not for everyone and that ministry requires a great variety of gifts and skills; however the opportunity for academic qualifications needs to be encouraged in those who are to be the next generation of leaders in the church – equipping those who will be the teachers and educators in their own circuits and settings, and thus facilitating the theological, biblical and spiritual education and formation of many who would not otherwise receive such opportunities." A learning institution writes that "we believe that the ordained ministers of the Methodist Church as it is currently constituted are its key strategic leaders, its core teachers of sacred memory, and its essential space-makers for holy imagination. We believe that to station ministers in local communities entrusts those individuals with a great deal of power and with the authority to act in the name of the Methodist Church and of God in Christ. We believe that to fail to train adequately such ministers not only potentially stunts the mission of the church but puts at risk those whom the church seeks to serve in the world... We continue to believe that critical, constructive and reflective leaders are best educated, not within a solely Methodist or narrowly ecclesial environment, but within a global academic setting where students are offered not simply a technical and utilitarian training predicated on the prevailing fashions of any particular generation, but are taught deeply to think in dialogue with some of the best thinkers the world has to offer. We acknowledge... that such an education may not be the most appropriate form of preparation for ministry for every student minister,

but argue that those who would most benefit from such engagement should be identified early and be appropriately supported.”

Other submissions root discussions of initial ministerial learning pathways in a broader but related discussion of the Church’s expectations of ordained ministers, and the link between these expectations and ministerial formation. An individual submission notes that “the majority of ministers are running a treadmill of too many committees and many of them prefer it that way! In all the training discussions can you ensure they are equipped to be realistic and live in the real world. We expect them to lead in mission of the church.”

Another individual submission notes the “need for men and women ministers displaying scriptural holiness and fired by God’s Holy Spirit, capable of guiding others to grow in knowledge and understanding of God’s love and grace, and to equip them to play their part in mission.” A district officer notes that initial ministerial learning pathways must “recognise the impact of recent and on-going changes in ministry within circuits. The Church will need ordained and lay people who are trained in approaches to collaborative ministry (in all its forms) in the new types of circuit and circuit missional aims and structures which are emerging in very different ways across the Connexion. This includes very different sizes of circuits in different places, for good missional reasons. The pattern of the Church across the circuits is now far less homogeneous and far more complex, with the level of complexity (difference) developing rapidly.”

k. emphasise ongoing* (as well as initial*) formation within a wide range of ministries

Extracts from the consultation submissions

A district leadership team writes that “generally we were supportive of the proposal in the sense of being about developing all kinds of ministry and with more emphasis on continuing development.” A District Policy Committee notes that “we support the vision to plan strategically so that the discipleship of the whole people of God is well resourced including ordained initial and continuing development but also the ongoing development of lay people in a range of ministries.” A district officer notes that “the ongoing development of our local preachers needs a more robust approach with clearer expectations.”

A district officer writes that “in my experience, more commonly than I would have imagined, presbyters do not have good enough facilitation and small group work skills, and often are not competent adult educators. I would argue that ministerial training needs more of these basic, generic and transferable skills within it, in the meantime, maybe we need a booster set of training for those currently in appointments so that they are equipped to deliver this...”

Skills of the theologian and reflector, the strategist and the facilitator of adult learning all needed.”

l. nurture apt and excellent scholarship and research, in partnership with the Higher Education sector

Extracts from the consultation submissions

A partner organisation notes that “we are concerned that scholarship and research are not developed aspirations in this report and we wonder how the Methodist Church intends to train its future theologians and theological educators.” A learning institution writes that “we are concerned that... the priority given to research in the opening stages of the document disappears. It is not clear from the consultation paper how education for research, the funding of research, nor the training of future theological educators would be achieved.”

A Local Preachers Meeting writes: “Ensure that links are maintained with the Universities. Do not become isolated from the universities, because through our links with them, our field of learning is broadened as we study and learn with people outside the Church.” A tutor writes that “the Methodist Church enjoys a unique relationship with some of the greatest universities in Great Britain. If these relationships are lost, they will never be recovered in the same way. I do hope that it will be possible to maintain and develop relationships with universities.” A tutor notes that “I think the jury is out when it comes to the long term survival of theology as an academic discipline within the university. Nevertheless, the church should be committed to the highest form of intellectual inquiry, and this would undoubtedly remain within the vocation of some people, places and pathways, but much more firmly rooted in the Church.”

A circuit submission notes that “it might be argued that the aspirations of the consultation paper are not ambitious enough. It is, perhaps, significant that its historical survey says little about the way that British Methodism has ‘punched above its weight’ in several academic disciplines. For instance, there is no mention of Biblical scholars of international stature such as Arthur Peake, Norman Snaith, Morna Hooker or James Dunn. Historically, the discipleship ethos of British Methodism has encouraged our people, ordained and lay (and three of the above names were not ordained), to excel in academic and other study. Could we not, intentionally and as part of our missional strategy, aim to foster again among us the desire for all our people, as they are able, to excel in study? So might we obey the command to ‘love the Lord our God’, ‘with all our mind’, as well as ‘with all our heart and soul and strength’.” An individual submission notes that “I would also contend that the Church needs some scholars. It is my perception that we are less

good at recruiting and retaining scholars to our ministry than we once were. For obvious reasons I have nothing against lay people. But I wonder whether it is an accident that the foremost Methodist Biblical scholars of my lifetime have been lay people; Morna Hooker, Judith Lieu, Jimmy Dunn are obvious examples and even Frances Young spent most of her academic career as a lay person. It is not clear to me that – apart from Frances – we have anyone in our ministry of the calibre of these people. Should we not be aiming to develop at least some of our ministers as scholars?” A circuit submission notes that “we need to nurture and support our theologians and thinkers and then enable the wider Church to access their lectures, their writings and their courses.”

A circuit staff team notes that “ministers are community theologians, and it is vital that the depth of theological training for deacons and presbyters is not lost in any new model of training. It is therefore important that the links with existing universities, and established faculties of divinity and theology, are not broken by starting afresh on a new site.” A District Policy Committee notes that “we welcome an approach which seeks to co-ordinate investment in scholarship and research and align this with development, learning and formation.”

m. can be developed alongside and shared with ecumenical partners wherever possible

Extracts from the consultation submissions

A district officer writes: “What about the ecumenical dimension in all of this? How do we ensure that we encourage and support ecumenical growth, whilst making the changes that are needed for Methodism?” A connexional grouping notes that “we must not lose input from other denominations. How can [we] learn from the insights of others, how might they wish to use the resources we create, how do we partner with others?”

A district officer notes that “our ‘pathways’ also should not just be restricted to Methodism but should embrace and develop our already good ecumenical relationships... and lead us out into the community around us that is becoming increasingly secular and un-churched. It is only through engagement with others that we can truly become more effective disciples for Christ.” A submission from a grouping of superintendents “affirmed that this was about training for the ministry of the whole people of God (lay and ordained) and that from our perspective... this emphasised the importance of dispersed regional training and the ability to work flexibly with ecumenical partners.” A district officer notes that “I am a little concerned that our reference to working ecumenically is very light touch and not given much of a central consideration in the report. Our development as disciples of Christ

has to be based on a broad awareness of the Church as a whole, and not just how we as Methodists understand that calling... It is my sincere hope that any solutions or changes to the existing training 'pathways' are all open to ecumenical colleagues and are done so in partnership (ie not like a business opportunity to 'sell courses on'). This therefore requires the 'hub' and the regional networks to both be set up with ecumenical partnerships in mind – perhaps even with ecumenical representation within them.”

A connexional grouping writes that “we also note the positive statement that ecumenical partnerships in Scotland and Wales have often found more effective ways of releasing energy and resources for shared learning and development.”

A postholder in a partner organisation notes that “unusually for Methodism *The Fruitful Field* is not particularly strong in promoting an ecumenical approach. Whilst recognising the urgent financial issues that must be addressed, the acknowledged failures of regional training partnerships (in our experience only a few RTPs have been effective) and the reemergence of a more self confident Methodism, there have been significant fruits from an ecumenical approach to training in recent years and we would be disappointed if the good fruits of ecumenism were lost.”

Some submissions advocate a different order of priorities. A District Policy Committee “acknowledged that Methodism is coming from a different place as a ‘discipleship movement shaped for mission’ and that it might be right to tackle the issues from a denominational perspective first and put that out to ecumenical partners later.”

n. are authorised* in an appropriate manner

Extracts from the consultation submissions

A grouping of superintendents writes that “the tension between allowing multiple pathways for a diverse Church (something we are keenly aware of in [our district]) and ensuring that these pathways not only lead in similar directions but also can link in with each other will be a difficult one to resolve, particularly as finance will dictate some hard choices.” *Other reflections on appropriate forms of authorisation for a range of pathways, opportunities, programmes and resources are included within the extracts included above in f, g and h.*

There are, however, further specific reflections on Higher Education validation as a particular form of authorisation. A district officer writes that “validation of training will need to be robust. Possibilities for working ecumenically for Foundation level is desirable, taking care to accommodate Methodist ethos” – whereas another tutor writes that “Methodism has not

been particularly well served by training presbyters through the awarding of university degrees over the last 50 years.” One learning institution writes: “Continue conversations with ecumenical partners and pedagogically qualified Methodist tutors about validation arrangements for formal learning programmes which might result in access to departmentally taught degrees for those for whom it is appropriate, and appropriately structured vocational awards for those for whom this is most appropriate.” Another learning institution notes: “Looking to the future the changes in Higher Educational policy may place current accredited courses beyond the economic reach of Methodism. Consideration needs to be given to the use of non-accredited courses or those not linked to the higher education sector. Such courses may need to be built from scratch and this will be more effectively done with ecumenical partners with whom we already have good working relationships. Linked to this is the need to maintain the quality of content and delivery.” A partner organisation writes that “The Church of England has already begun to work in this way with proposals for a single national suite of validated Higher Educational awards for theological and ministerial qualifications, through a group under the chairmanship of the Bishop of Sheffield. The potential for this to be shared with an ecumenical partner should be explored since the benefits of partnership in terms of both quality and economy are obvious.”

The committee will therefore:

- o. oversee work to identify and develop the principles and values of such pathways**
- p. oversee work to identify and develop a framework and scenarios for such pathways, with an emphasis in the first instance on contemporary discipleship formation, formation for accredited lay ministries (including local preachers and worship leaders) and initial ministerial formation**
- q. oversee work to develop these principles, values and frameworks in collaboration with ecumenical partners**

Reflections and future explorations

Part two

People: A team of expert staff

The consultation submissions have helped the Ministries Committee to discern the importance of a team of expert staff:

- a. which has at its heart a commitment to the formation* of transformed and transforming disciples*, ministries* and communities*

See the extracts included in a-e of Part one

- b. which has an intentional impact within local churches and circuits

Extracts from the consultation submissions

A district committee writes that “some see the roles of training officers and district development enablers as vital to... pathway provision. Vital because they are located within reach of each church and circuit and vital because they can form a body which can ensure the sharing of best connexional practice.”

A district submission notes “a critical element of any networking model is the number of facilitators in learning/training/development that are deployed as close as possible to ‘the ground’ (fruitful field?) where people can access the opportunities being offered. For both ordained and lay people in churches and circuits, excellent resources effectively shared/delivered are a priority.”

A district leadership team writes of a team of staff which “[needs] to be able to work with churches and circuits as they try to develop as worshipping and mission focussed communities and to be able to design and tailor learning pathways to suit the particular context.” Another leadership team writes of a team of staff which includes “people trained and able to deliver, people with expertise – must include understanding of culture, mission in contemporary society and local context, able to enthuse learning among people who are phobic about the academic.”

A connexional committee writes that “local, district and regional mission, pioneering, and evangelism experts are needed to drive mission forward effectively, across the UK and beyond – both in the continuing consultation process and in the subsequent implementation of any agreed recommendations.”

c. with skills across the team in formation, learning, training, theological education, scholarship and organisational development

Extracts from the consultation submissions

A regional forum writes that “integration of all the people involved in training and development would be desirable and strengthen the Church.”

A district officer writes that “the plan for an integrated approach within teams across larger areas than current districts is... to be welcomed, provided that this retains the recognition that there are differing skills which are needed in these teams. We will need collaborative, interdisciplinary teams in the regions, recognising and playing to different strengths, expertise and gifts, matched to the varying needs of both the wider Church and the specific localities.”

A district officer writes that “it will be important to build the team as a whole so as to ensure that the wide range of skills, specialisms and expertise can be shared across the network. Looking at a project/matrix approach to the work that lies ahead mixing and matching teams to the various individual tasks that will emerge.”

A district officer writes that “a network of skilled people will be required to deliver the pathways, be advocates for learning and a source of advice. Different skill sets are required in different roles; tutors, educators, trainers, learning facilitators – all subtly different and all valuable. We currently rely heavily on volunteers for much lay training and this work could be valued and strengthened more if the roles were better acknowledged and more accountable.”

A tutor writes that “the vision of a single connexional network of skilled and knowledgeable staff is exciting and energising, enabling the sharing of skills, resources, expertise and stimulating creativity and debate. There is the potential for more engagement with the diversity of the church; for avoiding duplication of work; for enabling creative thinking through releasing resources and linking different people; and for using and encouraging a greater variety of people’s skills, gifts and expertise... The role of ‘tutors’ perhaps also needs some unpacking as currently connexional tutors often have academic, oversight and pastoral responsibilities. The skills and expertise required for each of those functions are different, and are not always found in the same person.”

A regional forum writes that “since 2005 we have operated an integrated staff team approach... in which the old division between tutors and trainers has systematically been eroded and we would wish to see this continue. This

staff team has a clear line management structure and clear lines of local accountability for the various aspects of its work.”

A district chair writes that “the creation of a ‘hub’ – of whatever kind – will still require effective networking more locally in ‘regional’ areas, and the capacity to deliver learning programmes well. This points to the need for investment to be made in regionally deployed personnel, rather than buildings. A common factor in the current training regions that feel they are functioning less effectively is the lack of capacity to cover the geographical area equally well. The creation of a super-duper central hub is not going to address this issue.” A regional forum affirms the importance of “funding well-resourced people rather than under-resourced institutions.”

d. which is connexionally coordinated and developed

Extracts from the consultation submissions

A learning institution writes that “the concept of a connexional network is welcomed. It will need considerable organisation. Yet it can be a means of bringing together the wide range of professional expertise, knowledge and theological awareness from a range of bodies and institutions from across the regions that will enable cross-fertilisation in a way which has always been intended, but not always implemented.” Another institution writes that “we support the vision of a single network of skilled and knowledgeable staff. We see the current disconnection between regional/district officers and learning institutions as profoundly unhelpful. The experience of forming ‘networks’ at regional level over the last 4 years demonstrates that this is far from easy and just how quickly territorial mentalities emerge. The vision needs to be realistic about the energy needed to form and sustain effective networks.”

A district leadership team writes of the importance of “access to a multi-disciplinary team of skilled people who will work in churches and circuits in partnership with the district chairs and other officers. Methodism has always faced the dangers of such people and resources being too thinly spread and isolated; the quality of the resources available to the Church will be greatly increased if they are genuinely part of collaborative team, but this requires considerable ingenuity to achieve.”

A circuit submission notes that “overall the basic ideas command support particularly the idea of developing the appropriate pathways and ensuring that the gifts and resources of those involved in training and education are linked in an integrated network rather than being dispersed in different and often unconnected institutions.” Another circuit submission notes that “we affirm the vision for a ‘single connexional network of skilled and knowledgeable staff’ which is ‘coherently coordinated’ thus allowing the easy

sharing of information across regional and institutional boundaries, avoiding duplication of work.”

A district officer writes that “the vision for a broad, single connexional network of people is also a good one. One of the problems which district development enablers have felt is that they have not been seen by some in the Connexional Team as a connexional resource. This has been disappointing to say the least, and has probably meant that the Connexion hasn’t made sufficient use of the expertise that it has at its disposal. The vision for a network across the Connexion which learns from the experiences of those in the network is therefore to be welcomed.” A district officer writes “that this approach is very different to that adopted when district development enablers were introduced. From that experience I concur wholeheartedly with the value of co-ordination, however I observe that as an organisation we will need to learn many new skills if we are to become accomplished as a Connexion in working to a level of excellence in this co-ordinated way. We can learn much from the strengths of the regional district development enabler networks and from the benefits which district development enablers as a national group have enjoyed since [the Connexional Team] took a linking interest. There is a mutual appreciation of the channels of communication and feedback which have been established as a result.”

A district officer writes that “following a more centralised team model for regional training officers like the youth participation model could be helpful to develop common pathways over a long term period... Currently we tend to go off on our own training officer tangents because we rarely meet nationally.” A connexional grouping notes that “the participation project managers see themselves as “specialist staff” and their roles as being both connexional and regional. So, for example, [one participation project manager] is regionally responsible for growing local expertise and good practice in children’s and youth work across the [region] but is also a connexional expert on sports ministry. So the participation project managers have both a local and national role. This was felt to be an advantage that training officers do not have. Being a part of the connexional picture, through working together to design and deliver connexional strategy (in *3Generate* and *Connecting Disciples*, for example) enables the participation project managers to better reflect the direction of travel of the Church as a whole. It also enables the Church to recruit and retain and invest in highly qualified staff with a national reputation.”

A regional forum writes that “despite all the advantages of the dispersed model of learning and development there has been one significant weakness that we have been experiencing... It is the lack of coherence with the rest of

the Connexion. While there is a creativity to be found in ‘doing our own thing’ there is also a danger of inefficient duplication of efforts and a disconnection from the work of God in other parts of the country.”

A postholder within a partner organisation writes that “The Methodist Church has the advantage of funding its regional staff through the Connexion, so can define their job descriptions rather than having to negotiate with Districts and Circuits. The URC works through Synods which have their own funds and therefore set their own regional priorities to some extent.”

A connexional grouping notes that “it takes a lot for someone to admit they do not have the skills needed to do the job they are in. As role expectations change people can find themselves in this situation. The hub and spoke model can offer places for such needs to be identified and supported.”

- e. **which has both a dispersed presence across the Connexion (including across and within the nations and jurisdictions of the Connexion), and a gathered presence across and within centres***

Extracts from the consultation submissions

There is a link between this reflection and the extracts included above in c and d.

A tutor writes that “it would be educationally (and, particularly in relation to initial ministerial training, formationally) undesirable for the majority of staff to be primarily located within the hub. Regionally based tutors and academic staff are vital for supporting and enabling the development of those training for a broad range of ministries: and these people will need to be ‘housed’ and resourced.”

A district officer writes that “I am not convinced that the hub can be the centre of the culture change work; this needs to happen more locally. What would be ideal would be if the ‘regional’ connexional staff were part of a whole connexional team where there could be an exchange between staff, so the needs of the people could be fed in from the field and the hub staff can pull together people to work on some generic materials to be used flexibly locally.”

A tutor writes that “it is likely that in some places there will be a wealth of people with particular skills, whereas in others it may be more difficult to find people to deliver material. A network would therefore need to be flexible and adaptable enough to cater for these varieties, and put greater resources into some regions”

f. which builds on current strengths and good practice across the Connexion

A circuit staff team writes that its members “have been deeply appreciative of the work of [district expert staff] and would wish to see this provision upheld or preferably strengthened.” A district chair notes that “we need to build on success achieved and not sweep aside important gains and established work of high quality.”

A district leadership team notes that “we need the capacity in terms of personnel to be able to sustain some of the good work we have initiated over the last three years including: signposting people to appropriate learning opportunities; support for people exploring their vocation; candidating for ministry; and joint initiatives with ecumenical partners.”

A regional grouping writes that it “has seen how the wisdom and experience has been built up in the region and would be concerned that this wisdom and experience is not lost in whatever future arrangements the Church makes.”

The committee will therefore oversee work to develop and cost a model for such a team.

Reflections and future explorations

Part three

Places: Centres and spaces

The consultation submissions have helped the committee to discern:

- a. the importance of places, centres and spaces which have at their heart a commitment to the formation* of transformed and transforming disciples*, ministries* and communities*

See the extracts included in a-e of Part one

- b. the importance of nurturing learning churches and circuits* as beacons of excellence* in formation, learning and development

Extracts from the consultation submissions

A District Policy Committee writes that “we share the opinion expressed on page 5 [of the consultation document] that ‘a healthy Connexion is properly a community of learning where every disciple is learning about their faith and telling the story of their faith, where every minister is both an educator and a reflective learner, and where every circuit is a learning circuit.’”

An individual submission notes that “A ‘learning Church’ should not only be committed to creating and supporting a lifelong learning culture which equips Christ’s disciples for ministry and mission but also needs to be a learning organisation – constantly learning about itself and the changing context within which it is called to witness.

“I believe we should formally recognise the circuit as the primary unit of formation. This is already implicit in much of what we do, but I believe it would be helpful in the context of *The Fruitful Field* to make this clear. This should not undermine the role of the local church nor should this preclude a group of circuits choosing to work together. Like any other core activity it should be natural to look to the district for support and leadership. This primary responsibility should be designed to help people to discern the nature of their calling so that they can benefit from the wide range of formational communities envisaged. I believe this move would be a natural consequence of existing policy and practice.

“The Church’s resources for formation should be set within the context of the whole Church growing in faithful understanding of God. Just as Jesus prepared the Twelve for their ministry by keeping them in close fellowship with him, so too discipleship today is typically learnt in a community

environment by people committed to his fellowship and hence to fellowship with each other. The essential principle is that communities of faith, devotion and shared learning are the normal context for formation. The Church, as a community of learning and understanding, must share with the academy; as a community of service it must be deeply engaged with the life and needs of society; and as a community of mission it must know and understand the world in which it has to reveal the world to come.

“In the context of the Church we need to encourage more understanding and practice of the continuous learning of the Christian community – about itself, its context, its purpose and mission, its resources and its priorities. We need to encourage greater understanding of each disciple as a lifelong learner who is nurtured, pastored, affirmed and formed within the community. The circuit is the primary unit of formation (collective and individual). At any one time, each disciple in the Methodist movement should know the community of which they are a member and who is their pastor.”

A circuit learning and development team writes that “in 2008/2009 we conducted a circuit review, indeed we have been maintaining a practice of constant annual review each year since. This has led to some very significant changes in the life of our Circuit. In 2009 we adopted a new Mission Policy in which we tried to carefully articulate our developing sense of vision. As part of this the Circuit Meeting has said, ‘We aim to be passionately committed to life long learning as a fundamental element of our common vocation as disciples of Jesus.’

“In order to make this passion more evident in the circuit’s life we appointed a ‘circuit steward with particular responsibility for learning and development’. This steward... convenes the circuit’s learning and development team. The team includes the superintendent minister, the circuit’s families outreach enabler and two other lay people. In addition, since March 2011, the regional training officer has become part of the team.

“In recent years, as a group, the circuit learning and development team have arranged or delivered the following training events in the circuit: (a) *Extending Discipleship, Exploring Vocation* has been run twice in our circuit during this time; (b) ongoing learning and development of workers with children and young people (this is both in terms of safeguarding type training but also in terms of good practice in offering quality learning and development for children and young people); (c) *Encircled With Care* training for pastoral visitors (about to run this for the second time); (d) community audit training for church groups seeking to engage with their communities more effectively; (e) initial training of local preachers – we have ‘on trial’ preachers studying through a local group and we also have a

preacher studying through the pathway offered by the [local regional training partnership]; (f) initial training of worship leaders...; (g) continuing development training for worship leaders and local preachers; (h) encouraged staff to engage in team building and reflective practice training; (i) encouraged circuit mission and development team to access training on change management; (j) encouraged staff and circuit stewards to engage with training on strategies for deepening discipleship; (k) encouraged lay people around the circuit to participate in training opportunities beyond the life of the circuit. Some funding has been made available to individuals who choose to take up these opportunities.

“In the coming months we plan to offer training in evangelism, fresh expressions of church, financial planning and long term budgeting, ministry to children and young people, initial training for local preachers and worship leaders, and pastoral care.

“As well as all of this we have sought to work closely with [our local learning institution] to try to understand how our context of learning might help resource student ministers and how the [institution’s] educational resources might help to enable the work we are trying to do locally.

“In our circuit action plan for 2011/2012 we have set ourselves the challenge to ‘develop strategies to encourage everyone in their discipleship’. The learning and development team has been given the responsibility to lead on this.

“We have a sense of how this commitment to learning could serve our neighbouring circuits too but for now we have tried to build a culture of learning in the circuit. We feel this is an important first step before seeking to serve a wider area. We also have a sense of what more might be achievable with sufficient resources.”

A district chair writes that “the final paragraph of the [consultation document] talks about “communities of learning.” Is that not where we should be starting? This is every church! The learning is both intentional and informal. We learn bad habits at church as well as good ones! For most church members and attendees the key ‘educators’ are the presbyters, deacons, local preachers and others, who lead worship, enable Bible studies and discussion groups, chair meetings and create an environment where people are enabled to learn and grow in their faith and discipleship. If we could really get this as a Church/Connexion, we would understand that everything we do has implications for the learning agenda. It would also help us to stop creating a false divide between budgets for lay and ordained training. Whatever is put into the equipping of those people whose vocations to be leaders/pastors/teachers/theological reflectors in our churches and

circuits, is of immense benefit to the whole people of God indirectly. For many (most?) presbyters engaging with others and encouraging people on their faith journeys – in formal and less formal groups and contexts – would be very high on their list of ‘purposes’ in becoming ordained. Many have significant gifts in teaching/mentoring/accompanying, which they would love to put to good use, rather than being squeezed into all the other roles we ask of them. This does not negate the need for good and appropriate learning and training opportunities for lay people.”

A circuit meeting notes that “we should like to know what the Connexion means by ‘hub’, and how this relates to the proposed ‘learning circuits’. We have benefited from our proximity to [a learning institution] over the years, and have sometimes been engaged in supporting student ministers through placements. We think exposure to the particular challenges of our area helps form students for ministry. We would like to see a new model of training emerging which has a different balance between centrally and locally based study, and we would value the chance to be part of this process.” A district officer writes that “in order to be a vision that will serve the Church for the next 30 years, the hub should be a ‘skeleton’ hub – with minimal resources. The main resources, both money and people, should be located in the local circuits and districts.” A researcher and lecturer notes the “focus [of the consultation document] on building a central hub and pouring extensive resources into this hub, rather than empowering incarnational, local-church-centred learning structures, which are at the heart of a Methodist way of doing things.”

A circuit staff team writes that “we do agree that circuits are an appropriate unit of mission, and if properly resourced, could have a significant role to play in training and equipping ministers and lay people. However, without appropriate resources and support from effective training institutions, it is hard to see how they might facilitate the more effective training of ministers given the existing pressures on time and personnel. If adequate resources were made available for circuits to engage in training and development programmes, from a purely geographical perspective it would be helpful to have a number of institutions based in different parts of the country, to facilitate local travel, access and identification.”

A district submission notes that “we warmed to the part of the vision which saw the development of ‘learning circuits’ but we do not see any strategy for making the necessary cultural and organisational changes, let alone the resourcing of this development... We yearn for every circuit to be a learning circuit but we would settle for a strategic, short term plan for some circuits to take up a training role so that these are developed alongside any major changes to the Connexional superstructure for training.”

- c. **the need for far-reaching changes to ensure viable, sustainable and excellent centres* which are able to focus on the formation of disciples, ministries and communities**

Extracts from the consultation submissions

A postholder in a partner organisation writes that “Methodism faces a similar problem to most of the historic denominations in England. It is burdened by a history of inadequately maintained college buildings which do not meet the demands of either modern education practice or indeed legislation. Those buildings were designed to provide for the needs of communities of full-time ordinands and those who taught them. As the number of full-time ordinands has diminished over the last 30 years, the educational and training needs of the church have diversified. Theological education is one of the most emotionally charged parts of church life because denominational identity is partly expressed through its institutions, and because these institutions form people at critical moments in their spiritual lives. This will not be a pain free business for those charged with a review.”

A tutor writes that “the Ministries Committee has not shirked its responsibility to be radical and to challenge all of us working in the sector and I welcome that after the frustrations of working within the framework of the previous review of training institutions.”

A circuit meeting writes that “because of the wider Church’s financial situation and the fragmented nature of training for all kinds of ministry changes must be made.” A circuit staff team writes that “we see the logic and support the principle of the high quality of learning through the hub, and understand the benefit of no longer having separate learning centres.” A circuit submission notes that it “[recognises] that the dwindling financial reserves require urgent action to reduce the current costs of training and that inevitably means a reduction in the number of colleges and courses currently being used for initial ministerial learning.” A circuit submission notes that “most welcome of all is the clear understanding that things cannot go on as they are, in view of the demands of the present age, let alone future needs and the anticipated decline in financial resources, now so imminent. We also welcomed the Ministries Committee’s willingness to articulate an ambitious vision for the future of the Church’s learning.” A circuit submission notes that “there was also an appreciation of the economic reality which the church is facing at every level and the need to be practical in assessing the best options for the future. The document suggests a proactive approach, before we are forced to make more difficult decisions.” A District Policy Committee writes that it “recognises the need for fundamental change in the delivery of education and training.” A circuit submission notes that “a

good thing about the approach is that it is willing in some ways to leave behind existing structures and to think through the whole matter from a clean sheet.” A regional forum notes that it is “not content with the status quo and [agrees] that significant change needs to take place to effectively enable the learning and development of the people called Methodist.”

A learning institution notes the need for a “radical consolidation of the number of institutions in which the connexion has investment of capital assets, personnel and expertise.” Another learning institution notes that “we recognise the importance of some imaginative, long term thinking with regard to the Methodist Church’s provision of ministerial education. We accept that such thinking is likely to lead to significant changes that will cause some difficulties and indeed distress to particular individuals and institutions. Nonetheless, we see the sense of the outline vision in the consultation document as a serious attempt to ensure connexional resources are used in a well-coordinated and effective way to nurture the Methodist Church as ‘a discipleship movement shaped for mission’ for many decades to come.” Another learning institution writes that “we see many positive merits in a single hub. We recognise that there is an appropriate ‘fit’ between the ecclesiology of a connexional church and a single connexional hub which holds and embodies a connexional vision, strategy and practice of theological education. We acknowledge that the multiplicity of institutions has contributed to fragmented, uncoordinated provision and sometimes to competitive attitudes between institutions. We confess that training institutions have often not been willing or able to work together effectively. We recognise that the current provision does not make efficient use of resources and is not sustainable. We agree that radical change is needed.” A researcher and lecturer writes that “it has always been clear, from the early conversations in TSRE [the Training Strategy and Resources Executive] around the *The Future Use of Training Institutions* back in the mid noughties that change was needed. The replication and multiplication of resources for theological training provided a rich field of opportunities for training. However, the greenhouse growth of those resources has been shown to reflect some poor stewardship of our resources. The vine was not pruned as it grew and now the fruit is shown to be wanting.”

An individual submission notes that “the Open University has worked with one central hub since the 1960s and the idea is now well established so that training is very effective as it takes in the use of modern technology to encourage open learning in regional centres. There is much that the church could learn from that concept as we seek to enable everyone to be an effective disciple of Christ.”

Cautionary notes are also sounded. A district officer writes that “the idea of a central hub is not a bad one and in fact could offer many benefits for Methodism. It could offer a new lease of life for all involved in learning and give a clear sense of professionalism... In my experience Methodism moves slowly and unless this build finds itself on an episode of *Extreme Makeover* the whole project may be energy sapping.”

A researcher and lecturer notes that “one central hub would probably involve disinvestment from validation partnerships with major universities... along with a withdrawal from engagement with such centres by the core tutorial team now located in the central hub. Closure of the current colleges would also be a disinvestment of ecumenical relations with a knock-on effect to partner colleges and institutions... [Such] disinvestment is too high a price.”

A connexional committee writes that “the centralisation proposed (one single hub) is excessive. The Methodist Church is a Connexion and, as such, requires a focus on regional, district and circuit level that a single stand-alone hub would not be able to provide. The report refers to Wesley’s educational vision and much of his work in that field was directed to producing educational materials that could be used nationally... We are therefore sure that today he would be fully utilizing on-line learning. However, Wesley never envisaged creating just one educational base – rather he adopted both a regional approach (with libraries in Bristol, Newcastle and London) and a local approach (with the education delivered within societies).”

A district chair provides a different historical and ecclesiological perspective, noting that “as a Church we have tried to be too flexible to individual needs. There has to be a balance between the needs of the Church and the particular circumstances of the individual. The current multiplicity of routes/pathways for initial training serves neither well. It creates in some ministers the expectation that the Church must simply bend to their needs, the demise of itinerancy and an individualism among some that impedes the ministry and mission of the Church.”

d. the importance of effective and intentional connections between centres and learning churches and circuits

Extracts from the consultation submissions

There is a link between this reflection and the extracts included above in b.

A circuit leadership team writes that “the idea of a hub where resources are concentrated is appealing, provided that there are “spokes” going out into the regions and districts to provide opportunities at a more local level for initial training of ministers, training of local preachers, etc.”

A District Policy Committee notes that “we have noticed that possibilities for increased fruitfulness can develop as local circuits work closely with learning institutions... We consider that there is huge potential for identifying and resourcing circuits which have the potential to be centres of excellence in terms of learning and development. We believe that some circuits may be particularly well suited to serving districts and regions as centres for local preacher development, practical placement opportunities for student ministers, development of probationers, enabling the development of the whole people of God as discipleship, ministry and mission is reflected upon in an intentional, focussed and coordinated way, offering a focus for vocational discernment to take place in a well supported way. Such an environment for learning and formation would also enable good practice to be modelled to student ministers and probationers so that there is greater potential for ‘every minister to be an educator and a reflective learner’. We notice that other denominations identify fruitful places and contexts for new ministers to grow and for their training to be enhanced. We wonder if Methodist patterns could evolve to make this more possible in our context. We believe that this has rich potential for increasing the fruitfulness of the whole people of God.”

A learning institution writes of “models of learning which are embedded in partnership between circuit and connexional institutions to enable distributed learning,” noting that it “has been at the forefront of developing learning models in partnership with circuits. For example, [we were] the first connexional institution to appoint a diaconal member of staff rooted in a circuit, specifically to improve the quality of formation for student deacons. In addition, over half of [our] teaching staff are embedded in nearby circuit teams and are therefore well placed to develop models of learning in partnership between circuit and connexional institution. [We are] already in conversation with circuits in two separate districts exploring more sophisticated models of distributed learning than those we are currently undertaking across the Connexion.”

A postholder in a partner organisation writes that “at a time when we are being called to be contextual we welcome the emphasis on local pathways and networks. If the central hub is pursued it will be important that it is quite compact with the envisioned networks of regional people being given license and encouragement to adapt pathways to their context. There is a delicate balance to be struck between being contextual and connexional. A permissive culture for local adaptation and delivery will be essential. In a recent BBC documentary Mark Zuckerberg presented his vision of the future of Facebook as a sustainable ecosystem of interconnected relationships. Learning from such visionaries and revolutionaries as Zuckerberg will also

be critical to shaping future training resources and relationships. As *The Fruitful Field* evolves consideration of things of value from outside as well as inside the church will be very welcome.”

A district officer writes that “learning that is formational and not merely academic is to be encouraged... Learning that is linked to the forming and reinforcing of communities must be seen as positive. Care would need to be taken that this does not become the institutionalisation of individual disciples by conformity to a prescriptive hub.”

e. the importance of centres which can connect with partners across the World Church

Extracts from the consultation submissions

A connexional committee writes that “for such a [British] base to be useful to the World Methodist family it needs to: (a) have sufficient capacity to undertake serious scholarship on issues of historical and contemporary concern to British and World Methodism, including at post-doctoral level; (b) have in place mechanisms for sharing this research, through publication and conferences. With the demise of the Epworth Press, and uncertainty over the future of the Epworth Review, the ability to communicate ideas about contemporary British Methodism within the worldwide academic community has been diminished and this needs addressing by *The Fruitful Field* as a core issue about the support of scholarship in a world arena. Equally there should be a commitment to our continued involvement with the Oxford Institute for Methodist Theological Studies which is a World Methodist Council initiative supported by the Methodist Church in Britain, recognising the importance of this conference both for sharing scholarship but also involving younger academics alongside world respected researchers from both the global North and South; (c) be able to cope with exchange of students and faculty as a matter of routine and from a range of churches and institutions within the world Methodist family. Noting that part of the issue with this in the past relating to faculty is that the staff size of most of our current institutions is so small and the range of responsibilities so wide, it is almost impossible for any member of staff to be away for significant periods; (d) build on the ability of [some existing institutions] to attract students from overseas, recognising the increasingly difficult visa issues associated with this but also that it is vital for ensuring a diversity of voices and experience; (e) find ways of not limiting the learning opportunities offered by the world church simply to those with physical access to the hub. E-learning clearly offers opportunities here and serious consideration should be given to increased involvement in programs such as the Methodist E-Academy which operates across Europe; (f) understand that the trend in Higher Education is

not simply for institutional partnership within the UK but also worldwide and in considering the strategic partnerships which need to be forged with UK providers, we should also look at whether those partnerships also need to include institutions in other parts of the world.”

A connexional committee writes: “We... challenge the Connexion to raise its eyes beyond the traditional and historic boundaries of learning provision and to incorporate a broader worldview. We also challenge the Connexion to engender a culture of learning which is outward-facing, world-engaged and global in its understanding of participation in God’s mission. We challenge the Connexion to develop an expression of discipleship which expands horizons and embraces the wide-ranging perspectives of our world church partners.”

A connexional grouping writes that “the most important element in our experience of and requirement for a training institution would be the possibility of people living in an international Christian community of encounter within which the formal learning would also be processed and integrated. We could imagine great benefits from a place in which many different pathways and people cross and interact, eg people on sabbatical, doing research, attending formal courses, doing in-service training, or attending e-learning gatherings.” Another connexional grouping notes that “the experience of overseas Partner Churches can only add to the understanding of members of the Methodist Church in Britain however we need to ensure that the relationship is one of partnership. The Methodist Church in Britain should be encouraging and facilitating the development of theologies that authentically arise from the culture of the country, for example the works of Kitamorai, Mbiti and Massey. What needs to be avoided is the further dominance of western theology in other cultures.”

A learning institution notes that “we welcome the comments made about a place which is open to links with others, especially with the world wide Church, but links is an insufficiently developed term. We need an institution in the UK that helps the world wide family of Methodists to be shaped together for mission, to learn with and from each other, to be a partner with other institutions to build their capacity and to receive their wisdom and insights.” Another learning institution notes that “a residential community of prayer and scholarship is in a position to welcome guests, whether sabbatical or world church visitors, or those taking short courses as they prepare for lay ministries or engage in further training as presbyters or deacons.”

f. the importance of centres which allow deep sharing with ecumenical partners

Extracts from the consultation submissions

There is a link between this reflection and the extracts included under m in Part one.

A circuit leadership team notes that “in terms of the ecumenical context of our work, we note that much hard and patient work has gone into the forging of working relationships [within and across learning institutions], and there is little to rival in importance the day by day links that are forged by students from different traditions doing the same things and reading the same books, especially the Scriptures, together. A scaling down or ending of that partnership on Methodism’s part and failure to create something similar elsewhere would seem to be a retrograde step.” A connexional grouping notes that “‘Methodists in splendid isolation’ is not wanted for either students and tutors; [there is a] need to recognise that individuals thrive and flourish from the whole of Christian tradition... ecumenism; needs to be one that recognises the issues ministers face in circuit and church life... any proposal needs to honour, value and develop our ecumenical relationships with a range of ecumenical partners... further discussion of the nuances of ecumenical training and formation needs to take place.” A circuit staff team submission notes that “the creation of a single connexional hub on one site as a focus on the priorities of the Church may be a good idea which could turn out to be cost-effective. However, it has the potential of undoing the good work that has been done in the past through the training of Methodist ministers and other ministers from different denominations in either the same theological college... or in a theological federation... Training ministerial students from different denominations together promotes the spirit of ecumenism and enhances awareness and understanding of our different traditions.” Another circuit staff team notes that “if this new initiative is for a solely Methodist provision/vision we would point out the essential value of training within an ecumenical context. We have concerns whether a sole denominational resource will be able to deliver the quality of training to fit those in training for an ecumenical, multicultural and multi-faith context.”

A circuit submission notes: “Ecumenical training essential – partner churches should be involved in discussions.” A learning institution notes that “the Methodist Conference has repeatedly committed the Connexion to not doing anything separately that can be done together. *The Fruitful Field*, it appears to us, sets those ideals to one side as it envisages creating a learning hub shaped entirely by Methodist aspirations; ‘a hub of which the Methodist people can be proud,’ and then, almost as an afterthought, inviting

ecumenical partners to join what we have done. Indeed *The Fruitful Field* envisages a hub which is merely ‘open to links with partner denominations’. We suggest that genuine and strategic ecumenical partnership requires a more collaborative approach than this.” A learning institution notes that “while recognising that ecumenical working in any context can bring its frustrations, we would urge the Methodist Church and the Church of England in the strongest terms to seek to work together in responding to some common challenges in ministerial education and training. At this critical point in the policy making cycle in both Churches, intelligent and respectful collaboration can lay the basis for fruitful partnership for decades to come. Without a commitment to such collaboration now, it is almost inevitable that the direction of policy will drift unintentionally but steadily apart and make the sharing of programmes and resources increasingly difficult if not impossible, to the detriment of future students from both Churches and the impoverishment of our common life.”

A circuit submission notes “the risk of not only rendering us too inward focused but also of losing our influence and shaping of ecumenical dialogue and participation in the direction that training should take for the future.” A tutor writes: “What of our life of service within the wider Church? I believe that a flee to a centralised Methodist college will diminish our standing with other denominational churches and Christian partners.”

A tutor writes that “there is a richness to be derived from training in community with partner denominations and this requires students to sit together and learn together... Establishing a single hub would have a significant impact on a variety of ecumenical partnerships across the Connexion, and this is an area which seems to demand, as a priority, further work, exploration and reflection in order to be clear about what the potential gains and losses are, how good existing relationships can be maintained, and how Methodism might best work connexionally and regionally with our ecumenical partners.”

A postholder in a partner organisation writes that “*The Fruitful Field* [consultation document] makes specific reference to disappointment about the effectiveness of regional training partnerships (RTPs), their failure to reap the benefits of cooperation and a tendency to consume scarce resources of time and effort. This is regrettably true for a number of RTPs. However, there are good examples... where significant progress has been made in shared work and there is strong local feeling, including among Methodist members, that this should be sustained. It is to be hoped that such progress can be recognised and accommodated under any new central arrangements, all the more so since RTPs remain a key aspect of Church of England policy and planning for training and learning provision.”

A learning institution writes: “We urge the Ministries Committee... in seeking to develop relationships with other churches, not to turn its back on established and covenanted partners.” Having focused on relationships between the Methodist Church and the Church of England, a learning institution notes: “We reiterate that although the focus of these comments has been on two major partner churches the principles are extendable to other churches and provide the foundation for our commitment to deepening our ecumenical partnership with Black Majority Churches.”

A postholder in a partner organisation writes that “the report notes the importance of new ecumenical partners. My observation is that the black churches in particular, look to the historic churches as possessors of theological and educational resources which they do not have, and are eager to develop relationships so that those resources can be shared... In other words part of the synergy is what the historic churches have and can bring to the table.” A partner organisation writes that “in a post-denominational future we... see the increasing need for institutions in good standing across the wider Church, offering training with a rich ecumenical mix, whilst at the same time offering Methodist charisms as a gift to the Church universal.”

Alternative perspectives on ecumenical working within an institutional context are also offered. Two are included here.

First, a district officer writes that “it may be said that a single Methodist focus will no longer foster ecumenical relationships. That will be true in the context of a specific training pre-ordination culture. However, we must have regard to what is happening in other denominations, and a re-appraisal of our own Church’s requirements needs to be at the fore. There will be other ways in which the ecumenical context of the Church can be made part of formational learning; it could even be that these will be more effective than the current methods.” A regional management group notes that “regionally some good work has been done ecumenically on specific projects – eg *Mission Shaped Ministry*... Perhaps the regional loci would be better placed for ecumenical cooperation which is more contextual than theoretical.”

Secondly, an individual submission notes that “we cannot ignore significant institutional differences in managing ‘formation’ between the Methodist and Anglican perspectives and reluctantly, I would strongly urge the Methodist Church to forge ahead with our own formation agenda, making it openly available to Anglican and other ecumenical colleagues to comment and to advise. The Church of England model (for residential formation of ordinands) feels like a ‘contracted out’ model. The Colleges, although founded with specific Anglican purposes, appear to be treated as ‘outside’ the church and hence the style of ‘external inspection’. They take the students

they can attract from the Church's annual pool of candidates. It is a competitive environment. Money to fund their formation 'goes with' the ordinand... The parallel Methodist model feels more like a 'contracting in'. The Colleges are treated as a part of the Methodist Church and each has a defined role as the core (and a major resource) of a 'training hub'. They are part of the 'formation arm' of the Methodist Church in their region and a 'testing ground' for new methods for the Connexion. Methodist student ministers undertaking residential formation, with due regard to stated preferences and personal criteria, are 'assigned' to one of the colleges. The size and balance of these student populations are also taken into account. Per capita funds follow the student but these are in addition to financial and human resources provided as a direct grant. Annual student intake to any one institution is more affected by the total annual number of candidates nationally and individual student needs than any competitive process... I hasten to add that I would still hope that in developing along the lines proposed we would all continue to be 'instinctively ecumenical' in sharing with our ecumenical partner denominations and try to retain and build upon as much as possible of the existing good ecumenical practice which is so inspirational. We should emphasise the expectation that all regional, district or circuit implementation will continue to foster ecumenical ways of working locally."

- g. the importance of centres which can nurture apt and excellent scholarship and research, in partnership with the Higher Education sector**

Extracts from the consultation submissions

There is a link between this reflection and the extracts included under l in Part one.

A tutor writes that "the Methodist Church needs a university validated institution where some of the core areas of Methodism can be academically researched and studied. This is to provide accessible scholarship to further enrich the people of God and enable the Methodist Church in Britain to continue to make a wider contribution within Christianity and the world."

A postholder in a partner organisation writes that "at a time when the churches collectively are facing challenges concerning the resources for theological training, and when theology departments in universities are also under pressure, a long term issue for our two churches under the Covenant and for other partner churches is: where does the Church do its theology?"

An individual submission notes that "educationally, the report seems to reflect an older view of higher education rather than the kind of models used by the leading universities of today – the importance of research led

teaching, international relationships, diversity of delivery, etc. These should be major parts of a strategy for the long term development of Methodist training. Instead they are mentioned briefly but not developed with any expertise.”

h. the importance of centres which can appropriately house connexional archives and other historic resources

Extracts from the consultation submissions

An institution notes that “(a) there is no overall national register of what the Church possesses, though some collections are catalogued; (b) some archives are housed in extremely unsatisfactory conditions; (c) those archives that are held in proper conditions are often treated as if they were the preserve only of a tiny academic elite; (d) the library provision is very unequal regionally; (e) there is little attempt to engage with the wider world by mounting touring exhibitions.”

Note | *The Methodist Heritage Committee, whose remit complements that of the Ministries Committee in this area, made a substantive submission. The Ministries Committee hopes that discussions between both committees will assist developments in this field.*

i. the need for a shared and common governance framework for all centres

Extracts from the consultation submissions

A district submission notes: “We wonder if the movement towards a single focus for learning and training might be better built on at least some of these resources [ie existing institutional arrangements], perhaps with a single governance and mandate for learning and training.”

A learning institution, offering an alternative configuration of centres to that in the consultation document, writes that “we are of the view that the aspirations of a discipleship movement shaped for mission could more adequately be met if there were a move to a learning infrastructure around more than a single centre, located in different regions of the connexion, linked by shared governance and oversight arrangements... Shared governance might include a single council setting strategic direction, consolidated financial accounts, single validation arrangements..., common oversight and employment procedures, shared resources and common procurement processes.”

Another learning institution writes that “we recognise and affirm the ‘connexionality’ of this vision. We see the logic and theological rationale of a connexional church structuring its resources, shaping its pathways and deploying its people in connexional ways. Some of us who are not Methodist

are often surprised at the way programmes, people and resources have been dispersed or distributed. We see under the current arrangements duplication of effort; learning in different parts of the Connexion that is designed to have the same outcomes being variable in quality; a confusion between what is understood to be connexional and what is local or regional. While we would wish that the dispersion of resources led naturally to strong and warm collaborative relationships our experience is that the church and its institutions (not just colleges) quickly adopt territorial, competitive and separatist mentalities. We recognise that at its best a clearer connexional model could aid the development of a network of people and places that would work together; however, without sufficient attention to issues of power and authority the outcome at its worst could be a model of command and control, with the 'centre' dominating the 'margins'."

j. the need for a range of spaces for formation, learning and development* across the Connexion

There is a link between this reflection and the extracts included above in b and d.

A district officer writes that "I see the sense in concentrating resources and of one virtual hub through which the training is coordinated and held coherently and cohesively. However, Methodism traditionally is a multi-faceted movement which may still require more intimate settings through which this diversity can continue to be taken forward, nurtured and thrive. The option of regional 'hubs' is worth exploring with a view on how the balance between a focussed coherent training environment and the rich diversity that the traditions of Methodism embrace can be carried forward. Sweeping away all existing institutions may appear the most cost effective solution today but might we regret this in a few years time when we struggle to find suitable places to gather."

A connexional grouping writes that "if we are enabling the younger generations then we are talking about dispersed models not centralised provision. For many teenagers a central residential will not be practical, they cannot utilise this style of training over and above their school/college/university commitments... In some regions the geography works better than in others and flexibility is important in our approach. In some places sub-regions might be necessary to overcome the difficulties of regional distances or travel... Our conversation stressed the importance of dispersed places and beyond circuit structures to this vision." A district officer writes that "it is understood that regional networks are key to [the] success of this model – I am just hoping that these 'networks' will include learning centres (like satellites, linked to the hub but spread around the

regions) so that local people who are unable to travel to a centralised hub (or unable to stay away from home due to home/work commitments) can still access these broad pathways that will be open to them. They need to share with others training in person – and not just by remote ‘e-learning’ type solutions.” A district officer writes that “if we are to offer hospitality and be welcoming then we may need more than one hub and need to retain appropriate places where folks can be gathered be they from within the Connexion, the wider Christian communities or the even broader secular society. Also, if we are to become more proactive, strategic and holistic this cries out for discipleship that is not fixed to one place, one institution, one ivory tower, one temple (even on virtual hub) but is a fluid form of discipleship which is not called to gather but rather sent out to witness to the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

A tutor writes that “the excellent environment for learning and formation that is envisaged for the hub, could also be creatively envisaged in different places across the Connexion, particularly if the majority of learning does not happen at the single hub location... Experience of blended learning... has highlighted the limitations of solely relying on tutorials via skype and occasional weekend residential courses for those training for ministry. This further adds to the need for regionally based academic and tutorial staff, and the importance of strong regional centres of learning.”

A circuit submission notes that “we feel that it is of paramount importance to continue to develop centres (which are regional or localised) of learning, empowerment and discipling that cater for the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and theologically diverse composition of our Connexion.”

A partner organisation writes that “we affirm the need for ‘quiet restful places’ where space and time can be offered for theological reflection and where events can take place which encourage and enrich the discipleship life of the Methodist people.”

k. the importance of learning from current strengths and good practice

Extracts from the consultation submissions

A circuit submission notes that “as it is proposed, the creation of a single hub will have many consequences for the current arrangements and the many institutions involved. Some of those institutions are excellent at what they do. How will their expertise, ambience, passions, gravitas, and good practice be transferred?” A learning institution writes that “some things are being delivered already which fulfil the vision of *The Fruitful Field*. Are they to be discontinued only to be re-invented or will the process allow us to use skills, expertise and knowledge which has sometimes been built up over years?” A

tutor notes that “*The Fruitful Field* does not explicitly mention the breadth of theological resources already offered (often in partnership with ecumenical colleagues and other institutions), how these resources will be built upon and utilised, and how the Methodist Church ensures that its pathways draw upon the richness and breadth of theological expertise within those partner denominations and institutions.” A connexional grouping’s submission notes that “concern was expressed that there was not sufficient about valuing what already exists and how we build on the strengths; mistakes are the focus rather than good practice.... much networking, sharing of good practice and creativity already takes place, not only between institutions but with other, more local partners, eg universities, other colleges and partners... ‘you can’t have fruits without roots’.”

A district submission notes that “the fear is that the hub will mean the dismantling of some places and work of excellence and the marginalisation of others, at inestimable cost to Methodism and the wider world. We wonder if the movement towards a single focus for learning and training might be better built on at least some of these resources.” A District Policy Committee writes that “we agree that rationalisation of our training provision needs to take place in order to achieve this aim but we are of the opinion that consolidation of what is best in our current provision and investing in its excellence is far better than dispensing with our current exemplary work. We believe excellence should be sought out and developed. We do not believe that we will be well served as a discipleship movement shaped for mission if our current centres of excellence are discontinued.”

l. the importance of and demand for the work of Cliff College, especially in the field of mission and evangelism, and especially in the field of lay formation

Extracts from the consultation submissions

An individual submission notes that “as one who came to faith through the mission of [Cliff College], and who has later been equipped for ministry through its undergraduate provision, to see its unique missional impetus and contribution to the Connexion be lost within a far broader training hub, rather than shining like the beacon for missiology and evangelism that the college surely is, seems unfitting and unwise to me.” Another individual submission notes that “Cliff College has a distinctive training aspect in the realm of evangelism. Whilst it is true that this is reflected in many other areas of our work, Cliff has consistently held a beacon light for the offering of the gospel of Jesus Christ, both in the Methodist church and far beyond. I have preached in many countries across the world and invariably meet people who owe their Christian roots to the ministry of Cliff College.”

Another individual submission notes that the “Cliff College campus is a

‘special site’ to many people of many generations. This sense of a place of pilgrimage’ or ‘holy ground’ is not restricted to former students. Many thousands of people throughout Methodism and the wider church can identify special milestones and life changing experiences that happened at Cliff College.”

A circuit staff team notes that “many of us within this circuit have valued strongly the training for lay and ordained we have received at Cliff College and their mix of academic and practical training.” Another circuit submission notes that “in the words of Howard Mellor’s doctoral thesis, Cliff is “more than a college.” To regard it simply as an academic or training institution is to indicate that one does not really fully understand it. We strongly feel that Cliff is distinctively different from other training institutions, and occupies a unique place in the history of British Methodism. We therefore feel that the current strength of British Methodism, and its future prospects, will be depleted if the distinctive emphasis and influence of Cliff College is lost.”

A significant number of other individual and circuit submissions affirmed the importance of the work of Cliff College, especially in the field of mission and evangelism, and especially in the field of lay formation.

A learning institution notes the “the business model that Cliff has always held to – not always without difficulty – of largely funding [its] own activities mainly through student fees and supporter donations/legacies. [Cliff has] never received a stream of funded students. The balance historically was more dependent on donations but, more recently, the scale and size of [Cliff’s] training has given [Cliff] the possibility to be financially viable through achieving critical mass and economies of scale. As a result, student fees and charges make up about 70% of [Cliff’s] annual income of about £1.3m, the remainder being about 20% from donations and conferencing, and 10% from a year-by-year connexional grant.”

A learning institution (not Cliff College itself) writes that “Cliff brings considerable expertise in lay and mission training which is central to our desire for the Connexion to be a discipleship movement shaped for mission. This expertise must not be lost.”

A partner organisation writes: “Affirm those places which offer academic strength through university validation, accessibility to a broad range of students from a wide range of academic and non-academic backgrounds, and training for God’s people for mission and evangelism with an accent on personal renewal and holiness in line with those emphases found throughout Methodism’s rich history and reiterated in the general secretary’s report.”

The committee will therefore oversee work to investigate:

- m. ways of enabling learning churches and circuits* to develop as beacons of excellence* in formation, learning and development
- n. the feasibility and configuration of two connexional centres* which (i) are communities of faith with expertise in formation, learning, training, theological education, scholarship and organisational development; (ii) have at their heart the formation of disciples*, ministries* and communities*; (iii) are interconnected with learning churches and circuits; and (iv) share a common governance framework and staff team
- o. the feasibility and configuration of other appropriate and effective spaces for formation, learning and development* across the Connexion, also overseen within a common framework
- p. the feasibility of enabling much greater use of virtual learning environments* as virtual spaces for formation, learning and development
- q. ways of capturing and learning from current strengths and good practice
- r. the ways in which Cliff College can be best resourced and developed in order to continue its work and take its place as one of the two connexional centres

Reflections and future explorations

Part four

Change and transition

The consultation submissions have helped the committee:

- a. to discern the importance of a flexible yet stable overall framework, which is both responsive to the needs of the Church as well as being capable of nurturing deep and transforming experiences and communities
- b. to understand the pressures and insecurities which a number of colleagues and institutions are facing at this time
- c. to appreciate that the work of The Fruitful Field should not add any more insecurity than is strictly necessary to these existing pressures
- d. to discern that far-reaching changes, which will have a significant impact on current arrangements and partnerships, are nevertheless necessary
- e. to discern and appreciate the need for careful investigation of the implications of the changes which the committee will propose in this area

The committee will therefore oversee detailed work to investigate the financial and infrastructural implications of the changes implied in parts 1-3 above, so that transitional arrangements and timelines may be designed and clearly communicated.

Conclusion

As we have already noted, the committee is clear that there is much work still to be done. As we take our next steps, we look forward to working collaboratively with experts and partners across the Connexion and beyond, and to building on and learning from our existing strengths and good practice. The committee, and the Connexional Team staff who support our work, will be inviting a wide range of colleagues and partners across the Connexion to share more information and to contribute their experiences and expertise to our work over coming weeks and months. Leaders of institutions within the remit of *The Fruitful Field*, district development enablers, district evangelism/mission enablers, participation project managers and training officers will be invited by Connexional Team staff to share their reflections on the committee's reflections and future explorations. We will also continue to draw from the wealth of information and insight included within the submissions made during the consultation period.

We gather again as a committee in late March to reflect on the progress which has been made and to continue to prepare our report to the Methodist Conference. Our hope is that our report will be able to offer to the Conference a comprehensive picture of the issues at stake, a careful exploration of alternative ways forward, as well as our developed recommendations.

We are clear that the decisions of the Conference – whatever they may be – will mark the beginning, and not the end, of a period of change. The need to nurture and enable reflection and collaboration, as well as prophetic vision and ambition, will not diminish at the end of this connexional year. We are grateful for the care, imagination and patience which so many – not least those most affected by our work – have shown over recent months, and our prayer is that good will and mutual trust will continue to be a mark of our discussions.

The Ministries Committee is conscious of the importance of the task which the Conference has entrusted to us at this time, and we have been very aware of being supported by the prayers of a large number of people across the Connexion over recent weeks and months. We are very grateful for your prayers, and ask that you continue to hold the committee members – and all those across the Connexion who work so diligently in the fields of formation, learning and development – in your prayers as we take our next steps forward together.

Glossary of terms

authorised*

There are a number of ways in which pathways, opportunities, programmes and resources may be authorised, ranging from 'kite-marking' learning outcomes and the outline of programmes to the much fuller authorisation provided through validating agreements for degree programmes with Higher Education partners.

beacons of excellence*

Places whose strengths should be connexionally nurtured and supported, and whose good practice should be shared across the Connexion. The 2009 Conference, in Notice of Motion 228 (entitled 'Centres of Excellence'), noted that "alongside the welcome support within the Connexion to develop fresh expressions of church and areas for pioneer ministry, the Conference is concerned also to promote the excellent work being undertaken in Methodism's traditional strengths, for example, preaching, social action and discipleship. Such work serves to showcase Methodism to the wider world, provides hope and encouragement to other Methodists, and opens new opportunities for engagement and mission. Conference wishes to honour and support such excellence and is therefore concerned that circuit structures and the stationing system promote and do not undermine this work." Supporting beacons of excellence forms part of the Conference's commitment expressed in the Notice of Motion.

centre*

A community of faith which nurtures and supports a deep expertise in formation, learning, training, theological education, scholarship and organisational development. A community of students and learners (gathered and, where appropriate, resident), visitors and staff (forming part of the team of expert staff). A community located in a stable and well-resourced set of premises. A community able to offer residential hospitality for short and longer periods of time. A community which looks outwards and which is interconnected with other centres, spaces, a number of partners, and with learning churches and circuits.

communities*

Classes and small groups; local churches and circuits; districts; fresh expressions of Church and new communities.

disciples*

The people of God. Methodist members, office-holders and ministers; those who belong to or associated with the life of churches and circuits in a wide range of ways; those on the edges of Church life and who are beginning their journey of faith.

The focus of discipleship lies beyond the Church. “The ministry of the people of God in the world is both the primary and the normative ministry of the Church... This ministry in the wider world, outside explicitly ecclesiastical contexts, and away from church premises, is expressed in Christ-like living, in social action and in witness to the Christian Gospel” [*Called to Love and Praise*, Agenda 1999, ¶14.5.4]. “We affirm the validity of people’s witness, and their attempts to hammer out a theology to enable them to discover the holy in their daily lives, to be true to Christ wherever they are, and to experience the presence of Christ in all the confusion of the world as it is” [*The Ministry of the People of God in the World*, Agenda 1990, preface].

formation*

Growth of individuals and communities in faith, hope, love, discipleship, mission, learning and understanding. This is not used to refer to the formation of ministerial students alone.

initial formation*

Learning and development at the beginning of a ministry.

[Continued]

learning churches and circuits*

Local churches and circuits which are able to focus their energy and resources on sustaining an environment which enables formation, learning and development. The formation of *disciples* and of the Christian *community* are high priorities. However, particular attention can be given to the initial and ongoing formation of *ministries*, which is enabled through the dedication of resources, and through other support from connexional structures and processes.

The interim report on *The Fruitful Field* to the 2011 Methodist Conference noted that “shared learning about our faith, about our mission context, and about one another is a cornerstone of our Methodist calling – and a healthy Methodist Connexion is consequently a community of learning where every disciple is learning about their faith and telling the story of the faith, where every minister is an educator and a reflective learner, and where every circuit is a learning circuit” [¶34].

ministries*

A wide range of lay and ordained ministries and offices within the life of the Methodist Church. “Ministries which enable God-centred worship and prayer; ministries which help people to grow and learn as Christians; ministries which engage with the everyday acts of love, kindness and service of the people of God in the world; ministries which encourage patterns of witness and evangelism” [*The Stationing Review Group’s Report, Agenda 2009, ¶4.3*].

“The ministry of the whole people of God’ can be discerned in the recurring insistence [in the New Testament] that each has a gift (Romans 12.3-5; Ephesians 4.7; 1 Peter 4.10). The interdependence of all within the body of Christ issues in corporate forms of leadership (e.g. 1 Peter 5.1-2); even strong individual leaders such as Paul engaged in collaborative ministry (as the frequency of the word ‘fellow-worker’ in his letters shows, e.g. Romans 16.3,9,21)... The ministry of the people of God in the world is both the primary and the normative ministry of the Church... But the ministry of all Christians within the corporate life of the Church is also important. By their various gifts the members of Christ’s Body contribute to the health and growth of the Church. Indeed, the ministry of laypeople has been essential to the very functioning of Methodism from its earliest days. Far more Methodist services of worship are led by local preachers than by ordained ministers. The partnership of ordained and lay ministers remains vital to the work and well-being of the Church, even though this truth has often been lost sight of in the history of the Church” [*Called to Love and Praise, Agenda 1999, ¶2.3.17 and ¶4.5.4*].

ongoing formation*

Continuing and often life-long learning and development, as a ministry is being exercised.

organisational development*

Supporting communities and structures as they make deliberate and planned changes to enable growth and in response to the changing context of mission.

pathways, opportunities, programmes and resources*

A wide range of formational experiences.

practice-based formation*

A programme of initial formation during which the primary context of formation, learning and development is the context in which ministry is being exercised and in which disciples are being formed. There is a crucial role for centres, spaces and the team of expert staff, as well as for learning churches or circuits, in supporting and enabling practice-based formation. This model is sometimes called ‘apprenticeship-style formation’.

space for formation, learning and development*

A permanent or temporary and virtual or physical location. A place of gathering whose environment sustains and supports formation, learning and development.

While a space may be shared with other organisations or institutions, we do not use ‘space’ to mean a quasi-autonomous organisation or an institution with a community of faith and links which are similar to but independent of those of a ‘centre’.

team of expert staff*

Lay and ordained practitioners with appropriate qualifications and specific and general skills in the fields of formation, learning, training, theological education, scholarship and organisational development, working together as colleagues across and within centres and across the nations and jurisdictions of the Connexion.

virtual learning environments*

Online communities designed to enable formation, learning and development.