

## Accessibility to the Conference: Report of the Working Party

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<b>Status of paper</b>	Final
<b>Action required</b>	Decision
<b>Resolutions</b>	<p>42/1. The Council receives the report.</p> <p>42/2. The Council commends the following recommendations to the Conference:</p> <p>Recommendation 1</p> <p>Recommendation 2</p> <p>Recommendation 3</p> <p>Recommendation 4</p> <p>Recommendation 5</p> <p>Recommendation 6</p> <p>Recommendation 7</p> <p>Recommendation 8</p> <p>Recommendation 9</p> <p>Recommendation 10</p> <p>Recommendation 11</p> <p>Recommendation 12</p> <p>Recommendation 13</p> <p>Recommendation 14</p> <p>Recommendation 15</p> <p>Recommendation 16</p>

## Proposed report to the Conference:

<b>Contact name and details</b>	John A Bell Chair of the Working Party johnabell@supanet.com
<b>Status of paper</b>	Final
<b>Action required</b>	Decisions
<b>Resolutions</b>	<p>N/1. The Conference receives the report.</p> <p>N/2. The Conference adopts recommendation 1, to ensure that the previous Working Party's resolutions adopted by the Conference of 2015 (as indicated in paragraphs 10 to 16 and 18) continue to be implemented.</p> <p>N/3. The Conference adopts recommendation 2, giving greater attention to enabling members of the Conference to identify office/role holders by publicising who they are at the Conference, as indicated in paragraphs 44 to 46.</p> <p>N/4. The Conference adopts recommendation 3, and directs that a 'Glossary of Terms used in the Methodist Church' be compiled as indicated in paragraph 47.</p> <p>N/5. The Conference adopts recommendation 4, to exercise stricter control of en-bloc and 200-series Notices of Motion, as indicated in paragraphs 48 to 50.</p> <p>N/6. The Conference adopts recommendation 5, enabling the Presidency to facilitate input and debates in the ways indicated in paragraph 52, and directs that the Conference Business Committee explore means of members contributing to debates, as indicated in paragraphs 53 and 54, to enable more people actively to participate in the business of the Conference.</p> <p>N/7. The Conference adopts recommendation 6, determining that the set-piece contributions from the incoming Presidency are as indicated in paragraph 55.</p> <p>N/8. The Conference adopts recommendation 7, to ensure that morning and evening prayers at the Conference be arranged as indicated in paragraphs 56 and 57.</p> <p>N/9. The Conference adopts recommendation 8, discontinuing the Wednesday Service of Holy Communion held within the Conference as from 2018, as indicated in paragraph 58, and, as a consequence, arranging an early morning Wednesday Communion as on the other days.</p> <p>N/10. The Conference adopts recommendation 9, encouraging that arrangements for continuous prayer within the Conference day be made as indicated in paragraphs 59 and 60.</p> <p>N/11. The Conference adopts recommendation 10, retaining the</p>

	<p>present pattern of Sunday Worship and Ordination Services until further notice, as indicated in paragraphs 61 to 64.</p> <p>N/12. The Conference adopts recommendation 11, and directs the Conference Planning Executive to observe the points indicated in paragraphs 65 to 68 in selecting the Conference venues and arranging the main hall layout, its facilities and provisions.</p> <p>N/13. The Conference adopts recommendation 12, thus ensuring that all the guidance in respect of providing for special needs, as indicated in paragraphs 69 to 71, is followed up and implemented as far as possible.</p> <p>N/14. The Conference adopts recommendation 13, and directs that the use of technology and electronic voting, as indicated in paragraphs 72 to 77, be further explored by the Conference Planning Executive and Conference Business Committee as appropriate, and implemented as far as possible.</p> <p>N/15. The Conference adopts recommendation 14, that the overall pattern of the Conference be scheduled as indicated in paragraphs 78 to 81, and directs the Conference Business Committee to decide the implementation date as either 2018 or 2019.</p> <p>N/16. The Conference adopts recommendation 15, that the participation of the fellowships of national origin be encouraged as indicated in paragraph 84.</p> <p>N/17. The Conference adopts recommendation 16, to reduce its size in principle as set out in paragraphs 83 and 85 to 89, and directs the Methodist Council to set up a further Working Party to bring detailed proposals to the Conference of 2018.</p>
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### Summary of content

Subject and aims	Following resolutions of the Conference of 2015, the Working Party was set up by the Methodist Council to bring further recommendations to the Conference of 2017 to enable the Conference to be more accessible to more people.
Main points	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improving accessibility to the Conference requires directional guidelines (for others to follow) as well as prescriptive solutions, and is as much incremental improvement as radical upheaval.</li> <li>2. There are tensions within the Working Party's terms of reference, and between people's expectations of the Conference.</li> <li>3. Accessibility is influenced by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members' knowledge of participants and procedures</li> <li>• How Conference business is transacted</li> <li>• Patterns of worship, prayer and Ordination Services</li> <li>• The Conference venue, accommodation and facilities</li> <li>• Provision for those with particular or special needs</li> <li>• Use of technology, including electronic voting</li> <li>• The overall pattern and length of the Conference week</li> <li>• The size and composition of the Conference</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

Background context and relevant documents	<p>Conference Agenda 2015 section 45 'Report of the [first] Working Party on Accessibility to the Conference': Notices of Motion 2015/108 and 2015/104.</p> <p>Methodist Council paper MC/15/115, stating the Working Party's terms of reference.</p> <p>Previous Reviews of the Conference reported in 1996, 2005 and 2006.</p> <p>Background papers/reports on the nature and purpose of the Conference include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Called to love and praise' (1999)</li> <li>• 'Episcopate and episcopacy' (2002)</li> <li>• 'The Nature of oversight' (2005)</li> </ul>
Consultations	<p>Members of the 2016 Conference, in a discussion session and by survey afterwards.</p> <p>Ecumenical partners (as listed in paragraph 35).</p> <p>Representatives of the Methodist Ghanaian, Nigerian and Zimbabwean Fellowships.</p> <p>Alison Earey and Phil Rees, professional advisors on learning and special needs.</p>

### Summary of impact

Financial	<p>Many recommendations have no cost implications and some will incur or save small amounts.</p> <p>Recommendation 13: the cost of electronic voting to be ascertained.</p> <p>Recommendation 14: the reduction in the length of the Conference will lead to savings.</p> <p>Recommendation 16: the reduction in the number of members of the Conference will lead to significant savings.</p>
Standing Orders	<p>None immediate.</p> <p>If adopted, recommendation 16 will require amendments to SOs 100 to 107 at some point.</p>
Wider connexional	<p>For districts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part of recommendation 1 (paragraphs 10 and 12) on Conference briefings and (paragraph 18) on disseminating Conference outcomes.</li> <li>• Recommendation 15 (paragraph 84) on enabling members of fellowships of national origin to be represented at the Conference.</li> </ul>

## A. Introduction and Process

1. The Conference of 2014 established a Working Party (WP) to review the accessibility of Conference, following the adoption of a Notice of Motion the previous year (2013, NoM 208), which brought its recommendations to the Conference of 2015. These were adopted and are summarised in section B as they constitute an essential part of the whole and ongoing picture. One recommendation indicated that further work might be undertaken which the WP felt was beyond its remit.
2. A further Notice of Motion (2015, NoM 108) was adopted in 2015, requesting that, in addition to this, greater consideration be given to certain dimensions of 'accessibility' which (in the view of the proposers) had not been fully addressed by the report.
3. The Methodist Council, adopting the resolutions of paper MC/15/115 at its meeting in October 2015, established a second Working Party<sup>1</sup> with the following much wider terms of reference, and which extended beyond accessibility as such, to report to the 2017 Conference.

'To consider further the issues of accessibility to the Conference with regard to issues of:

- i. Engagement and participation of all members regardless of experience, ability or confidence;
  - ii. Ways in which the overall length of the Representative Session of the Conference might be reduced without compromising its roles or responsibilities;
  - iii. Effective and appropriate use of resources.'
4. It was noted that although a related Notice of Motion (2015, NoM 104) was declined by the Conference (but not resisted by the presenters of the business) its thrust was effectively included in ii above.
  5. The new WP began its work in December 2015 and has met six times. The opportunity was taken to consult the members of the 2016 Conference on various aspects of its work, through a discussion session at the time and a survey conducted afterwards: see Appendix 1 for copy of the discussion paper and Appendix 2 for the survey form. 79 survey responses were received: given that a number – perhaps 30 or so – members of the Conference felt it inappropriate to contribute, the response rate was just less than 30%, and was widely representative of lay and ordained, ex-officio and elected representatives, and district representatives. An analysis of the survey feedback is available but, in view of its length and detail, is not appended: many of its conclusions inform and support the recommendations made in this report, as will become apparent.
  6. The WP records its gratitude to members of the Conference who shared in the discussions at the time and to those who submitted their views through the survey. The WP also met with the Secretary of the Conference to share its thinking as recommendations began to be formed. Acknowledgement of other specific contributions is given at appropriate points in the report.
  7. The WP recognises the value of previous reviews of the Conference. As the first WP acknowledged, we simply reinforce many of their recommendations, not all of which have yet been fully implemented. We now bring recommendations which are directional guidelines reflecting good practice as well as some more prescriptive solutions: also, many will offer incremental improvements rather than radical upheaval. Appendix 4 summarises which recommendations address each of the terms of reference. In all, we believe that the

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<sup>1</sup> The new Working Party comprised Mr John Bell (Chair), the Revds Ashley Cooper, Helen Cameron and Emmanuel Aggrey-Ogoe and Mrs Anna Malnutt. Ashley Cooper and John Bell served on the earlier WP.

recommendations in this and the 2015 report will form the basis for the evolution of the Conference for at least the next five years.

## **B. Summary of the 2015 report recommendations and progress made**

8. The report was printed in the 2015 Agenda as section 45, starting on page 409.
9. Recommendation 1 set up the new WP: this has been achieved in the terms of reference (specifically ii).
10. Recommendation 2 was about strengthening the role and purpose of pre-Conference district briefings: there is much evidence that this is being achieved, and the survey responses indicated how valued they are. The Assistant Secretary of the Conference underlines their importance at the annual autumn meetings with Synod Secretaries. It is noted that experienced Conference members can be invited to assist with the briefings and that skype may be a useful tool in some circumstances.
11. Recommendation 3 was about making Conference reports available as soon as possible: every effort is made to release reports on the website at the earliest opportunity (bearing in mind that many can be accessed in March/April as Methodist Council papers, albeit before they are approved) and the Conference Office uses email to update Conference members on progress.
12. Several responses in the survey commented on the volume of reading in the Conference Agenda, and the mandatory cover sheet with report summary was much commended (though Conference members should not regard it as a substitute for absorbing the full report<sup>2</sup>). Some districts suggest that their representatives share out the main reports to focus on those which interest them most and on which they may wish to speak in debate.
13. Recommendation 4 directed authors of reports to complete the cover sheet and summary: this is clearly highly valued, as evidenced in the survey, and has become mandatory.
14. Recommendation 5 suggested that first-time speakers always receive priority and should not have their speeches shortened on those occasions when time pressures dictate it in general: this was reinforced in the survey responses and simply requires the President and Vice-President to ensure that it is observed. It is noted that the Church of England General Synod<sup>3</sup> has a comparable 'first speech' arrangement.
15. Recommendations 6 to 10 were about variations from the standard plenary debate format of the Conference (selective planned debates, hearings, workshops, reference groups, parallel sessions and buzz groups) and were referred to the Conference Business Committee, in consultation with presenters of business, for active consideration as to when they might be used.
16. The survey responses indicated some misunderstanding as to the exact purpose of these alternative patterns in the Conference but, overall, that they offer the opportunity for significantly greater participation by more people in its proceedings and should be utilised on more occasions. Evidence from a learning perspective indicates that long, plenary, classroom-style debates, without direct input from most people, can become counter-productive, especially late in the day. Concentration can waver, interest can be lost and members may not

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<sup>2</sup> Attention is drawn to the comments made in the 2015 report, paragraph 6.4 on page 417, about the Conference members, under Charity Commission law, exercising their duties with diligence.

<sup>3</sup> Reference is made to ecumenical consultation in section E.

wholly understand what they are voting for: accessibility, enhanced through active engagement, informs decision-making. The contrary argument is that these variations disrupt the flow of the Conference and can be time-consuming. The WP strongly supports the more extensive use of varying styles of Conference engagement on the grounds that, on balance, accessibility outweighs any perceived disruption. Several people observed that the specific purpose of each variation must be made clear and that any feedback given (eg in workshops and buzz groups) is used and evidenced in later work – in other words, that views expressed are heeded<sup>4</sup>.

17. Recommendation 11 was about electronic voting: this is addressed in section K.
18. Recommendation 12 encouraged districts to ensure that the decisions and outcomes of Conference are disseminated to circuits and churches. Survey responses also commended this and evidence suggests that districts increasingly ensure that it happens, with the support of connexional briefing material.
19. The WP is profoundly aware that many of the above recommendations could not and cannot be enforced, as they rely on the good and thoughtful practice of others. We commend the better practice already achieved and underline, as our **Recommendation 1, that the earlier recommendations in paragraphs 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 18 continue to be implemented.**

### C. Tensions

20. The WP identified several tensions, implicit in its terms of reference and, as we reflected on our tasks, subject matter and the survey responses. The survey revealed widely disparate views amongst the 2016 Conference members on many aspects, which leads us to offer what may appear trite and but true statements such as ‘we can’t please all of the people all of the time’ and ‘we can’t have our cake and eat it’. It is a simple but serious conclusion that choices have to be made which cannot always fulfil the aspirations of all people and constituencies. The WP urges the Conference to recognise this and hold it in mind: balances must be struck and compromises agreed.
21. It can be argued that the Conference is more accessible if more people attend it. This conflicts with the third of the terms of reference about the efficient use of resources, which includes reducing the costs of the Conference as the whole church decreases in size. This is discussed in section M.
22. Survey responses indicated that experience at the Conference counts for a lot, and that individual contributions are more confident – indeed likely – in the second and third years: thus, the Conference becomes more accessible to you the more you attend it (and in general the WP supports the policy of electing representatives for two or three years). However, the Conference would be more accessible to more people if nobody attended more than once<sup>5</sup>.
23. In addressing the second of the terms of reference, the WP reflected on the Conference’s use of the time available for its business. There is perhaps an unstated expectation that the more important a subject, the more time will be devoted to it. This may apply when the matter is controversial, but there are some profoundly important matters which are not contentious and can be dispatched quickly: as it is, the Conference can spend an undue amount of time reaching

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<sup>4</sup> The WP believes that it has fulfilled this criterion, using buzz groups and the survey to elicit feedback.

<sup>5</sup> The WP considered whether we should recommend some form of constraining an individual’s number of consecutive attendances at the Conference, but concluded that this is best left to individual conscience and decisions of the districts and (for Conference-elected members) the Conference itself.

what is, effectively, a foregone conclusion. It is about 'doing justice' to the subject. Equally, there may be subjects where conclusions may never be reached, but decisions must be and the decisions are self-evident. Many survey responses regretted that so much time in the Conference is wasted listening to speaker after speaker repeating their support for a resolution which (it is confidently expected) will be adopted without demur. On some occasions, the Conference could confer less (though reducing participation and accessibility) and take decisions more quickly.

24. The WP suggests that the Conference could make better use of its time by imposing stricter controls on certain aspects of its business. We believe that the 200-series of Notices of Motion (ie on matters unrelated to the business of the Conference as printed in the Agenda) is abused by some individuals and interest groups seeking to promote their causes when, for the most part, the Memorials process could and should be used. We acknowledge that some new, urgent and important matters are brought to the attention of the Conference in this way, but not all. Further, the WP believes that more non-controversial items of business could be dealt with by the 'en bloc' arrangement. We fear that such attempts to improve the use of time may be construed as stifling debate or silencing dissent and perceived as an affront to accessibility.
25. It has been observed before that Conference members, in their enthusiasm to be pro-active, create business for the Conference and work for the Connexional Team and others by approving initiatives, then later, having retreated to their circuits and churches, wonder why assessments continue to increase. The WP submits that the Conference would do well to scrutinise more rigorously proposals that come before it and reflect on the local financial consequences of decisions taken.
26. Cost constraints, the size of, facilities at and nature of potential venues and the availability of suitable and convenient accommodation have, in recent years, narrowed the choices of the Conference location to a handful of cities. This, in itself, reduces the accessibility to the Conference (including Ordination Services and the provision of venues for those) of the whole Methodist people to those who happen to live nearby. For Conference members, the survey response overwhelmingly indicated the stresses and strains experienced in 2016 of holding the Conference in Westminster Central Hall (WCH) and accommodation being provided in Greenwich: on the one hand, WCH is a good Conference venue (despite the stairs) and moreover a Methodist Church (which counts highly in some minds), but accommodation in London which is suitable, affordable and accessible is more or less impossible. Adequate and affordable venues will therefore tend to be in and around provincial cities, such as the NEC Hilton, near Birmingham, and university campuses (thus excluding Methodist churches), which are self-contained and convenient but tend to be isolated from the city centres with their readier access to alternative dining and other facilities. Moreover, there is a view that city centre venues facilitate publicity and witness by 'putting the Methodist Church on the map'.
27. The WP reiterates the comments made in the first paragraph in this section: that in mounting the annual Methodist Conference, choices are to be made, compromises accepted and balances struck both in terms of individual and collective aspirations and budgetary constraints.

#### **D. Historical patterns of the Conference**

28. The WP realised, not least from its personal reminiscences, that the whole pattern of the Conference has significantly changed through a process of gradual evolution over several decades. It therefore seemed helpful to remind the Conference of 2017 how things used to be, though this section simply highlights certain examples and is not intended as an exhaustive list. What may be taken for granted now, and indeed regarded as part of the fixtures, is often of relatively recent origin.

29. Apart from a few senior officers of the Conference, there was a long tradition of Conference members staying with local (and in some places, not so local) Methodist people, usually on a bed, breakfast and evening meal basis<sup>6</sup>. This gradually gave way, for various reasons, to using hotel or hostel accommodation. There is an obvious and enormous cost impact of this transition.
30. Large venues, invariably Methodist Churches or city halls, were available in many English cities (we do mean English until 1989 – the Conference met in Cardiff in 1990, Llandudno in 2003 and Edinburgh in 2006) which could accommodate 900 people until 1941 and 576 until 1997<sup>7</sup>, albeit without the relative comfort of tables and chairs. Crucially, members did not need hotel accommodation and big cities embraced plenty of Methodist homes.
31. Conference members who were preachers generally preached twice on the Sunday somewhere near their lodgings: other lay members could attend worship with their hosts. There was no Conference Sunday worship as we now have it.
32. The act of Reception into Full Connexion was often held on Tuesday afternoon, with Ordination Services then held on Tuesday evening at 7 pm: the large city locations offered plenty of capacious Methodist churches for this purpose and were relatively close by. The use of the churches and cathedrals of other denominations was driven in large part by the demise of the large city Methodist churches, often 'Central Halls'.
33. The WP's recollections and impressions are that, until about (say) 1990, Conferences were managed in a more formal one-size-fits-all pattern and could be even more daunting experiences than those of recent times. Debates were generally adversarial and no allowance was made for first-timers. The sheer numbers present inhibited participation. Moreover, we believe that provision for special needs is of relatively recent origin.
34. The purpose of the Conference may not have fundamentally changed, but its pattern and practical arrangements have. Crucially, expectations of its nature and culture have moved on too, which is partly why this work is being undertaken.

#### **E. Ecumenical input**

35. The WP arranged contact with the Church of England, the Church in Wales, the Church of Scotland and the United Reformed Church to ascertain whether the Methodist Church might learn from experiences of their comparable governance gatherings. We record our gratitude to the Revd Neil Stubbens who acted as intermediary on our behalf, to the representatives of those Churches who kindly responded and to the Revd John Proctor, General Secretary of the URC, who met with the WP's Chair to share information on the URC's own review of its General Assembly being undertaken. Input from these sources is included in the appropriate sections and paragraphs of the report.

#### **F. Reflections on the nature, purposes and future of the Conference**

36. Survey responses elicited a considerable degree of satisfaction with the Conference, whilst highlighting some of its shortcomings, and recognising the tensions enumerated in section C. The WP takes the view therefore that it is wise to retain what is good and works well, and not to propose change for its own sake. That is not to be complacent.

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<sup>6</sup> The WP is aware that a few members still make their own arrangements for personal reasons.

<sup>7</sup> See section M on the subject of the size of the Conference.

37. The WP reminds the Conference of other reports which have considered the role of the Conference within the overall governance of the Church. These include 'Called to Love and Praise' (1999), 'Episcopate and Episcopacy' (2002) and 'The Nature of Oversight' (2005), as well as those which specifically reviewed the Conference itself (1996, 2005 and 2006). The Conference has a firmly established role which it, and it alone, is obliged to fulfil in a transparent, orderly and cost-effective fashion. Again, the survey responses acknowledged that the Conference has business to be transacted in ways which may not lend themselves to full and joyous participation at all times. Indeed, sometimes it is quite arcane.
38. The WP highlights that we are a Conference, not a Synod or an Assembly, and that therefore we confer together. We draw the attention of the Conference to the introductory paragraphs of the booklet 'A Guide to the Methodist Conference' (page 2), not least the phrases 'decisions are made by seeking the will of God through conferring together' and 'our worship and our conferring are both means of grace'.
39. Further, the WP reminds members of the Conference that they are representatives and not delegates as is the case in some other churches. In a profound sense that enhances their accessibility to the Conference as they speak and vote on their own account, not as puppets of a parent or sponsoring constituency.
40. The culture of an organisation has been defined as 'the way we do things round here'. Such is the culture of the Conference and it has evolved, sometimes imperceptibly and as expectations changed, its ways of working and behaving. Formal reviews have also delivered step-changes from time to time, not least in reducing its size.
41. Members of the Conference participate in it in differing ways. It is helpful to seek to understand participation as more to do with receptivity than with contributing. Thus to participate fully in the Conference one does not necessarily have to speak in a debate, as some survey responses affirmed, but one does need to be receptive to the content of the debate and the mood of the Conference as it engages in the debate. Participation may be more about what we take into our hearts and minds by listening rather than what words we utter from the tribune. We are all able to allow the contribution of someone else to influence, change or enrich our own view or understanding. Participation in a music concert does not depend on going up onto the concert platform itself – or playing an instrument. Participating fully means responding to what is going on so as to be caught up in the action, to become part of something bigger in a way which leads to self-forgetfulness and which leads to the discovery of meaning and truth. We must therefore be alert to the fact that participation happens at many levels and in all kinds of ways and within it we can become part of something much larger than ourselves, our views and our world – and become part of a larger whole.
42. Some survey responses commented on the frequency of the Conference and whether it is possible to consider either (1) a two-yearly Conference or (2) alternate years of a main Conference and a smaller one to deal with matters requiring annual events such as ministerial ordinations. The WP is advised that annual Conferences may not be strictly required, but responsiveness would suffer if too much business could only be covered every two years<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, accessibility would be compromised too. The WP therefore suggests that annual Conferences be retained for the foreseeable future.

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<sup>8</sup> One survey response suggested that two-yearly Conferences would have the benefit of creating less work for the Connexional Team and thereby save money. See paragraph 25 for a similar observation.

43. As to patterns in the nearer future, these are considered in following sections, bearing in mind contractual commitments already made for 2018 and 2019.

#### **G. Transacting Conference business**

44. The survey responses offered many suggestions as to how accessibility to the Conference might be facilitated for more members. Some affirmed those already recommended in the 2015 report and summarised in Recommendation 1 (see section B above) and others corroborated the WP's own views. Some have cost and effort implications and some need further research. Many expressed their general satisfaction with the overall pattern, timing and flow of the Conference from Monday to Thursday.

45. The WP recommends that greater attention be given to ensuring that Conference members know who people are, ie anyone who 'stands or sits at the front' and/or presents any item of business, including those who occupy the platform, introduce guests at the Opening, the chaplains, key officers and Committee representatives and the letter-writer. It must not be forgotten that a first-time member of Conference simply may not know who many people are and can feel excluded by others who seem to know it all. The WP hesitates to be too prescriptive but suggests that (1) a brief introduction to key people at the outset (say, when the Conference membership is confirmed) and (2) photographs with role title, projected on the screen, are obvious methods so long as they could be achieved easily.

46. It is further recommended that, in addition to the name of the presenter of the business on the cover sheet at the head of each report, a very brief (maximum 20 word) statement is made about that person, not unlike the short statements made when nominating people for committees et., saying why s/he presents the business.

#### **Recommendation 2**

**It is recommended that greater attention is given to enabling members of the Conference to identify office/role holders by publicising who they are at the Conference, as indicated in paragraphs 44 to 46.**

47. All organisations use jargon, acronyms and shorthand references and the Methodist Church is no exception. However, not everyone is familiar with them. It is recommended that, in addition to what is already provided in the booklet 'A Guide to the Methodist Conference', a more comprehensive 'Glossary of Terms used in the Methodist Church' is compiled, to be made available in printed form and on the Church website. The WP recommends that a volunteer<sup>9</sup> is sought to undertake the initial compilation and to undertake to update it.

#### **Recommendation 3**

**It is recommended that a 'Glossary of Terms used in the Methodist Church' be compiled as indicated in paragraph 47.**

48. Mindful of the comments in paragraph 24, the WP recommends that the Conference Business Committee seeks to include a greater number of non-controversial items of business in the en-bloc category and that stricter control is exerted of the facility to invoke their removal from en-bloc unless critical changes to resolutions are proposed. Putting and keeping such items in en-bloc releases the precious time of the Conference to be devoted to the most important issues.

49. Further, the WP recommends that the Conference exercises stricter control of the 200-series Notices of Motion (ie those unrelated to the business of the Agenda) so that they are used only

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<sup>9</sup> Perhaps mischievously, the WP thought this a suitable project for a newly retired minister lost for activity!

when the subject or need is unforeseen and exceptional. We recommend (1) that this message is conveyed clearly in the booklet 'A Guide to the Methodist Conference', (2) that district briefings can assist by advising that subjects known about in advance must be brought via the Memorials process, if at all, (3) that, apart from matters that are unexpected, important and urgent which arise in the week leading up to the Conference, all 200-series Notices of Motion be advised to the Conference Office by the Friday of the week preceding the beginning of the Conference, for consideration by the Conference Business Committee and (4) that the last-minute 200-series Notices of Motion be immediately referred to the Business Committee for a decision on whether the criteria, as in (3), are met. The WP is not persuaded that members of the Conference need personal contact with their potential supporters when they arrive – there is ample opportunity to enlist them by email in advance – and provision can be made to gather signatures formally at the Conference.

50. The WP notes the practice of the Church of England General Synod in dealing with comparable business, known as Private Members Motions (PMM): the PMM is posted at the Synod and must gather a minimum of 100 signatures (from the 468 members) before the Business Committee will consider it, and even if it is accepted, it may be deferred to a subsequent General Synod. We are not proposing such a drastic move, but recommend that the Conference Business Committee does consider increasing the number of signatures required if the suggestions in the previous paragraph prove ineffective.
51. The WP makes these recommendations, not to stifle essential debate, but to ensure that the time of the Conference is well used for the benefit of the majority, and bearing in mind that one of its terms of reference is to reduce the length of the Representative Session. We are not denying the importance of subjects on which some people feel very deeply, but simply pointing to more cost- and time-effective means of recognising and dealing with them.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**It is recommended that stricter control of en-bloc and 200-series Notices of Motion is exercised, as indicated in paragraphs 48 to 50.**

52. Following the observations made in paragraphs 14 and 23 and reading the survey responses, the WP recommends that the President and Vice-President exercise stricter control of speakers in debates so that the same points are not made repeatedly, that speakers refrain from simply extolling the virtues of reports which have been read, that anyone who has not yet spoken at all be given priority and that compulsive speakers be discouraged from airing their views on too many topics. This recommendation calls for the reasonable restraint of Conference members who contribute in many debates, so that others may be heard. A suggestion made in several survey responses that Conference members be allocated a maximum number of speaking slots has a certain attraction but the WP stops short of recommending it.
53. Reference was made in paragraph 15 to the use of planned debates. The WP intends this facility to be used in major debates on controversial subjects to ensure that all points of view are equally heard. It is also noted that it is required in most debates in the Church of England General Synod (with its 468 members as opposed to our 306) to complete a 'request to speak' slip with a summary of the main points to be made: this facilitates an even debate and not all are called to speak. Whilst the WP is not recommending this as a general rule, it is offered as a useful approach in certain circumstances which the Conference Business Committee should consider.
54. Further, there were several related ideas expressed in the survey responses about enabling the view of Conference members to be heard without the need to speak from the front. These included a 'one or two sentence comment from the floor' (using a roving microphone, as the Church of Scotland does in its General Assembly) and a 'drop-box for comments' which can be

summarised from the front. If a drop-box uses electronic means, its access must be confined to Conference members only. The WP recommends that the implementation means of these more informal innovations be considered by the Conference Business Committee.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**It is recommended that the President and Vice-President enable input and debates in ways indicated in paragraph 52 and that means of contributing to debates, as indicated in paragraphs 53 and 54, be explored by the Conference Business Committee to enable more people actively to participate in the business of the Conference.**

55. The WP makes a bold statement that it is a gift and a privilege to hold the offices of the President and Vice-President and that the incumbents are the servants of the Conference: neither should become a burden on the other. The WP observes that the formal contributions the incoming President and Vice-President wish to offer varies considerably and some have been content to give fewer formal inputs than others. Accordingly, we recommend that the President and Vice-President should offer one set-piece speech or address or sermon at the Conference (excluding Ordination Services) and that they be invited to choose which to fulfil. It is noted that recommendations in section H include discontinuing the Wednesday Conference Holy Communion service, so that the President and Vice-President would then have to decide who gives an address during the Opening of the Representative Session and who preaches on the Sunday morning. Further, notwithstanding the value of such items at the time, the WP suggests that the President and Vice-President do not need to introduce their own items of business during the week: indeed, they have a whole year to fulfil their agendas and aspirations (which, if they wish, can be set out in their address or sermon) wherever they visit and therefore they do not need to rely on such provision during the Conference.

#### **Recommendation 6**

**It is recommended that the set-piece contributions from the incoming Presidency are determined as indicated in paragraph 55.**

#### **H. Conference Worship and Prayer and Ordination Services**

56. The survey elicited many responses about patterns of worship and prayer during the Conference and, having digested them thoroughly, the WP brings the recommendations outlined below. What is striking above all else, if not surprising, is the extent to which members appreciate that the whole event, and each day, is conducted within an envelope of worship and prayer.

57. Morning and evening prayers are much valued, but it is suggested that the guidance given to those who prepare them must be strictly observed, not least in terms of time<sup>10</sup>. Responses indicated that repetition in prayers is not always helpful and that evening prayers can be very short indeed. The WP also suggests that prayers should always be led by people who are already present at the Conference, rather than have to travel for that sole purpose and incur expenses.

#### **Recommendation 7**

**It is recommended that morning and evening prayers at the Conference be arranged as indicated as in paragraphs 56 and 57.**

58. The WP observes that a daily service of Holy Communion is provided (Monday to Thursday<sup>11</sup>) and that anyone who wishes is welcome to attend. It is suggested that this continues. However,

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<sup>10</sup> The WP is aware that this direction is always given but unfortunately not always heeded.

<sup>11</sup> It will be introduced on Wednesday morning if the recommendation to discontinue the Wednesday Conference Service of Holy Communion is adopted.

given this daily provision and the opportunity to share in Conference Worship and Ordination Services, including Holy Communion, on Sunday, the WP recommends that the mid-week Holy Communion Service, usually held on the Wednesday, be discontinued as from 2018. This will have the added benefit of saving a session of time for business.

#### **Recommendation 8**

**It is recommended that the Wednesday Service of Holy Communion held within the Conference be discontinued as from 2018, as indicated in paragraph 58, and that, as a consequence, an early morning Wednesday Communion be arranged as on the other days.**

59. Some survey responses suggested that a facility for continuous prayer during the Conference, such as provided at the Church of England General Synod, might be considered helpful. The WP warmed to this idea and suggests that it might be implemented along the following lines: that the chaplaincy team take responsibility for it, finding volunteers to assist and creating a rota of prayer support during the hours of the Conference sessions.

60. Further, the WP encourages the current practice of the President and Vice-President to pause between major items of business within a session for a moment of prayer or silence, so that the Conference can change its mood in a dignified way as it confers on contrasting topics.

#### **Recommendation 9**

**It is recommended that arrangements for continuous prayer within the Conference day be encouraged and made as indicated in paragraphs 59 and 60.**

61. The survey specifically asked about the use of the weekend time and its patterns of worship and the WP is immensely grateful for a rich spectrum of responses. Some people were prepared for radical change and others were more than happy with the present arrangements.

62. The overriding view was that the Sunday pattern works well, especially the morning worship and Reception into Full Connexion. Opinion was divided between continuing several Ordination Services (enabling more and local people to attend) and holding a single Service, or indeed one for presbyters and one for deacons. Many expressed a preference that Ordination Services should always be held in churches (or cathedrals) and some specifically prefer Methodist churches. Long travel times to Ordination Services were regretted, not least when public transport services suffer weekend disruption; many commented that the Sunday is a special day, must not be rushed and generally works well as it is. There were a few responses strongly against using Sunday for general business (as, for example, the Church of England General Synod does).

63. The WP noted the Notice of Motion (2012, NoM 205) brought to the Conference at Plymouth in 2012, but defeated by 143 votes to 129 (a narrow margin in Conference votes), recommending that consideration should be given to holding regional Ordination Services shortly after the Conference. Such a move would reduce the length of the Conference itself by gaining the whole of Sunday after lunch, and, but for the reasoning below, the WP considered recommending that this option (favoured by some in the survey response) be revisited, as a factor significantly impacting numbers ii and iii of its terms of reference.

64. However, the WP is aware of significant related work now underway and therefore our recommendation is that it is wise to retain the present pattern of Ordination Services (and therefore the shape of Conference Sunday) until its direction is known. The present pattern does of course depend on the number of ordinands and the WP observes that if, in the meantime, it becomes evident that a single presbyteral Ordination Service is sufficient, it would be appropriate to hold it on Conference Sunday at or close to the Conference venue.

## **Recommendation 10**

**It is recommended that the present pattern of Sunday Worship and Ordination Services be retained until further notice, as indicated in paragraphs 61 to 64.**

### **I. Conference venue and accommodation**

65. Survey responses were hugely influenced by the daily commute from Greenwich to Westminster at the 2016 Conference. Whilst the WP recognises that this was the most affordable deal available, given that WCH was to be Conference venue, it is plain, from an accessibility point of view that it caused very considerable difficulties for many people – even, as one member put it, ‘for someone who thought herself to be fairly fit and resilient’. In the light of this experience, the WP therefore makes some (albeit obvious) recommendations for the future which will be fulfilled at the NEC Hilton Birmingham in 2017 and at the Nottingham University campus in 2018.
66. The overwhelming benefits of the Conference meeting at a conference centre or university campus venue are obvious, ie that the Conference hall with auxiliary facilities and the accommodation and dining are close at hand, thereby diminishing time spent moving between them to a minimum, and also lengthening the hours available for the working day. Conference members do not begin the working day already feeling weary and can enjoy their evenings without a tiresome commute. Many survey responses expressed a preference for ‘an early start’ (say 09.00 hrs) but a strict 18.30 hrs finish each day.
67. As to the Conference hall itself, survey responses exposed the shortcomings of the Westminster Central Hall layout in 2016 in which rows were too close together and there were dead-end rows making it difficult to navigate in and out from seats in the middle or at dead-ends, coupled with concerns about the safety risk should an evacuation have been required. Attention was also drawn to the lack of handrails to facilitate access to the tribunes on the platform. These may seem details, but they are about limiting accessibility which inhibited contributions from the floor. The WP makes the self-evident recommendation that such problems must be overcome in setting out the Conference hall.
68. In the light of general expectations and to achieve some of the recommendations in paragraph 70, the WP recommends that the availability of high quality wi-fi at the Conference venue is now an imperative.

## **Recommendation 11**

**It is recommended that the Conference Planning Executive observe the points indicated in paragraphs 65 to 68 in selecting the Conference venues and arranging the main hall layout, its facilities and provisions.**

### **J. Facilitating access to the Conference**

69. For some years, arrangements have been made at the Conference to accommodate the needs of members with special needs, so long as these are notified in advance. These include provisions to facilitate participation in Conference sessions and assistance related to mobility, transport and accommodation. The WP affirms that these must continue as required and that consideration should also be given to making such provisions for visitors during the weekend even if not required for any Conference members.
70. The WP is grateful for the professional advice and guidance provided by Alison Earey<sup>12</sup> and Phil Rees on several matters related to ways of learning<sup>13</sup> and coping with hearing and sight

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<sup>12</sup> Alison Earey is a Dyslexia Specialist Support and Literacy Tutor, based in Birmingham, and Phil Rees acts as a lip-speaker at Conference.

impairment, dyslexia and other conditions. Their many detailed suggestions on how to offer assistance, along with ideas in the survey responses, have been communicated to those responsible for Conference arrangements and the preparation of materials: it is expected that some will be implemented in 2017. The provisions include the following:

- i. Touch-typing facility, to supplement lip-speaking
- ii. Subtitles on screen (will also help those with any difficulties hearing or following strong accents)
- iii. Speakers to face the audience and camera (not address the platform table, which is often behind) and speak into the microphone
- iv. Hearing loop systems in all rooms used in Conference sessions, eg for break-out groups, as well as in the main hall
- v. Software (easily and freely acquired for any computer) to enable anyone to change the font, font size, background, colours etc of all written materials sent electronically: the Sans Serif font is acknowledged as clear and good, but may not be everyone's preference
- vi. Communicate all daily written materials (Order Papers, Notice of Motion papers, Daily Records) electronically as soon as they are available, even if it is late evening – this will enable anyone to access them before the start of each working day and adapt them to their preference
- vii. Audio facilities, to supplement written materials, including software to convert words to audio
- viii. Use plain and suitably coloured background for all overhead/powerpoint images, and issue a standard to all who prepare slides: don't clutter slides
- ix. Print all written material, and not just that sourced by the Conference Office, in a suitable font on coloured paper (cream is recommended)
- x. Offer a large print edition of the Agenda, given adequate notice.

71. The WP acknowledges that many people with such conditions already have ways of coping, including facilities on laptops etc, and further recommends that, as such facilities and aids evolve, the Conference Office, the Conference Arrangements Team and the Events Co-ordinator ensure that they are publicised.

#### **Recommendation 12**

**It is recommended that all the guidance in respect of providing for special needs, as indicated in paragraphs 69 to 71 is followed up and implemented as far as possible.**

#### **K. Greater use of technology and electronic communications**

72. The earlier WP report (2015 Agenda section 6.2 on page 415) reminded the Conference that a previous review had suggested the use of on-line forums for Conference members to discuss items of business with each other. This was implemented in 2007 but abandoned by 2010 through lack of use. By 2015, the WP suggested that this idea be revisited but the Methodist Council declined to support it on the grounds that the drawbacks outweighed the imagined benefits. The main drawback was the potential prohibitive workload which might be imposed on many authors of reports for whom the run-up to the Conference is already extremely pressured.

73. This WP now recommends that further consideration be given to this idea, with the specific condition that it is available only to Conference members to share their thoughts and therefore would be in a restricted zone of the Conference website accessed via the authorised login. An increasing number of Conference members would find this medium helpful prior to the

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<sup>13</sup> The importance of the earliest possible availability of Conference papers has already been covered in paragraph N and value of breaking up the plenary sessions in paragraph N.

Conference and whilst authors of reports would be permitted to contribute, there would be no expectation or requirement that they should.

74. Various suggestions and recommendations have already been made which involve the greater use of technology at the Conference. The WP notes the survey responses which requested (1) projecting on screen the melody line of a hymn/song tune which may not be well-known and (2) that the background music prior to the Opening of the Representative Session and Sunday worship be moderated in appropriate preparation for the occasion.
75. As was mentioned in paragraph 17, the earlier WP also considered the use of electronic voting for resolutions in debates (but not for the elections of the Presidency etc) and referred it to the Conference Planning Executive and Business Committee. It is noted that electronic voting is used at the Church of England General Synod and the Church of Scotland General Assembly and was trialled for a day at the 2011 Conference at Southport. Several responses in the survey suggested that it would be beneficial and therefore this WP brings it back for further consideration.
76. To recap, the advantages are (1) that close-call votes are more easily, reliably and quickly counted, (2) that members can express their honest view anonymously and without pressure, (3) that members are not influenced by the decisions of those they perceive as opinion-shapers, (4) that it guarantees a truly secret ballot on vital issues and (5) that it enables members on the platform, who often do not vote, to do so without fear of influencing others. Given that electronic voting only needs to be used when a vote may be recorded, controversial or close, thereby enabling the customary show of hands to be sufficient in many cases, the perceived disadvantage that it is time wasting is overcome: that said, there may be many occasions when counted (electronic) votes may reveal more dissent than is normally apparent. The only significant disadvantage is the cost associated with providing the electronic voting facility throughout the period of the Conference and the WP recommends that the Conference Planning Executive (in consultation with the Business Committee) ascertains the costs of different options: indeed, it may be that some Conference centres will offer the facility as part of a package.
77. The WP favours the implementation of electronic voting as soon as an affordable annual package can be acquired, and adds that such packages may be available for use at other Methodist gatherings during a year (such as the Methodist Council and 3-Generate).

### **Recommendation 13**

**It is recommended that the use of technology and electronic voting, as indicated in paragraphs 72 to 77, be further explored by the Conference Planning Executive and Conference Business Committee, and implemented as far as possible.**

#### **L. Pattern of the Conference 2018 onwards**

78. As a result of all of the recommendations made, the WP believes that the following pattern of the Conference can be implemented as from 2018<sup>14</sup> or 2019, depending on the contractual arrangements already committed and/or subject to amendment or negotiation. A shorter overall period will cost less and enable many people to arrive at home a day earlier (ie Wednesday evening) whilst still travelling to the Conference on a Friday evening or Saturday morning, not least lay working people whose personal holidays are precious. Arrangements for Wednesday night accommodation will be made for those who are unable to travel home: all Conference members will be offered Friday night accommodation (as at present), but may decline it if they wish.

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<sup>14</sup> It is noted that the expected volume of business in 2018, including some major reports may preclude shortening the overall length until 2019.

79. For reasons given in paragraph 64, at this stage the WP is not recommending any changes in the Sunday pattern of morning worship, Reception into Full Connexion and Ordination services: it is recommended that when the outcome of wider considerations is known, this is further reviewed.

80. Responses from the survey indicated an overwhelming satisfaction with the pattern of working days, though some suggested that breaks could be shortened. The WP suggests that, in the pattern set out below, the Conference Business Committee may wish to consider a slightly later morning start (say 09.15 hrs) or earlier evening finish (18.30 hrs) with slightly shorter breaks<sup>15</sup>.

- Saturday 10.30 hrs Conference Representative Session begins with Opening and one address. Formal business will commence after a sufficiently long lunch break: adjourn at 19.00 hrs.
- Sunday pattern as at present and Morning Worship will include the other address.
- Monday and Tuesday 09.00 hrs (bearing in mind members are on site) until 19.00 hrs, with breaks as at present: all business sessions.
- Wednesday 09.00 hrs until 17.00 hrs, with breaks as at present: all business sessions.
- The Conference Office and Business Committee will undertake the detailed planning to meet this pattern, including provision for timing deadlines for Notices of Motion and election ballots.

81. The WP indicates that the above pattern, taking into account other recommendations (not least discontinuing the Wednesday Holy Communion Service) is a package, to be adopted as a whole or not at all. As was observed by several survey respondents, if the Conference is to fulfil its duties and tasks, any further shortening would result in business being rushed, ill-done or undone (and perhaps passed to the Methodist Council) and therefore not achieve in full the second of the terms of reference.

82. The WP also noted that its remit did not extend to the events which precede the Representative Session, though some survey responses did suggest there is opportunity for review of those too.

#### **Recommendation 14**

**It is recommended that the overall pattern of the Conference be scheduled as indicated in paragraphs 78 to 81, and directs the Conference Business Committee to determine the implementation date as either 2018 or 2019.**

#### **M. The size and composition of the Conference**

83. In considering the third of its terms of reference, and in the light of budgetary pressures on connexional activities generally, the WP thought it appropriate to look into the size and composition of the Conference. We noted that the required 5-yearly review<sup>16</sup> had been carried out in 2013 and the decision taken not to make changes. Also, we have acknowledged that reducing the size of the Conference in itself denies access to those excluded, but realistically it must not become disproportionate to the size of the whole Church – not least because the cost of the Conference is funded by fewer and fewer Church members. Further, a smaller Conference becomes more accessible to those who do attend and will encourage greater conferring.

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<sup>15</sup> Though the WP acknowledges that shorter breaks may impact the work of the officers of the Conference and the Conference Record Office in progressing work behind the scenes which facilitates the smooth running of the Conference.

<sup>16</sup> As per SO 100(2).

84. In reflecting on the representation of the wider Methodist communities, the WP is grateful for the responses received from the Ghanaian Fellowship, the Nigerian Fellowship and the Zimbabwean Fellowship, courtesy of contacts made through the Revd Emmanuel Aggrey-Ogoe, to ascertain their views on their relationship with the Conference. These revealed evidence of a lack of knowledge and understanding of the Conference or how to be elected to attend it. The WP recommends that steps are taken by districts to address these issues and that these fellowships (many of whose members are already local Methodist Church members) are encouraged to offer nominations to the Conference through normal district channels.
85. Survey responses to the question of reducing the size of the Conference were mixed – 39 in favour, 32 against and 8 unsure. Perceived advantages (such as greater choice of venues) and disadvantages (such as narrowing representation and fear of greater concentration of power), in addition to those mentioned above, were well rehearsed. An over-riding concern was that, if the Conference size is reduced, it should be proportionate between ex-officios and elected representatives.
86. Appendix 3 summarises the historic evolution of the size of the Conference in relation to Church membership. Given the original intention of the ratio of Conference membership to Church membership, it is evident that a reduction is again overdue.
87. The statistics indicate that the Conference should be reduced to around 220 members, though this may be regarded as too drastic a cut<sup>17</sup>, and therefore the WP recommends that a phased reduction first to 250 in (say) 2020 and later (say in 2023) to 220. This will take into account members who are elected for three years and contractual commitments already made before 2020.
88. This report does not set out detailed proposals, as the WP suggests that a decision of principle should first be made. If the 2017 Conference adopts the principle of reducing its size, a further WP should be established (which may include members of this one) to bring specific recommendations to the 2018 Conference which would enable the 2020 deadline to be met.
89. However, not least in the light of the survey responses, a few observations on the scope for reductions are made to help inform the immediate decision:
- Bodies such as the Conference always have a fixed element of membership – the roles which enable it to function at all: reductions are less easily achieved in this group than in elected representatives.
  - The WP strongly supports the survey's indication that reductions should fall proportionately on ex-officio members and elected representatives.
  - The WP also supports the survey's indication that district representation should be proportional to Church membership, with a minimum of two per district.
  - Many survey responses supported a major cut in the number or the total removal of Conference-elected representatives, indicating that the continuity they allegedly bring can be equally achieved by three-year elections of district representatives.
  - The diversity objectives (including racial justice and youth) can equally be achieved through district representation<sup>18</sup>. That said, other constituencies made a case for their distinctive representation, eg children's work, ministerial formation.

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<sup>17</sup> The WP observes that, in previous reviews of its size, the Conference has consistently voted to retain more members than were proposed in order to preserve certain vested interests.

<sup>18</sup> This is amply provided for in SO 417(2). Comments were made in the survey to the effect that districts cannot be relied on to achieve such representation: they should.

- More survey responses favoured all District Chairs attending the Conference than not, and many felt the Synod Secretaries should be there too (by election), but concerns were expressed about how many places these take up. In a smaller Conference, it would be a disproportionate number. Given that the number of districts is decreasing very slowly, suggestions that Chairs are allocated to attend on a regional basis (and take turns) were made.

#### **Recommendation 15**

**It is recommended that the participation of the fellowships of national origin be encouraged as indicated in paragraph 84.**

#### **Recommendation 16**

**It is recommended that the Conference takes the decision in principle to reduce its size, as set out in paragraphs 83 and 85 to 89, and that a further Working Party is established to bring detailed proposals to the Conference of 2018 if this is adopted.**

### **\*\*\*RESOLUTIONS**

**N/1. The Conference receives the report.**

**N/2. The Conference adopts recommendation 1, to ensure that the previous Working Party's resolutions adopted by the Conference of 2015 (as indicated in paragraphs 10 to 16 and 18) continue to be implemented.**

**N/3. The Conference adopts recommendation 2, giving greater attention to enabling members of the Conference to identify office/role holders by publicising who they are at the Conference, as indicated in paragraphs 44 to 46.**

**N/4. The Conference adopts recommendation 3, and directs that a 'Glossary of Terms used in the Methodist Church' be compiled as indicated in paragraph 47.**

**N/5. The Conference adopts recommendation 4, to exercise stricter control of en-bloc and 200-series Notices of Motion, as indicated in paragraphs 48 to 50.**

**N/6. The Conference adopts recommendation 5, enabling the Presidency to facilitate input and debates in the ways indicated in paragraph 52, and directs that the Conference Business Committee explore means of members contributing to debates, as indicated in paragraphs 53 and 54, to enable more people actively to participate in the business of the Conference.**

**N/7. The Conference adopts recommendation 6, determining that the set-piece contributions from the incoming Presidency are as indicated in paragraph 55.**

**N/8. The Conference adopts recommendation 7, to ensure that morning and evening prayers at the Conference be arranged as indicated in paragraphs 56 and 57.**

**N/9. The Conference adopts recommendation 8, discontinuing the Wednesday Service of Holy Communion held within the Conference as from 2018, as indicated in paragraph 58, and, as a consequence, arranging an early morning Wednesday Communion as on the other days.**

**N/10. The Conference adopts recommendation 9, encouraging that arrangements for continuous prayer within the Conference day be made as indicated in paragraphs 59 and 60.**

**N/11. The Conference adopts recommendation 10, retaining the present pattern of Sunday Worship and Ordination Services until further notice, as indicated in paragraphs 61 to 64.**

**N/12. The Conference adopts recommendation 11, and directs the Conference Planning Executive to observe the points indicated in paragraphs 65 to 68 in selecting the Conference venues and arranging the main hall layout, its facilities and provisions.**

**N/13. The Conference adopts recommendation 12, thus ensuring that all the guidance in respect of providing for special needs, as indicated in paragraphs 69 to 71, is followed up and implemented as far as possible.**

**N/14. The Conference adopts recommendation 13, and directs that the use of technology and electronic voting, as indicated in paragraphs 72 to 77, be further explored by the Conference Planning Executive and Conference Business Committee as appropriate, and implemented as far as possible.**

**N/15. The Conference adopts recommendation 14, that the overall pattern of the Conference be scheduled as indicated in paragraphs 78 to 81, and directs the Conference Business Committee to decide the implementation date as either 2018 or 2019.**

**N/16. The Conference adopts recommendation 15, that the participation of the fellowships of national origin be encouraged as indicated in paragraph 84.**

**N/17. The Conference adopts recommendation 16, to reduce its size in principle as set out in paragraphs 83 and 85 to 89, and directs the Methodist Council to set up a further Working Party to bring detailed proposals to the Conference of 2018.**

## Appendix 1

### Conference Accessibility Working Party – Consultation with the Conference of 2016

Resolutions passed by the Conference of 2015 led to the Methodist Council establishing a Working Party (WP) with the following terms of reference:

‘To consider further the issues of accessibility to the Conference with regard to issues of:

1. Engagement and participation of all members regardless of experience, ability or confidence [i.e. the Conference culture];
2. Ways in which the overall length of the Representative Session of the Conference might be reduced without compromising its roles and responsibilities [i.e. Conference’s structure and pattern];
3. Effective and appropriate use of resources [which includes Conference’s size and composition].’

The WP is to report its recommendations to the Conference of 2017 and is taking the opportunity this year to invite Conference representatives to share their views on some ideas. We recognise that there are conflicting objectives and tensions within these terms of reference and in some of the ideas below: a balance will need to be struck.

#### Culture

The culture of any organisation might be summarised as ‘the way we do things round here’. The Conference has evolved its own ‘ways of doing things’ which some people find difficult to absorb and engage with, certainly for the first time.

The 2015 Conference agreed recommendations that the formal business of the Conference should be rendered as accessible and participative as possible through the greater use of (1) the first-time speaker card, (2) assistance in preparation with Notices of Motion, (3) some planned debates, (4) hearings, (5) workshops, (6) reference groups, (7) buzz groups and (8) electronic voting. Some of these are specifically to break up the ‘classroom’ style of long, plenary sessions and formal debates.

The WP has focussed on how to enable people to more easily engage with and participate in the Conference who learn in different ways; or who find the printed word, especially in huge volumes, challenging; or have obstacles to assimilating large amounts of information.

#### *Question 1*

What other steps could be taken to facilitate the engagement of all representatives in the proceedings of the Conference?

#### Structure and pattern

The present pattern of the Representative Session of the Conference starting on Saturday (usually early afternoon) and ending at lunch-time on Thursday is well established. It embraces acts of worship, the induction of the President and Vice-President and their addresses, the Reception into Full Connexion, Ordination Services, the business of the Conference and various elections.

The over-riding question is whether there are ways to reduce its length by a full day, by making better use of the overall time, not least on the Saturday and Sunday. It is taken as a given that the Ordination Services must take place within the period of the Conference. It is also recognised that the venue of the Conference has a major impact on travel times for representatives.

*Question 2*

What are your views about the Saturday starting time and the overall pattern of Conference worship and business on the Saturday and Sunday, and the effective use of the time available?

*Question 3*

Would you favour a Sunday morning pattern beginning with the Reception into Full Connexion, followed by Ordination Services (one presbyteral and one diaconal) held at or very close to the Conference venue?

*Question 4*

What are your views about the general pattern of the working days from Monday onwards including start and finish times and lengths of lunch and refreshment breaks?

**Size and composition**

Since 1933, when there were 900 representatives, each adjustment to the size of the Conference has been constituted on the basis of 1 representative per 900 to 1000 church members. There are now 306 representatives, which is 1 for every 654.

In addressing the third of its terms of reference the WP believes that the size of the Conference must be radically reduced again. Now that the church membership is about 200,000 (and decreasing gently), the WP therefore proposes, as a starting point, that:

- (1) the Conference should comprise 200 to 220 representatives, and
- (2) the reduction should fall proportionately on the two main groups i.e. ex-officio (all except those elected) and elected (i.e. Conference-elected + District elected).

The table below summarises the impact to achieve 200 or 220 representatives:

	Present	Target 200	Reduction	Target 220	Reduction
Ex-officio	73	48	25	52	21
Elected	233	152	81	168	65
Total	306	200	106	220	86

The 233 elected representatives at present comprise 224 from Districts and 9 Conference-elected. (For reference, the Conference Agenda, near the end of volume 2, lists all the representatives.)

The WP is seeking your views on how to achieve the reductions suggested, recognising that hard decisions lie ahead, and offers some preliminary thoughts for your consideration:

- District representatives to reduce from 224 to 152-168: should they be allocated based strictly on current church membership figures, but retain not less than 2 per District?
- Do we need separate Conference-elected representatives (a reduction of 9)?
- Do the Record, Journal and Memorials secretaries need to be voting representatives?
- Do the representatives from other Churches (Irish, UMC and World Church Partners) need to be voting representatives? (Not all World Church representatives are voting members now)
- Do Stationing Committee, MWiB and Youth need to be separately represented?
- Should the Racial Justice representation be reduced?
- Given the reduction in District Chairs through other initiatives (by just 2), are there ways of further decreasing their significant representation?

*Question 5*

Given the objectives of enabling more effective use of resources (including costs) and enhancing the accessibility for those who attend, is a figure of 200 to 220 representatives desirable and achievable and, if so, how?

**You will all shortly receive a survey by email with specific questions: we would be most grateful if you would complete it in the light of your discussions and return it, as indicated, by August 1<sup>st</sup> 2016.**

**Appendix 2**

**Conference Accessibility Working Party – Expressing your views**

Following your opportunity to discuss the paper and questions at the Conference, the Working Party now invites you to record your views and submit them to us. Do use additional sheets if you need them.

Kindly complete the survey either electronically and return it .....to be received by August 1<sup>st</sup>.

*Question 1*

What other steps could be taken to facilitate the engagement of all representatives in the proceedings of the Conference?

Please list your thoughts and ideas below.

*Question 2*

What are your views about the Saturday starting time and the overall pattern of Conference worship and business on the Saturday and Sunday, and the effective use of the time available?

Please list your thoughts and ideas below.

*Question 3*

Would you favour a Sunday morning pattern beginning with the Reception into Full Connexion, followed by Ordination Services (one presbyteral and one diaconal) held at or very close to the Conference venue?

Please answer (by circling) YES or NO. Now add any thoughts or comments you may have below.

*Question 4*

What are your views about the general pattern of the working days from Monday onwards including start and finish times and lengths of lunch and refreshment breaks?

Please list your thoughts and ideas below.

### Question 5

Given the objectives of enabling more effective use of resources (including costs) and enhancing the accessibility for those who attend, is a figure of 200 to 220 representatives desirable and achievable and, if so, how?

Please answer the specific question – is a figure of 200 to 220 representatives desirable – circle YES or NO. If it is desirable, please indicate how you believe it can most equitably be achieved – list your thoughts and ideas below.

## Appendix 3

### Conference membership and Church membership

The table below summarises the changes in Conference membership since 1933. The original concept is believed to have been one Conference member per 1000 Church members, which was achieved in 1933 with the rounding up to 900 Conference members, of whom 50% were ordained and 50% lay, a principle which has been properly and faithfully retained ever since.

The table shows that, as Church membership<sup>19</sup> gently declined (though there were occasional increases in the post-war years), the ratio of Church members to Conference members decreases until the next downward adjustment is made in the latter to restore the ratio to near 1 per 1000. Taking the Church membership figure as near enough 200,000 in 2016 gives the ratio of 1 Conference member per 654 Church members. To restore it to 1 per 1000 thus indicates a Conference membership of 200 or so and it is noted that the last three changes were made when the ratio was 1 to between 625 and 685.

The WP submits therefore that the time has come for a further review but, as paragraphs N to N indicate, not to reduce the Conference membership as low as 200.

Period	Church membership	Number of Conference reps	Ratio in 1 <sup>st</sup> year	Ratio in last year
1933-1941	858,000	900	953	889
1942-1975	778,000	670	1161	813
1976-1997	528,000	576	917	625
1998-2007	353,000	384	919	685
2008-2016	252,000	306	824	654

## Appendix 4

### Impact of recommendations on the terms of reference

The table below summarises which of the 16 recommendations address the three terms of reference. It is noted that most which achieve ii also contribute to iii.

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<sup>19</sup> These figures are to the nearest 1000.

Rec.	ToR i	ToR ii	ToR iii
1	X		X
2	X		
3	X		
4		X	X
5	X	X	X
6		X	X
7	X		X
8		X	X
9	X		
10		(X)	
11	X		
12	X		
13	X		
14		X	X
15	X		
16			X