

19. Connexional Council, part 2

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SECTION I MINISTRIES COMMITTEE

- 1 The Ministries Committee reported to the Council that it had reviewed its work coming from the 2024, 2023 and 2022 Conferences and discussed its Workplan for 2024-2025.
- 2 The committee reported on the need for a significant review of all of the processes relating to ministers seeking to transfer into the British Methodist Church (the Methodist Council in April 2024 had delegated to the Committee the responsibility for appointing members of a task group to carry out a full review of the ministerial transfer scheme). The committee broadly agreed the membership, terms of reference, suggested consultants, and timetable for the small task group to lead the review, consulting widely as appropriate. Proposed changes will be presented for consideration by the 2026 Conference and enacted over the following connexional year.
- 3 **Supervision Research Project and 2021-2026 policy extension**
The current Reflective Supervision Policy was adopted by the 2021 Conference, to be reviewed in 2026; to inform any changes to the policy, a significant piece of research into the efficacy of supervision for those involved in lay and ordained ministry would be undertaken. The research would give both quantitative and qualitative insights which would inform the new policy. The Ministries Committee, in February 2023, approved the proposed approach to the research project, to be carried out under the oversight of the Supervision Reference Group (SRG).

After a recruitment process, a highly qualified researcher was appointed, and the following timeline agreed:

Spring 2024	Research process designed
Summer 2024	Research undertaken
Early 2025	Initial findings presented
Summer 2025	Final outcomes of research
Autumn 2025	Draft Supervision Policy 2026 ☐ incorporating research findings; scrutinised by Committees
June 2026	Supervision Policy 2026 ☐ presented to the Conference

Unfortunately, the research has been unavoidably delayed: whilst some quantitative research has been undertaken, the research will not be completed within the above timeline. On the recommendation of the Ministries Committee, the Council therefore endorsed the proposal for the research process to be extended by one year and for the findings to be reported to the 2027 Conference. The intrinsic link between the research and a new supervision policy means that this delay will entail a year's extension to the current *Reflective Supervision Policy* so that it runs until the 2027 Conference. The Council approved this extension.

- 4 The Ministries Committee co-opted the Revd Matt Sheard and Mr Dan Bishop onto the Committee for the Discernment of Ordained Vocation for 2025, under the terms of SO 250(2).
- 5 The committee has worked jointly with the Mission Committee to convene the Connexional Economic Justice Working Group.
- 6 The Ministries Committee received a Year Three Update from the Deliverance Ministry Panel. This highlighted where the work is currently, offered future direction, and informed the Ministries Committee of the intention of the Chair of the Connexional Panel for Deliverance Ministry, the Revd Kate Strange, to stand down. As this ministry moves into its next phase, Ms Strange suggests that protecting the most vulnerable should remain its core value. The committee thanked her for this comprehensive piece of work and the very significant amount of progress that had been achieved in a few years. A process for reflecting on the matters raised and recruiting a new lead for this work will be set in train.

- 7 The Assistant Secretary of the Conference reported to the committee regarding the need for a supplementary report to accompany the 2008 Conference Report *With Integrity and Skill* (guidance around pastoral care and confidentiality in the Methodist Church). The Ministries Committee recommended that a Task Group be established to prepare the supplementary report to be presented to the 2026 Conference.
- 9 The Ministries Committee received an update on its membership and recruitment and noted that interviews would be taking place in the very near future for two new lay members and for new Chairs of the committee. The committee expressed its grateful thanks to the Chair of the Committee, the Revd Gill Newton and the Deputy Chair, Mr Keith Norman, for whom this is their last year in office.
- 10 The Ministries Committee received the Annual Report from Cliff College and expressed its thanks to the Revd Ashley Cooper, in this his last year, for his work in nurturing the college as Principal. The College's strategic vision is to be 'A Global Centre for Evangelism and Missiology', a community formed by God's Spirit and centred on God's Word, equipping people for practical ministry and engaging in mission. It was recognised that the last year had been a very challenging and that there is further work to be done on in relation to the future work of the College.
- 11 The Ministries Committee received the annual report from the Queen's Foundation. The committee also welcomed the new Principal, Bishop Anne Hollinghurst, to its meetings this year. In its partnership with the Methodist Church in Britain, Queen's continues to receive all those candidates accepted by the Conference for initial ministerial training. In September 2023 Queen's had a total of 39 student ministers. Of these, 25 were full-time and 14 part-time; nine were student deacons and 30 student presbyters. Among the full-time students were seven students on the Circuit-based Learning Pathway (CBLP). The new cohort for 2024-25 comprised 25 student ministers, 12 allocated to the full-time pathway and 13 to part-time, with one (presbyter) provisionally allocated to CBLP for later in their training. Of the new cohort, four are student deacons and 21 student presbyters; 17 are women and 8 men; six are of Global Majority Heritage. As well as the standard credit-bearing and other courses which prepare student ministers to build on the knowledge, experience and skills they bring with them, and move towards readiness for stationing, Queen's has made changes over the last two to three years in the ways in which it engages with the expectations of the Methodist Church more generally in, for instance, EDI training, safeguarding training, and making Mental Health First Aid training available to student ministers. In 2023-24, Queen's worked with 51 probationers on the programme of probation studies designed to build on their pre-ordination training. The work is led by the Revd Dr Catrin Harland-Davies. Queen's continues to provide additional support for those writing dissertations or completing other modules beyond probation studies, to help them complete their programme.

Methodist staff appointed to Queen's continue to make wider contributions to the life of the Connexion beyond initial ministerial training and probation studies. During 2023-2024, two Methodist tutors have also been members of the Faith and Order Committee, one is on the New Places for New People Guiding Team, and another on the *Holiness* editorial board. Three tutors have roles in the various stages of Discerning Ordained Vocation (DOV 1 and DOV2). Tutors also continue to lead worship, study days and other events around the connexion.

- 12 In its reply to Memorial M25 (2019), the Conference agreed that the Ministries Committee will receive an annual report on the work of worship leaders and local preachers, and in particular their initial training and ongoing development. The Ministries Committee encourages and supports local preachers and worship leaders, who have a vital role to play in the regeneration of the life and mission of the Church. It directed the Ministries Team to explore a revised form of oversight for the work of governance and oversight of the training process for local preachers and worship leaders.

The annual report presented the following statistics:

As of December 2024 there were 4,526 active local preachers recorded on the connexional database, a decline of 12% from 5,145 the previous year. Of those in training, 309 had a Note to Preach (2023: 280), and there were 342 persons On Trial (2023: 456) as local preachers. Taken alone, these numbers are broadly as expected, and align with declines in membership and attendance, together with the assumed demographic profile of local preachers and worship leaders.

The number of local preachers who died and were included in the Remembrance Book in 2023 was 254. The list for 2024 is in preparation and will be presented at the 2025 Conference.

Regarding initial training, 94 portfolios were successfully completed on the Worship: Leading & Preaching course in 2024, compared with 68 the previous year. Of these, five were from Worship

Leaders (2023: 7), who have successfully completed modules 1-4. Forty-one were Portfolio LPA (2023: 34) and 47 were Portfolio LPB (2023: 28), indicating completion of LP training. These numbers represent a significant increase over the previous year and have returned to levels from previous years. This suggests that the dip in numbers in 2023 was due at least in part to factors associated with the COVID pandemic and the introduction of the new candidating process for presbyteral ministry, which removed the need for applicants to be local preachers.

Regarding new enrolments and admissions, the number of people starting and completing training continues to be encouraging:

Role	2024	2023	2022
Worship Leaders starting training	97	70	54
Worship Leaders completing training - Gold Level	5	7	3
Local Preachers starting training	134	123	152
Local Preachers Admitted	56	33	83

The number embarking on training as worship leaders remains very encouraging, and probably reflects the opportunity presented by Local Arrangements for new people to become involved in leading worship. It may also reflect the progressive adoption of flexible training for worship leaders (authorised in 2019) which is facilitated locally using WLP resources. The number of new LP admissions has varied considerably over the last five years. The 2024 total of 56 is encouraging. Particularly encouraging is the continuing number of those seeking a Note to Preach, with 134 starting their formation in 2024 (up 9% from 2023).

District Local Preachers' Secretaries and Tutors provide valuable support to circuits, particularly in training provision and through times of change but there has been a decline in the number of Districts making these appointments. Districts will be contacted directly during 2025 to emphasise the value of District LP Officer roles in encouraging and equipping lay leadership.

Work has proceeded to provide more course materials in Welsh, and the Worship: Foundations booklet is now available for use. The same material is also now available in Traditional Chinese, to help the growing Cantonese fellowships and the significant numbers coming forward as leaders and preachers.

A significant development in 2024/5 has been the introduction of a new accessibility toolset for the Worship: Leading and Preaching course, called ReciteMe. This provides state-of-the-art tools allowing adaptation of screen presentation (colour, contrast, text spacing etc) together with audio transcription of textual content and specialist tools such as screen masks, magnifiers and focus aids. In addition, ReciteMe provides a real-time translation facility in some 200 languages. This is proving helpful for trainees for whom English is not their heart language.

Feedback from students studying with Worship: Leading and Preaching continues to be positive, the major source of concern being the availability of Mentors and Tutors for those wishing to study. The Connexional Team continues to provide a comprehensive package of training for WLP students, tutors and mentors, which is largely delivered online. Quarterly Explore Online weekends are provided for students. For 2025, there will also be a pilot series of four WLP Explore Weekends, hosted by circuits and districts around the connexion, combining intensive Explore sessions for students, and a training day for local preachers and worship leaders to develop their skills.

- 14 The Ministries Committee received a report proposing that the Local Preachers' Meeting be relaunched as a more inclusive learning community of all those involved in leadership of public worship in the Circuit, including worship leaders, local preachers, presbyters and deacons, and others such as musicians and artists as appropriate. A suggested name for the new meeting is the Circuit Worship and Preaching Community (CWPC). The community would become the focus of training and development for local preachers, worship leaders and those leading Local Arrangements, as well as leaders of other worshipping communities such as New Places for New People. The Community would provide an accessible and welcoming way for people to explore worship and preaching as part of their discipleship. Some of the key roles and responsibilities of the Local Preachers' Meeting would remain, such as the responsibility for discerning in community a person's call to preach.

The report proposed that the community would take over the responsibilities of the Local Preachers' Meeting, but under revised and simplified Standing Orders. The priorities of Worship, Learning,

Support and Accountability will be embedded in new resources and guidelines. Careful work would be required to ensure that the current responsibilities for discernment, formation and decision-making are clearly elucidated in the Standing Orders, supported by logical and coherent guidance where required. The Ministries Committee felt that further work was needed in this area and directed the Ministries Team to establish a working group to do further work.

- 15 The Ministries Committee received for information a report on the **Discerning Ordained Vocation Committee** and noted the detailed statistics. DOV1 applicants are matched with an accompanist at the earliest opportunity after they apply. The Accompanists have now formed a community of practice and meet three times a year for training and preparation. They regard their work as vocational and a privilege to be walking with people as they discern God's call. The elements of the process are gradually being honed and there is increasing development of continuity of practice around the completion of the structured conversation between applicants and accompanists and other parts of the process. There is scope for more people to become accompanists. The Retreat Team has now established a mutually trusting community and runs the retreat itself. It has a pool of people from whom the actual retreat team is drawn each year, depending on the numbers of applicants, and to ensure there is appropriate balance on the team. However the team members all train and plan together. The Advisory Group operates in teams of three who meet with each applicant online in June. There is scope for more people to join this group.

The report also referenced the fact that we now refer to a psychosocial adviser rather than a psychologist in relation to candidating and MOCC applicants. Therefore the Standing Orders which identify the role of the 'Connexional Psychologist' need to be amended. The Council agreed to recommend to the Conference that, in SO 713(4) and SO 730(4)(vi), the words 'connexional psychologist' be replaced by 'connexionally-appointed psychosocial practitioner'. Currently the DOV documents refer to the 'psycho-social adviser', but when the documents are updated for the following year, these will be brought in line with the Standing Orders.

- 16 The number of candidates has reduced in this second year of the new candidating process which is not unexpected as many people were waiting for the new scheme to start, thus inflating the numbers in 2023-2024. The DOV2 Committee is seeking to address the fact that some candidates are attending DOV2 committee with insufficient preparation or awareness. The DOV2 Committee Co-chairs are proposing some adaptations and a review of the processes. As the Conference agreed the revised criteria for candidates in June 2024, these are being used from the start of the 2025-2026 candidating year. The documents for DOV1 and DOV2 are all made available on the website from the start of January for the following year.
- 17 The Ministries Committee received a general report from the Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee (MCPOC). The Committee accepted a recommendation from the MCPOC Task Group concerning the implementation of Standing Order 723(3) where a candidate offers for specific context, as follows:
- If this is a defined specific context (eg a particular pioneering community or a particular employer), representatives of the other institution will need to complete an additional section of the C2 form to declare their support for the eventual appointment, their understanding of it, and their willingness to release the probationer to undertake the necessary elements of probation. This needs to be based on the clauses of the standing order.
 - If it is not a defined specific context (eg a candidate feels a general call to a form of full time chaplaincy but this is not in a particular named institution), then the candidate will be advised not to apply for specific context while candidating. However this may be explored by such candidates during their placements while at Queen's and they can express a wish on their stationing profile for this context to be part of their first appointment. The committee notes that there is often flexibility in circuit appointments for other elements of ministry to be explored within the appointment.

The Law and Polity Committee has reviewed the Standing Orders to ensure they reflect the decision and the proposed amendments are presented in resolution 19/3 (below).

- 18 The Ministries Committee received a report from MCPOC's Implementation Group on Developments in the Stationing of Probationers. The Committee approved the proposal from MCPOC: that from September 2026 all presbyteral probationers will normally have one un-planned Sunday per month (excluding holiday Sundays) in which to learn their craft of worship leading and preaching, learning from, and working alongside others (adapted pro rata for those in part time appointments). Diaconal probationers will have the equivalent time in which to learn their craft in these areas as appropriate to

their context. Guidance will be provided, and this will be monitored and reported on through the Worship Development Groups. This will be a flexible arrangement depending on the prior experience of the probationer. The Ministries Committee also approved the proposal from MCPOC that work be carried out to strengthen, empower and train the Worship Development Groups for probationers. The Ministries Team is developing this work.

***RESOLUTIONS

19/1. The Conference received the Report.

19/2. The Conference amended Standing Orders SO 713(4) and SO 730(4)(vi) as follows:

713(4) A candidate shall meet with the ~~connexional psychologist~~ **connexionally-appointed psychosocial practitioner** who shall produce a resilience assessment report which the candidate will be invited to sign before it is submitted.

730(4)(vi) a resilience assessment report on the applicant provided by a ~~connexional psychologist~~ **connexionally-appointed psychosocial practitioner** in accordance with connexional guidelines, which the applicant will be invited to sign before it is submitted.

19/3. The Conference amended Standing Orders as follows:

713 Discernment of Ordained Vocation: Stage Two. ...

(6) (a) ...

(b) The Superintendent shall also make a preliminary assessment on a connexional proforma of what might reasonably be expected of the candidate's future availability for stationing in circuit or other appointments and the terms and conditions of service under which the candidate might serve.

In the case of a candidate offering for presbyteral ministry and applying to serve in an appointment that is not within the control of the church or in a pioneering or other appointment that is within the control of the Church but does not involve being appointed to a circuit, the preliminary assessment shall include a report of conversations with the other institutions and parties involved in the specified context regarding the feasibility of the criteria for probation being fulfilled and assessed in the type of appointment envisaged.

723 Probationers' Appointments. ...

(3) (a) Where a presbyteral probationer is to be stationed in an appointment ***in a defined specific context*** that is not within the control of the Church ***or in a pioneering or other appointment that is within the control of the Church but does not involve being appointed to a circuit***, the Connexional Team member responsible for probationers shall arrange for consultations to be held ~~between the~~ ***with the other institution and other*** relevant parties ***involved in that context*** to ascertain the way in which the probationer will exercise ~~his or her~~ ministry within the particular appointment and link it with the worship and mission of the wider Church, and how ~~his or her~~ ***the probationer's*** character, work and general fitness for the presbyterate will be assessed. ***If the other institution or relevant party is not able at this point to make the required commitments the Connexional Team member shall arrange for consultations to be held about how the student minister concerned may serve as a probationer in other ways.***

(b) From such consultations the Connexional Team member responsible for probationers shall ensure that an agreement ***with the other parties*** is formulated as to the nature of probation in the appointment. This proposed agreement shall be in accordance with connexional guidelines issued on behalf of the Stationing Committee. It shall be reviewed by members of the district Probationers Committee appointed by the committee for that purpose and forwarded by the Chair to the Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee for approval.

783 Stationing Procedures: diaconal. (1) The Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order shall be responsible for deciding upon the recommendations to be made as to the stationing of the deacons in the available diaconal stations, recognising the specialised ministry needs of the Circuits involved, ***and in the light of the current discipline, policies and practices of the Order in stationing.***

SECTION J

ASSESSING OF PROBATION

The Ministries Committee, in April 2024, asked the Methodist Council to consider recommending a revised process for the assessment of probation. The aim of this is to reduce the workload for district officers and committees and to streamline the process. The Council directed that the Ministries Committee undertake a wider consultation, including with the Faith and Order Committee and the Chairs and Secretaries of District Probationers Committees, on the ecclesiological and practical implications of the proposals and to report regarding the consultation together with any revised proposals to the Connexional Council not before April 2025. The Ministries Committee held those further consultations with: Chairs of District and the Warden of the MDO, recent ordinands, Faith and Order, District Probationer Secretaries and presented revised proposals to the Council in March 2025. The Council agreed to recommend these revised processes to the Conference. It further referred them to the Law and Polity Committee for consideration of the constitutional implications, and the Law and Polity Committee will report separately on that aspect.

First year probationers will be assessed later in the year with the Religious Order Advisory Committee (ROAC) meeting in March rather than January and District Probationers' Committees meeting in May rather than March. This takes the pressure off committees and probationers and allows assessment to be based on a longer period of ministry.

The Conference Diaconal Committee and the Presbyteral Session of the Conference will still receive the names of probationer ministers with their expected dates to be received into Full Connexion. District Probationers' Committees will hold panel interviews for any first year probationers for whom there are any concerns. The Ministerial Candidates' and Probationers' Oversight Committee (MCPOC) will receive detailed reports on first year probationers in July each year. The timetable for second year probationers (and those in subsequent years) remains the same as in the current processes. Some changes to the reporting processes and forms were also agreed.

It is additionally suggested that District Probationers' Committees hold panel interviews with any first or second year probationers for whom they have concerns that may need additional attention. These panels can be called on the agreement of the District Chair, District Probationers' Secretary and Warden (for diaconal probationers). The recommendations of such a panel could be a referral to MCPOC, an additional meeting of the whole DPC, an additional meeting of ROAC or an intervention such as occupational health assessment. It is strongly recommended that prayer for all probationers (presbyteral and diaconal) is offered at the spring Representative Synod. Chairs are asked to exercise sensitivity in the way they do this, since it could be a difficult time for some probationers.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

19/4. The Conference received the Report.

19/5 The Conference noted the direction of travel being proposed and directed the Ministries Committee to carry out further work in partnership with the Faith and Order and Law and Polity Committees, and to bring a joint report to the Conference of 2026 which will include the Law and Polity Committee's advice on any necessary changes to Standing Orders.

SECTION K

DISCERNMENT FOR SENIOR LEADERSHIP

The 2022 Conference directed the Ministries Committee to continue its work on discernment for senior roles and to report to the 2023 Conference, to consider how vocations for leadership in the Church can be appropriately identified, fostered, and coordinated with processes of appointment. The committee appointed a group to take this forward. The 2024 Conference received a report from the Methodist Council which reported the work undertaken so far, including pilot schemes for new and incoming District Chairs.

The Council received an update report from the Ministries Committee, which indicated further developments in this area as set out below.

Key background information

1. 'Senior posts' has been defined as leadership roles in *Districts* (Chairs, Deputy/Assistant Chairs, Synod Secretaries/senior lay roles in District leadership teams) and *the Connexion* (Chairs and

Deputy Chairs of Committees, the Conference Secretariat, and senior leadership roles within the Connexional Team).

2. There are three key drivers underpinning this discernment work:
 - a. Ensuring that attention is given to individuals' strengths in the discernment process which allows them to lead in 'liminality': agility, thriving in complex and uncertain times, team builders, effective at learning from experience.
 - b. A clear need for a more diverse senior leadership within the Church.
 - c. The need for a carefully planned leadership development programme and pathways, beginning from initial formation in ministry for the ordained and from circuit stewards (for example) for lay people – although there is clearly greater complexity in developing lay leadership pathways.
3. Conversations with twenty-five current senior leaders were carried out in Jan/Feb 2024. From these conversations with senior leaders, five key qualities of leaders who thrive in senior roles were identified:
 - a. Spirituality
 - b. Self-awareness
 - c. Working with others/ leading teams
 - d. Leadership models (moving away from the solitary 'hero' leader)/ awareness of diversity
 - e. Strategic understanding/ Connexional ways of working
4. The group was then asked to carry out further work on the following:
 - a. Paying attention to the characteristics of senior leaders (above) and how these can best be reflected in the processes for appointing senior leaders.
 - b. Defining the process of discernment: for this to be clearly identified with some flexibility and freedom.
 - c. Reviewing defined selection processes and suggesting appropriate changes.
 - d. Linking this work with The Methodist Church's *God For All, Justice-Seeking Church*, and *JDS* strategy to ensure that processes enable a truly diverse and inclusive senior leadership and that senior leaders operate within this culture.
 - e. Liaising with the Faith and Order Committee around its work on 'The Role of a District Chair'.
 - f. Undertaking a review of related Standing Orders as appropriate.
 - g. Drawing various strands of leadership work together to bring proposals to the 2025 Conference.
5. Additionally, a Pilot Support Development Programme for New District Chairs in their first three years, to take place in 2024/5, was proposed and agreed by the Ministries Committee.

Proposals for Senior Leaders' Discernment/ leadership pathways development trial, 2025-6

The 'Senior Leaders' Discernment task group' met in January 2025. Following that meeting, the group proposes a trial and review of the following leadership pathways development approach in the Connexional year 2025/6:

1. A Senior Leaders' Discernment and Leadership Programme (ordained and lay as appropriate)
2. A Superintendent Ministers' Discernment and Leadership Programme
3. A bespoke package of ongoing leadership learning with experienced District Chairs

The points below expand on the three proposals and refer specifically to the development of new leadership discernment programmes which prepare colleagues for their future roles, and not to existing programmes such as the New Supers' or Chairs' Induction. The suggested approaches below build on various work undertaken around the role of leadership in recent years, noting the recommendations of The Faith and Order Committee's work on *What Is A District Chair?*, the research undertaken with 25 senior leaders, and review and reflection of the experience of the District Chairs' Pilot Programme of 2024/5.

Implementation of proposals

The following information sets out in more detail how the proposals above would work in practice.

1. Key leadership characteristics and qualities

- a. Adopt the key qualities/characteristics of Senior Leaders identified in the 2024 research project as those for which we aspire for leaders both lay and ordained to model appropriately at all levels within the life of the Church. Spirituality is clearly identified as the first and most important of these, providing the foundation for all other qualities.
- b. Refine and develop these, with the potential need for more theological reflection and input in the trial year.

2. Leadership Development Pathway model (see Appendix 2)

The Methodist Church trials a leadership development pathway model for leaders within The Methodist Church. This seeks to:

- a. Identify gaps in leadership provision at different stages of ordained ministers' and lay employees'/volunteers' 'journeys' and develop programmes and provision to fill those gaps. For ordained ministers, this is preparation for superintendency before being appointed as Superintendents, preparation for Senior Leadership roles before being appointed to them, and ongoing leadership development for experienced District and Committee Chairs and vice-Chairs.
- b. Integrate all of the current leadership provision offered by the Methodist Church into a holistic model.
- c. Offer a model of progression to develop the leadership qualities outlined above as the 'golden threads' which run through all leadership in the Methodist Church.
- d. Offer a range of approaches for leadership learning and development, ensuring that best practice from other organisations and sectors is utilised, whilst remaining faithful to the Christian and Methodist ethos of leadership.
- e. As an overarching aim, equip leaders at all levels for high quality leadership in the current 'liminal' context in which the Methodist Church finds itself.

Some key points to note:

- a. The task group felt that any sense of 'career progression' or implied linearity in leadership pathways was not appropriate. The model therefore seeks to identify those points where leadership discernment and support are most appropriately offered, and this is in line with the broad stages outlined in the ministerial competencies.
- b. The orange boxes identify provision already in place for leadership development for ordained ministers (almost entirely for presbyters). It is recommended that this provision continues and some (e.g. Pilot New District Chairs' Programme) could be developed to include lay leaders within the church.
- c. The green boxes detail the current provision available to both lay and ordained leaders within The Methodist Church.
- d. The key questions seek to identify those factors which are critical for the success of the leadership pathways approach; some initial solutions for discussion are then offered.
- e. The pathways (especially for lay colleagues and volunteers) will need refinement.

The Process of Discernment of Senior Leaders (and others)

There are broadly speaking two extremes of approach in discernment for senior leaders (and other roles): the 'talent spotting' approach, or the self-selecting approach. For the Methodist Church, it seems proportionate and appropriate to develop a 'blended' approach, which contains elements of the two. The discernment process recommended here for senior leaders and others has two distinct stages:

Stage 1: Discernment for joining a leadership pathway programme. Suggested approach:

- a. **Experience:** Appropriate level of experience (e.g. Superintendent or equivalent for potential senior leaders' development programme). Somebody appointed to a post via a different mechanism (for example, a Chair of a Connexional Committee) would automatically be enrolled onto a senior leaders' development programme, if appropriate and proportionate given their prior leadership experience.

- b. **Application:** Ability to reflect critically on the five leadership qualities via a short (500 word) application. There will be a particular emphasis on knowledge and self-awareness in relation to issues of spirituality and diversity.
- c. **Scrutiny of application:** By a representative group, including members of the Ministries Team, a member of the JDS Committee and, for senior posts, the Secretary or Assistant Secretary of the Conference, with consultation with the District Chair where needed.
- d. **Mechanism for identification of gifted leaders:** The approach includes the mechanism for recommendation by existing District Chairs or those of an appropriate level. An application (see b.) would still be needed.

Stage 2: Ongoing discernment during leadership development programme

- a. The leadership development programme, in and of itself, offers a space for discernment. It is recommended that criteria are developed to aid this process (such as engagement, ability to reflect critically through work with a mentor, a short written reflection of no more than 1000 words, applying the learning in context).
- b. Care will need to be taken to ensure that the facilitation group (coaches, mentors, those delivering aspects of the programme) represents the diversity of those within the Church in line with, for example, *the JDS strategy*.

3. Normative expectations

- a. There will be a normative expectation that those who discern that they are called to a Senior Leadership role within the life of the Church (such as a Chair of District) will be able to show that they have engaged with at least one aspect of leadership development within the range of the Church's offering or with high-quality leadership support and development outside of the Church.
- b. Care will be needed to think about how this applies to those preparing to become Superintendents, given the shortage of those we currently have. There will need to be a normative expectation that Superintendents engage with the New Supers' Induction programme. However, it might be that a trial group for Superintendents' discernment or leadership preparation gives participants the confidence to offer for superintendency.

4. Linking with other processes within the Church

- a. We believe that the suggestions above can be implemented without revision to the Standing Orders. Currently, there is nothing specific in the Standing Orders about the qualities of those who thrive in Senior Leaders' roles (see, for example, SO 200(2)(b), SO 290 and SO 360). Thus, following a trial, it might be that a revision to Standing Orders is sought – but this is not necessary to be able to develop a trial.
- b. Nonetheless, it will be important to liaise with the Secretary of the Conference so that the work on discernment of Senior Leaders and the appointment of District Chairs is linked.

5. Ongoing evaluation of discernment trial

The task group acknowledges and notes the following will be needed as the leadership development pathway approach is trialled:

- a. Ongoing work to address the systemic barriers to those marginalised and traditionally under-represented in leadership roles.
- b. Ensuring that there is synergy with the leadership development trial, and ministerial competencies, the 'ministerial covenant' and MDR. The group notes that MDR, if offered more systematically across Districts, could form a helpful part of the discernment and encouragement process.
- c. The need to liaise with interview panels, especially related to District Chair panels, to ensure that they are fully aware of this work.
- d. Ensuring that there is encouragement, and space, for ongoing leadership, learning and development for ordained ministers and lay employees.
- e. Working with selected autumn synods for refinement and review of these proposals.

6. Next steps

The suggested next steps for implementation are as follows:

- a. Recruit two small trial groups (around eight people in each) for the two discernment programmes, using the process above (but with more liaison with District Chairs at this point): this could be a mix of ordained and lay colleagues.
- b. Work with experienced District Chairs at an individual level to develop a bespoke programme. This will also aid the future transition of the New District Chairs.
- c. Ensure relevant finance is in place, either through the MVW budget and/or seeking other internal/external funding for this work.
- d. Review the current New District Chairs' Pilot Programme to see how this work might be built into discernment programmes.
- e. Review and ensure capacity for this work and set out a project management plan and evaluation process
- f. Develop discernment programmes, using both internal and external expertise (eg from other religious institutions and third-sector organisations). Ensure that discernment programme content is mapped against characteristics drawn out from twenty-five leadership conversations in 2024.

*****RESOLUTION**

19/6. The Conference received the Report.

SECTION L REVIEW OF LEARNING FOR MINISTRY

1 Background

At the 2024 Conference, a review of the learning that constitutes preparation for lay and ordained ministry was approved. Terms of reference were subsequently agreed by the Ministries Committee. The review was conceived as having two stages: a period of consultation resulting in an interim report to the 2025 Conference and a second stage considering a set of broader questions to follow.

In the first stage, the review objectives focused on

1. the efficacy of work at Cliff College and the Queen's Foundation
2. agreements with any other institutions
3. collaboration between the institutions and the Connexional Team

and to be noted were

- A. the criteria and competencies for ministry agreed by Conference
- B. changes in the HE and TEI landscapes
- C. the priorities set for training by the Conference
- D. the circumstances in which ministry will be exercised in the mid-21st century
- E. the role of the Connexional Learning and Development Forum.

The initial output of the first stage of the review was to be an interim report to the Ministries Committee by 31 January 2025, followed by subsequent reporting to the Connexional Council and the 2025 Conference.

2 Approach to the review

Based upon the exploratory nature of the objectives outlined above, the review is being approached in an open and collegiate manner, framed as an opportunity for the MCB, the institutions that provide learning and a wider set of stakeholders. The review will be assessing the efficacy of learning being offered and the underpinning viability in the medium to long term, with a deliberate future-focus. Predefined targets have not been set by the Conference for the outcomes and recommendations of the review. Any short-term

opportunities that present themselves during the review period will be considered carefully. However, short-term solutions are not the focus of the review.

3 Summary of activities to date

The review is being overseen by Richard Armiger, Head of Ministries and Learning, on behalf of the Connexional Team. The recruitment process for a reviewer began in August 2024. In October 2024, an independent consultant, Susan Martin, was recruited and started work on the review in November 2024. Susan Martin and Richard Armiger have met fortnightly to discuss planning for the review and to monitor progress.

In the period to Christmas 2024, the review activities focused on desk-based background research, including a thorough reading of *The Fruitful Field Project* (Conference Agenda, 2012) and the *Summary of the Outcomes of the Training Review* (Conference Agenda 2017) papers and reports summarising the programmes of learning delivered via the institutions. This desk-based work was accompanied by initial meetings with members of the Connexional Team.

In January 2025, a series of online introductory meetings was held with a selection of key stakeholders from the following institutions: Cliff College, The Queen's Foundation, and Southlands College. As well as an opportunity for the stakeholders to meet the reviewer, the meetings also provided parties time to discuss the themes of the review. Within the two main themes of the review, efficacy and viability, five supporting areas were considered. These are as follows:

Efficacy	Training priorities (as set by the Conference) Criteria and competencies for lay and ordained ministry Current circumstances of ministry
Viability	Position of HE sector Budget/financial pressures

Additionally, and to support the open and future-focused nature of the discussions, a series of prompts were shared with stakeholders, as follows:

- Overview of institution
- Specific aspects of ecumenical context to highlight
- Strategic changes due to take place that may be of interest to review
- Opportunities that the review may present
- Anything else?
- Wish list for outcomes of review
- Recommendations for who else the reviewer should meet

Some meetings covered all topics, others focussed on a few areas of particular interest to the stakeholder(s). Preliminary observations based on notes of those conversations are summarised in section 7.

The observations outlined in section 7 have been identified using thematic analysis. Themes were recorded if they emerged in comments across multiple stakeholders. However, it should be noted that the observations are not definitive, due to both the limited number of stakeholder meetings and the time available following completion of the first round of meetings (24 January) and the drafting of the report (26 January). A comprehensive analysis of the data will be completed in the coming months and themes will be updated accordingly.

A summary of the review timeline can be found in Appendix C and a list of stakeholders who engaged in stakeholder meetings up to 24 January 2025 can be found in Appendix D.

4 Timing of papers

The timing of the interim report to Ministries Committee in relation to the commencement of the review was noted by several stakeholders. One stakeholder expressed some concern that, due to the timing of the paper deadlines for committees, the preliminary observations in the 2025 interim report to Ministries Committee, which were based on very early discussions, would 'stick'/be in place until 2026 and potentially all the way up to the 2026 Conference. Another highlighted that the combination of the tight turnaround from the review start date to production of the initial report and the significance of work of the review along with the decisions that need to be taken should be noted by the committee: 'The outcomes of the review will have an impact on the lifeblood of the Church for a decade to come.' Another commented that although the review had been 'thought about for a long time' within the MCB, it had only just started in practice and the 'sensemaking' that

will come from the discussions with stakeholders takes some time. Members of, and attendees at, the Ministries Committee in February 2025 mirrored these concerns about the timing of the interim report in relation to the stage of the review. However, it was recognised that there is sufficient time for the necessary in depth consultation to take place over the coming months and leading to the final report and recommendations in 2026.

5 Topics out of scope of the review

Adopting an open approach to the review, and allowing stakeholders to focus on areas of their own interest and concern, meant that some topics raised fell outside of the scope of the review. One key topic that arose during the introductory conversations was the fundamental question of what the MCB wants and needs from its ministers. This question emerged in two ways: whether there was clarity of thinking and whether there was clarity of articulation.

The focus of the review is clearly linked to this question, as the answers will determine what education and training are required to equip an individual for the role of lay or ordained minister. However, it is beyond the scope of the review, and the expertise of the reviewer, to seek to answer this question directly. Instead, the reviewer will note when these questions and points are raised and seek to establish whether responses relate to current or legacy criteria and competencies. If sufficient evidence emerges across the wider group of stakeholders that the existing competencies are viewed as not 'fit for purpose', the review reports will highlight those observations for consideration elsewhere in the governance structure.

6 Legacy of Fruitful Field and the Training Review Group (TRG)

A number of stakeholders raised the continuing influence of 'The Fruitful Field' on the MCB and the institutions. The resulting changes, more so than the review and report itself, were seen as divisive, and the degree of compromise necessary to deliver change was the focus of criticism. One stakeholder commented that there were many positives to be found in the intent of Fruitful Field, with the main issue being the compromised implementation. There was a less positive view of the TRG and it was felt to have been an unproductive exercise.

The legacy of these two reviews is important to the current review both as the source of the architecture of the current learning portfolio and as a factor in how individuals may respond to a review of learning being undertaken. Colleagues affected by restructures resulting from the implementation of Fruitful Field and the TRG still hold posts in the MCB and the institutions. Along with the factors outlined in section 2 above, an open and collegiate approach to the review has been adopted to alleviate some of the concerns that this review could mirror those that have taken place previously. Although change will result from the review, a collaborative and transparent approach accompanied by regular communication will enable colleagues to input to discussions and to feedback on recommendations.

7 Preliminary observations

Although early in the review, a number of important themes emerged from initial discussions with stakeholders. These are:

1. Lack of a connected and collaborative approach to learning

Stakeholders noted that the current approach to education and training for lay and ordained learning has a number of shortcomings and one that routinely emerged from the discussions was a lack of connectedness. The term 'silos' was repeatedly used by a number of stakeholders and one stakeholder pointed out that current structures were inhibiting innovation. Several stakeholders noted that a more collaborative approach to designing learning would help resolve such issues and ensure that the MCB does not miss opportunities. In fact, one stakeholder commented that being more joined up will actually create opportunities for the Church. A collaborative and connected approach was seen as a positive way of resolving existing inadequacies in the extant structures.

2. Equity between lay and ordained training and education

The importance of equity of opportunity for lay and ordained in learning for ministry was raised by many of the stakeholders. One noted that, 'Until the recent past, the ordained took precedence. The policy position and rhetoric has now changed.' However, stakeholders commented either directly or indirectly that resourcing, access to resources and budgets did not align with policy and that learning

for ordained ministry was still taking precedence. Indeed, one stakeholder had assumed that the review was only concerned with ordained ministry.

3. *Separation/gap between 'the centre' and local structures*

This theme of a divide also manifested itself with regard to a separation or gap between the central teams and the local church structures and came up in all of the institutional discussions to a greater or lesser degree. The institutions did not appear to have clear visibility of the work happening in and with the Learning Network and other parts of the Connexional Team, particularly at a local level, leading to a perception that there was not adequate 'connection' between the Learning Network and local structures (churches/districts etc). One stakeholder wondered how the MCB could more effectively capitalise on the work of the Learning Network and whether a 'better'/alternative resourcing model may help improve interaction.

4. *Models of learning*

Various questions about where, when and how individuals were engaging in learning were raised by many of the stakeholders. A few examples include:

The majority of stakeholders touched on the potential, and in some cases the imperative, of contextual/contextualised learning. The importance of learning relevant to, and happening in, local, in-circuit and community contexts was repeatedly stated. One stakeholder commented that they wanted to see 'learning for ministry plunged into the community', adding that 'ordination training should be outward-based and context-based.'

Two stakeholders expressed the view that a 'cell' or 'semi-monastic' model of training is no longer extant or, in the opinion of one stakeholder, appropriate for a 21st-century church. Several others queried whether the proportion of residential learning would, or should, be as high as current levels in the future.

There were a number of comments around the relative appropriateness of the extant models of learning. Stakeholders questioned whether a degree was the most relevant route to ministry and several queried whether lifelong learning opportunities were sufficient, accessible or prominent enough in the learning patterns available to ministers.

The potential for a hybrid model of in person and online learning was raised by many of the stakeholders, both from the point of view of learner experience and meeting the more varied needs of today's learners, and also from a financial perspective, seeking ways to reduce the overall cost of educating people for ministry. Stakeholders noted that significant advancements have been made in both the design of hybrid and online models of learning and the technology that supports those models. Some stakeholders encouraged greater utilisation of digital education.

Regardless of the particular perspective a stakeholder brought to the table, there was a general consensus that a different or new model was needed. This model had a few common characteristics: it was more agile and facilitated flexibility; it was 'bigger' and more ambitious; it was looser (to help with finance) and gave agency to institutions; it was less traditional and was willing to embrace new models of learning being seen within the education sector. One stakeholder noted, 'Shaping learning for changing patterns of ministry needs changing patterns of learning.'

5. *Education, training or learning*

The review has been titled 'Review of Learning for Ministry', locating the focus of the review firmly on the experience of the learner. However, there was a question from a couple of stakeholders about whether there is a clear, well-articulated distinction between education, training and learning. Clarifying how and when both the MCB and the institutions are using these terms and how each relates to the 'learning' available for ministers was seen as a potentially valuable exercise.

6. *Ecumenism and a broader environment*

The majority of stakeholders explicitly and firmly supported the value to be gained from learning within environments that included people with different backgrounds and perspectives. They

consistently felt that these environments more accurately represented the contexts in which lay and ordained ministers will find themselves working.

The value of the ecumenical context within which learning currently takes place was a strong theme in the discussions. However, several stakeholders noted that targeting an Anglican-only alliance should not be the focus. A broad ecumenical position was preferred as minimum, with two stakeholders emphasising the importance of exposure to either multi-faith or inter-faith communities during learning. At the Ministries Committee, it was felt that an ecumenical foundation was vital, with multi-faith/inter-faith exposure as a supplementary rather than core component.

The concept of a broad and inclusive approach to learning was expanded by several stakeholders to include an international context. A globalised perspective and the opportunities presented by resourcing learning from a much wider pool were seen by several stakeholders as beneficial to both the learners and the MCB.

7. Governance and oversight

The importance of appropriate governance was raised by several stakeholders. Routes into decision-making were felt to be critical for institutions. Stakeholders perceived that there was currently no clearly identified governance path for institutions to secure engagement with key issues. This route to decision-makers differed from access to individuals within the Connexional Team, who sometimes did not have the authority or capacity to effect change.

There was also the associated point of the nature of oversight. Stakeholders viewed the relationship with the MCB as often being 'transactional'. For example, annual reports did not prompt a follow up planning conversation or there was not an infrastructure within which to explore opportunities for innovation. Several stakeholders commented that they did not feel that the Church was benefitting from the breadth of institutional activities because there was not a good enough understanding of the potential contributions that institutions could make to the intellectual life of the MCB. Clarity of purpose, on requirements for outcomes, in relationships and of opportunity were all identified as ways to move from transacting to collaborating.

8. 'Future-focused', 'innovative' and 'opportunities'

During stakeholder meetings, there was an overarching consensus that what is currently in place is not fully working and is not agile and responsive to the changing needs of MCB, the changing circumstances for ministry and the changing profile of the Church's members. Stakeholders identified that a long-term, future-focused solution requires adaptable organisations that recognise the need for change and are ready to make the necessary changes. A number of stakeholders felt that there was an opportunity to be innovative in creating a solution and that there was an appetite to radically rethink learning for ministry. However, there was equal concern that the type and degree of change that will be required was going to be extremely challenging to achieve.

8 Next steps

This report does not contain conclusions and nor does it offer an analysis of findings. It is currently too early in the review to do either. However, the preliminary themes highlighted above indicate that the review, and the methodology adopted for the review, will need to provide sufficient and relevant evidence to assess the efficacy and viability of the current learning portfolio and facilitate the identification of a guiding set of principles for framing a future-focused learning offer for lay and ordained ministers.

Over the coming months, the review will seek to expand on, test and re-evaluate observations made to date. In order to achieve this outcome, the review consultant will continue to hold introductory and follow-up meetings with stakeholders and groups of stakeholders, as well as undertaking site visits, where possible, to facilitate face-to-face small group discussions. These meetings will be with a broad range of stakeholders, including those from various institutions, Districts, circuits and local churches, members of the Connexional Team and representatives of external organisations, such as the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Church of England, and universities. Supplementary desk-based reviews of relevant reports will also be carried out. Up to this stage, the review has largely been focused on qualitative data. However, there will be some basic analysis of quantitative data in later stages of the review, for example student numbers, learner profiles, and completion rates.

Alongside the above review activities, the following actions approved by Ministries Committee:

1. *Steering Group*

The review can offer a mechanism for addressing some of the governance concerns identified by stakeholders. A review Steering Group should be constituted of representatives from the institutional contributors to ministry learning, current/recent learners, members of the Connexional Team, those who supervise or have oversight of ministers and members of local churches/circuits. To avoid constituting a group that is too large to function effectively, members who represent multiple stakes in the review should be prioritised.

The creation of a Steering Group to facilitate an open and collegiate review was approved at Ministries Committee and details of the group's purpose and composition will be agreed by members prior to convening the group.

2. *Communication*

An important action that suggests itself based on the interim report is the need to regularly and accurately communicate with the wider body of stakeholders about the focus and the progress of the review. Confirmation of the scope, timescales and progress of the review will provide stakeholders with valuable understanding of its purpose and potential impact.

The Ministries Committee approved the establishment of a communications plan for the period of the review and its implementation. The Head of Ministries and Learning will work with the Review Consultant and the Director of Communications to devise and roll out the plan.

3. *Investigation of models for learning*

An important set of observations outlined in section 7 were related to the potential options for a new model of learning. As such a core aspect of the review, this topic requires further, focused consideration by stakeholders. It was proposed that a two-stage meeting cycle is set up to facilitate consideration of options:

1. An initial meeting with institutional representatives and key members of the Connexional Team, facilitated by the review consultant, to consider future-focussed learning for ministry and to outline desired characteristics of a model for learning. This group would act as a 'non-threatening, creative, intellectual' community that has a mandate to broadly discuss what learning is needed and how it might be delivered. (May/June 2025)
2. A dedicated meeting of the Connexional Learning and Development Forum tasked with reflecting on the proposed model and characteristics identified in the initial stakeholder meeting and to articulate more fully potential components for the model. Membership of the CLDF to be expanded to ensure representation from all institutional partners. (Sept/Oct 2025)

The outputs from both meetings will inform the review's final report and recommendations submitted to Conference 2026.

The Ministries Committee approved the creation of an institutional stakeholder group to facilitate a collaborative approach to identifying an innovative and future-focused model of learning for ministry and the subsequent embedding of the initial proposals made by the institutional stakeholder group into the work of the Connexional Learning and Development Forum.

*****RESOLUTION**

19/7. The Conference received the Report.

SECTION M APPEALS PROCESSES

- 1 In October 2021 the Methodist Council agreed to a proposal from the Ministries Committee that in the light of changing selection procedures and patterns of oversight the Committee establish a Task Group to review the Appeals processes concerning candidates for the ministry, student ministers, probationers and

others. The summary paper presented to the Council can be found at https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/counc_oct-21_mc21-85-appeals-processes.pdf.

- 2 The terms of reference for the Task Group were:
 - To explore the relationship between the Church's understanding of discernment and the 'right' to appeal decisions;
 - To review the current Standing Orders on appeals/reviews for candidates and ministers in training and to consider if these might be clarified and simplified;
 - To review the timescales of appeal processes;
 - To consider the implications of ministers in training returning to the context in which an original (but overturned) decision for discontinuance was made;
 - ensure that processes include the principles of justice, dignity and solidarity and compliance legislation;
 - To review the protocols for the hearings of appeals.
- 3 The Task Group made an Interim Report to the Ministries Committee in May 2022. In the light of comments received it produced a revised version of the report in January 2023 and made a second Interim Report to the Committee in February 2023.
- 4 That second report explained that the Task Group was looking to make as coherent and consistent as possible all the Appeal processes relating to decisions about what might be termed initial ministry with the Methodist Church in Britain (ie cases of the acceptance or not of candidates for the ministry, the continuance or discontinuance of students, the continuance or discontinuance of probationers, decisions about the transfer of ministers of other conferences or churches or the reinstatement of former ministers into Full Connexion, and matters of competence dealt with under Standing Order 042 'Inability to Fulfil Requirements'). Amongst that range of cases, for example, a decision to discontinue a student or probationer is very similar to a decision to remove a minister from Full Connexion after the minister has been ordained. There should therefore be some coherence and consistency between the processes for appeal in both cases. It was recognised that coherence and consistency do not require absolute similarity between all appeals, but any divergences should be rationally defensible as being due to the requirements of the particular context in each case.
- 5 However, at the time of that second report a major review of the Complaints and Discipline system as set out in Part 11 of Standing Orders was being conducted. The work of the Task Group was therefore paused until the outcomes of that review were clear.

The Review of Part 11 of Standing Orders eventually reported to the Conference of 2024 (Agenda item 32). It started that 'There are no recommended changes to appeals following a discipline hearing.' (Agenda p 414). The work could therefore proceed, and the Ministries Committee now presents the following report and recommendations.

General Considerations

- 6 Candidating; the training of student ministers; probation; and the procedures for assessing the applications of Ministers of Other Churches to transfer to the British Conference: all of these are about the discernment of ministerial vocation. Sight of that should not be lost, especially when appeals concern technical breaches of procedural rules or narrow construal of particular facts. Alongside that priority, however, the procedures of the Church need to be fair and, where appropriate, open to challenge. Knowing where and when it is appropriate to challenge a recommendation is another form of discernment, but in a connexional church clashes of discernment about ministerial vocation should lead to a moment of deeper reflection and, in some cases, the check and balance of a review of the initial judgement.
- 7 Trust between those with oversight and those they oversee is an essential element in discernment and ministerial formation. Ideally, all the processes during candidating, training and probation, and indeed beyond in ordained ministry, should meet both the needs outlined above. All too easily, however, appeal procedures can be perceived as judicial and adversarial, with "winners" and "losers". One result of some appeal processes in recent years has been an erosion of trust in the Church's processes when different bodies make contradictory decisions. Those bodies whose decisions or recommendations are overturned can be distressed and demotivated. Those individuals who "succeed" on appeal can be tempted to an

unhealthy feeling that they have 'got one over' on the Church's authorities. Social media can enable this kind of unhelpful attitude to be widely broadcast.

- 8 So far as recommendations of discontinuance from training or probation are concerned one very unsatisfactory result of some successful appeals is that student ministers and probationers return to the oversight of people who are known to have made the initial recommendation to discontinue. Whereas a probationer can sometimes be re-stationed in a different District, that may entail a huge disruption to family life. No such remedy is available for student ministers now that we have just the one training institution. Although it should still be possible to appeal successfully against a recommendation, those hearing any appeal should exercise careful discernment about the judgements of those who have worked most closely with the student minister or probationer concerned, and also about the implications of any decisions they might make.
- 9 Similarly, the multiple layers of appeal available in relation to recommendations of discontinuance leave student ministers and probationers in a state of limbo for extended periods before a final outcome is determined. Can they continue with their studies and, in the case of probationers, with day-to-day ministry while the possibility of discontinuance hangs over them? Can they reasonably be expected to do so with the pressures of pending appeals, and with important relationships in question?
- 10 All of these considerations lead us to question the current lengthy and elaborate appeal procedures. Many of those concerning candidating were developed before the introduction of forms of selection based on evidence-based discernment. Those concerning students were developed when there were multiple training institutions, some with local oversight committees and others where MCPOC had to act as the local oversight committee. In a church much smaller than it was when these procedures were developed, and with far fewer candidates, student ministers and probationers, we believe that a significant streamlining of the avenues of appeal is needed.

Outline Proposals: Principles

- 11 The appeals processes shall be clearly evidence-based.
- 12 Those sitting on appeals committees shall be trained and fully conversant with the procedures that have led to the decision which is being appealed. Where required, they shall have available to them expertise and advice on matters of neurodiversity, occupational health and other policies relating to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.
- 13 Candidates, students and probationers and ministers of other churches are at different stages on a single trajectory of discernment, formation and development. Appeals procedures therefore need to take account of the different circumstances applying to each, but also need to ensure consistency between the stages as well as across the whole Connexion. This particularly applies where the appeal is made because an Occupational Health report has led to the overturning of an initial recommendation by the Committee for Discernment of Ordained Vocation that a candidate should be accepted; or against an allocation of a student minister to a particular training pathway.
- 14 Appeals may only be submitted by the candidate, student minister, probationer or minister from another church, supported where desired by submissions from other interested parties.
- 15 Appeals shall not be complete re-hearings of the original case, but only possible on stated grounds, such as
 - i. that there was a material procedural irregularity in how the matter was dealt with by the original body;
 - ii. that the original body failed to take into account all relevant matters or took into account irrelevant ones;
 - iii. that in the light of events occurring since the decision, or of evidence of which the person appealing could not reasonably be expected to have been aware at the time, substantial doubt has been cast upon the correctness of the decision.
- 16 Appeals shall be submitted to clearly established 'gatekeepers' who shall in each case judge whether the criteria for proceeding to the hearing of an appeal have been met. It is proposed that the Chair and

Convenor of the Connexional Appeal Committee (see para 18 below) shall be designated to fulfil this function.

- 17 There shall be one main point of decision-making in the initial processes leading to the appeal (although various streams may feed in to the making of that decision), and a single possibility and place of appeal.
- 18 A Connexional Appeal Panel shall be appointed by the Ministries Committee to deal with appeals by candidates, student ministers, probationers and minister of other churches in all the above categories. This shall replace the panel currently appointed by the Ministries Committee under Standing Order 251 and widen its brief. It shall also replace both the Connexional Review Committee provided under Standing Order 031 for cases of Continuance in Training and Probation and also the committee hearing any appeal against the decision of that Review Committee under Standing Order 032, merging and fulfilling the functions of both without the possibility of further review.
- 19 Individual committees shall be drawn from the Connexional Appeal Panel to hear particular cases. Members of the Panel shall be fully trained in the processes of candidature and probation that are relevant to the Committees on which they sit. They shall not have current involvement in those processes of selection, training and formation about which they hear appeals.

Proposed Procedures

20 In summary, the following processes shall apply:

In the case of **candidates**

- the Committee for the Discernment of Ordained Vocation shall make a decision (see Section 71 of Standing Orders, especially SO 714)
- if the candidate appeals, the Chair and Convenor of the Connexional Appeal Committee shall decide whether the appeal satisfies the established criteria for appeals (see para 15 above)
- a Panel of the Connexional Appeal Committee shall hear and resolve any eligible appeal.

In the case of candidates appealing against a **decision made in the light of an Occupational Health assessment**

- the Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee (MCPOC) shall make the initial decision as set out in Standing Order 715 (4) to (6)
- if the candidate appeals, the Chair and Convenor of the Connexional Appeal Committee shall decide whether the appeal satisfies the established criteria for appeals (see para 15 above)
- a Panel of the Connexional Appeal Committee shall hear and resolve any eligible appeal.

In the case of candidates or student ministers appealing against an **allocation to a training pathway**

- a connexional allocations panel, acting under the oversight of MCPOC, shall make the initial decision about allocation under Standing Order 722 (3)
- if the candidate or student appeals, the Chair and Convenor of the Connexional Appeal Committee shall decide whether the appeal satisfies the established criteria for appeals (see para 15 above)
- a Panel of MCPOC shall hear and resolve any eligible appeal. *[This will require an amendment to SO 722(3) If an appeal against allocation is to the same body as the other cases in this list (a) it raises the importance of allocation and (b) it makes it harder to say that there cannot be appeals against initial stationing.]*

In the case of **ministers of other churches applying to transfer**

- the Committee for the Discernment of Ordained Vocation shall make a decision (see Section 73 of Standing Orders)
- if the applicant appeals, the Chair and Convenor of the Connexional Appeal Committee shall decide whether the appeal satisfies the established criteria for appeals (see para 15 above)
- a Panel of the Connexional Appeal Committee shall hear and resolve any eligible appeal. *NB, this procedure shall not apply to decisions about whether someone shall be recognised and regarded as a minister in Full Connexion with the Conference, as that is primarily a technical judgement about eligibility.*

In the case of **student ministers**

- The Queen's Oversight Committee (QOC) shall make a recommendation
- a panel of the Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee (MCPOC) shall hear the whole case and make a decision
- if the student minister appeals, the Chair and Convenor of the Connexional Appeal Committee shall decide whether the appeal satisfies the established criteria for appeals (see para 15 above)
- A Panel of the Connexional Appeal Committee shall hear and resolve any eligible appeal (see SO 031).

NB, there shall no longer be a right of appeal against the decision of the Connexional Appeal Committee as currently set out in SO 032, or further appeal as set out in SO 035.

In the case of **probationers**

- a District Probationers Committee (and, where appropriate, the relevant district Presbyteral Synod) shall make a recommendation
- a MCPOC panel shall hear the whole case and make a decision
- if the probationer appeals, the Chair and Convenor of the Connexional Appeal Committee shall decide whether the appeal satisfies the established criteria for appeals (see para 15 above)
- a Panel of the Connexional Appeal Committee shall hear and resolve any eligible appeal (see SO 031).

NB, there shall no longer be a right of appeal against the decision of the Connexional Appeal Committee as currently set out in SO 032, or further appeal as set out in SO 035.

- 21 At any hearing of an appeal the appellant shall present their case and answer any questions, supported by one other person who shall have the right to speak. The relevant connexional officer or officer of the committee making the decision being appealed shall present the case of that committee and answer any questions, supported if appropriate by one other person with close knowledge of what happened in the processes of that committee.
- 22 In dealing with cases concerning candidates, the Connexional Appeals Committee shall have the power not just to accept fully or to reject completely a candidate's offer, but also to recommend that where appropriate the candidate be dispensed from repeating those requirements of the earlier stages of the process of candidating, should they choose to offer again in a future year.
- 23 In dealing with cases of appeals against discontinuance by student ministers or probationers, the Connexional Appeals Committee shall have the power to recommend that the oversight or other arrangements for the student minister or probationer be altered if the decision is that she or he is not to be discontinued.

Reporting to the Conference

- 24 The Connexional Appeals Committee shall report the outcomes of its work to the Conference (in the first instance in the Presbyteral Session or Conference Diaconal Committee as appropriate). The decisions of its Panels shall become effective from the date stated in the notification of the decision.
- 25 As noted in paragraph 4, there are similarities between decisions about (a) the acceptance or not of candidates for the ministry and of minister of other churches applying to transfer, (b) the continuance or discontinuance of student ministers and probationers, and (c) the removal of ministers from Full Connexion and reinstatement of former ministers in it. There should therefore be some coherence and consistency between the processes for reporting these matters to the Conference.
- 26 There are, however, discrepancies which point to systemic problems. In our discipline procedures, a charge is found to be established and the penalty judged to be one of removing a minister from being in Full Connexion is in essence treated as a final decision made on behalf of the Conference and takes effect immediately or at a date decided by the Discipline Committee dealing with the case. The result is reported to the Conference, which is not asked to approve or amend it.
- 27 The only exception is if a formal appeal is made on particular stated grounds. Such an appeal can be made by the Presenting Officer in the case or by the Respondent, or if the matter is one of the leniency or

severity of the sentence, by the President. Procedures are laid down for how such an appeal is heard and adjudicated.

- 28 Beyond that Appeal Hearing there is the possibility of a further appeal by one of the parties to the Conference, but again on restricted grounds. If the issue is a matter of interpretation of doctrine, it is heard (in the type of case outlined above) by the full Presbyteral Session. If it is concerned with other matters, it is heard by a committee of 15 acting on behalf of the Conference.
- 29 Only in the case of such a Further Appeal on a matter of doctrine does the full session of the Conference make a decision about an individual case (and there it is a matter of a decision about the interpretation of a particular doctrine more than about the particular individual – although admittedly the decision about the doctrine may have consequences for that individual).
- 30 Both an Appeal and a Further Appeal to the Conference are treated as judicial procedures reviewing other judicial procedures. The Presenting Officer and the Respondent may be present, heard, supported, and legally represented at both. The procedures mainly deal with matters of report: new evidence can only be introduced in very particular circumstances.
- 31 There are some similarities between the above and the processes for making decisions about (a) the acceptance or not both of candidates for the ministry and of minister of other churches applying to transfer to the Conference of the Methodist Church in Britain; (b) the continuance or discontinuance of student ministers and probationers; and (c) the reception or not of presbyters and deacons into Full Connexion. As proposed in the earlier sections of this report in each of these cases there are in general terms procedures leading to an initial decision and then the possibility of appeals on stated grounds. Those appeals are heard in courts of the church that are formally constituted and consist of a range of people who are carefully chosen and trained in what they are doing.
- 32 The results of these processes, including appeals, are then reported to the Conference. Over the last 30 years we have moved to a position where the Conference formally adopts the results but is not expected to resist or amend them, although members of the Conference still have the right to do so. But it is increasingly accepted that the point of the matter being before the full Conference, including in closed sessions, is not to deal with individual cases but so that trends can be recognised and general principles decided which will influence the way that the procedures work in the future.
- 33 Other cases such as reinstatements, however, are not always treated in the same way. The Conference has been known to debate and at times reject or vary recommendations about individuals. Members of the Conference have intervened who happen to have been party to earlier parts of the process, or who profess to have knowledge of some aspects of a case, but who have not been present in the most recent process which has reviewed and balanced all factors in the case. The person who is at the centre of the case is not present or represented and so cannot respond to anything that is said. There is therefore a strong possibility that the process in the Conference will not be fair, just or discerning.
- 34 To ensure that there are better processes at the Conference and consistency about all the cases that are dealt with in this report, any report to the Conference about a case could be circulated in confidence to the members of the particular Session of the Conference in advance, rather than being made orally for the first time at the point of decision-making in that Session. Anyone seeking to amend the proposed resolution attached to that report would then have to indicate that intention in advance. A Committee of Reference under Standing Order 137 could then be appointed to act on behalf of the Conference and hear the matter. Anyone wishing to raise matters could present their case to the Committee of Reference and the subject of the case or a representative together with an officer of the body making the recommendation to the Conference could reply. The decision of the Committee of Reference would then be formally reported to the Conference.

***RESOLUTIONS

19/8. The Conference received the Report.

19/9. The Conference amended Standing Orders as follows:

251 Appeals. (1) The Ministries Committee shall appoint an Appeals Panel consisting of persons who are not members of the Committee for the Discernment of Ordained Vocation ***or other committee against whose decision an appeal has been submitted*** to deal with appeals under Standing Order ***033, 040(11), 716, or***

722(3) or 730(10). **Members shall be drawn from the Appeals Panel to form committees to hear each particular case.** The Ministries Committee shall also appoint **a chair of the Appeals Panel and** a convener of Appeals Committees.

(2) Members of each Appeal Committee shall be trained and fully conversant with the procedures that have led to the decision that is being appealed.

(3) Appeals Committees shall undertake their tasks in accordance with principles and procedures approved and published by the Ministries Committee.

716 Appeals. (1) The candidate, ~~or with the candidate's consent the candidate's Superintendent or Chair,~~ may, by notice given in writing to the secretary of the Committee for the Discernment of Ordained Vocation, or in the case of an appeal against a recommendation of the Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee in accordance with Standing Order 715(5) above to the secretary of that committee, within fourteen days of notification to the candidate in writing of the decision of the committee, appeal against the recommendation of the committee, on one or more of the following grounds:

(i) that the procedural provisions of this Section **or the guidelines issued by the Ministries Committee** have not been correctly followed **to such an extent as to make the recommendation inappropriate;**

(ii) that ~~there are facts which were not available to the committee~~ **failed to take into account all relevant matters or took into account irrelevant ones to such an extent** and which are such as to make its recommendation inappropriate;

(iii) that ~~the judgment of the committee, as conveyed to the candidate in the official letter informing the candidate that the offer made has been declined, is questioned in writing by both the Superintendent and the Chair of the candidate,~~ **in the light of events occurring since the decision, or of evidence of which the appellant could not reasonably be expected to have been aware at the time, substantial doubt has been cast upon the correctness of the decision.**

The notice of appeal must specify the grounds of appeal and a reasoned statement to support the appeal shall be supplied by the appellant.

(1A) The chair of the Appeals Panel and convener of the Appeals Committees shall judge whether the grounds of appeal have been sufficiently established for the case to proceed to a hearing by a committee.

(2) Every such case **that is to be heard** shall be considered by an Appeals Committee of eight persons, of whom seven shall be a quorum. In the case of an appeal by ~~or on behalf of~~ a candidate for the diaconate the committee shall always include at least two deacons. The members of the committee shall be selected by the convener from the panel appointed by the Ministries Committee under Standing Order 251. The convener shall be present throughout the meeting of the committee in order to advise on procedure and practice but shall not speak on the substance of the case and shall have no vote.

(3) The Appeals Committee shall be supplied at its meeting with copies of all papers from Stage One and Stage Two of the appellant's Discernment of Ordained Vocation process in the case of every appeal and, where the appeal is under Standing Order 715(7) above, the Occupational Health assessment, whether that appeal is against the recommendation of the Committee for the Discernment of Ordained Vocation or of the Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee, ~~and the secretary of the relevant committee shall expound its case for its recommendation.~~

(4) ~~The candidate and any other appellant specified in clause (1) above shall have the right to attend the committee, to be present for the presentation of the Committee for the Discernment of Ordained Vocation's case or that of the Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee, as the case may be, and to reply. The candidate may be accompanied by a presbyter or deacon of the candidate's own choice.~~ **The hearing of the appeal shall be conducted under the provisions of this Standing Order and in accordance with the principles and procedures approved by the Ministries Committee under Standing Order 251(3).**

(5) The candidate may be questioned about the grounds of the appeal and, where the appeal is under heads (ii) or (iii) of clause (1) above, the issues cited in the judgment of the Committee for the Discernment of Ordained Vocation or of the Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee but there shall be no general rehearing of the case or repetition of the assessment procedures, as the case may be, of the relevant ~~Committee~~ **committee.**

(6) **At the end of the hearing,** ~~After the candidate (if present), any other appellant and the secretary of the relevant committee have withdrawn,~~ the Appeals Committee shall decide whether or not to uphold the appeal.

(7) Subject to the above the Appeals Committee shall regulate its own procedure.

(8) The Appeals Committee shall report to the Presbyteral Session of the Conference or the Conference Diaconal Committee, as the case may be, with the number of votes cast for and against its recommendation, no neutrals being allowed. Any recommendation at variance with that of the Committee for the Discernment of Ordained Vocation or of the Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee (as appropriate) shall require not less than six votes in favour.

722 Pre-ordination Training. ...

... (3) The connexional allocations panel, acting under the oversight of the Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee shall have the responsibility for:

- (i) allocating each candidate to full-time or part-time pre-ordination training and to the appropriate training institution; and
- (ii) determining which candidates are to receive financial assistance towards the cost of such training in the form of bursaries (and if so, at what level).

Any appeal made against a decision upon the matters covered by (i) or (ii) above shall be ~~dealt with by the Appeals Panel appointed under Standing Order 251.~~ **made on the grounds set out in Standing Order 716(1). Where the chair of the Appeals Panel and convener of the Appeals Committees appointed under Standing Order 251(1) judge that the grounds of appeal have been sufficiently established for the case to proceed to a hearing it shall be dealt with by an Appeal Committee appointed by the Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee for that purpose. The hearing of the appeal shall be conducted under the provisions of this Standing Order and in accordance with the principles and procedures approved by the Ministries Committee under Standing Order 251(3).**

730 Ministerial Transfer between Churches.

... (10) The applicant may, by notice in writing to the appropriate Team member responsible for candidates for the presbyterate or the diaconate, apply for a review of the recommendation of the committee, specifying **under which of the grounds of appeal set out in Standing Order 716(1) it is being made.** The notice shall be given so as to reach the Team member within fourteen days of notification in writing to the applicant of the decision of the committee. The appeal shall be dealt with under Standing Order 716(2)(1A) to (8) substituting "applicant" for "candidate" throughout, except that:

- ~~(i) there shall be no other appellant than the applicant;~~
- (ii) the phrase "Stage One and Stage Two of" should be omitted in Standing Order 716(3), and "relevant connexional officer" substituted for "Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee";
- ~~(iii) the phrase "and any other appellant specified in clause (1) above" in Standing Order 716(4) should be omitted;~~
- (iv) the phrase "relevant connexional officer" should be substituted for "Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee" in Standing Order 716(8).

Section 03 Continuance in Training and Probation

030 Scope of Section. (1) The provisions of this Section relate to students and probationers in training or on trial for the presbyterate or the diaconate and in this Section 'student' and 'probationer' shall be construed accordingly.

(2) The provisions of Standing Orders 031 to 034 shall apply when ~~either of the oversight committee concerned recommends discontinuance~~ (that is to say that a student cease training or that a probationer be not continued on trial or be not recommended for ordination, as the case may be) but there is no charge which would, if established, put in question ~~his or her~~ **the standing of the relevant student or probationer** as a member of the Church or as a local preacher.

(2A) ...

(3) For the purposes of this Section the oversight committees concerned are:

- (i) for presbyteral and diaconal students the Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee and the local oversight committee appointed under Standing Order 252(11);
- (ii) ~~[deleted]~~
- (iii) for presbyteral and diaconal probationers, including those who are in part-time circuit appointments, the Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee and the district Probationers Committee.

(4) If during the annual review of the progress of students and probationers the question of discontinuance of a student or probationer arises for the first time at some stage later than **regular meetings of the bodies concerned allow** ~~that referred to in clause (2) above~~ then so much of the procedure prescribed in Standing Orders 031 to 034, or an analogous procedure, shall be followed, and with such adaptations, as the church courts considering the case think fit.

(5) ...

031 Initial Committee. (1) When ~~this Standing Order applies~~ **the Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee in consultation with a student oversight committee or district Probationers Committee as appropriate has confirmed a recommendation of discontinuance and the student or probationer concerned wishes to appeal, the case shall be dealt with by** a connexional ~~Review~~ **Appeal** Committee, consisting of five persons, shall be appointed by the Secretary of the Conference,

~~who shall also appoint an additional person to be its secretary, and that committee shall be convened by its secretary to consider and make a decision upon the question of discontinuance~~ **under Standing Order 251 in accordance with the provisions of this Section and the principles and procedures approved by the Ministries Committee under Standing Order 251(3).**

(1A) The student or probationer concerned shall submit any appeal within fourteen days of being sent notification in writing of the decision of the oversight committee, on one or more of the following grounds:

- (i) that the procedural provisions of this Section or the guidelines issued by the Ministries Committee have not been correctly followed;**
- (ii) that the committee failed to take into account all relevant matters or took into account irrelevant ones to such an extent as to make its recommendation inappropriate;**
- (iii) that in the light of events occurring since the decision, or of evidence of which the appellant could not reasonably be expected to have been aware at the time, substantial doubt has been cast upon the correctness of the decision.**

(1B) The chair of the Appeals Panel and convener of the Appeals Committees appointed under Standing Order 251 shall judge whether the grounds of appeal have been sufficiently established for the case to proceed to a hearing by a committee.

(1C) The member of the Connexional Team responsible for student presbyters, student deacons, presbyteral probationers or diaconal probationers, as the case may be, shall be responsible with the officers of the relevant oversight committee for collating and presenting a statement of the grounds for recommending discontinuance and any reports or other documents which it is intended to place before the ~~connexional Review~~ **Appeal** Committee. These shall be submitted to the ~~secretary~~ **convener** of the committee who shall immediately supply a copy to the student or probationer concerned. The committee shall not meet until at least fourteen days after the copy or, as the case may require, the last of the copies, has been supplied.

~~(1B)~~**(1D)** The student or probationer concerned shall send to the ~~secretary~~ **convener** of the committee any material which he or she wishes to be put before the ~~connexional Review~~ **Appeal** Committee not less than seven days before the date fixed for its meeting, unless the person appointed to chair the meeting permits a late submission of such material upon being satisfied that such material could not have been sent earlier.

~~(1C)~~**(1E)** If, after making further inquiries in respect of the material supplied by the student or probationer under clause ~~(1BD)~~ above, the person presenting the case for discontinuance (as determined by clause (2) below) wishes to put before the meeting the result of those inquiries, the committee shall not meet until at least seven days after the student or probationer has been informed of such result and sent any additional documents intended to be relied on. The date of the meeting shall, if necessary, be adjourned for this purpose. It may also be adjourned at the request of the person presenting the case where the chair of the committee has permitted a late submission of material by the student or probationer under clause ~~(1BD)~~ above.

~~(1D) The secretary of the connexional Review Committee shall ensure that students and probationers are aware of their right to be accompanied each by a friend and shall encourage and assist them to avail themselves of that right. To that end the President shall maintain a list of persons, including senior presbyters and deacons, willing to act as friends.~~

(2) At the meeting of the committee the case for discontinuance shall be presented by the appropriate member of the Connexional Team or officer of the oversight committee concerned, as may be agreed with the person appointed to chair the meeting. The student or probationer shall have the right to attend and respond and to be accompanied by a friend, who shall also have the right to speak.

~~(3) Members of the committee who wish to raise any matter not referred to in the written statement of grounds shall do so before the student or probationer leaves the meeting and both the person presenting the case for discontinuance and the student or probationer shall be given an opportunity to deal with it (for which purpose the meeting shall be adjourned if necessary); no fresh matter shall be raised after the student or probationer has left.~~

~~(3A) The secretary of the Review Committee shall make the student or probationer aware of the importance of attending the meeting. If he or she then refuses or fails to attend, the committee must consider the reason for his or her absence and may adjourn for that purpose. The committee may then, if it thinks fit, hear the case for discontinuance and reach a decision in the absence of the student or probationer.~~

(4) The committee shall decide whether to accept the recommendation of discontinuance made by the relevant oversight committee, solely on the basis of the documents supplied in accordance with this Standing Order, the submissions presented at the meeting and any other documents which both the person presenting the case for discontinuance and the student or probationer agree that the committee may consider, and shall record its reasons for its decision. Where the committee decides to accept the recommendation, the **date at which it** decision shall take effect **shall be stated** as soon as the period within which an appeal can be made has expired without the giving of a notice of appeal.

~~(4A) The secretary shall take notes of the proceedings which, together with the original written statement of grounds, any documents brought in evidence and the committee's decision and reasons for it, shall form the basis of the committee's report in the case of an appeal.~~

(5) The decision of the committee shall be communicated to the student or probationer in writing. ***There shall be no possibility of further appeal.***

DELETE STANDING ORDERS 032 (Right of Appeal) AND 033 (Procedure on Appeals)

034 Reports upon Decisions. ~~The secretary of the Review Committee or, if there has been an appeal, the reporting officer of the Appeal Committee shall report to the next ensuing Conference in its Presbyteral Session, or to the Conference Diaconal Committee, as the case may require, any decisions made under this Section.~~

DELETE STANDING ORDER 035 (Further Appeal)

Section 04 Ministerial Competence

040 Failure to Fulfil Obligations ...

(11) The person concerned may within two weeks of receiving the written communication under clause (6) above appeal against the action of the committee to the President in writing, setting out the reasons for the appeal. The President or the Vice-President on ~~his or her~~ **the President's** behalf shall ~~consider the documentary evidence before the committee including any notes of meetings and the committee's record of its decision and the reasons for it, or may~~ appoint a committee of not more than three persons from the ~~connexional Appeals~~ Panel established under Standing Order ~~251~~ **290** to consider the appeal on ~~his or her~~ **the President's** behalf (holding a hearing for the purpose if the committee thinks it necessary) and advise on a reply. The reply of the President or Vice-President upon the appeal shall be final.

*****RESOLUTION**

19/10. The Conference directed the Ministries Committee to consult further and bring detailed proposals to the Conference of 2026 about the proposal in paragraphs 24-34 of the report

SECTION N

UPDATE ON THE JDS STRATEGY

The Council received a report from the officers within the Connexional Team concerning the progress made in developing and implementing the JDS strategy recommendations during the connexional year 2024/25. The Conference adopted the strategy in 2021, and this included ten main recommendations.

The emphasis in 2024 had been to reflect on what had been achieved in terms of JDS strategy implementation, and to embed and integrate the strategy throughout the work of the Connexional Team. In addition, priority was given to the capacity building of the District EDI Officers. A focus has been on encouraging Connexional Team members to complete Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) for any major change and significant decision-making processes. In addition the Connexional Team has been encouraged to engage with members of the Solidarity Circles as part of the process.

District EDI Officers

District EDI Officers have been appointed in most Districts and in addition there is a growing number of Circuit EDI Officers. The aim is for every District and Circuit to appoint one or more EDI officers. Significant effort was made to build the capacity of these officers, by providing a number of online workshops through the year.

Solidarity Circles

Solidarity Circles were established to help the Methodist Church to understand the challenges and barriers faced by people from diverse backgrounds within the Church which have prevented full participation in the life of the Church. Solidarity Circles have been established as safe spaces for individuals within the Church to share their experiences, support one another, and communicate concerns to the Connexional Team and wider Church, for opportunities to resolve issues. Each Circle focuses on a specific aspect of diversity, aiming to promote understanding and inclusion within the Methodist community.

Equality Impact Assessment

The Methodist Church Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is designed to help the Connexional Team, Local Churches, Circuits and individuals ensure that policies, practices and decision-making processes are fair,

inclusive and transparent. The EIA is intended to ensure that individual members of the Church are not inadvertently disadvantaged or discriminated against as a result of new policies or major change.

Discrimination and Abuse Response Service (DARS)

The Discrimination and Abuse Response Service is pivotal in addressing issues of discrimination and abuse within the Church. Initially piloted in two Districts, DARS expanded to ten Districts and has supported a number of individuals throughout 2024. Full implementation across all Districts is scheduled for spring 2026.

Truth and Reconciliation

The Truth and Reconciliation project has entered a critical consultation phase to ensure shared expectations and understanding of the process. Key developments from the steering group, formed in summer 2024, included the decision to host Roundtables in 2025 with core stakeholders within the Methodist Church (including JDS committee, former Presidents and Vice-Presidents, senior leaders in the Connexional Team, District Chairs, Cliff College leaders) and key partners (including HE learning centres, Place for Hope, other identified specialists and practitioners in truth and reconciliation work). The Susanna Wesley Foundation continues to support and to help to shape this important work. This consultation is scheduled to be completed by the end of the current connexional year.

The Council has planned a conversation with representatives of the JDS Committee at its meeting in June 2025, which will take place after the submission of items for the Conference Agenda.

*****RESOLUTION**

19/11. The Conference received the Report.