

3. Connexional Council, part 1

Contact name and details	The Revd Sonia M Hicks Chair of the Council chaircouncil@methodistchurch.org.uk
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SECTION A GENERAL REPORT

The Connexional Council is charged under clause 37B of the Deed of Union with responsibility for the general control and management of the connexional administration of the Methodist Church. SO 203 sets out its specific responsibilities as the trustee body, and SO 204 its responsibilities in respect of finance and property. SO 205 charges the Council with responsibility to keep in constant review the life of the Methodist Church, so as to assist in making its work and witness more effective. SO 203(3) directs that in fulfilment of these responsibilities, the Council shall help to ensure that the Conference's decisions and objectives are implemented in a timely, cohesive and considered manner, and shall bring such proposals and reports to the Conference as will assist the Conference to determine the future policy and objectives of the Conference.

The Council has begun to reflect on strategy with members of the Senior Management Group, recognising the constraints that the Connexion faces in terms of the decline of its membership, the need to make some critical decisions about what is no longer sustainable, and the opportunities that the short-term boost to the Connexional Priority Fund from the sale of redundant property is likely to offer. This is a continuing piece of work and the Council has determined to devote time in 2025-26 to the further exploration of these issues.

The membership of the Connexional Council for the year 2024/2025 is as follows:

The Secretary of the Conference

The President of the Conference

Vice-President of the Conference

The Chair of the Connexional Council:

Sonia Hicks

The Chair or Deputy Chair of the Mission Committee:

Joanne Cox-Darling

The Chair or Deputy Chair of the Ministries Committee:

Gill Newton

The Chair or Deputy Chair of the Resourcing Committee:

Alethea Siow

The Chair or Deputy Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee:

Keith Hickey

Up to fourteen other persons: Richard Byass, David Goodall, Beverly Hollings, Michael Long, Anna Malnutt, David Matthews, Nick Oborski, Sarah Parkin, Paul Spray, Tim Swindell, Dawn Wood.

The Connexional Secretary, assistant secretary of the Conference and the Conference Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice also attend the Council's meetings. The Council has also invited other members of the Senior Management Group and the Legal Counsel to be present for most of its discussions.

Information about the Council can be found on the Methodist Church website at www.methodist.org.uk/council

The report to the Conference is presented in two parts, this one in Volume 1 of the Agenda and part two in Volume 2 of the Agenda.

These reports contain those items considered by the Council and not reported elsewhere in the Agenda.

1.1 Governance responsibilities

In accordance with its governance responsibilities, the Council:

- appointed connexional committees, trusts and representatives for the year 2024/2025;
- received reports from a number of committees and trustee bodies;
- approved a scheme of delegation;
- received reports at each meeting from the Senior Management Group of the Connexional Team;
- adopted a revised risk management policy and the corporate risk register;
- received updates on serious incident reports made to the Charity Commission;

- approved the signing of a data sharing agreement between the Pension Trustee and the Pensions Team;
- approved the 2023 Valuation of the Methodist Ministers' Pension Scheme and associated documentation;
- appointed an approval group to consider applications under Model Trust 20(1) and Model Trust 14(2A);
- appointed its representatives to the Conference;
- received a report concerning the Special Resolutions which the 2024 Conference had referred to the Council;
- received an annual report concerning Action for Hope;
- as required by Notice of Motion 2024/104, appointed Nick Oborski to hold before the Connexional Council the needs and differences of jurisdictions other than England and Wales on all matters considered by the Connexional Council, particularly those with legal and jurisdictional dimensions such as GDPR, Employment Law, relationship with TMCP, Charity Legislation, etc;
- acting on behalf of the Conference, appointed the Law and Polity Committee, the Safeguarding Committee, the Forces Board, the Ministerial Candidates' and Probationers' Oversight Committee, the Authorisations Committee;
- acting on behalf of the Conference, appointed Brian Oakley and Thomas Osborne to the Nominations Committee;
- appointed a review group to consider an appeal against a decision made under SO 376(6)(i);
- agreed a process and appointed a scrutiny group to consider reinvitations for those whose appointments fall under the terms of SO 387(2);
- adopted a policy concerning Connexional Team members holding positions on Methodist trustee bodies and related committees;
- agreed to enter into a Deed of Indemnity for the outgoing members of the Methodist Council and authorised the Chair and Secretary of the Connexional Council to finalise the Deed;
- agreed to relinquish the reversionary gift left to the Fund for the Support of Presbyters and Deacons under Trust 10465 and to authorise the release of the capital from the Trust to enable the Managing Trustees of Trinity St Andrew's Methodist Chapel to pursue the release of capital in accordance with the Charities Act 2011;
- agreed to recommend to the Conference that the Revd Gillian M Newton be stationed to the Connexional Team from 1 September 2025, for an initial period of six years;
- agreed to recommend to the Conference that the Revd David M Goodall be stationed to the Connexional Team from 1 September 2025, for an initial period of six years;
- agreed to recommend to the Conference that the Revd Dr George Bailey be stationed to the Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education for a period of five years from 1 September 2025;
- agreed to recommend to the Conference that the Revd Dr Catrin Harland-Davies be stationed to the Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education for a period of five years from 1 September 2025;
- agreed to recommend the extension of the Revd Graham Jones's appointment as Learning and Development Officer for five years from 1 September 2025;
- noted the change of role to be undertaken by Deacon Kerry Scarlett within the Connexional Team from 1 March 2025 and agreed to recommend to the Conference that Ms Scarlett be stationed to the Connexional Team for a further five years from 1 September 2025;
- agreed to recommend to the Conference that the Revd Dr Andrew Stobart be stationed as Principal of Cliff College from 1 September 2025, for two years;
- agreed to recommend to the Conference that the Revd Sylvester Deigh be stationed to the Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education for a period of five years from 1 September 2025;
- acting on behalf of the Conference, agreed that The Methodist Church Upper Myanmar be invited to send a representative as an Associate Member of the 2025 Conference in place of the Methodist Church in Malaysia;
- approved a revised role description for membership of the Connexional Council.

1.2 Other business

The Council received an annual report from the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

*****RESOLUTION**

3/1. The Conference received the General Report of the Council.

SECTION B APPOINTMENT OF THE SECRETARY OF THE CONFERENCE

The Council noted that the current invitation of the Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler, in his role as Secretary of the Conference, comes to an end in August 2026. The Methodist Council, at its meeting in April 2024, had received a paper outlining a potential process for considering a reinvitation/nomination. The Methodist Council delegated to the Strategy and Resources Committee the responsibility for devising the process for considering the reappointment or appointment of the Secretary of the Conference and directed the Strategy and Resources Committee to establish a small group to oversee the process during the connexional year 2024/2025 and to report back to the Connexional Council. The group was duly appointed to act as the reinvitation committee.

Following a pastoral conversation with Dr Hustler, the reinvitation committee met in August 2024 and agreed the process to be followed and the questions to be asked in a consultation process. The committee reviewed the summary of the feedback received and noted the overwhelmingly positive responses which had been submitted. It recommended to the Council that an extension of five years be recommended to the Conference. Members of the reinvitation committee met with Dr Hustler to share the feedback, to talk through some of the points raised, and to confirm his willingness to accept a reinvitation.

The Council recommends to the Conference that the Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler be invited to serve as Secretary of the Conference for a further period of five years from 1 September 2026.

Reasoned statement

Jonathan Hustler brings wisdom, honesty and integrity, trustworthiness and competence to the office of Secretary of the Conference. His leadership style is collaborative and supportive of others, and he appreciates and supports the expertise of others with whom he works. He has particular skills in assimilating complex material and presenting it accessibly, and brings a depth of knowledge and theological insight to the role. In relation to the Conference, connexional groups and committees, he brings extensive wisdom and provides a calming presence which engenders confidence, particularly at a time of uncertainty and change.

Jonathan's leadership and management of the Connexional Team is felt to be collaborative and thoughtful, recognising the gifts and skills in others and delegating appropriately. He is supportive and listens honestly to District Chairs and the Warden of the Order, providing timely and helpful advice in response to specific enquiries. He is ecumenically sensitive and contributes wisely to ecumenical contexts.

Jonathan has resilient capacity, inhabiting the office with humility, and bringing wisdom, knowledge and a care for the Church.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

3/2. The Conference received the Report.

3/3 The Conference, with the required majority, adopted Resolution 3/3 in the form:

The Conference designates for appointment the Revd Dr Jonathan R Hustler as Secretary of the Conference for a further period of five years from 1 September 2026.

SECTION C RESPONSE TO MEMORIALS M1 AND M2 (2019)

- 1 In 2019, Memorial 1 and Memorial 2 were sent to the Conference (see Appendix 1) regarding the financial provisions for ministers who are on sick leave for six months or more (covered in Standing Order 376, previously numbered 365). The Conference's response to the memorials requested a

report to be submitted no later than 2021.

- 2 Between 2021 and 2024, the Connexional Allowances Committee (CAC) submitted annual reports which gave recommendations for the financial provision for ministers who are on long-term sick leave. The CAC agreed the following on an interim basis until September 2026:
 - Circuits can claim back monies paid to a minister for 12 months (minus Social Security benefits and statutory sick pay) if the minister has been off sick for 26 weeks, thus enabling a minister to have up to 18 months of sick leave.
 - Ministers can apply for a grant from the Methodist Church Fund for up to £350 per quarter in lieu of fixed costs they would not recover through their usual mileage claims.
 - Ministers can claim up to £600 for recuperative breaks, of which £400 is non-taxable.
 - Funding for additional wellbeing support services, consultation and appropriate recuperative treatment to help facilitate recovery is also available from the Methodist Medical Benevolent Fund (MMBF).
 - The Secretary of the Conference has the discretion to grant a recuperative year to a minister in order to assist their recuperation and return to the active work. These breaks have been funded by the Fund for the Support of Presbyters and Deacons (FSPD) with each case agreed between the President's Governance Adviser and the CAC.
- 3 The Council agreed to recommend that the funding for ministers who are off sick for over six months is picked up by connexional funds and the 12 month time limit is removed from the Standing Order. Whilst it would be expected that ministers are supported back to work in a shorter timeframe than 18 months (six months funded by the Circuit and 12 by connexional funds), in the rare circumstances where this is exceeded, it should remain a cost to connexional funds, rather than reverting to the circuit.
- 4 In relation to the provision of a manse during a period of sickness, it is expected that this should remain the responsibility of the Circuit and this could be added to the Standing Order.
- 5 The Council noted that further work is underway to consider ministerial wellbeing issues more generally.

***RESOLUTIONS

3/4. The Conference received the Report.

3/5. The Conference adopted the Report as its further reply to Memorials M1 and M2 (2019).

3/6. The Conference directed the Law and Polity Committee to bring the SO amendments to the 2026 Conference.

Appendix

M1 Reimbursements for stipends of ministers on long term sick leave

The Yeovil and Blackmore Vale (26/5) Circuit Meeting (Present: 31; Voting: unanimous) requests the Conference to amend Standing Order 365 so that responsibility for the stipend of a minister on long term sick leave does not revert to the Circuit from the Methodist Church Fund should a minister still be on sick leave after eighteen months.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Yeovil and Blackmore Vale Circuit for its memorial and for drawing the attention of the Conference to the difficult issue of the financial support of presbyters and deacons who are on long-term sick leave.

SO 365 aims to take from the Circuit some of the responsibility for the provision for ministers who are unwell. The Circuit is right to note that the assumption of responsibility for the stipend is time-limited to a period of

twelve months ('the eligible year'). This, effectively, offers a twelve-month period in which the minister can be helped back to full time work or explore other possibilities.

There have been a number of ministers unable to work for a considerable period over the last few years. The Strategy and Resources Committee has expressed concern that this is a part of the budget which cannot be predicted and is difficult to manage. Since the last revision of SO 365, statutory provision has changed and an employer (as which for these purposes the Methodist Church is classified) can no longer recover sick pay.

Members of the Connexional Team have been working at the behest of the Ministries Committee reviewing the support that is offered to ministers to prevent ill-health and through periods of absence and it is clear that this is a serious and complex problem of which finance is one aspect.

The Conference therefore encourages these pieces of work. The Conference notes that the stipend is not a salary and that a minister's need for support is no less (and can be greater) in periods of illness than in health. During such periods, it is incumbent on the Church to ensure both that the minister is supported and, as far as possible, free from additional stress through financial worry, and that the Circuit, or other body is able to offer ministry in the stead of that of the incapacitated minister.

In light of the ongoing work the Conference declines the memorial but directs the Council to ensure the policy for the payment of stipends and the provision of a manse for ministers on sick leave as set out in SO 365 and SO 801(4) is reviewed and a report made to the Conference no later than 2021.

M2 Amendment of Standing Order 365

The Salisbury (26/12) Circuit Meeting (Present: 25; Voting: unanimous) requests the Conference to amend Standing Order 365 so that responsibility for the stipend of a minister on long term sick leave does not revert to the Circuit from the Methodist Church Fund should a minister still be on sick leave after eighteen months.

Reply

The Conference adopts the same reply as to M1.

SECTION D RESPONSE TO MEMORIAL M16 (2024)

- 1 Memorial 16 to the 2024 Conference requested a review of the policy regarding housing payments for Authorised Ministers from other denominations. The Southport Circuit has requested the payment for a housing allowance for ministers from other churches/denominations who are authorised to serve the Methodist Church.

Update

- 2 The Resourcing Committee requested the views of the Ministries Committee on the issues raised in the memorial. The Chair of the Resourcing Committee presented the paper to the Ministries Committee, who received the report. The Ministries Committee discussed the memorial and advised that it did not believe that there is a need for a revision to the policy regarding Ministers' Housing Allowance. In addition, it noted that Circuits have a number of ways in which ministry costs can be compensated through existing expense claims.
- 3 The Council therefore noted that there does not appear a compelling argument to treat Authorised Ministers differently in the circumstances outlined in the Memorial. If a manse is available, then the minister should be expected to move in to it. If no manse is available then the usual rules apply.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

3/7. The Conference received the Report.

3/8. The Conference adopted the Report as its further reply to Memorial M16 (2024).

Appendix

M16 Ministers' housing allowance

The Southport Circuit Meeting (18/17) (Present: 30 Voting: in favour 29, against 0) is aware that there is a significant number of ministers of other churches/denominations who are 'authorised to serve' the Methodist Church.

The Southport Circuit requests that the Conference considers agreeing to payment of Accommodation Allowances to Authorised Ministers from other denominations who request to live in their own homes. We ask the Conference to permit the payment by Circuit Meetings.

The current position places ministers who have good reason for such a request at a major financial disadvantage. For example, in some cases the minister may have lived in his/her own home for a considerable number of years and chosen to do this. This is the case of one of our Authorised Ministers where the Liverpool Diocese has previously paid an accommodation allowance.

It is appreciated that a manse can often be made available if the authorised minister is not already living in the house provided with their primary role. However, the latter is not always the case so the Authorised Minister may be expected to move. However, the initial period of invitation can make moving into a manse costly and relatively inconvenient. In addition, the Conference only authorises people to serve the Methodist Church, 'during the ensuing connexional year'.

The Southport Circuit suggests that, since the minister remains under the discipline of their denomination, allowances should be modelled on the arrangements currently in place or currently agreed for any particular ministers of these respective denominations and also with the agreement of the appropriate authority in their own church/denomination.

The Southport Circuit requests that the Conference requests the Connexional Allowances Committee to consider the matter and also consider the documents provided with this memorial (available on request) which show the relative position of the Church of England, United Reformed Church and The Baptist Union.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Southport Circuit Meeting for this memorial.

The work of the Connexional Allowances Committee will, subject to decisions of this Conference, become the responsibility of the Resourcing Committee as of September 2024. The Conference refers the question raised by this memorial to the Resourcing Committee for consideration, in consultation with the Ministries Committee, and requests a report back to the Conference of 2025.

SECTION E

RESPONSE TO MEMORIAL M13 (2023)

Memorial M13 to the 2023 Conference asked the Ministries Committee to consider withdrawing the requirement to engage in Ministerial Development Review. The Conference, in its reply, declined that proposal but recognised that there is further work to be done in order for 'Renewing Full Connexion' to bear fruit in the life of the church. It directed the Ministries Committee to consider these matters and to report to the Conference of 2025.

The Ministries Committee reported to the Council that, in response to this request, the Ministries Team is in the process of developing the following resources:

- A short 'explainer' of the *Covenant Relationship between the Church and Its Ministers* in everyday language
- A wide variety of activities for each ministerial *Covenant* commitment for use in meetings and for MDR which links *The Covenant* more closely to MDR
- A short resource for MDR to explain how *The Covenant* can be used to develop greater mutual accountability
- Three short videos: *The Covenant* 'explainer', Using *The Covenant* in MDR, and *The Covenant* and ministerial wellbeing.

There are plans to discuss these at Superintendents' Conferences and Circuit Stewards' Communities of Practice and also to develop webinars to demonstrate both an understanding of *The Covenant* and its relation to MDR. These new resources will be publicised and their use modelled widely to ensure that they are embedded across the Connexion.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

3/9. The Conference received the Report.

3/10. The Conference adopted the Report as its further reply to Memorial M13 (2023).

Appendix

M13 Ministerial Development Review

The Newcastle upon Tyne District Synod (Present: 115; Voting: 111 for, 1 against) welcomes the advent of 'The Covenant Relationship between the Church and its Ministers' and the opportunities that this brings for reflection on the ministry of the whole people of God. Given that the Covenant is about a partnership between church and minister, the existing process of Ministerial Development Review (MDR) no longer seems appropriate, given that it is purely minister-centred. Furthermore, many of the commitments and expectations within the covenant more than adequately cover the requirements of MDR.

The Ministerial Covenant also references CPD Book VII Guidance, Part 3 re the expectation that full-time stations will involve only 12 sessions a week. We are concerned that engaging in MDR and regular review of the Commitments and Expectations will make heavy/unrealistic demands on time for both lay and ordained.

Ministers are discovering the value of our supervision system and finding the benefit of this for the development of ministry. This requires 6 sessions a year and preparation as well as training for those involved in its delivery.

The Synod believes that it would be better, in the light of the covenant relationship and alongside supervision, to use the commitments of the Covenant instead of MDR for members, presbyters and deacons to review and develop the ministry of members, presbyters and deacons within the District.

In addition, we ask the Ministries Committee to consider the question of withdrawing the mandatory requirement to engage in MDR.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Newcastle Upon Tyne District Synod for the memorial and particularly for its welcome of 'The Covenant Relationship between the Church and its Ministers' (2022), which now forms Part 6 of Book IV of CPD and is entitled 'Renewing Full Connexion: Commitments and Expectations'.

'Renewing Full Connexion' sets out mutual expectations of ministers, members and the Church and can offer a helpful framing of a range of conversations including supervision, MDR, discernment processes and as part of the lifelong work of reflecting on ministry of both lay and ordained.

The purpose of the Ministerial Development Review (MDR) is set out in Standing Order 743 as being a process which enables every presbyter or deacon to reflect, with input from others, on how the ministry of that presbyter or deacon is being experienced and fulfilled both in relation to the Church as a whole and within the particular context in which the ministry of the relevant presbyter or deacon is being exercised.

MDR offers an opportunity for feedback from those amongst whom ministry is exercised, in a way which supervision does not. The Ministries Committee has recently reviewed MDR and recognised it is one part of a suite of support and accountability tools for ministers and the Church. In 2021 a new resource supporting MDR was launched, which can be accessed at media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/ministerialdevelopmentreview_final_Bc1lxRw.pdf on the Methodist Church website.

Whilst the Conference declines the proposal to remove MDR, it recognises that there is further work to be done, in order for 'Renewing Full Connexion' to bear fruit in the life of the church and directs the Ministries Committee to consider these matters and to report to the Conference of 2025.

SECTION F

RESOURCING COMMITTEE

- 1** The Resourcing Committee is appointed by the Council to advise and assist 'in fulfilling the Council's responsibilities for the strategic oversight and use of resources with regard to personnel, finance and physical assets which are within the purview of the council' (SO360).
- 2** In addition to overseeing the production of the Connexional Central Services Budget for the Council to present to the Conference, the Committee has been actively engaged with a wide range of topics during its first year.
- 3** Its initial work focussed on supporting the establishment of a Scheme of Delegation to help give clarity to the Council, its Committees and its officers about where responsibility was being delegated and where it was being retained. It also agreed a new Connexional Allowances and Ministerial Grants Policy that built upon the considerable work undertaken by the previous Connexional Allowances Committee.
- 4** The Committee received the annual report of the Listed Buildings Advisory Committee and noted the concerns raised about the lack of volunteers able to maintain our historic churches. It also noted that a subsequent internal audit report had found that the Listed Buildings processes 'are rigorous and provide strong compliance assurance'.
- 5** A range of other property issues considered during the year included: a review of the successful new Methodist Church House project; the annual report on Connexional and District Consents; transition of oversight of connexional manses from the Connexional Manses Committee; a briefing on the expanded Property Support team; and a recommendation was made to the Council to sell the former Methodist Publishing building in Werrington as it was surplus to requirements.
- 6** As the lead employer for the Pension and Assurance Scheme of Lay Employees of the Methodist Church (PASLEMC), the Council was advised by the Committee on a number of matters. The work by the PASLEMC Trustee to seek an insurance buy-out of the scheme reached a conclusion and, following the appropriate due diligence, the Committee recommended to the Council that the scheme be formally wound up.
- 7** The Committee received reports on a wide range on Human Resource issues. Areas of particular focus included: the work being undertaken in relation to ministerial wellbeing, the process for the transfer of District Safeguarding Officers into the Connexional Team, and the ongoing development of the lay employment resources on the website.
- 8** The Council has delegated to the Committee the governance oversight of those entities that form part of the consolidated connexional accounts (Cliff College; Methodist International Centre; Southlands Trust; All We Can). As the issues facing each entity are so different, the Committee decided to calibrate its approach to oversight accordingly. The Committee also liaised with Methodist Central Hall Westminster (which is a Conference Property) and its new Chair as it continued to reshape its business post the pandemic.
- 9** The Committee is also responsible for the key partnerships with the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (TMCP) and the Central Finance Board (CFB). TMCP undertakes legal work for the Connexion under Standing Order 931(3) and the Committee has oversight of the Service Level Partnership Agreement that covers this work. The CFB reported to the Committee on the performance of the Council's investments and the parameters used to manage the investments; discussion was had on the investment strategy for Connexional Funds.
- 10** The routine work of the Committee includes the review and/or approval of ministerial grants; the review of the connexional management accounts; the review of investment and cash movements; the ongoing process to review how some historic restricted funds of the Council can be used effectively;

the review of various resource related policies; and making recommendations to the Council on other matters related to the terms of service of ministers.

Connexional Allowances

- 11** A full list of the proposed allowances for 2025/26 can be found in Appendix 1. In line with the Connexional Allowances and Ministerial Grants Policy, a number of these allowances has been reviewed in 2024/25 as set out below.

Stipends

- 12** Using the index numbers published in October 2024, the Consumer Price Index movement for the year to September 2024 was +1.7% and the Average Weekly Earnings Index movement for the year to August 2024 was +4.43%. The average of these is 3.06%. In line with the stipend formula agreed by the Conference of 2024, the annual standard stipend for the year beginning 1 September 2025 is to £31,980 (rounding up to the next highest figure divisible by 12, to give a monthly stipend of exactly £2,665).

Responsibility Payments

- 13** Whilst responsibility payments are not due for a review this year and are simply uplifted in line with the uplift in the stipend, a simplification is being proposed. Currently, the allowance for a number of posts is to be agreed by the Remuneration Committee (now disbanded and the task transferred to the Resourcing Committee). In reality, the practice for some time has been to pay as follows:

Grade of post	% responsibility allowance
0-4	0
5	10
6	20
7	25

In order to add clarity and avoid the need for individual decisions requiring Committee sign-off, it is proposed that this practice is now adopted as a policy.

Allowances for Malta and Rome

- 14** An annual review of the position in respect of appointments in Malta and Rome is undertaken to assess if currency fluctuations require an additional allowance to be paid for these appointments. Over the last five years the £:€ exchange rate has moved from £1.00:€1.17 to £1.00:€1.18 so no allowance would be proposed for such an appointment.

Relocation allowances

- 15** The relocation allowance exists to support ministers when they move station. It is in addition to removal and travel expenses. It was last uplifted for inflation in 2012, from £500 to £600 (N.B. an allowance of £800 is paid where two ministers sharing a manse move simultaneously). No representations have been made to increase the allowance which would be an additional financial cost to circuits (for active ministers) or the Fund for Support of Presbyters and Deacons (for ministers sitting down).

Sabbatical annual levy expenses level

- 16** A levy of £100 per minister is levied on districts as part of the Assessment process. These monies are then used to fund the costs of sabbaticals taken by ministers up to a cap of £1000 per minister per sabbatical. This cap was last uplifted in 2015 (from £800 to £1000) and inflation since would imply an uplift of c35% is justified. However, given the affordability issues being experienced across the Connexion and the fact the sabbatical costs are wholly discretionary it is not proposed to make any changes for 2025/26.

Computers in Ministry

- 17** This annual allowance was introduced for all ministers to equate to approximately 25% the cost of a new computer (therefore funding new equipment every four years). It increases each year in line with CPI (as at September) so will increase by 1.7% to £211.

Local Allowances

- 18** The Committee reminds circuits that in line with Standing Order 801(1)(b) no discretionary local allowance can be paid without the prior authorisation of the Committee. As agreed by the Conference of 2024, this also encompasses ministers stationed in district appointments and the Committee asks the Law and Polity Committee to draft the necessary amendment to Standing Order 801(1)(b).

Ministers in part-time appointments

- 19** The Conference of 2007 reviewed the policy on part-time appointments. In particular it clarified that ministers in part time appointments ('part-time minister' is not an appropriate term) are paid a 'proportional allowance', not a part-time or proportional stipend. Further, they clarified that there is no requirement for a manse to be provided for a part-time appointment.
- 20** This situation is not clearly reflected in Standing Orders and therefore, in reality, there will be many circuits that do provide a manse in such circumstances. Furthermore, whilst a policy has been developed in relation to manse provision and housing related costs where the minister has a second role outside the control of the Church, there is no policy to cover the situation where no such outside role exists. These situations need to be agreed locally and the consequent 'local allowance' approved by the Committee.
- 21** The Committee was made aware of an anomaly where a minister was in two appointments under the control of the Church, each appointment being less than 50%, but the two collectively being greater than 50%. Having reviewed the issues that arose as result of this situation, the committee proposes that where a minister is in multiple appointments under the control of the Church the financial arrangements should follow current policy as if it were a single appointment, with an agreement required between the relevant bodies and a sharing of costs proportionate to each appointment. It is anticipated the number of situations to which this will apply will be few.

Ministerial Grants

- 22** The Committee has oversight of the ministerial benevolent funds on behalf of the Council. These continue to provide ministers, both active and supernumerary, and their dependants, essential financial support in times of financial need. Whilst the funds remain in relatively good health, the demands on the funds increase year on year. Therefore, the Committee remains very grateful for the ongoing donations received from across the Connexion to allow this growing need to be met.
- 23** Further information about each of the funds and the support they offer is available on the Methodist Church website.

***RESOLUTIONS

3/11. The Conference received the Report.

3/12. The Conference directed the Law and Polity Committee to prepare an amendment to Standing Order 801(1)(b) so that it encompasses ministers stationed in district appointments.

3/13. The Conference adopted the proposed policy in paragraph 21 of the Report.

3/14. The Conference approved the changes to connexional allowances as set out in the Report.

Appendix 1

Allowance	Current Amount			Due to be reviewed	Interval	Proposed amount for 2025/26	
Stipend	£31,020 per annum			2024/25	Annual	£31,980	
Stipend formula	Based on CPIH and average earnings			2026/27	3 years		
Responsibility payments		%	£	2026/27	3 years	%	£
	President	30	9306			30	9594
	Secretary of the Conference	30	9306			30	9594
	Assistant Secretary of Conference	25	7755			25	7995
	Connexional Secretary	25	7755			25	7995
	Separated District Chair	25	7755			25	7995
	Warden of the MDO	25	7755			25	7995
	Superintendent	10	3102			10	3198
	Training Institution Principal	25	7755			25	7995
	Other roles*:						
	Grade 7	25	7755			25	7995
	Grade 6	20	6204			20	6396
	Grade 5	10	3102			10	3198
	Grade 1-4	0	0			0	0
	* ministers serving in the Connexional Team or stationed to appointments within the control of the Connexional Council, staff members of Training Institutions, and the Deputy Warden of the MDO.						
Island within the UK Allowances	22%			2026/27	3 years	22%	
Allowances for Malta	0%			2024/25	Annual	0%	

and Rome				
Island travel allowances	2x trips per annum (4x Isle of Wight)	2026/27	3 years	2x trips per annum (4x Isle of Wight)
Relocation Allowances	£600 (standard) £800 (if two ministers share a manse)	2024/25	3 years	£600 (standard) £800 (if two ministers share a manse)
Travel Allowances	Car up to 10,000 miles - 45p/mile Car over 10,000 miles - 25p/mile Motorcycle – 24p/mile Bicycle – 20p/mile Additional passenger rate – 5p/mile		In line with HMRC	Car up to 10,000 miles - 45p/mile Car over 10,000 miles - 25p/mile Motorcycle – 24p/mile Bicycle – 20p/mile Additional passenger rate – 5p/mile
Travel grant during sickness	£350	2025/26	3 years	£350
Computers in Ministry	£207	2024/25	Annual	£211
Computers in Ministry formula		2026/27	3 years	
Initial grants to ministers	£3,000	2026/27	3 years	£3,000
Initial loans to ministers	£10,000	2026/27	3 years	£10,000
Grants in lieu of state benefits	Allowance per child	2024/25	3 years	Allowance per child
Preaching fees	£30	2028/29	5 years	£30
Sabbatical levy	£100	2024/25	5 years	£100
Sabbatical expenses	£1,000	2024/25	5 years	£1,000

SECTION G MISSION COMMITTEE

- 1 The committee reported to the Council that it had reviewed its workplan.
- 2 At its meeting in October 2024, the committee received a progress report on the work in response to Memorial 22 (the Slave Trade) to the 2021 Methodist Conference, from the small group designated for this piece of work within the Connexional Team. The group, working together with a Reparations Advisory Group of experts and interested parties, shared that beginning conversations with the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and Americas (MCCA) was taking longer than had been anticipated. The committee agreed that the importance of these conversations with Partner Churches meant that the project timings should be adjusted so that real partnership would be prioritised over timelines. The original timetable brought to the Committee in May 2024 had proposed that the final report should be taken to the Conference in 2026, however, it is now recommended that this is delayed to 2027. It is now clear that the original deadlines will not work for our partners, so the proposal is to bring the final report instead to the Conference in 2027, with an interim report on the historical context in 2026 and, if possible, some form of workshops or consultation around what may be brought the following year.
- 3 The committee received a report from the Methodist Heritage Committee outlining work achieved over the past year and progress regarding the alignment of Methodist Heritage work to the current strategic priorities of the Church, and the development of a new strategy for Methodist Heritage (2025–2030). The Committee gave its input towards the formation of the new Heritage Strategy, noting the need for key synergies between the strategy and other connexional policies and the Church's ongoing commitment to be growing, inclusive, evangelistic and justice-seeking.
- 4 The committee received a report from the MMAC Management Committee, which included an update of the Management Committee's work in 2023-24 and welcomed the progress on an appropriate alternative future for the watercolour of *The Annunciation* by Eric Gill. In discussion, the committee approved the proposed outline plan and timeline to return the Gill watercolour to the Collection pages on the MCB website with enhanced interpretation, to be used for mission. Specifically, the Committee approved the Management Committee to lend this work to Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft in summer 2025, as part of a co-curated Collections Display working with the Methodist Survivors' Advisory Group.
- 5 The committee received an update on the search for a new home for the MMAC and gave its support for continued negotiations with Kingswood School and the Holburne Museum, Bath, and discussions with Bath Preservation Trust and the Gibbs Trust to scope the potential of this proposal.
- 6 The committee has worked jointly with the Ministries Committee to convene the Connexional Economic Justice Working Group.
- 7 The committee received a report from the newly established Global Communities Ministries Sub-Committee, which came into being on 1 February 2025. The current Fellowships Sub-committee will continue to meet as a support group for the fellowships until August 2025. Having previously reviewed and approved the terms of reference for the Global Communities Ministries Sub-Committee, the committee appointed new members to the Sub-Committee. The Committee looks forward to working with the Global Communities Ministries Sub-Committee as they develop the priorities for their work across the Connexion with Global Communities, and as they prepare recommendations that will come to the Council in time for the 2026 Conference.
- 8 The committee received a report following an appraisal of the 3Generate event and youth ministry work in local settings, and the extent to which these two complement each other to provide spiritual support for children and young people in view of the vision stated and directed by the Mission Committee and held within the Children, Youth and Families strategy. The assessment conducted by the Good Faith Partnership made five management recommendations for the Church to consider as a response to their findings, the focus of which was to redress the balance as to where resources were spent and looking at impact on work at a local level. The committee discussed the recommendations in depth and commended these to the Connexional Team.
- 9 The committee discussed a proposal to explore the creation of a joint post with Methodist Church in

Ireland (MCI) and the Methodist Church in Britain as part of renewal of the *God For All strategy (2025–2032)* (*paragraph 13*)¹, which made clear the intention and direction of global Methodist and Wesleyan working in respect of growing churches desire and capacity for mission. The committee welcomed this way of working and also commended the contribution MCI makes to the committee through ex officio members of the Mission Committee and with our partnership work.

- 10 The Committee also discussed the considerations for Methodist participation in the future of Let's End Poverty, after the end of the fixed term funding. Proposals outlining a future for Let's End Poverty brought to the Committee were contingent on partners coming forward with commitments to increase their leadership of the project and their financial and staff contributions towards coordinating capacity. It has recently come to light that despite a positive and committed tone from many partners, there were not sufficient new sources of staff capacity or funding to enable a shared, sustainable future for Let's End Poverty to emerge beyond May. Connexional Team staff are therefore in the process of working with the Let's End Poverty Enabling Group and partner organisations to agree that the current work of Let's End Poverty will finish at the end of May 2025. Opportunities are being generated to share learning from Let's End Poverty and to continue partnerships into future anti-poverty work through Justice-Seeking Church and JPIT.
- 11 As part of the ongoing work of the Oversight and Trusteeship Task Group (OTTG), the Committee received terms of reference from sub-committees and working groups that report to the Mission Committee. It also appointed new members to these groupings and will report this to the OTTG.
- 12 Following a recommendation from the Conference that a plan be drawn up to embed the Justice-seeking Church Report in the life of the Methodist Church, the Committee received an update on the Justice-seeking Church strategy one year in. The update highlighted some of the actions undertaken in the Church during this time. It also identified some of the challenges around capacity, links with local churches and depth of engagement with justice-seeking. The committee noted evidence that one year in, the Justice-seeking Church strategy has seen progress in beginning to embed the principles, priorities and practices of the Methodist Conference report throughout the wider church and supports an increased capacity within the team to sustain this.
- 13 The committee received an update on Faith-rooted Community Organising (FRCO) and the next steps for the Methodist Church. The renewal of the *God for All* strategy included a commitment to employ a Connexional FRCO Officer funded through the *God for All* Strategy. The Committee was pleased that Deacon Kerry Scarlett took up the new role of Connexional Faith Rooted Community Organising Officer on 3 March 2025. One of her key priorities will be developing and implementing a Connexional FRCO training strategy, developing and sustaining a network of district officers, recruited as FRCO leads in each district. The role will advocate for and deliver faith-rooted community organising practices in the Methodist Church, to support organising for justice, to develop existing congregations and to begin new forms of Christian communities.
- 14 The committee received the annual report from the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT), which reported on key activities undertaken in support of the team's main priorities over the last 12 months. The Committee approved the JPIT partnership agreement on behalf of the Methodist Church. The partnership agreement was recently reviewed by the JPIT's Strategy and Policy Group, made up of senior representatives from each of the denominations in the partnership, and sets out the joint working arrangements between the partners in JPIT.
- 15 The committee received an update including a review of the key projects and orientations of the transitional year (2024-25) of the *God For All* work, held currently within *God For All report* adopted by the 2024 Conference, plus ongoing work of the Evangelism and Growth team and the planned-for further development and embedding as part of renewal of the *God For All strategy (2025–2032)*. The Committee had conversations about the Connexionally-funded district leads for Faith-Rooted

¹ <https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/conf-24-pc-20-god-for-all-strategic-update-renewal-2025-2032.pdf>

Community Organising and New Places for New People in every district from September 2025. These posts will provide bespoke support to embed FRCO practices aiming to develop teams and effective leaders of change in congregations and communities, and to support and build the NPNP movement across the district respectively.

- 16** The committee presented to the Council a discussion paper concerning measurement; the Council invited the Mission Committee to design and pilot a measurement rubric and system and to report back to the Council within 18 months the process, findings, and recommended application elsewhere in the Connexion.
- 17** The committee received a report from the Global Relationships Committee (GRC) outlining the work of the GRC in 2024-25. They recognised how the partnership coordinators had adapted their ways of working with overseas partners on the ground following changes to the mission partner programme. They noted a diverse delegation of British and Irish representatives and others had attended and participated in the World Methodist Conference in August 2024 and acknowledged the ongoing opportunities and challenges therein. The Committee discussed the imminent strategic review for GRC relationships, stakeholders, policies, priorities, and programmes, which will reflect on the work of Global Relationships in response to the new terms of reference for the GRC and consider evolving priorities and strategies within Methodist Church in Britain. The Committee offered reflective feedback and welcomed the process for a strategic review which promises a fruitful, theologically engaged, and searching reflection.
- 18** The committee was joined online by the Revd David Hardman, the Connexional Officer at the Methodist Liaison Office (MLO) in Jerusalem, and reflected on the current situation in the West Bank as the backdrop against which the MLO operates, acknowledging the ongoing risk assessment that governs his travel and work plan. The Committee discussed where the focus for the MLO lies in future, in the context of the volatile situation in the Gaza and how it and the Church could support the work of the MLO. The committee expressed its solidarity with David and the work of the MLO in the West Bank, Gaza and Israel, as he supports partners and continues to be a focus for advocacy in the MCB and MCI.
- 19** The committee received a report from the Justice Dignity and Solidarity (JDS) Committee, which provided an overview of ongoing work on the JDS strategy. The report highlighted work conducted throughout 2024, where the emphasis had been to reflect on what had been achieved in terms of JDS strategy implementation, and to embed, integrate the strategy throughout the work of the Connexional Team. In addition, priority was given to the capacity building of the District EDI Officers.

*****RESOLUTION**

3/15. The Conference received the Report.

SECTION H METHODIST SCHOOLS COMMITTEE

The Council received the report of the Methodist Schools Committee which follows. It noted the question about the future funding of MAST that was raised and directed the Connexional Secretary to work with MAST on a structural review of its responsibilities to ensure that the Council can fulfil its statutory obligations in the most effective and efficient way and to report by March 2026.

Introduction

The new UK government, elected in May 2024, has brought fresh ideas and policies into the world of education and some significant challenges for all Methodist Schools. Independent schools are wrestling with the imposition of VAT, whilst state schools have had to get to grips with a new set of priorities, and a large change in the direction of travel. Less than three years ago the DfE indicated that all schools would become academies by 2030, but the new government, whilst not abandoning the idea of schools becoming academies, no longer promotes or prioritises academisation.

In the midst of regular educational policy changes, Methodist Schools continue to serve daily 25,000 children and young people, a large staff group and a wider community of 100,000. Methodist schools maintain a high standard in all forms of inspection and, equally importantly, provide a strong learning environment shot through with a confident Methodist ethos. These 83 schools are a significant part of our 'God for all' strategy, many serving communities facing significant hardship.

This year, as last, the main report from each part of the Methodist Schools network is set out under the strategic directions of development set out in ***Transforming Lives*** report in 2021.

- *Growing schools,*
- *offering excellent education*
- *with a confident Methodist ethos,*
- *working together, and*
- *prioritising areas of need.*

Each of the component groups that make up Methodist Schools' network, therefore, reports its work under these headings. In year 4 of the strategy's expected 10-year life, we report significant progress, but also some disappointing news. The Executive Summary and Highlights are to guide the reader to some of the key points which are expanded elsewhere in the report.

Executive Summary and Highlights

- **Epworth Education** (Multi-Academy) Trust (EET) has grown in strength and numbers over the last year, now serving 11 academy schools and with plans for further growth in the coming years. It is highly regarded by the DfE and the regional directors for its ability to strengthen school performance and develop all staff serving in schools. Its weekly worship for all schools together, led by pupils and staff, is an outstanding development.
- Sadly, our second Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), the **Inspiring Lives Educational Trust (ILET)** has had to close before it could be launched. This is due to a variety of factors but principally because of delays and the changes in government policy. The committee is disappointed with this outcome, as the vision for a MAT serving the south of England, open to both Methodist and non-Methodist schools, was an ambitious and exciting one, and the work and cost of setting it up was considerable. We are especially grateful for the selfless time and energy given to this project by David Kershaw, Steve Colledge and Charlotte Taylor. The preparatory work is fully documented and will be kept in case there is a further change in government education policy.
- Last year, the committee reported that **MAST** was facing financial uncertainty and will not have the funds to continue to exercise its responsibilities as Religious Provider for 66 schools on behalf of the Methodist Church beyond 2026. We are actively seeking funding for the next period in conversation with the Westminster College Oxford Trust, the Southlands Methodist Trust and the Executive Director of Finance and Resources in the Connexional Team. In order to ensure that this financial difficulty does not occur again, there will be a structural review undertaken in the next connexional year and reported to the next Conference.
- The Council's attention is drawn to the excellent work being undertaken by **MIST chaplains** set out in the MIST report under 'a confident Methodist ethos'. This year MIST has focused on highlighting and developing the work carried out by our chaplains.
- MAST will be sorry to lose Charlotte Taylor at the end of July. Charlotte has announced her retirement having been Head of Service for MAST for the last 2 years and before that Headteacher at Holly Hill Anglican-Methodist Primary school. She has navigated MAST through difficult times and represented Methodist schools in government forums and consultations. Work is underway to find a successor.
- Details of several changes in MIST personnel can be found at the beginning of the MIST Report.
- We are delighted to report that Dr David Kershaw, a Methodist local preacher, was awarded the 2024 Pearson Gold Lifetime Achievement Award for services to education. David has worked in education for 60 years. He supported four secondary schools to come out of OFSTED 'special

measures' and overseen dramatic school improvement of schools within deprivation areas of Birmingham, Coventry, Leicester and Bradford. He is passionate about enabling excellent education opportunities for all. He has served Methodist Schools as Chair of Epworth Education Trust, in the groundwork done for Inspiring Lives Trust and as a member of the Methodist Schools Committee.

MAST (Methodist Academies and Schools Trust)

1. Growing Schools

Increasing the number of schools is largely not undertaken by MAST directly, though MAST remains open to schools which wish to join the Trust. The Epworth Education Trust (EET) has been growing as an Academy trust and hopes to receive non-Methodist community schools in the North West into its fold over the next few years. It is clear that several such schools are attracted by the values and ethos of the EET.

2. Offering excellent education

Our Methodist schools are thriving!

Evidenced through Ofsted inspections, 97% of our schools are judged good or better.

With a recruitment crisis and a shortage of headteachers nationally, all of our vacancies for September headteachers have been successfully filled, securing strong leadership for our schools.

Twenty-three of our 66 schools are presently academised, five are in process (with five different trusts) therefore 38 remain in the local authority. The increased number of non-Methodist trusts that MAST is working with continues to increase and stretch central resources. It would be our wish that all of our Methodist and joint Methodist schools would join a Methodist trust. However, there are many factors that influence a school's decision to join a particular trust. MAST works alongside the schools and trusts to ensure that Methodist ethos and high-quality education is promoted and protected into the future.

Schools in our Methodist Trust (EET) are well supported and benefit from working together and sharing good practice, and workload. They remain as part of the wider Methodist family and under the religious authority of MAST. Those schools that remain within the local authority continue to be supported through MAST and benefit from our school support team consisting of 11 Regional Leaders of Education (RLEs). All are experienced and knowledgeable headteachers in our schools. *'As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's Grace'* (1 Peter 4:10). Our dedicated RLEs visit schools, share best practice, support with inspections and foster a sense of belonging to the Methodist family of schools and church.

In addition to our school support team, schools benefit from our bespoke, high quality professional development programme. Our termly senior leadership briefings and biweekly newsletters ensure our leaders are abreast of national changes and requirements. They are signposted to the latest research highlighting best practice. Termly training for governors develops confidence and knowledge within this strategic role of holding headteachers to account.

3. A confident Methodist ethos

Dynamic partnerships reflect the school's deeply embedded Anglican and Methodist foundations. These collaborations enhance collective worship, enrich religious education (RE), empower wellbeing and develop pupils' understanding of diversity and justice'. (SIAMS report, November 2024, Hapton Primary)

SIAMS inspections demonstrate that 100% of our schools are flourishing.

Our professional development programme is distinctive to our Methodist schools. Building on the success of our spirituality trilogy, this year we are delivering a series of worship webinars entitled Looking Up, Looking Out, Looking In. In response to evaluating our SIAMS reports MAST has provided a session on Courageous Advocacy and Social Justice and shared a bank of resources from Christian Aid with the opportunity to achieve accreditation in this area. Responding to Ofsted's research and RE subject report, the year started with a session on 'Outstanding Subject Leadership in RE'. Leaders reflected upon the progress and impact of RE within their schools and developed their knowledge to secure a strong account of their subject across their school. All of our 66 schools use the Methodist specific units to enhance their RE syllabus and underpin their strong Methodist ethos.

Our school support team receive high quality training from MAST and the SIAMS central team, ensuring they have the most relevant and up to date knowledge relating to effective practice within Anglican and Methodist

church schools. They are kept abreast of any changes to inspection and are best placed to represent MAST as the religious authority.

As you enter our Methodist schools, they feel special. They are warm, inviting and compassionate. They offer sanctuary to families who are marginalised and disadvantaged in society, offering hope and aspiration for a generation who care for others and the world in which they live.

4. Working together

MAST continues to develop relationships both within and beyond Methodist education, contributing to the formation of national policy and practice through a number of key forums:

Faith Schools Policy group: This group is chaired by the Minister for Schools and Standards. The agenda is broad and responsive to national changes and developments. Examples of areas covered this year include: Ofsted accountability; an overview of the new government RISE team (Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence); Changes to school admissions; A briefing on Multi-agency Safeguarding; An update on Gender Equality guidance.

Ofsted Section 48 Inspectorate Group: Work in this group considers all things Ofsted and the implications for changes in policy and practice particularly from our faith perspective. We have completed a joined-up piece of work on agreeing a protocol for deferring inspections should scheduling between faith schools' inspections and Ofsted collide. Papers submitted on key characteristics of each of our faiths has been included in the training of inspectors to develop their understanding of, and sensitivities to, inspecting in faith schools. We have contributed to updating the School Inspection Handbook used by all inspectors and schools.

MAST has been invited to be part of the government's Curriculum and Assessment Review. The purpose of this roundtable is to engage directly with Professor Becky Francis OBE, Chair of the review, and other members of the review panel on religious education (RE). The roundtable is attended by other key stakeholders across the RE sector.

Through academisation opportunities MAST is working closely with dioceses, DfE regional teams, local authorities and multi-academy trusts (MATs) across the country. With 40 joint Anglican/Methodist schools, partnership working is essential to ensure that those of our schools academising outside of the Methodist family are safeguarded into the future.

To support our children to become courageous advocates and challenge social injustice in our schools, MAST and Christian Aid have entered a formal partnership agreement. Through the Global Neighbours' accreditation scheme our schools receive a discounted rate for the scheme and have access to high-quality resources and advice.

Flourish: These meetings are attended by representatives from Flourish, Church at the Margins and Free Churches, recognising God's call to work with schools so that children and young people, communities and churches can be transformed and flourish in all aspects of life, both physical and spiritual.

Epworth Education Trust and MAST continue to work closely together to share expertise across the family so that all Methodist schools continue to thrive. Epworth is leading on Christian Leadership and working on updating Methodist resources for religious education.

Our wider Methodist family continues to seek opportunities for strengthening and advancing Methodist education. Southlands and MAST are committed to working together, exploring opportunities for joint working and sharing of resources. Methodist Independent Schools Trust and MAST focus on key areas of mutual benefit. A joint letter has been sent to districts and circuits thanking them for their wonderful work and commitment to our schools, encouraging responsibility for ensuring schools are compliant with foundation governor appointments. Our termly chaplaincy coffee mornings continue, focusing on key discussion points and sharing good practice in a safe space.

5. Prioritising areas of need

MAST has one over-arching priority at this point and that is to be sustainable into the future. Increased funding is being sought in order for MAST to continue to fulfil the Council's statutory duty beyond September 2025 as the religious provider as stated in Standing Order 272. It is hoped that a swift and sustainable resolution will be found to ensure our children continue to thrive through high-quality education underpinned by our Methodist ethos.

Academisation of our schools into our Methodist trusts, and non-Methodist trusts, remains high on the agenda to ensure that our Methodist ethos remains secure in time to come. As EET continues to grow in the north, a review of the MAST academisation strategy, particularly in the south of the country is needed in response to there not being a Methodist trust. All Methodist only schools are required to join a Methodist trust. At present there are four Methodist schools in the south that do not have a Methodist trust option.

MAST has worked hard to support our schools and foster a deep sense of belonging to a wider Methodist family. We need to continue to engage and support our leaders ensure that all of our schools are flourishing educationally and spiritually and that this is externally validated through the inspection system.

Epworth Education Trust (EET)

1. Growing schools

Epworth Education Trust has experienced significant growth since the last conference report, with five additional schools—Bakewell, Leyland Infants, Leyland Juniors, Wheatley Lane, and Hey with Zion—joining in Summer 2024. This nearly doubled the size of the Trust, initiating a period of consolidation to strengthen internal organisation. The Trust's family of schools continues to work closely to support one another, exemplifying a unified commitment to educational excellence.

Two grants from the Department for Education (DfE) were successfully secured, enabling strategic staffing and organisational changes in anticipation of these new additions. These grants have also supported the implementation of a Trust-wide best-practice curriculum, ensuring alignment with the High-Quality Trust Descriptor.

Additionally, the opening of a SEND unit at Summerseat Methodist School has enabled the Trust to grow through different avenues. This has set a benchmark for excellence in providing tailored education for students with high-level needs as the unit has become a beacon of good practise within the Local Authority. Following this success, the Trust has submitted a proposal for a primary special free school in Bury.

Looking ahead, the Trust remains proactive in navigating the changing educational landscape under the newly elected government. Plans are underway to evaluate and enhance resilience and sustainability, ensuring adaptability to forthcoming reviews and reforms.

2. Offering excellent education

Epworth Education Trust remains committed to excellence, as evidenced by rising outcomes in national data and strong Ofsted ratings across the majority of its schools. These achievements are complemented by recognition of strengths in pastoral care and staff well-being.

In September 2024, the Trust launched *Infinite Eight*, a flagship initiative offering all pupils access to enriching opportunities beyond the curriculum. These eight core experiences include be at one with nature, walk a while in someone's shoes, be inspired to aspire, be a helping hand, be a culture collector, be a heritage host, be part of a top team, marvel at the masters. This initiative aligns with the Trust's vision of holistic education, inspiring aspiration, collaboration, and creativity in every child.

The Trust has been proactive in developing the optimum opportunity for every child to be taught the best curriculum by excellent teachers. Professional development continues to be a cornerstone of the Trust's educational strategy, delivering to staff across the Trust high quality continuing professional development that is often created and delivered by Trust staff. The teaching and learning model continues to provide a strong exemplification to teaching staff of the key components of high quality teaching. The annual conference, themed 'Belonging', focused upon critical priorities such as attendance and effective habits for learning. Additionally, the successful Trust delivery of three National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) - Headteacher, Teaching and Learning, and Behaviour and Culture - as enhanced leadership capacity within the Trust. By 2025, the Trust plans to expand this offering to include the SEND course, further empowering staff to lead with expertise and compassion. The NPQs not only develop the leadership skills of those attending the courses but also provide wider opportunities for other colleagues as they have delivered the course or provided coaching.

3. A confident Methodist ethos

The Trust's vision, 'To be a family of schools working together so all within our communities flourish and succeed', is deeply rooted in its Methodist foundation. This ethos permeates every aspect of school life, from collective worship to strong relationships throughout the Trust.

Epworth Worship Together continues to unite the Trust family of schools, with children creating and delivering collective worship through engaging videos and resource sheets. This initiative not only fosters spiritual development but also strengthens a sense of shared purpose.

The recent SIAMs inspection at Rosehill affirmed the Trust's dedication to its Christian mission, highlighting the embodiment of the Methodist ethos. The report states:

'The three core values of compassion, friendship and forgiveness are embodied in the governors' shared aspirations for the school and their commitment to its work. This vision is deeply rooted within the Methodist foundation of the Trust and are a golden thread throughout the school.'

'The school's overarching value of love ensures that there is a tangible culture of care both in the school and wider community',

'Collective worship is inspiring, engaging and provides the opportunity for spiritual development'.

4. Working together

The Trust is proactive in working with a wide range of Methodist partners through shared webinars and sharing of best practise. It is fully committed to developing partnerships further. Members of the Educational Team provide wider support to Methodist Schools through being a MAST Regional Leader of Education or delivering CPD through the MAST webinar programme.

EET is working with wider Methodist partners to establish a Christian Leadership course which will provide opportunities for leaders in Methodist schools to explore more fully what it means to lead a Methodist school.

The Trust has established wider links with new North West England District within which the majority of schools in the Trust sit and is looking at how these links can be strengthened going forward.

A teacher of RE in the Trust has been successful in gaining a Farmington Institute Scholarship and is currently exploring the use of music as a vehicle to teach RE and enhance spirituality. Building upon this work, the Trust will further develop the RE curriculum in the Trust, enhancing the 'Methodist Unit' which will be utilised wider.

5. Prioritising areas of need

The Trust continues to live out the Methodist ethos of inclusivity in its approach to education ensuring that all feel welcome and included and are given the opportunity to flourish. This is seen in the strong SEND offer across the Trust. We strive to be the answer rather than see a problem and have many stories of children unable to access education fully until joining an EET school and then through the strong ethos and bespoke offer are flourishing both within the SEND units and across the wider schools.

Beyond local impact, the Trust's partnership with EDUKID reflects its global outlook. By sponsoring children in Uganda and organising biannual visits, the Trust instils in its community a sense of responsibility to support those in need. The recent visit by Tracy Beaty brought these connections to life through collective worship and Trust-wide activities, fostering empathy and global citizenship among students.

The Trust has partnered with an external charity 'AllChild' to improve life chances for pupils in a Wigan school through providing opportunities to develop a stronger sense of belonging and optimising their opportunities for a number of pupils. This has already seen pupils receive opportunities they may not have previously been able to access. The project will run for two years.

MIST (Methodist Independent Schools Trust)

At the end of last academic year, we said farewell with great gratitude to three MIST Trustees, Revd Dr Jonathan Pye, Mr Richard Thomas and Dr Neil Tunnicliffe. We also wished safe travels to Revd Dr Calvin Samuel as he embarked on a new stage of his spiritual mission and personal journey. We welcomed a new Chair, Mr Ian McCaig, a new Chair of Finance, Mr John Jefferson, and the Revd Dr Mark Wakelin to our Trustee family in September. In our schools, we welcomed Mr David Bailey and Mr Mike Gough as Chairs of Kent College, Canterbury and Queen's College, Taunton, respectively.

1. Growing Schools

These are challenging times for independent schools. The impact of government policy will be significant; the sector will shrink; schools will close. There will be a real and deeply felt human cost to the pupils currently

educated within it. To sustain the unique ethos of Methodist independent schools educating over 10,000 children, we will need to face into these changes and make tough decisions on the road ahead.

The outcome of the imposition of VAT will be clearer by September 2025, but it will take another 2-3 years for the full impact to be known. The absolute priority for MIST and its schools will be to enable sustainability and plan for a different future.

Within Methodist Independent Schools, we continue to grow and develop our networks for staff:

- The Heads of RE had their first training day last June, inviting Lat Blaylock to run a session and based on its success will run the day again in 2025.
- The Leads for Equity Diversity and Inclusion in our schools had their first meeting in September 2024, sharing good practice, challenges and planning for an in-person day at one of our schools.
- The Designated Safeguarding Leads' group continues to meet annually and we have increased the support and training for our Safeguarding Governors, devising a toolkit for use on conversations in schools and inviting them to a day of training and sharing of best practice.

2. Offering excellent education

Methodist Independent Schools provide an excellent all-round education infused with a strong Christian ethos.

The needs of our children and young adults have changed greatly in the past ten years and, with them, the role of the school in offering all-round support to our pupils and families. As local authority systems become ever stretched, schools nationally play an increasingly central role in society. It's no longer a village that raises a child; it is often a school.

At one MIST school, the objective is that each pupil grows to be the best that they can be, is fully prepared for the world they will encounter when they leave school, and develops strong levels of integrity, loyalty and commitment whilst upholding the school's values and Methodist heritage.

Pupil mental health wellbeing and pastoral issues continue to grow – our schools put time and resource into supporting our young people at a time when local authority support services are increasingly stretched.

Public Examination results in Summer 2024 were very much in line with the national picture, and it was most pleasing to note that the value added for the pupils in our schools supports the deeply held view that every child can grow and succeed in their own way and time. In this way, MIST schools continue to provide an education tailored to the needs and aspirations of all pupils and each pupil.

Governance at School and Trust level: an external, strategic review of governance at Trust and school level was completed in the winter and yielded recommendations that will strengthen our stewardship of the schools we serve. In challenging times, it is important that we are rigorous, robust and professional, and we must do that whilst remaining true to our ethos and values.

3. A confident Methodist ethos

This year we have a focus on Chaplaincy in our schools. Our chaplains seek to reach out into the school and local communities and circuits:

'Our school Chapel continues to be a wonderful part of the school daily diary. Over the last twelve months, we have seen Baptisms, a Wedding, a Golden Wedding Anniversary and sadly, a funeral – all people who had or still have links with our school. It is a special place to be in. Roughly 27,000 pupils come through chapel each year, looking at themes as broad as Homelessness, Emotions, War Heroes, Fairtrade / Harvest, Honesty, Equality and many Bible stories teaching us about the simplicity of care and love for all.'

'I have begun to reach out to the wider Methodist family here, building relationships with the local Methodist Church, the District, the National Methodist Children & Youth Team, JPIT (Joint public issues team) and Methodist Charities such as All We Can. I preach occasionally in various Methodist chapels to connect with the Methodist communities and seek ways of strengthening the Methodist links with the School.'

'I joined the Methodist circuit rota of ministers as a visiting minister to congregations, leading worship and talking about my role as Chaplain and attended Methodist synod meetings with clergy and lay

people. I reconnected with our local church, and now have permission to use the church for services and activities with the students.'

'Our major piece of work this year has been our being awarded "School of Sanctuary" status, which means we are now able to explore, from a place of influence, how to respond to those seeking sanctuary in our country. We have begun by welcoming those who are seeking asylum into school, giving real life stories of war and homelessness – truly moving. We have also organised football matches at school alongside sports footwear donations for asylum seekers, supported by the Sports Department. We want to promote that 'all are welcome' at our school.'

"The Chaplain continues to be part of the local Circuit preaching once a month and taking a Sunday School class once a month in the Circuit. She continues to host a church staff lunch meeting in her home on a bimonthly basis.'

A (New) Chaplain's Charter: *'I decided to help myself navigate through the year by creating a Chaplain's Charter. This puts some shape and dimensions to my role, chaplaincy being a "ministry of presence". Throughout my first year here, my main priority has been to get to know pupils, staff and our wider school community, being present and available to them as much as possible. Four key areas of my work have evolved, as listed below, all rooted in our Methodist Ethos and School Values.*

1. *Encouraging a Methodist Ethos – affirming and embedding*
2. *Hearts Strangely Warmed – encouraging Spirituality*
3. *Accompanying on the Road – getting alongside others*
4. *Doing all the good we can – seeing beyond ourselves.'*

The Methodist Independent Schools' Annual Chaplains' Conference took place in October. Based at Charney Manor, Oxfordshire, the 3 days offered retreat and reflection. This year the focus was: *how we do what we do in service of our schools*. Other sessions on Wellbeing, Social Justice and International Partnerships (with All We Can) took place and the CEO of MIST delivered a session entitled: *'Walking The Path'* (Leading a Charity A Year on).

SERVE (Spiritual, Ethos, Relationships & Values Education) visits continue apace. By the end of this year, all our schools will have had an audit, and we can distil the learning from these and establish regular cycles of review. Some of the positive comments from the audits are below:

'The school's enduring Methodist ethos is powerfully reflected in the new school motto, 'Together, with Courage and Compassion'. Under the servant leadership of the head, the school has a strong, collaborative and inclusive culture that seeks to support pupils to be the best versions of themselves.'

'The school epitomises what it means to be a Methodist School.... [They] live and breathe the ethos and values that successfully set them apart from other similar establishments in their local area. They are highly inclusive, with an authentic culture of openness and honesty that starts with the heads and flows through the community of staff, pupils and friends.'

Our Pastoral Visitor: the Revd Aubin de Gruchy's work in the autumn term included visits to Kingswood School, Queen's College, The Leys and St Faiths, Culford and Truro Schools. He devised and led (with the other Chaplains) our service of thanksgiving at The Royal Foundation of St Katharine in September.

4. Working together

A Christian Leadership course with Southlands College and EET is under discussion.

We held our first Chaplains' Coffee mornings in early December, where our topic for discussion was: *'Who Is This Jesus Born of Mary?'*. Chaplains from across MAST and MIST attended and the Pastoral Visitor led the session.

End of term reflections to mark holy days and holidays have taken place this year for all Methodist Schools. The Christmas Reflection was led by the Revd Dr Mark Wakelin taking the theme of *'Hush The Noise: Join the Love Song This Christmas!'*. Chairs of Governors, Trustees, Heads, Chaplains and Methodist Schools' Staff all attended.

5. Prioritising areas of need

Methodist Independent Schools are committed to increasing the number of bursaries available, with a strong ambition that these account for 10% of all pupils on roll.

Partnerships work at our schools continue apace at home and abroad:

'With the appointment of a new Chaplain, we have been able to reinvigorate our community links. For example, students have been volunteering at local church events various events Harvest Festival.'

'We continue to support 'Candlelighters' as our 'global' school charity alongside, local foodbanks, a Hedgehog Sanctuary, St George's Crypt in Leeds, 'ZARACH' who supply beds for children who do not have a place to sleep.'

'We are also fortunate to have a long-term partnership with the school and community in Nankhufi, Malawi. Each year, a group of L6 students pitch their projects to the Rosetta Trust for funding. The projects the pupils supported and participated in this year included maintenance of rural water pumps, the Good News Children's Home, conservation and reforestation work.'

'The school has continued to work with Holding On Letting Go, a charity that supports bereaved children, benefitting from their expert advice as the school supported the friends of one student.'

'As a number of staff have been directly affected by cancer during this academic year all our charity work has been directed to a number of cancer charities.'

'Over the last year we have developed a partnership with No Place Like Home (NPLH), a highly personalised companionship and care service for senior residents living in the local community, which especially welcomes people affected by dementia. Most recently, our Reception and Year 5 children welcomed a number of visitors from this organisation, and they all worked together on creative craft activities.'

'World Aims Days with a focus on Courage, embedded in the Truro School Festival, which has helped our school to grow community links, involving music and drama, with performances from three local state schools as well as our pupils.'

*****RESOLUTION**

3/16. The Conference received the Report.