

38. Westminster College Oxford Trust Ltd

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1. *Introduction*

Westminster College Oxford Trust Ltd is the body whose board is appointed by the Conference to oversee the continuing relationship between the Methodist Church and Oxford Brookes University (OBU), following the merger between Westminster College Oxford and Oxford Brookes approved by the Conference in 1999. It is the managing trustee of the property leased to the university under that agreement.

2. *Activities*

The board has continued to meet regularly to scrutinise the operation of the merger agreements, including careful monitoring of the implementation of the lease, and to discharge its defined duties. Each year there is a formal Liaison Meeting with the university Registrar and the Chair of the university board of governors. Besides all these regular activities, the board has been actively engaged with the university as it develops its estates strategy, and seeks discussions leading to the agreement of a new lease.

3. *University Estates Strategy*

In 2013 a full report was brought upon possible developments arising from the university's evolving Estates Strategy, and the appropriate response to it by the Methodist Church. The consequent discussion resulted in the Conference's resolution of consent, as required under the Declaration of Trust, to the grant of a new lease of 99 years if this were to be sought by the university. Such a lease was to be subject to stated conditions (which were modified in certain respects by the Conference in 2016), with the details of any such lease requiring the eventual approval of the Methodist Council. The university early in 2016 declared its commitment to continuing developments on the ex-Westminster College campus and, as anticipated, began negotiations with the board about a new lease. Detailed discussions on its terms have continued with full property and legal professional advice and the Methodist Council has, as required, approved the heads of terms. These negotiations are now well advanced, but at the time of writing it is not yet possible to indicate with certainty the date of commencement of the lease although it is hoped that it will be sometime within the next few months.

When it comes into effect, the relationship between the board, on behalf of the Church, and the university will be on a different basis. A commercial rent will be paid annually, and in addition there will be a one-off capital sum paid as a premium for the grant of the lease. The board is considering very carefully the appropriate use of these funds, in line with its charitable purposes and history, and taking into account the priorities and needs of the Church. It is intended that at least in the short-to-medium term, some of these funds will be deployed in developing activities at Oxford Brookes which reflect both the long-term history and the current involvement of the trust with the academic and spiritual life of the campus. However, there are no geographical or institutional limits on how the funds may be used.

The board is also carefully considering all the other aspects of its engagement on behalf of the Church with the university, not least in its vision for the life of the chaplaincy. It is also mindful of its responsibilities as owner of, or agent for, the various collections of art and archival material which are deposited on the campus, and their place in the research and teaching activities of the university.

The board will be in a position to bring a much fuller report to the Conference of 2018 about all these developments.

4. *The work of the board*

The board has been active in setting and reviewing its objectives for each year; these are included in its annual governance report submitted to the Conference Office. In the financial domain, the use made of the subvention funds which support Church-related activity in the university is regularly scrutinised, with the related subvention accounts (reviewing actual spend against budget). Investment performance is closely watched and returns are maximised in a way which is consistent with prudence and operational need. Continued efforts are made in the use of endowment fund income to ensure that student awards continue to match current academic and pastoral needs. Reports from key university officers are made on an annual cycle and periodically from the Executive Committee of the Westminster Society.

5. *University academic developments*

Professor Anne-Marie Kilday, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, within which all Westminster-related activity takes place, has offered to the board full and helpful reports on these areas.

The continuing reduction in undergraduate Education and PGCE recruitment (primary) remains a concern, especially as efforts to mitigate this have not proved as fruitful as had been hoped. During the autumn the National College for Teaching and Leadership did return to a policy of allocations for institutions and therefore there is now a slightly more stable position in prospect for 2017 entry. At the same time employability scores have improved with 98% of Education students and 85% of History, Philosophy and Religion students in employment within six months of graduating.

6. *School of Education*

School of Education development plans reflect the continuing changes in the national Initial Teacher Education (ITE) context. The school has already substantially adjusted its ITE provision but there may be further national policy moves that would impact upon it such as current policy discussions about the future nature of Qualified Teacher Status. More positively, there may be opportunities linked to the developments in Continuing Professional Development for teachers and the scoping of apprenticeship routes into teaching. Alternative income streams continue to be developed. International initiatives include projects in Saudi Arabia, Japan, Mexico, Chile, Hong Kong and potentially in Brazil.

7. *Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History*

Professor William Gibson and Dr Peter Forsaith have contributed to many conferences and events, and published and supervised research work in the area of Methodism and Church History. The Centre continued its support (in conjunction with Wesley Memorial Church, Oxford and Lincoln College, Oxford) for the Annual Wesley Day Lecture which was delivered by Professor Jeremy Black in May 2016, speaking on '*John Wesley and History*'. This was one of the best-attended lectures so far and attracted a diverse audience.

The departmental research study leave award was held in 2016 by Dr Michele Paule for research into the role of religion in girls' perception of leadership. The joint Methodist Studies seminar took place in Durham in April 2016, held in conjunction with the annual conference of the Scholarship Research and Innovation unit in the Connexional Team of the Methodist Church, and was well attended. The Centre hosted the December 2016 seminar, with two papers given by directors of the company - Martin Wellings on *The Wesleyan historian: the life and work of Luke Tyerman (1820-89)* and Clive Norris on *A Singular Preacher: The Life and Times of Thomas Wride* – and another by Peter Forsaith, *Image and identity: John Wesley*. A symposium on Religion and Medicine jointly sponsored by the Centre and the Oxford Brookes University Centre for Medical Humanities was held in November 2016; it is hoped that there will be other such joint initiatives.

The Centre sponsors a research monograph series, now called the Routledge Methodist Studies Series, in which 13 titles are available. The next books to be published are on Wesley Portraiture by Peter Forsaith and on Methodist Heritage and Identity by Brian Beck.

Bruce Smetham, the owner of the James Smetham Art Collection, died in July and bequeathed the Collection to Oxford Brookes University.

The Centre has established a Blog, which went live in July 2016; its address is <https://ocmch.wordpress.com> By September 2016 it had attracted over 900 'hits' and by November had reached 1,434 page views.

8. *Chaplain*

There is a daily service of morning prayer in the Westminster Chapel, with Roman Catholic liturgy on Fridays. Events such as Candlemas, Ash Wednesday, All Souls, Holocaust Memorial Day and Remembrance Day have been marked with special services; and the annual carol service was well-attended. The Muslim Prayer Room continues to be very well used. Pastoral activity is at the heart of the Chaplain's work and includes relationships with all staff who work on the campus as well as with students. The Diocese of Oxford has appointed a half-time Anglican chaplain to join the OBU chaplaincy team.

The Westminster Society Reunion service in September included a special mention of two former Westminsterians who had been awarded the VC for their actions at the Battle of the Somme. The Vice-Chancellor with the great-nephew of one of them laid a British Legion poppy wreath on the window sill below the Donald Simpson Bell memorial window in the chapel. The Chaplain acts as honorary secretary and chaplain for the Westminster Society, and the committee meets termly.

The annual Oxford Brookes Chaplaincy Lecture for this academic year was given in November by the Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal on the theme of 'Hospitality and Sanctuary, a Faith-Based Approach to Refugees'. The event was well-attended by local Methodists as well as members of the university.

9. *Estates*

The Director of Estates has continued to report to the Board, outlining improvements and additions to the estate; for some works the company's permission is required. The Green Flag Award has been retained for a further 12 months until July 2017. The major works on the Chapel, begun in the previous year, continued with substantial expenditure on roof repairs.

The Estates Department is starting to plan for more significant investment in the coming years with a series of planned refurbishments to bring buildings up to a robust standard and ensure they are fit to meet the delivery needs for the site.

10. *Board*

Mrs Susan Howdle (as Chair), Mrs Susan Barratt, Dr Clifford Marshall, Dr Clive Norris and the Revd Dr Martin Wellings have continued to serve as members of the board, along with Mrs Ann Leck (General Secretary's nominee).

*****RESOLUTION**

38/1. The Conference received the Report.