

43. Summary of the Outcomes of the Training Review

Contact name and details	Professor Peter D Howdle Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee p.d.howdle@leeds.ac.uk
---------------------------------	---

The Training Review Group (TRG) was established by the Council in October 2015 in the light of six memorials to the Conference.

Its Terms of Reference were as follows:

- Review the premises and principles upon which current provisions of [ministerial and lay] training were proposed and adopted in the light of subsequent developments and practical experience*;
- Review provision of ministerial training*;
- Review provision of resources for lay training*;
- Review the impact of the post-2013 pattern of training on candidating;
- Evaluate how well the post-2013 pattern of training is preparing ministers for the breadth and variety of ordained ministry*; and
- Review the discernment process in candidature leading up to and including the candidate's portfolio.

In practice, their work allowed them to offer recommendations in relation to the starred items.

The Council considered an initial report of the group in January 2017. It engaged in an in-depth discussion about that report and asked that the group return to the Council in April 2017 having taken account of the views of the Council.

The group did so and the report they presented to the Council (in April 2017) contained the following key points:

- establishment of the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network (DMLN), following completion of Fruitful Field (FF) in 2012, has involved a major change programme and, notwithstanding the considerable challenges, much has been achieved;
- the balance of views and evidence given to the TRG suggest that there were nevertheless both new external developments and substantive issues which required attention.

The areas raised included:

- (i) that the Church takes action to reinforce the notion of a Learning Church, through supporting Circuits (in all their variety) to create learning communities; prioritising support for circuit and church stewards, and establishing a Methodist Open Learning function, largely in the form of a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE);
- (ii) that the DMLN should evolve into a Community of Expertise in Methodist Formation and Education, intended to be a catalyst and support for all in the Church to be nurtured and enabled to grow in understanding and faith; and where important first steps would be:
 - The appointment of a highly experienced theologian as Secretary of Methodist Education and Formation;
 - The streamlining of governance and oversight so that a single Committee takes

responsibility for oversight of DMLN priorities in the light of budget constraints;

- Work to ensure that full use is made of skills and knowledge of the centres (the Queen's Foundation and Cliff College).
- (iii) that, to be responsive and effective, the DMLN needs to be able to be more flexible in its use of resources;
- (iv) that, within the DMLN, the local (Churches and Circuits) voice should be strengthened;
- (v) that for those entering ordained ministry, the normal (but not universal) period of initial formation and training should be three years full time or its part-time equivalent; and that greater provision should be made for continuing ministerial development.
- (vi) that the Church should develop a strategy and identify funding to support lay people and ordained ministers with potential to be theologians and future theological educators, and to enable them to become imaginative, engaging and exciting communicators;
- (vii) that the Church should extend the number of institutions with which it works, by exploring opportunities for undertaking continuing professional development for ordained and lay people, and some initial ministerial formation, at universities with theology departments with international reputations, especially at Cambridge and Durham.

The Council made no decisions in respect of any of the recommendations in the report, particularly those in relation to institutions or staffing. Rather it considered a number of points that have the potential to support evolutionary developments to structures and patterns of formation, both lay and ordained.

The Council responded warmly to the following points:

- An increased focus on our life as a Learning Church;
- The continuation of investment in the existing VLE and support for its intended enlargement for other blended learning opportunities;
- Exploration of a Chair of Methodist Studies in an existing faculty of theology;
- Reflection on extending the length of Initial Ministerial Learning;
- The need for further investments in creating Methodist theologians for the future;
- An immediate review with the Regional Training Forums about their structures and purposes, taking into account where it is working well as well as the perceived issues;
- The need for continuing the conversation about how the content and pattern of training reflects more clearly our understanding of ministry in all its forms.

The Council expressed particular concerns with regard to:

- The lack of lay voices, particularly circuit and church stewards, consulted within the Review

- The focus on ordained learning over opportunities for lay learning
- An imbalanced focus on Learning that reduces the coherence of all four elements of *Our Calling* working together
- The role of the suggested Secretary for Methodist Education and Formation from theological, ecclesiological and structural viewpoints

The Council passed the following resolution:

The Council directed:

- the Strategy and Resources Committee to present to the Conference a summary of the report noting the points of consensus and concerns raised by the Council;
- the Strategy and Resources Committee, in consultation with the Ministries Committee and the Faith and Order Committee, to undertake evaluations of the recommendations in order to make detailed provision for any implementation and to make regular reports to the Council.

*****RESOLUTION**

43/1. The Conference received the Report.