

3. Connexional Council, part 1

Contact name and details	The Revd Dr 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 membership of the Connexional Council for the year 2025/2026 is as follows:

The President of the Conference

Vice-President of the Conference

The Secretary 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:

Barbara Easton

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: Mucharutya Chisvo, Thomas Hart, Michael Long, Anna Malnutt (Deputy Chair), David Matthews, Judith Neal, Sarah Parkin, Cliff Shanganya, Paul Spray, 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 to be present for most of its discussions. The Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee has attended when appropriate.

Other than those which need to be treated confidentially, reports to the Council are circulated before each meeting to all District Chairs, the Warden of the MDO, the Secretary

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of the Faith and Order Committee and the Chair of the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity Committee, the JDS Scrutiny Group, the President- and Vice-President-Designate, the Youth President, members of the Senior Management Group of the Connexional Team, and comments (usually via the Connexional Secretary) are invited on them.

A report on each Council meeting is made available, which, along with other information about the Council can be found on the Methodist Church website at www.methodist.org.uk/council

The Council presents its Report in five parts: part one (this General Report), part two (Ministries), part three (Mission), part four (Resourcing), and part five (Connexional Policy Options). Additionally, the Council brings Agenda item 6, Missional Use of Property. 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 2025/2026;
- received reports from a number of committees and trustee bodies;
- adopted a revised risk management policy and the corporate risk register;
- received updates on serious incident reports made to the Charity Commission;
- appointed its representatives to the Conference;
- under Standing Order 387(2), and by the required majority, recommends the extension of the Revd Dr Christine Dutton's appointment as Officer and Tutor in Evangelism and Leadership for five years from 1 September 2026;
- under Standing Order 387(2), and by the required majority, recommends the extension of the Revd David Hardman's appointment as Coordinator of the Methodist Liaison Office in Jerusalem for one year from 1 September 2026;
- under Standing Order 387(2), and by the required majority, recommends the extension of the Revd Carla Quenet's appointment as Learning and Development Officer for five years from 1 September 2026;
- acting on behalf of the Conference, appointed Deacon Helen Webster as a member of the Ministerial Candidates' and Probationers' Oversight Committee under Standing Order 252, with immediate effect;
- appointed a panel to decide upon applications made under Model Trust 20(1) and Model Trust 14(1) and received reports from the group during the year;

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- confirmed the appointment, pursuant to SO 387(1), of the Revd Dr Graham Edwards at Cliff College for a period of six years from 1 September 2025;
- confirmed the appointment, pursuant to SO 387(1), of Deacon Angela Allport at the Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education for a period of three years from 1 September 2025;
- recommended to the President that, pursuant to clause 29(b) of the Deed of Union and Standing Order 387(1), the Revd Dr Peter M Phillips be stationed to Cliff College with effect from 1 November 2025 (alongside his appointment in the Thames Valley Circuit) for the remainder of the connexional year 2025/2026;
- agreed that the sale proceeds of International House can be retained by the London Committee and utilised as an additional grant allocation to the five Districts covered by the terms of reference of the London Mission Fund;
- approved revised terms of reference for the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee;
- adopted a revised policy concerning Connexional Team membership on Methodist trustee bodies and related committees;
- approved the role description for the President and Vice-President of the Conference as required by SO 110A(1);
- appointed the Hope in God's Future resource group;
- noted with thanks the grants provided by the Joseph Rank Trust in 2025 and wrote to the Trustees to express its gratitude;
- gave permission for the disposal of the font formerly sited at Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, to the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and Americas and delegated the arrangements for this disposal to the Head of Mission and the Chair of the Mission Committee;
- received a report confirming that the members of the Connexional Council are now the managing trustees of Methodist Church House;
- received safeguarding updates at each meeting;
- approved the reappointment of Martin Tingle and Pete Harris as directors of the Methodist Lay Employees' Pension Trust Limited for a period of three years from 1 September 2025;
- pursuant to SO 387(1), agreed to recommend to the Conference that the Revd Ruth Jeffries be stationed to the Connexional Team for a period of five years from 1 September 2026;
- approved the Annual Report and Consolidated Accounts for the year ended 31 August 2025 and directed that they be published on the Methodist Church's website as required by SO 204(1)(i);
- approved a partnership with Eco Church;
- acting on behalf of the Conference, appointed the following additional three people to the Connexional Panel for Review Groups required by SO 291, to

enable an interviewing committee to be convened to hear two applications for reinstatement under SO 761: Deacon Sue Culver, Bala Gnanapragasam, Ruth Pickles;

- received a report on Memorials M3, M4, M5 and M6 (2025) and referred the issues raised to the Connexional Economic Justice Working Party;
- agreed to be a co-complainant against HSBC Holdings plc under the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct.

1.2 Other business

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

The Council, in the context of worship, heard reflections from the President and Vice-President on their year of office.

The Council witnessed the attestation of the Journal of the 2025 Conference.

***RESOLUTION

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

SECTION B SPECIAL SUNDAYS

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Under Standing Order 129B, the Connexional Council may, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee, propose to the Conference 'special days for prayer and the consideration of particular concerns'. The Council considered a report brought by the Liturgy and Worship Subcommittee and the Faith and Order Committee and it now brings a proposed list of such Sundays to the Conference.

2. Proposal

- 2.1 The Council noted that there are different kinds of observance and recommends to the Conference the designation of Special Days under SO 129B where they are not already part of the liturgical calendar approved by the Conference and where the Council wishes that the observance should normally be kept in all Methodist churches, in a suitable way. A longer list of 'themed days' will continue

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to be signposted from the website. Such themed days do not require approval by the Council or the Conference, but will enable churches to have the flexibility regarding whether and when to observe them.

- 2.2 The Council proposes the following Special Days to be designated by the Conference under Standing Order 129B

Special Sunday	When observed	Resources
Action for Children	2nd Sunday in July	Action for Children
Bible Sunday	Last Sunday in October	Bible Society
Conference Sunday	End of June/beginning of July	Produced for the Conference
Methodist Homes Sunday	2nd Sunday in June*	MHA
Racial Justice Sunday	2nd Sunday in February	CTBI
Vocations Sunday	4th Sunday of Easter ¹	Connexional Team/Various
Week of Prayer for Christian Unity	18 to 25 January	CTBI

*NB Where the second Sunday in June is Pentecost or Trinity Sunday,² then these observances should take precedence. Appropriate reference to the theme of Methodist Homes could still be included.

***RESOLUTIONS

- 3/2. The Conference receives the Report.**
- 3/3. The Conference designates the list set out in paragraph 2.2 as special days for prayer and the consideration of particular concerns under Standing Order 129B; and revokes all other designations under that Standing Order.**

1 On the decision of the Ministries Committee, the Methodist Church has observed Vocations Sunday on the first Sunday in May in recent years: it is proposed it be restored to its traditional and ecumenical date.

2 The latest possible date for Pentecost is 13 June and for Trinity 20 June.

SECTION C NET ZERO

The Council received a report from the Director of Environmental Engagement, which formed the basis of the report presented to the Conference as item 37.

The Council also received a report from the Internal Audit which indicated that at the current rate of progress, the Church will not meet the aspirational target which it set itself in 2021; the Council finds this lamentable. The Council celebrated the considerable progress that has been made by some churches and Circuits and by the Connexional Team; however, it also noted that addressing these issues requires a significant amount of resource in churches and Circuits that are in many ways struggling to comply with other requirements. It also noted that, absent reports on measurements of current usage and of progress towards net zero, it is currently impossible accurately to chart by how much the Connexion will fall short of its ambition; at the same time, the Council is reluctant to place additional administrative burdens on already fully occupied ministers and trustee bodies.

The Council therefore commends to the Conference the roadmap included in report 37 and through the Conference reminds the Connexion of the assistance that is available from the Connexional Team, A Rocha, and other organisations, and urges churches, Circuits and Districts to keep reducing the Church's carbon footprint as a key part of their mission.

*****RESOLUTION**

3/4. The Conference receives the Report.

SECTION D ECONOMIC JUSTICE WORKING GROUP

Introduction and Background to our work

The 2024 Conference directed that a Connexional Economic Justice Working Group be established, on the basis that three significant pieces of current work – The Justice Seeking Church Strategy, God For All: The Connexional Strategy for Evangelism and Growth Update and Renewal (2025-2032), and the Stationing Review – all independently call for the Church to address more urgently what the Church's tradition of economic justice asks of us practically for such a time as this. These reports identify the nature of the Methodist Church as a connexional church and the calling to privilege contexts

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marked by economic marginalisation – but also acknowledge the reality that the Church's structures do not fully facilitate economic justice within the Church.

The Council received this interim report from the working group and presents it to the Conference.

This interim report sets out:

1. The purpose/rationale of the work
2. A theological underpinning
3. Lines of enquiry and engagement for the work
4. A call for further evidence
5. A process to bring a report to the 2027 Conference

1. The purpose/rationale of the work

1.1 To establish a connexional process

- (i) to fund ministry and mission where the need is greatest, where the reserves are depleted, where the "income" is comparatively less due to poverty and economic marginalisation;
- (ii) to practise the connexional principle that the Church says it lives by; and
- (iii) to respond to the principle for justice that *"God consistently shows a bias to people experiencing poverty and those who are excluded."*

2. A theological underpinning

- 2.1 The theological underpinning for the pursuit of economic justice in the Methodist Church in Great Britain and for a call to faithful action is rooted in **the theology of connexionalism** and **the journey of justice-seeking**. The statement below is therefore a re-articulation of what the Conference has already received and adopted.
- 2.2 Working out this theology throughout the Methodist Church at every level will enable the Church to act justly in the deployment of ministry, the funding of projects, the engagement in mission, the unlocking of reserves, and action and advocacy on poverty.

2.3 The theology of connexionalism

- 2.3.1 “For Methodists, connexionalism is not an abstract principle or a piece of historical baggage, but a way of being Christian.....Connexionalism has a strong missionary dynamic, enabling the effective deployment of resources in the service of God’s mission, and challenging parochial attitudes and assumptions.”
- 2.3.2 *The Gift of Connexionalism* (2017) concludes: “In embracing the persistent and dynamic tension between the local and the wider community, the connexional principle prompts us to face the challenges and hard work of living in relationship with others. Where isolation, individualism and suspicion impair relationships, such a witness to other ways of being can offer life-giving possibilities. In emphasising relationships of mutuality and interdependence, the connexional principle helps us to reveal something of the love and nature of God. Although working out the practical implications of being a connexional Church in the twenty-first century is challenging (as it was in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries), the Conference is confident that the Methodist people have the resources and the determination to undertake this task. Above all, we affirm our confidence in God, who calls us into connexion, and sustains us in relationship.”
- 2.3.3 “In *Called to Love and Praise*, the essence of connexionalism is identified and defined in terms of belonging, mutuality and interdependence. All Christians are essentially linked to one another; no Local Church is or can be an autonomous unit complete in itself. This understanding of the essence of the Church is grounded in the New Testament. It is vital for effective mission, and it is expressed in apt structures of oversight, balancing authority and subsidiarity. Where these insights have become part of the ethos of the Church, connexionalism is experienced in a way of life which assumes that all contribute to and receive from the life and mission of the whole Church.”
- 2.3.4 A key extract from *Called to Love and Praise* states: “How is this ‘connexional principle’ effected? First, at all levels of the Church, the structures of fellowship, consultation, government and oversight express the interdependence of all churches, and help to point up, at all levels, necessary priorities in mission and service.
- 2.3.5 In *Ministry in the Methodist Church* (2021) “A Church that is ordered according to the connexional principle pays attention to the mission priorities not just in each area of its life but across a range of contexts and deploys its resources where they are most needed.”

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2.4 The journey of justice-seeking

- 2.4.1 Methodism is rooted in social justice, with the 2023 report *'A Justice-Seeking Church'*³ outlining Principles, Priorities, and Practices for The Methodist Church. The report commits The Methodist Church to being a justice-seeking church and includes repentance for past injustices and an acceptance of the need for deeper change.

Principles

- 2.4.2 The report outlines six principles for justice, which describe how the Church understands God's justice and what this means for individuals as justice-seekers. This includes the principle that "God consistently shows a bias to people experiencing poverty and those who are excluded. The search for justice must attend to those who live in poverty, and those who are marginalised in other ways, as a priority".
- 2.4.3 The work of seeking economic justice is also upheld by the principle that "God entrusts those in power with a special responsibility for upholding justice", which includes power over financial and material resources. Seeking economic justice flows from the principle that "God calls us to live in hope and in ways that reflect God's character and the pattern of God's kingdom", as the process of reviewing how our connexionalism enables us to practice justice through our economic resources will involve "honesty and truth, and may demand ... restitution, forgiveness, reconciliation and ultimately transformation."⁴

Priorities

- 2.4.4 Of the five Priorities,⁵ the work of the CEJWG is focused on 'tackling inequality and poverty'. Importantly, this priority invites us to connect by nurturing "relationships with people experiencing poverty to build new Christian communities and with people in power to foster transformational relationships between them and the people engaged in the struggle with poverty to achieve lasting social change." This is at the heart of collaboration to seek economic justice across the Connexion.

3 <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/social-justice/a-justice-seeking-church/>

4 <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/social-justice/a-justice-seeking-church/principles-for-justice-why-do-justice/>

5 <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/social-justice/a-justice-seeking-church/priorities-for-justice-what-can-we-do/explore-the-five-methodist-priorities-for-justice/>

Practices

- 2.4.5 The Practices for Justice outlined in the report help us to stay close to God and to those who experience injustice as we seek justice. Seeking economic justice should embody as well as promote these practices in how we live together as Methodist people today.
- 2.4.6 The practice of “Being with not for” encourages decision making around economic justice to take place in partnership with communities most affected by economic injustice by listening, involving communities in making decisions together, and enabling people to have agency and dignity.
- 2.4.7 The practice of “Humility in community” encourages any resolutions about redistribution of resources to be made in reflection of our commitment as partners and collaborators in God’s mission, not rescuers or providers for communities with more limited economic power.
- 2.4.8 The practice of being “Attentive to power” challenges us to recognise the consequences of economic power across the Connexion, as well as in wider society, and the injustice that can be perpetuated even amongst our own communities, when power is unbalanced.
- 2.4.9 Seeking economic justice requires us to engage the practice of “transformation”, confronting the reality of economic injustice as it currently is within our structures, but maintain hope that right relationship can and will be restored, leading to the flourishing of all God’s creation.
- 2.4.10 Finally, the process of discerning what economic justice across the Connexion looks like must be rooted in prayer at every stage, connecting us to the character and work of the God of justice, so that in all we do we draw on limitless divine grace.
- 2.4.11 The **Justice, Dignity and Solidarity Strategy**, adopted by the Methodist Conference in 2021, also guides the Methodist people in their justice-seeking as a connexional church so that all Methodists are able to be full participants in the Church’s life.

2.5 Our Methodist Heritage

- 2.5.1 Early Methodism was socially diverse but working people made up the largest group. John Wesley encouraged Methodist societies not only to give to those in need, but also to befriend those experiencing poverty, to understand their

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story, and to challenge the attitudes and economic structures that kept people in poverty.

- 2.5.2 This commitment was seen in the witness of the Primitive Methodists and in the work of the Forward Movement in city and town centres. The Wesley Deaconess Order combined social action and evangelism, particularly amongst those at the economic margins. Action for Children, All We Can, and Methodist Homes (MHA) were all established as Methodist responses to poverty in different contexts. The Mission Alongside the Poor Affirmation in 1983 stated “The Methodist Church, faithful to its missionary calling to evangelism, social caring and political justice, will strive to use its resources for all in society, recognising that this will mean especially taking sides with the poor and disadvantaged.”
- 2.5.3 Wesley commented in his sermon “On Visiting the Sick” that “One great reason why the rich in general have so little sympathy for the poor is because they so seldom visit them” and told rich followers that they could not be faithful to Christ unless they spent time with the poorest among them.⁶

2.6 Conclusion

- 2.6.1 Christians are called to act justly,⁷ and to work for God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.
- 2.6.2 The scriptures emphasise God’s concern for the poor, marginalised, and vulnerable. The prophets call for just treatment of widows, orphans, and strangers.⁸ And the teachings of Jesus reinforce the imperative to care for “the least of these”.⁹ The example set by Jesus highlights that “holiness cannot be self-seeking... holiness is a gracious outwards-turning”.¹⁰ Indeed, the early Christian community exemplified economic sharing and mutual support,¹¹ embodying a radical commitment to justice and equality.
- 2.6.3 Economic Justice across the Connexion is therefore not merely an aspiration, but a gospel imperative rooted in the life and teachings of Jesus, Wesleyan heritage, and the foundations of Methodism. The Methodist Church seeks to ensure

6 A Justice Seeking Church Study Guide, p. 13

7 Micah 6:8

8 Isaiah 1:17

9 Matthew 25:40

10 Tom Greggs: *Dogmatic Ecclesiology*, 2019, p. 150

11 Acts 2:44-4

that the spiritual condition of an area is not based on their economic wealth, or lack thereof. To continue to grow the Kingdom of God, build the discipleship of followers, and continue the work that Wesley started, it is necessary to ensure that there is probity in the distribution of financial, social, and spiritual wealth across the Connexion.

3. Lines of enquiry and engagement for the work

The following three lines of enquiry are being pursued, and the group has created a Language Guide to assist in the engagement:

3.1 Gather and analyse relevant and existing information about how economic factors affect stationing decisions and deployment of ministry, particularly drawing on evidence submitted to the Stationing Review

Part A Evidence gleaned from Stationing Review

Including further research to

- (i) Identify barriers to free deployment
- (ii) Investigate the lack of expressions of interest to places where ministry is needed most
- (iii) Note the current ways we can use to mitigate this.

Part B Suggestions for decision-making processes on deployment of ministry

Part C Changing patterns of ministry

Including

- local lay-pastors
- pioneer ministry
- ministers of other Conferences and Churches (MOCCs)
- pathways to ministry from low-income communities

3.2 Continue to consult with the Resourcing Committee to identify concrete changes to current mechanisms and structures that may be brought to the Conference 2027 and note that the effective use of the existing enablers and mechanisms may produce an immediate impact

Part A

There is a number of enablers and mechanisms already in place. These have been included in budget guidance and elsewhere for some time, with the intention

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to encourage resources to be directed to work in communities experiencing economic marginalisation.

The table below will be used to assess the effectiveness of these enablers and mechanisms .

Enablers for Economic Justice across the Connexion	Q1: How well known is this?	Q2: How well used is this?	Q3: What is the sticking point?	Q4: What is the potential impact?	Q5: Who does it currently privilege?
God for All (New Places for New People NPNP and Church at the Margins CaM) 2025-2032					
Weighting of District Advance Funds (DAF)					
Levy on Model Trust Fund Balances					
Methodist Church Fund (MCF) Assessment Exclusion					
District and Circuit Assessment Methodology					
Church Donation – Individual churches supporting activity outside their ‘patch’					
Connexional Priority Fund (CPF) Allocation					
Methodist Action on Poverty and Justice (MAPJ) Review					

Part B

a. **Capacity of communities**

Poverty often creates a spiral, where lack of financial resources in individual households as well as concentrated in a community makes it harder to access good quality healthcare, education opportunities, and other public services. The Index of Multiple Deprivation measures communities' access to opportunities and resources on a range of measures alongside income, including employment, education and skills, health, crime, housing and living environment, showing how access to different resources connects.¹² Furthermore, low-paid, insecure work often leads people to working multiple jobs to meet their essential costs, with the Living Wage Foundation reporting that one in three low-paid workers have resorted to take on extra work to make ends meet.¹³ This means much more of people's time and energy is taken up trying to meet their basic needs.

As a consequence, a church in a low-income community might struggle to generate capacity from within the church community to build income and resources for mission. This does not mean that people are not generous, or do not seek to use their other gifts to serve in their church and community, but often a lack of financial resources can be a significant barrier to generating capacity to resource ministry and mission. This is an important factor to explore when looking at levers to generate income for mission and ministry, particularly through routes such as grant applications. Churches in communities with a greater proportion of people on higher incomes are more likely to be able to generate time and capacity to access these sources of income, biasing resources towards these communities.

b. **Policy application**

A review will be undertaken of how our existing policies are being applied through the lens of economic justice.

c. **Transparent and Effective Use of Reserves**

Financial reserves exist in churches, Circuits, Districts and within the Connexion. Each reserve will have a reserve policy detailing why it is being held and what it should be used for. Some will be restricted or designated and therefore their use

¹² Local Deprivation Explorer 2025, <https://deprivation.communities.gov.uk>

¹³ In-work poverty causing misery as over half of low-paid parents forced to turn to food banks | Living Wage Foundation, <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/news/work-poverty-causing-misery-over-half-low-paid-parents-forced-turn-food-banks%C2%A0>

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may be quite narrow, while others could be used much more broadly to further the work of the church.

In promoting economic justice, there needs to be exploration of how there can be a more transparent understanding of the resources and reserves available across the whole church and how more effective use of those resources can be encouraged.

3.3 Undertake broad engagement to:

- Ensure that the stories are heard of those with lived experience of economic injustice and those working in and alongside communities experiencing marginalisation through consultation with key groups, and deep listening exercises in a number of Districts.
- Consult with ecumenical colleagues in order to gain an understanding of how other denominations have approached the issue, and how this may inform our recommendations.
- Work with a number of Districts to gather information about:
 - a) how well the flexibility within key funds (such as DAFs) are understood.
 - b) how far this flexibility is used to facilitate economic justice (both for mission and church-to-church support).
 - c) their views about potential future actions which could feed into the work of The Connexional Economic Justice Group.
 - d) how they have experienced the lack of financial resources being available and sharp inequalities across their district.

In inviting participation in this, attention will be paid to the need to hear from diverse voices and experiences, whilst privileging the experiences of those who are economically marginalised.

There will be three approaches to this research:

Part A: National online conversations with key groups

Part B: Targeted conversations in Districts

Part C: General Consultation

Part A: National online conversations with key groups

One-off conversations with key groups engaged in this work across the Connexion, including:

- 1) Partners who have acted and advocated with us on poverty.
- 2) Deacons, pioneers and other ministers who are continuing ministry/mission in areas where congregations have ceased to meet/buildings have closed.

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3) Colleagues from Scotland, Shetland, Wales, Channel Islands, and Isle of Man.

Timeline: April – August 2026

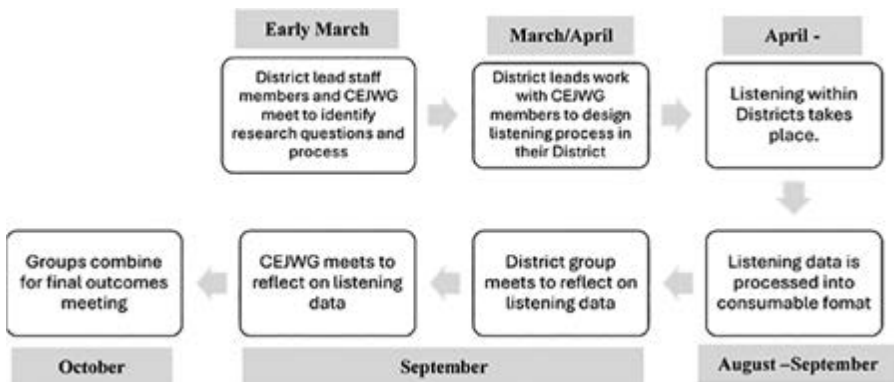
Part B: District Conversations

Research will take place in five Districts, which represent a broad range of social and geographical contexts from across the UK. The research approach will draw on Theological Action Research, to enable reflection from key participants throughout the process.

Timeline: March – September 2026

Research Process

- Identify listening process in each District, to listen to people in the four key groups.
- Identify lead staff in each District who will carry out listening across the District.
- Identify a lead staff member in each District who will be part of the research listening group.
- Listening within Districts takes place.
- District group gathers to reflect on listening.
- CEJWG group gathers to reflect on listening.
- Groups combine for listening outcomes meeting.



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Headline questions:

- a) What is the impact of a lack of economic justice in your context?
- b) What would be different if there was economic justice in your context?
- c) Where are the opportunities to reach that now, at a local, District and National level?
- d) What barriers do you identify in accessing / applying for money for mission and ministry?

Who are we listening to? There are four key groups to particularly identify for listening within each District:

- 1) Ministers, lay leaders and church members in low-income communities.
- 2) People who can speak of the Impact of withdrawal from an area and how ministry is continuing (deacons and pioneers in particular).
- 3) Church at the Margins practitioners.
- 4) Higher income churches and how they operate with economic justice.

How will listening happen?

District leads will work with Connexional Economic Justice Working Group members and consultants to identify how listening can best happen in their District, likely to be through a combination of 1-1 and focus group meetings. It will be encouraged that listening should be done in conversation, rather than via email or written feedback. District leads will then carry out the listening over the five-month period.

How will evidence be gathered?

An online form will be provided to district leads to input feedback on the headline areas from their listening conversations. District lead staff will be encouraged to record/transcribe their meetings, so that direct quotes can be used in the research. Support to gather informed consent from participants will be given to district leads, and participants can be named or anonymous.

How will evidence be reflected on?

Drawing on the tools of Theological Action Research (TAR), the evidence will be collated and then reflected on by two groups:

- District Lead staff, representing local contexts.
- Connexional Economic Justice Working Group members, representing the researchers.

Separate reflective meetings will be held, with a combined reflection meeting bringing the two groups together towards the end of the process.

This approach will enable theological and practical reflection to be embedded throughout the process and shaped by participants at all levels. It will encourage deeper involvement of key practitioners, encouraging engagement with transformative practice locally and connexionally. It also reflects a more justice-oriented approach to enabling lived experience to shape practice and outcomes.

Part C: General Consultation

Feedback opportunities will also be created from members across the whole Connexion, including through an online survey, launched at the Conference and open until autumn 2026.

4. A call for further evidence

- 4.1 The group looks forward to receiving comments, testimonies, and suggestions from the Methodist people across the Connexion on the matters raised in this report.

A process to bring a report to the 2027 Conference

There are 4 stages to the work-

Fixing the Research Questions (January and February 2026)

Gathering evidence within the three Lines of Enquiry (March to September 2026)

Analysis of the evidence (October to December 2026)

Preparation of recommendations and resolutions (January to March 2027)

The Working Group Members and Consultants are:

Karen Attaway (Ministries), Deacon Eunice Attwood (Consultant), Dan Bishop (Consultant), Julian Bond (Consultant), the Revd Dr Jonathan Dean (Mission), Hannah Fremont-Brown (Consultant), Ian Hancock (Resourcing), Rachel Lampard (Consultant), the Revd Ian S Rutherford (Mission and Chair), the Revd Chris Sandy (Ministries), the Revd Michaela Youngson (Convener)

*****RESOLUTION**

- 3/5. The Conference receives the Report and approves the outlined basis for the 2027 Report.**

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SECTION E

METHODIST ACADEMIES AND SCHOOLS TRUST (MAST) GOVERNANCE

The Council received a report which reviewed the governance of Methodist Academies and Schools Trust. It noted that the Methodist Academies and Schools Trust (MAST) was formed at the end of 2011 as a 'holding trust' or academy sponsor for Methodist state schools, and to fulfil the then Methodist Council's responsibilities to Methodist state schools. It does not currently fulfil the role of academy sponsor/trust directly; instead, The Epworth Education Trust (EET) acts as a Methodist multi-academy trust (MAT). As the religious authority for 66 state schools, the Methodist Church has specific legal responsibilities (summarised in SO 272(1)(b)); responsibility for these lies with the Connexional Council although these responsibilities are currently carried out by MAST. MAST currently has seven trustees including an interim chair (and can have as many as 13). The review found that there is considerable educational expertise within MAST, that the trustees are a committed group and that a body such as MAST is needed. However, there are some areas that need thought and discussion, especially: the need to establish financial sustainability of the work related to Methodist state schools; confusion around accountability and operational activities (especially now that the Director of State Schools role is in the Connexional Team); and the lack of oversight of MCGB around significant decisions such as approaches to academisation for Methodist state schools. The Council considered some questions related to updating of Standing Orders and Articles of Association to ensure clarity around the respective strategic and operational roles of MAST, the Connexional Council, the Methodist Schools Committee (MSC) and Connexional Team staff.

The Council directed work to re-draft MAST Articles of Association and Standing Orders 271, 272 and 274, and report back to the Connexional Council within an appropriate timeframe. It also directed the Connexional Team to review and update the Terms of Reference of the Methodist Schools Committee to ensure that appropriate oversight is in place, on behalf of the Connexional Council.

*****RESOLUTION**

3/6. The Conference receives the Report.

SECTION F

METHODIST SCHOOLS COMMITTEE

The Council received the report of the Methodist Schools Committee which follows. It was reported to the Conference in 2025 that the Inspiring Lives Educational Trust had

had to close before it could be launched. Now that it has been formally wound up, the Conference is asked to revoke SO 270.

Introduction

In the second year of the current government, the emphasis of the DfE remains firmly on Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and strengthening the early years provision, so children get a good start in education. Both priorities have been at the heart of Methodist Schools for some time and this year we have taken steps to further strengthen our work in these areas.

The Methodist independent schools have broadly weathered the changes in VAT regulations, albeit recognising ongoing market conditions are hard, which sadly reflected in one school closure. As regards Methodist State schools, Methodist Schools and Academies Trust (MAST), has been helping its schools navigate the changes in education policy including changes in Ofsted methodology, financial pressures, leadership transitions and demographic variability. Throughout all our schools, the desire to retain and strengthen the Methodist ethos remains a top priority, with schools sharing best practice and supporting each other in this endeavour.

This year is the midpoint of the ten-year strategic plan set out in *Transforming Lives* report in 2021. Each of the component groups that make up Methodist Schools network, therefore, reports its work under these headings.

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

The Executive Summary and Highlights are to guide the reader to some of the key points which are expanded elsewhere in the report. The range of Methodist Schools and the components of the Methodist Schools network can be seen at www.methodistschools.org.uk.

Executive Summary and Highlights

- It is a delight to report the appointment of Fay Cairns as the new Director of Methodist State Schools. This post is now located within the Connexional Team within the Ministries unit. Fay took up her post in December 2025 and is working closely with MAST and Epworth Education Trust to lead the work.
- On the 19 November the first Celebration of Methodist Schools Day at University of Roehampton was held. Under the leadership of the President of the Conference,

3. Connexional Council, part 1

90 headteachers, chaplains and governors met together, with the support of the Southlands Methodist Trust, to address some of the current issues in schools. The key speakers covered the issues of leadership in Christian Schools, how schools can best tackle inclusion and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and the how schools play a part in the work of the kingdom of God. The day also enabled networking and mutual support between schools and their staffs. The day was judged to be a huge success and there are plans to make this a regular part of the Methodist Schools Committee's work.

- The pressure on headteachers and other school staff is high with absence due to illness and stress affecting those on the front line. So, this year, the various schools are exploring ways of increasing support. Epworth Education Trust (EET) is already developing supervision for heads and senior staff. The plan is to extend this to all our schools. As part of this, there is an interest in learning from the Church's work in supervision.
- Sadly, we have to report that Judith Fenn, the CEO of MIST has been ill for some time and decided to step down from the post. During Judith's illness, James Lockwood, head of Woodhouse Grove School, acted as interim Chief Executive. It has been agreed that James will continue to lead MIST for the next two years, as well as retaining overall executive leadership at Woodhouse Grove School.
- Epworth Education Trust has gained approval for the extension of early-years provision at Wesley Methodist Primary School, in Radcliffe, enabling the school to welcome children from the age of two.

The Methodist Academies and Schools Trust (MAST)

MAST continues to play a pivotal role in stewarding, supporting and championing Methodist education across the maintained and academised sectors. Over the past year, MAST has worked to deepen collaboration and build shared identity and ensure that Methodist schools continue to provide places of belonging, learning and hope for children and communities. The interim Head of Service, Charlotte Taylor, retired in July 25 and Julie-Ann Hewitt undertook the role whilst recruitment took place. The new Director of Methodist State Schools, Fay Cairns, took up role in December and holds the role within the Connexional Team.

Growing Schools

MAST has continued to work alongside schools and Trusts to enable stability, sustainability and appropriate growth within the Methodist educational landscape. It has considered strategic matters relating to Trust configuration and ensuring that the Methodist Trust Deed is preserved. It made the difficult decision to wind down Inspiring Lives Education Trust (ILET). It continues to support the development of Epworth Education Trust. 24 of the 66 Methodist schools have academised with 11 sitting within the Epworth family of schools and the remainder in Diocesan Trusts. A number of other schools are in the process of academising.

Throughout the year, MAST has supported schools in navigating national educational shifts, including changes in Ofsted methodology, financial pressures, leadership transitions and demographic variability. There remains a focus on ensuring that Methodist schools are well positioned to respond to both immediate operational demands and long-term strategic direction.

MAST also continues to work in alignment with the evolving connexional structures for Methodist education, ensuring that its governance and operating model reflect the wider strategic shape of the Church's educational presence nationally.

Offering excellent education

MAST continues to champion high quality education that develops the whole child. Across the year, MAST has enabled educational partnership, knowledge sharing and leadership support, ensuring that Methodist schools can sustain and enhance their practice through the webinars and Regional Leaders of Education (RLEs) support. The RLEs continue to support schools through the sharing of best practise and raising the profile of Methodist education.

Schools continue to secure positive educational outcomes, with many demonstrating strong curriculum work, effective safeguarding practice and rich provision for pupil wellbeing as demonstrated through the number of Ofsted judgements that are Good or better, which is higher than national average. MAST provides a conduit for shared expertise across schools, and the Executive Team continues to support leadership capacity, development of pedagogy, and alignment with the vision of education as a vehicle for human flourishing.

A confident Methodist ethos

MAST continues to nurture and protect the distinctively Methodist character of school communities. This includes upholding the theology which underpins Transforming Lives that every person is of worth and ensuring that Methodist schools remain places where individuals are valued, relationships are nurtured, and hope is embedded in daily experience.

Methodist identity expressed through inclusion, aspiration and care ('Watching Over One Another in Love') remains central to MAST's work. All MAST schools have a positive SIAMS outcomes, this is further evidence which demonstrates that our schools are flourishing. MAST remains attentive to encouraging schools to live out their ethos authentically rather than performatively.

The sharing of best practice in this area remains a priority and the vast majority of webinars link directly to our Methodist ethos as leading experts deliver high quality CPD to school leaders.

3. Connexional Council, part 1

Across the year, MAST has engaged in work to support worship, prayer and spiritual reflection within schools. Weekly reflections, half termly newsletters and end of term online reflections (Be Still) further build upon the work.

Working together

At the heart of MAST's work is partnership. MAST has continued to deepen its relationship with key stakeholders and national bodies, recognising that Methodist education is strengthened when it is connected and collaborative rather than isolated.

It has worked closely with other members of the Methodist Schools Committee to develop the Methodist Celebration of Education. It continues to work closely with MIST, Southlands College and Epworth Education Trust.

MAST plays a key role on the SIAMs National Body, RE Council, DFE Faith Schools Provider Group and Ofsted Section 48 Inspectorate Group. MAST remains committed to ensuring that schools feel supported in practice and understood in context and that the Methodist voice within the educational sphere remains distinctive and credible.

Prioritising areas of need

MAST continues to hold a particular concern for schools serving communities where there is greater deprivation, instability or vulnerability. It reaffirms its dedication to serving Methodist schools, sustaining Christian character, championing inclusion and advocating for the flourishing of children and staff.

MAST's work this year reflects the Methodist Church's vision of education as a means through which lives are transformed: intellectually, emotionally, spiritually and socially. It remains resolute in the task of enabling Methodist schools to be places where hope is cultivated, potential is nurtured and God's love is made visible in community.

Headteacher Supervision

As part of MAST's collaboration with RLEs, termly touch-base meetings provide an opportunity for RLEs to discuss their own schools and those they support, as well as share wider considerations to strengthen support across MAST schools. These discussions highlight that school leaders often face significant challenges, particularly when managing high-level safeguarding concerns or wider serious matters.

When asked about support, it is clear that supervision is not currently available for all Headteachers, despite their responsibility as designated safeguarding leads. Regular supervision is widely recognised as good practice, offering space for reflection, promoting wellbeing, and enhancing safeguarding decisions. Where this is in place, the benefits are evident.

Currently, Epworth Education Trust schools receive termly supervision from a trained Safeguarding Supervisor, and the Headteacher at Richmond Methodist benefits from supervision provided by her Minister. However, when some other Headteachers were asked, they were unclear about what supervision entails.

It would be beneficial to review the current offer for all school leaders, as there may be other schools already receiving this support. Where supervision is not in place, MAST may wish to explore how Ministers or other qualified providers could be utilised to ensure this offer is extended to all leaders within Methodist schools. Further discussion on supervision for school leaders will take place at the March Ethos meeting.

Epworth Education Trust (Academies)

Epworth Education Trust (EET), comprising 11 schools across Northwest England and Derbyshire, continues to contribute to the Methodist Church's educational mission within the framework of Transforming Lives. The Trust remains committed to nurturing educational excellence, embodying Methodist ethos, and ensuring that all children (and especially those in greatest need) flourish.

Growing Schools

Epworth Education Trust has continued to strengthen its presence and impact within the Methodist educational network. Following the expansion to 11 schools, the Trust has undertaken a period of intentional consolidation, ensuring that growth is matched by organisational capacity, leadership depth, and sustainability.

A notable development this year has been the approval of the extension of early-years provision at Wesley, enabling the school to welcome children from the age of two. This expansion enables the Trust to live out its aspiration of holistic education from the very early stages of learning and development.

The Trust continues to lead with confidence in providing provision for Special Educational Needs. The imminent establishment of the SEND unit at Westleigh, alongside already established practice across other schools, strengthens EET's reputation for inclusive, high-quality education. The Trust remains proactive in exploring further opportunities for growth in alignment with the Methodist aspiration to extend school provision and presence across communities.

With political uncertainty in the academy landscape at national level, the Trust is preparing a resilience and sustainability approach to ensure that it remains strong, agile, and able to respond to continued system reform.

3. Connexional Council, part 1

Offering Excellent Education

Epworth Education Trust is unwavering in its commitment to educational excellence rooted in the flourishing of the whole child: this aligns with our core purpose 'To Educate and Nurture Children'. The Trust continues to implement its refined Education Strategy, ensuring leaders have the skills, knowledge and support required to lead their schools effectively. The Trust is intentional in developing a high-quality curriculum and embedding strong assessment methodology.

The success of the Infinite Eight initiative has embedded enriching experiences across the Trust, broadening horizons, developing character, and offering life-enhancing opportunities to all pupils. This included a huge celebration, 'The Big Sing' in which pupils from across the Trust performed to each other and with each other at the Victoria Hall in Bolton.

Many EET schools continue to secure strong Ofsted recognition, with reports frequently noting the quality of relationships, curriculum development, safeguarding culture, and school ethos. The Trust continues to deliver National Professional Qualifications, equipping leaders for current and future roles. Completion rates remain high, and leadership talent within the Trust pipeline continues to strengthen.

The Trust-wide CPD strategy promotes staff learning, collaboration and the sharing of best practice across schools with many staff now leading training for others across the wider education sector. The annual Trust Staff Conference 'Reimagining Education: Endless Possibilities' was a huge success as we explore the use of AI in Education.

A Confident Methodist Ethos

The Trust continues to anchor its identity in the Methodist theological vision that every human being is made in the image of God and filled with potential. The Trust vision 'To be a family of schools where all within our communities flourish and succeed' remains at the centre of its culture and practice.

Epworth Worship Together continues to be a central expression of Trust ethos, with regular shared worship enabling pupils and staff to reflect spiritually, connect across schools, and express being part of a faith community.

The Trust has embedded a weekly reflection, shared with staff and governors across EET, reinforcing core Methodist values, language, and theological grounding and enabling a faith-based start to the week.

SIAMS outcomes continue to affirm the Trust's distinctive strength in living out its Christian character in practice as well as theory, reflecting the Methodist aspiration for values to be embodied rather than stated. All inspections in the last 12 months were successful.

The Trust continues to invest in deepening staff understanding of Methodist ethos through CPD, chaplaincy partnership work, and sharing of best practice.

Working Together

Epworth Education Trust continues to be a collaborative and outward-facing partner within the Methodist family of education, working in close alignment with MAST, MIST, Southlands College and national networks. Members of the Team contribute to national education through MAST roles and by offering CPD and leadership development to other Methodist schools.

The Trust continues active partnership with the new North West England District, exploring how the relationship between church and school can be deepened as part of shared mission and presence. EET actively shares resources, collective worship material, curriculum exemplification, and leadership capacity strengthening the Methodist educational presence beyond its own schools.

Prioritising Areas of Need

Epworth Education Trust is deeply committed to the Methodist priority of serving “those who need us most”. The Trust’s inclusive practice is recognised by Local Authorities and national networks as an example of enabling children with significant difficulty to find belonging, stability, and educational success. SEND leadership continues to be a hallmark of Epworth schools, with the work of Julie Whittaker and wider SEN teams being recognised locally and nationally for excellence.

The Trust continues to collaborate with charities including EDUkid and AllChild, building global compassion and offering opportunities for enriched life experiences to children experiencing local and national challenges. The Trust’s approach is to see potential not deficit, possibility not limitation and to embody the Wesleyan conviction of education for all.

In addition, Epworth Education Trust acknowledges the importance of organisational health, leadership pipeline development, and AI-assisted educational innovation. These strategic developments have strengthened capacity, improved communication and enriched professional culture across the Trust.

MIST (Methodist Independent Schools Trust)

People and Governance

During the year, MIST embraced its external governance review which gave rise to Trustee Board composition changes. We said thank you and farewell to Elaine Cleland who retired at the end of her nine-year term. In addition, Mark Donougher and Tony Harris retired from the Board and Gill Wilson stood down as Chair of Governor Trustees.

3. Connexional Council, part 1

We welcomed Matthew Bartlett, Isabel Nisbet and Christina Sturge. This followed the Articles of Association changes which improved MIST's corporate governance and added to the education & standards and human resources skillsets. On the staff side and after a period of sick leave, Judith Fenn relinquished her role as MIST Chief Executive and moved away from leadership in education. MIST has been extremely grateful for the work Judith has done for schools during her time as CEO and wishes her the very best for the future. Following a period as interim Chief Executive, James Lockwood has now taken on the substantive role. He will continue to lead MIST for the next two years, as well as retaining overall executive leadership at Woodhouse Grove School.

Growing schools

2025 was a challenging time for independent schools. The imposition of additional taxation was significant and resulted in a shrinkage of the sector. MIST has maintained a strong approach to good governance and financial sustainability to preserve the interests of children and young people.

MIST has continued to deliver in their local communities where they operate. This has delivered good educational outcomes at the same time as helping children and young people to be the best they can be.

MIST has devoted considerable time to safeguarding and supporting Designated Safeguarding Leads and Governors in the schools. This has included training and a new toolkit to look after the best interests of children and young people.

School closure during the year

At the same time as promoting the provision of education in several areas, it became necessary to close the Moorlands Prep School in Leeds. This was a very sad time for the children, parents and people involved with the school. However, it had become fundamentally unsustainable to continue in an area that was over-supplied with educational places in all sectors, coupled with the Leeds area experiencing a falling birthrate greater than the national average. Whilst it was sad to close, all pupils were quickly accommodated at nearby schools thus ensuring their education continued without unnecessary interruption.

Offering excellent education

Methodist Independent Schools provide an excellent all-round education founded on a strong Christian ethos.

The needs of children and young people continued to develop as society changes around them. There are growing needs affecting the beneficiary group which required greater support for pupils and families. As local authorities are over-stretched, schools are now taking a greater role in society as they seek to support people when they need it most.

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Each MIST schools has clear aims and values. These are embraced by MIST as a whole, which seeks to enable and support its schools to advance quality education in accordance with Methodist Principles.

Public Examination results in Summer 2025 were very positive. There was a great deal to celebrate as pupils delivered of their best. In this way, MIST schools continue to provide an education tailored to the needs and aspirations of all pupils and each pupil.

A confident Methodist ethos

MIST continues to support the Chaplaincy network within the schools. This is supported by the Pastoral Visitor, staff team and through the Chaplain's retreat. Every school has a chaplain who supports the pastoral journey of their school and the people within it.

MIST has continued to embrace its SERVE reviews. These focus on Spirituality, Ethos, Relationships and Values Evaluation. They evaluate how well our schools meet the aspirations of their Methodist foundations, support the development of their Methodist ethos, and enable them to share good practice. They provide a parallel evaluation to SIAMS inspections (to which Methodist Schools in the state sector are subject), are undertaken by the project lead, accompanied by a headteacher from one of the other MIST schools.

The SERVE reviews operate on a three-year cycle. The reports provide a fascinating read on how Methodist values and Christian ethos is lived out in local school settings. The SERVE reviews are publicly available on the MIST Schools website at <https://mistschools.org.uk/about-us/aims-ethos/>

They are commended to the Methodist Conference as they are distinct to each school, but overwhelming focus on positive faith-based impacts for children and young people. They are well worth reviewing as they demonstrate that Christian values are being promoted in many settings, as part of equipping children and young people to live effectively in the world.

Working together

MIST is committed to the work of the Methodist Schools Committee and its desire to embrace Christian leadership within education.

A new MIST event is being developed which focuses on Impact. This aims to showcase school impact, value add, promote success and celebrate Methodist values through an annual service.

MIST has been supporting some research projects with the Susanna Wesley Foundation. They seek to provide practical research and resources on contemporary Christian

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leadership in education. Furthermore, MIST and Foundation are sharing insights, learning and material flowing from the SERVE reviews to help inform and develop Christian leadership and ethos within schools. This collaborative work is welcomed.

The Chaplaincy network in schools continues to foster engagement through regular coffee mornings, discussions and devotional sessions. The annual Chaplaincy Conference strengthened the network and provided retreat and learning opportunities. These initiatives are welcomed as a means of living out our calling.

Prioritising areas of need

MIST supports families making education accessible and provides public benefit where there is need. In 2024/25, over £7.7m of financial support was provided to help children with scholarships and bursaries.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

3/7. The Conference receives the Report.

3/8. The Conference revokes Standing Order 270.

SECTION G

JUSTICE, DIGNITY AND SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE

The Council received the annual report from the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity Committee, which focused on the progress made in the first five years of the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity. A full report on this is elsewhere in the Conference Agenda.

1. Introduction and Context

In 2021, the Methodist Conference adopted the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity (JDS). The Strategy was designed as both a theological statement and a practical framework for transformation, affirming the conviction that every person is created in the image of God and is therefore inherently worthy of justice, dignity, and solidarity. It called the Church to undertake the deeper work of cultural, systemic, and attitudinal change across every level of connexional life.

The Oversight and Trusteeship Report to the 2022 Conference subsequently located JDS explicitly within the Church's gospel calling and committed the Connexion to sustained

3. Connexional Council, part 1

structural and cultural change. This trajectory was further developed in Council reports MC/24/46 (2024) and CC/25/37 (2025), which affirmed the constitutive nature of this work for the life of the Church, noted the unevenness of implementation, and identified the need for strengthened governance clarity.

This report marks the first five years of implementation. It charts the progress made in embedding JDS principles into governance, structures, and culture, while also acknowledging areas where change is still at an early stage. It includes the findings of three independent reviews carried out by the Susanna Wesley Foundation, offering external evaluation of the Church's journey so far. The report also reflects on the challenges encountered, the lessons learned, and the priorities to guide the next phase of work. Together, these insights provide both encouragement and a clear mandate for sustained commitment as the Church continues on its journey towards becoming a community where justice, dignity, and solidarity truly flourish.

2. Progress on Conference Recommendations (2021–2026)

The 2021 Conference set out eight major recommendations to embed the JDS Strategy into the life of the Church. Over the past five years:

- Several recommendations have been fully implemented and are now part of regular Church practice.
- A number are at pilot stage, being tested across Districts.
- Others are in active development, with clear plans for full implementation in the coming year.

Key Highlights of the First Five Years

Over the past five years, significant progress has been made in embedding the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity Strategy into the life of the Church. The following demonstrates how the Strategy has begun to shape structures, culture, and practice across the Connexion:

- Formation of the JDS Committee (SO 330) to provide oversight, accountability, and guidance for the implementation of the Strategy.
- Formation of the JDS Scrutiny Group to work alongside the JDS Committee ensuring transparency and progress in the strategy's implementation.
- Publication of *A User Guide to the Strategy for Justice, Dignity & Solidarity* (in print, digital and accessible versions) as a companion to the 2021 Conference report. It includes theological framing, principles, practical steps, prayers and reflections, and guidance for churches at all levels to implement and embed the strategy.

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- Development of a *JDS Inclusive Language Guide* (with both language and image guidance), offering practical advice on avoiding exclusionary or harmful terms. It emphasises listening to how individuals self-identify (for example, in pronouns or relationship terms), avoiding assumptions and openness in conversations about identity and belonging.
- Permanent pages on the Methodist Church website under “*The Inclusive Methodist Church / Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity*”, presenting the strategy, resources, training links, news updates, and support materials. This digital presence allows ongoing access to resources and latest developments under the strategy.
- The development of the key role in the Connexional Team from *EDI Adviser* to the more strategic *Director for Inclusion*. This shift signifies that inclusion work is no longer a side or advisory function but central to leadership, accountability, and decision-making in the life of the Church.
- A dedicated *Programme Coordinator* role was to lead, in collaboration with the JDS Committee, the implementation, monitoring, coordination and reporting of JDS strategy initiatives. This role ensures that the many strands of the strategy are actively managed.
- Development of the *Equality Impact Assessment* (EIA) designed to help the Connexional team, Districts, Circuits and local Churches ensure that policies, practices and decision-making processes are fair, inclusive and transparent.
- Review of the Connexional Committees to ensure diverse membership and accessible communication and continued prioritisation of justice in theological education with interest from other denominations our approach including:
 - Strengthening the work of the Nominations Committee to promote greater diversity and representation within connexional appointments and leadership roles.
 - The formation of a dedicated coaching and mentoring facility to build confidence, nurture leadership skills, and support those who may feel unsure about applying for roles in committees, council and decision-making bodies.
- Offering through the Learning Network a diverse portfolio of learning and development opportunities, including *Equality, Diversity & Inclusion support*, *Unconscious Bias training*, and courses for lay employees, circuit stewards, worship leaders, and pastoral care including the following:
 - A structured series of “*Equipping for Equalities*” workshops, building on the mandatory JDS (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion) training offered via the MCBX/TheologyX platform.
These workshops are intended to increase knowledge of diverse communities and people within the Church, enabling local churches, circuits and districts to become more inclusive, engage in reflective dialogue and embed equity in everyday practice.
 - The Learning Network is aligned with District EDI Officers who act as local points of contact, helping to tailor training to district needs and contexts.

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- Piloting of the *Discrimination and Abuse Response Service (DARS)*, providing a structured, pastorally supportive system in which to respond to incidents of discrimination or abuse.
- Beginning the work on Truth and Reconciliation to establish the framework for a process of confession, healing, and renewal.
- Working with the Faith and Order Committee on the nature of Healing Ministry.
- Exploring how the Church can be more inclusive of neurodivergent people, to ensure that every person is valued and fully able to participate.
- Initiating Pilots for Inclusive Worship: There are three components to this initiative:
 - Inclusive worship through music,
 - Inclusive worship through drama
 - Inclusive worship for children.
- Appointment of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Officers within Districts, ensuring local leadership and support for embedding the principles of JDS. These Officers are supported by the Connexional Team through bi-monthly meetings and quarterly Newsletters.
- Creation of Solidarity Circles as a way of supporting people in different diversities of the Church's life through offering regular on-line opportunities to meet, and to raise their concerns with relevant Church leaders through the Connexional Team. The coordinators are supported by the Connexional Team through by bi-monthly meetings.
- Development of the Affirmation Scheme Pilot including the design of universal icons for protected characteristics, for churches to use as visible signs of welcome and inclusivity.
- A detailed progress table on the eight recommendations from the 2021 Conference is available on request.

Collectively, these developments reflect more than organisational progress; they indicate the gradual embedding of JDS within the Church's structures, practices and relationships, inviting the Connexion to understand this work not as a series of initiatives but as an expression of discipleship shaping how the Church lives, leads and belongs.

3. Embedding Principles into Church Structures

From the outset, the implementation of the JDS Strategy has emphasised that justice, dignity, and solidarity must not remain aspirational ideals, but must be rooted in the frameworks that govern Church life. Embedding these principles into structures and policies helps ensure that commitment is sustained, not optional.

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Embedding has been approached in the following ways, with examples of progress achieved to date:

Connexional Governance

- JDS priorities are now routinely integrated into the agendas of Conference, Connexional Council, and other key committees. This ensures that justice, dignity, and solidarity are considered alongside mission and financial decisions.
- The Strategy has called for mandatory actions for local churches, circuits, districts, and the Connexional Council, to embed the values of JDS within governance expectations.
- Through the Connexional Team, there is ongoing oversight and coordination to ensure that JDS remains part of the governance culture.

Policy and Process Alignment

- Existing policies in recruitment, complaints, safeguarding, ministerial support, and appointments are continuously being reviewed and revised to reflect JDS principles.
- Processes such as equality impact assessments (EIAs) have been introduced more broadly to ensure that new or revised policies are screened for their effect on inclusion and dignity.
- Human resources and personnel policies have been aligned so that systems and processes fully reflect fairness, transparency, and diversity.

Shared Resources and Support Tools:

- A suite of accessible templates, toolkits, and training modules has been developed for use by Districts, Circuits and Local Churches. These resources help local leaders adapt JDS principles in their contexts.
- The Methodist Church's "Learning and Development" pages provide access to courses, support, and materials across the Connexion, coordinated via the Learning Network and aligned Learning Network Officers.
- Among the courses listed are Equality, Diversity and Inclusion support, Unconscious Bias training, and leadership development modules.
- Districts are encouraged to use these shared tools to reduce duplication, support smaller Circuits, and ensure consistency of approach.

Learning, Formation, and Leadership Development

- JDS principles are being included in ministerial training pathways and continuing development programmes, so that both incoming and existing leaders are better equipped to lead in an inclusive culture.

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- Worship-leading development, and accredited courses are aligned with JDS values through the Learning Network
- The Learning Network works in partnership with District Learning & Development Officers to contextualise training, ensuring it addresses local needs and challenges.
- Leadership programmes and formation pathways now include components on justice, dignity, and inclusion.

The Committee's engagement with connexional work is at times constrained by being involved primarily through annual reporting and through responding to papers rather than participating in the relational and conversational spaces where thinking is formed and shaped. This can limit the Committee's ability to contribute formatively, as important nuance, emerging concerns and the depth of shared discernment often arise through dialogue, informal exchange and in-person engagement rather than through written material alone. Earlier and more relational integration of the JDS perspective has been widely recognised as strengthening decision making, reducing the need for later corrective intervention, and enabling justice, dignity, and solidarity to function as preventative influences within governance rather than as retrospective considerations.

While the original intention for the JDS Committee to report through the Mission Committee was understood as a way of ensuring connection with the Church's missional priorities, lived experience over the past two years suggests that this arrangement has not enabled the breadth of relational engagement that the work requires. In practice, the Committee has found that limited visibility of discussions within the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, the Ministries Committee and the Connexional Council has reduced opportunities for formative contribution and mutual learning across governance spaces.

The Committee continues to affirm that JDS is not the responsibility of a single body but the shared vocation of the whole Church. At the same time, the evaluation's ongoing indication of uneven implementation and the continued sense that an inclusive Church remains aspirational rather than consistently experienced highlight the importance of ensuring that the Committee can engage more fully and relationally across Connexional structures.

A consistent theme emerging from both the independent reviews and the Committee's conversations is the continuing tendency for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity to be perceived as the responsibility of a committee or specialist function, and at times as another strategy to be implemented alongside many others, rather than as constitutive of the Church's discipleship and witness. While there has been meaningful structural progress, the uneven pace of implementation across Districts and Circuits, together with ongoing reliance on individual champions, suggests that the work is most sustainable where it is understood not as a programme of activity but as integral to the life, mission and formation of the whole Church. For JDS to be fully embedded, it must permeate

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the Church's structures, relationships, decision making and worship without exception, shaping how the Church understands belonging, exercises power and embodies its calling.

The evaluation also highlights the importance of participation, trust, and communal engagement in processes of acknowledgement and healing. In this light, the Committee notes the Church's continuing journey in relation to Reparative Justice as Conference prepares to engage this work more fully. The Act of Repentance offered in 2022 marked an important and courageous moment in the Connexion's willingness to acknowledge harm and to seek God's forgiveness. At the same time, opportunities for wider participation across Synods and local contexts were experienced as limited, and the Committee's reflection suggests that repentance is most meaningful when accompanied by shared acknowledgement, communal engagement, and space for those affected to be heard. Attending to this unfinished dimension offers the Church an opportunity not to revisit the past but to deepen its commitment to truth telling, healing and restoration as part of its ongoing formation in justice, dignity, and solidarity.

4. Independent Review and Church Response

Susanna Wesley Foundation (2023)

Between February and May 2023, the Susanna Wesley Foundation conducted interviews and focus groups with District Chairs, EDI Officers, Superintendents, and Solidarity Circle Officers to assess awareness and progress in the implementation of the JDS Strategy.

Key findings:

- The Strategy was widely welcomed as necessary and courageous, yet implementation was slow and uneven.
- Awareness among local members remained low, with visible impact limited mainly to training and some changes in worship language.
- Progress was patchy and dependent on individual leaders, particularly EDI Officers and Superintendents, many of whom were overstretched or absent in some districts.
- A culture of hesitancy to change and fear of mistakes slowed momentum.
- Training raised awareness but respondents requested practical "how to" resources.
- Clearer Connexional leadership, priority-setting, and alignment with other strategies were seen as essential.

Conclusion: The Strategy enjoyed strong support, but without clearer guidance, additional resources, and a culture of encouragement, lasting transformation would take many years.

Susanna Wesley Foundation (2024)

A second stage of research expanded the consultation to include re-interviewed District Chairs and EDI Officers, in addition to Solidarity Circle members and 2025 Representatives to Conference. This broader engagement revealed both progress and continuing challenges.

Key findings:

- Greater awareness of the JDS Strategy than in 2023, though resistance to change remains in some areas.
- Shifts in representation, with more diversity in Conference membership and those entering ordained ministry.
- Lack of clear priorities for local churches with limited time and resources.
- Communication gaps: poor communication to and from local churches about training uptake and priorities.
- EDI training incomplete across the board, despite the requirement.
- Aspirations remain unmet: the vision of an inclusive Church is affirmed but still distant.
- Progress uneven: some local successes (notably around inclusive language and accessibility), but not across the whole Connexion.

Conclusion: Progress has been made, but awareness and engagement remain uneven. Respondents affirmed the aspiration of an inclusive Church but called for clearer leadership, accountability, and practical guidance to move from vision to reality.

In light of the findings from both phases of the Susanna Wesley Foundation research, the following steps have been taken to strengthen implementation and address the barriers identified.

Key actions include:

- Appointment of a JDS Programme Coordinator to work collaboratively with the Director for Inclusion and the JDS Committee, supporting implementation through coordination, learning, and communication, while the Committee continues to exercise its discernment, advisory and oversight role within a shared Connexional framework of responsibility.
- Strengthening connexional accountability through the JDS Committee and the JDS Scrutiny Group, with regular reporting to the Conference.
- Development of practical resources, such as the Guide to Inclusive Language, and expansion of accessible “how-to” materials for Districts and Local Churches.

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- Greater alignment between JDS and other strategies, including Safeguarding and *God for All*, to ensure consistency across connexional communications and practice.
- Expanded encouragement and support networks, enabling presbyters and lay colleagues to engage with JDS at a local and practical level.
- Increased focus on communication and training compliance, with reminders, monitoring, and support to ensure Districts and Circuits complete mandatory training and understand next steps.
- Building systems for data collection and monitoring, enabling measurable progress to be reported and tracked.

Susanna Wesley Foundation (2025)

Taken together, Phases I, II and III offer a five-year assessment of how Justice, Dignity and Solidarity is embedding across Districts, Circuits and Local Churches.

The following is taken from the 2025 questionnaire responses from Synod Secretaries, Chairs, presbyters, deacons and circuit stewards

1. Overall Assessment after Five Years

Five years on, the Strategy is widely known and broadly supported. Commitment at a formal level is clear. Cultural transformation across the whole Connexion remains uneven.

Perception of Progress

- 28 per cent perceive good or very good progress
- 62 per cent perceive some progress
- 20 per cent perceive little or no progress

The prevailing picture is steady but partial movement. Engagement is strongest at district and connexional level and less evident at circuit and local church level.

Awareness of Aims:

Awareness of the three central aims is high:

1. Eradicating discrimination
2. Celebrating diversity
3. Transforming culture, practices and attitudes

The aspiration for profound culture change is recognised, though many respondents indicate that its practical implications are less clearly understood.

2. Evidence of Change

2.1 District Level

District Synods show the clearest structural adjustments, including:

- Hybrid meetings increasing accessibility
- Greater sensory and physical access awareness
- More inclusive language in official documentation
- JDS visibility on agendas

Respondents describe Synods as increasingly attentive to neurodiversity, disability, language use and representation.

2.2 Circuit and Local Church

Impact decreases from District to Circuit and again from Circuit to Local Church.

- Around 30 per cent perceive greater diversity at District Synod
- Only a small minority perceive greater diversity in Circuit meetings
- 39 per cent report that Local Churches have become more welcoming

The strongest shifts are found in governance and formal gatherings. Congregational embedding remains inconsistent.

2.3 Training and Confidence

Training remains a decisive factor:

- 39 per cent report receiving role specific JDS related training
- 61 per cent have received none
- 24 per cent do not feel equipped to implement the Strategy
- 56 per cent feel equipped only in some ways

Where training has occurred, engagement is more confident. Where it has not, implementation is cautious or minimal.

2.4 Inclusive Language

The Inclusive Language Guide has had visible impact, particularly in connexional communications and Conference documentation.

Changes are noticed progressively less at District, Circuit and conversational levels.

This demonstrates that central modelling influences tone, though local adoption requires sustained encouragement.

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3. Discrimination and Challenge

3.1 Reported Experience

- 36 per cent report some experience of discrimination connected to protected characteristics.
- Ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability are most frequently identified.
- Observed discrimination is reported most often at local church level.

The majority report no personal experience of discrimination. A significant minority identify ongoing concerns.

3.2 Challenging Behaviour

When discriminatory behaviour is observed:

- It is more commonly challenged informally
- Formal grievance or disciplinary processes are rarely enacted.
- Where formal processes are used, outcomes are mixed.

Awareness of the Discrimination and Abuse Response Service remains limited, suggesting that justice mechanisms are present but not yet widely embedded in practice.

4. Obstacles to Implementation

Across all three evaluation phases, several themes recur:

4.1 Capacity and Resourcing

The most frequently cited obstacle is limited capacity.

Respondents refer to:

- Ministerial overload
- Volunteer fatigue
- Lack of dedicated EDI staffing in some Districts
- Rural and single minister Circuits prioritising survival

Many describe JDS as essential yet competing with safeguarding, governance, finance and growth priorities.

4.2 Communication Gap

Nearly half of respondents believe the Strategy has not been communicated effectively to local churches.

Connexional clarity does not automatically translate into grassroots understanding.

Several report that many congregational members remain unaware of the Strategy beyond mandatory training.

4.3 Cultural Resistance

Resistance is often subtle rather than overt. It manifests through:

- Inertia and tradition
- Perception of irrelevance in homogenous contexts
- Anxiety about theological direction
- Concern that inclusion of one group may exclude another

Eighty-eight per cent report no theological concerns. Around ten per cent raise significant reservations, often related to biblical interpretation and perceived political framing.

There is repeated call for:

- Deeper theological articulation
- Space for respectful dialogue
- Clear integration of JDS with discipleship and evangelism

4.4 Structural Power

Entrenched leadership patterns and informal power dynamics are described as barriers to renewal.

Respondents refer to limited rotation of roles and reluctance to yield influence. Cultural change therefore requires attention to power as well as policy.

5. Conference 2025 Resolution

The Conference encouraged District Synods to review progress.

Of those responding to this question:

- Approximately half report no action taken yet
- Some report early conversations
- A minority report structured review activity

The review process is still bedding in. Five years after adoption, systematic self-examination across Districts is not yet consistent.

6. Cross Phase Findings

Across Phases I, II and III, five consistent patterns emerge:

1. Widespread aspiration for justice and dignity
2. Stronger progress in governance than in congregational culture

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3. Training significantly increases confidence and engagement
4. Cultural resistance is rooted in habit and theology more than hostility
5. Local implementation requires practical tools, not only policy statements

7. Priorities for the Next Five Years

Based on respondent insight and researcher conclusions, the following areas require focused attention.

7.1 Resource Local Churches

- Provide concise, practical implementation guides
- Integrate JDS into existing governance rhythms
- Ensure each District has identifiable and supported capacity

7.2 Deepen Theological Framing

- Anchor the Strategy clearly within Methodist doctrine
- Provide Bible studies, preaching materials and small group resources
- Create spaces for intersectional and respectful theological conversation

7.3 Strengthen Accountability and Measurement

- Increase use of Equality Impact Assessments
- Improve awareness of DARS
- Establish clear benchmarks for cultural shift

7.4 Embed Celebration and Storytelling

Celebration remains occasional rather than embedded.

Respondents emphasise telling stories of difference and inclusion and sharing examples of transformed practice. Cultural change grows through narrative as well as policy.

Challenges Identified

Perception of Progress

20 per cent perceiving little or no progress is significant. Those are often the voices with the most urgent concerns.

Circuit and Local Church

The point that impact decreases from District to Circuit and again to local church is crucial.

The figure of 39 per cent reporting local churches becoming more welcoming is encouraging but also means 61 per cent are not seeing change.

Training

The 39 per cent trained vs 61 per cent not trained is stark. Given this is five years in, it raises questions about whether mandatory training is being enforced consistently. This is a governance issue as much as a cultural one.

Discrimination

36 per cent reporting some experience of discrimination is significant. That this is reported most often at local church level is painful but important to name. The Church cannot claim to be inclusive while this remains true.

Structural Power

The paragraph on entrenched leadership patterns and reluctance to yield influence is vital. Power is often the unspoken issue in inclusion work.

The Consolidated JDS Survey Report is available on request.

Conclusion and Reflection from the JDS Committee

A recurring insight was that progress is not primarily limited by resistance but by uneven clarity, sustainability and relational confidence. Participants consistently described gaps in information flow, uncertainty regarding authority and responsibility, and delays in decision-making that unintentionally create duplication of work and, at times, pastoral harm. These dynamics risk placing responsibility for progress upon individuals rather than systems and can contribute to fatigue among those tasked with implementation.

Justice, Dignity and Solidarity perspective is sometimes engaged late in policy development, positioning the Committee as a reviewer rather than a formative partner. Where justice, dignity and solidarity are applied retrospectively rather than constitutively, opportunities for preventative attentiveness may be lost and the work becomes dependent upon corrective intervention rather than shaping discernment from the outset.

At the same time, both evaluation and reflection affirmed that trust remains a central ecclesial theme. Confidence in raising concerns, belief that challenge leads to visible change and clarity regarding how learning is shared across the Connexion were all identified as essential to sustaining engagement. Trust was consistently understood not as the product of policy alone but as emerging from transparency, attentiveness to lived experience and consistent relational practice.

These reflections point towards then next Phase as a period requiring deeper integration, clearer governance coherence, strengthened formation pathways and relational accompaniment that enables justice, dignity and solidarity to be lived as a shared vocation across the Church.

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1. Shared Theological Responsibility and Constitutive Identity

A consistent theme within both the independent reviews and Committee conversations was the perception that the work of Justice, Dignity and Solidarity can at times be understood as belonging primarily to a committee or specialist function rather than as the shared vocation of the whole Church. While structural progress has been evident, the uneven pace of implementation across districts and circuits and the continued reliance on individual champions suggest that the Strategy is most effective when embraced as an expression of discipleship rather than as a programme of activity.

Residential discernment affirmed that justice, dignity and solidarity arise from the Church's participation in the reconciling work of Christ and therefore function as a lens through which governance, formation, policy development and communal life are discerned. Where this constitutive understanding is less visible, implementation risks becoming uneven and dependent upon individual advocacy rather than sustained by shared ecclesial commitment.

2. Accountability, Authority and Governance Coherence

Experiences shared highlighted ongoing ambiguity concerning authority, responsibility and reporting pathways. Participants described circumstances in which responsibility for progress was held without corresponding clarity of authority, leading to delays, duplication of work and concerns moving between bodies without clear resolution. These dynamics were experienced as contributing to frustration and, at times, undermining confidence in the visibility of change.

The JDS Committee is sometimes engaged at a late stage in policy development, limiting its capacity to contribute formatively. Earlier integration of the JDS perspective was recognised as strengthening decision-making, reducing corrective work and enabling justice, dignity and solidarity to function as preventative influences within governance.

3. Assurance, Monitoring and Risk Awareness

Both evaluation findings and residential discernment revealed limited visibility of how progress is monitored and how learning is shared across the Connexion. Participants expressed a desire to move beyond assumptions of progress toward a more intentional understanding of lived experience at district and local level.

The residential also identified the importance of recognising JDS-related risks within existing assurance and risk awareness processes, including risks associated with exclusion, misuse of power, communication breakdown and inconsistent implementation. Naming these realities within assurance structures was understood as a preventative practice that supports learning rather than regulatory control.

4. Formation Pathways and Accessibility of Continuing Development

The Committee's reflection highlighted that while learning opportunities have expanded, the accessibility and clarity of Continuing Professional Development are experienced unevenly. Participants noted that complex language, inconsistent communication and limited contextual support can leave some ministers and lay leaders feeling uncertain about expectations and inadvertently disadvantaged. This was particularly significant for ministers serving across cultural contexts who must navigate new institutional expectations while seeking to exercise faithful ministry.

The Committee therefore discerned that formation pathways must be experienced as relational, accessible and contextually attentive, enabling growth in confidence rather than functioning as an additional burden.

5. Capacity, Resourcing and Sustainable Implementation

The Committee recognised that uneven progress across the Connexion is frequently shaped by differences in capacity, staffing and practical support rather than resistance alone. Implementation was often described as competing with existing responsibilities, particularly within rural and single-minister contexts. The Committee affirmed the importance of sustainable support mechanisms that enable engagement without over-reliance on individual goodwill.

6. Participation, Accompaniment and Flourishing

The Committee drew attention to the experience of individuals from marginalised communities who, while increasingly present within leadership spaces, may encounter isolation where relational support is limited. Participation without accompaniment was recognised as a risk to flourishing and sustainability, potentially exposing individuals to misunderstanding, informal exclusion and premature withdrawal from leadership.

7. The Pastoral and Emotional Holding of the Work

Engagement with experiences of discrimination and exclusion requires sustained listening to painful narratives. The Committee recognise that this dimension of their work carries emotional and psychological weight and that members may at times revisit personal experiences of harm. The provision of chaplaincy presence and access to appropriate emotional and psychological support was therefore discerned as an important expression of the Church's care.

8. Neurodivergence, Repentance and Belonging

The Committee welcomed developing work relating to neurodivergence and affirmed that inclusion must be accompanied by repentance, practical adaptation and recognition of neurodivergent people as bearers of gifts essential to the Church's life. The formation of the Neurodiversity Work Scoping Group was welcomed as a constructive step.

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9. Implications Arising from the Phase III Evaluation

The Phase III evaluation reinforces the themes emerging from the Committee's discernment, particularly the uneven awareness and implementation across the Connexion, limited familiarity with key mechanisms such as DARS and Equality Impact Assessments, and the importance of trust, communication and accessible theological framing. The evaluation suggests that the work ahead involves strengthening alignment, improving accessibility of resources and creating spaces for theological dialogue that deepen confidence and engagement.

Concluding Reflection

Taken together, these reflections indicate that the next phase of the Strategy is less concerned with expansion of activity and more with deepening integration, strengthening governance coherence and nurturing relational trust. The work of Justice, Dignity and Solidarity continues to call the Church toward attentiveness to those whose voices are less easily heard and toward the shaping of structures and relationships that reflect the reconciling life to which the Church is called. This work is carried not only through policies, structures, and strategies, but through the lived experiences of those who long to belong, to be heard, and to be treated with dignity within the life of the Church. For many, JDS touches deeply held fears, memories of exclusion, courage in speaking, and the fragile trust that the Church can be a place of safety and grace.

This is therefore not merely organisational work, but spiritual and relational labour that calls for patience, compassion and attentiveness to the emotional realities held within our communities.

The evaluation also draws attention to the importance of thoughtful and transparent data collection in enabling the Church to recognise patterns of inclusion and exclusion that might otherwise remain unseen. The Committee affirms the value of monitoring processes, diversity data and complaints analysis as tools that support accountability, learning and preventative justice. At the same time, the collection and interpretation of data must remain attentive to context, lived experience and the limitations of categorisation, ensuring that monitoring serves the flourishing of people rather than becoming an end. Where data is gathered with care, communicated transparently, and held alongside narrative and relational listening, it has the potential to strengthen trust, illuminate inequity and support more informed and compassionate decision making across the Connexion.

This reinforces the importance of developing coherent and accessible approaches to monitoring across the Connexion, so that data supports shared learning and informs the Church's ongoing commitment to justice, dignity, and solidarity.

The reflections within this report suggest that uneven implementation should not be read simply as a measure of success or failure, but as an invitation to deeper formation and attentiveness to the lived experience of the Connexion. The questions raised in relation to governance, participation, data, resourcing, and reparative justice point not towards deficiency but towards the ongoing work of becoming a Church whose structures, relationships and practices more faithfully reflect its calling. JDS is not primarily about correcting behaviour; it is about forming a different way of being Church together, in which trust is nurtured, voices are heard, and responsibility for justice is shared across the whole body. The credibility of this work is shaped not only by commitments expressed but by the relationships, participation and investment that make those commitments visible and trustworthy in the life of the Church.

These reflections invite the Church not simply to assess progress but to continue its formation in justice, dignity, and solidarity, recognising that this work is less about implementing a strategy and more about becoming a community in which inclusion and belonging, trust and shared responsibility are increasingly lived realities.

5. Future Direction

Drawing on lessons learned from the first five years, this process will help shape a clear framework that outlines shared cultural expectations and supports leadership accountability.

In the next phase, the emphasis will be strengthened not simply through the expansion of activity, but through a more intentional focus on cultural, attitudinal and structural change, addressing inequitable experience, strengthening governance coherence, and nurturing relational trust across the Connexion. The aim is to ensure that connexional direction and local ownership work together to embed justice, dignity and solidarity more deeply across the life of the Church.

Priorities for the Coming Years:

- Implementing the recommendations of the Susanna Wesley Foundation review, ensuring that the insights from all phases of research translate into concrete action. This will require clear ownership, defined timelines and regular reporting so that learning leads to sustained and measurable change.
- Strengthening accountability frameworks, so that progress is measurable, visible and consistent across the Connexion. Agreed indicators and transparent reporting mechanisms will enable Conference and Connexional Council to assess impact with confidence and clarity.
- Expanding opportunities for lay participation, enabling greater diversity at every level within committees, leadership roles, districts, circuits and local churches through

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coaching and mentoring. Intentional pathways of development will help identify emerging leaders and remove barriers to participation.

- Establishing clear systems for data capture and reporting, to identify gaps in representation, barriers to participation and areas where resources or support should be most urgently directed. Reliable data will provide an evidence base for informed decision making and targeted intervention.
- Encouraging relational support systems, Circuits, Districts and connexional bodies to develop relational support systems, including mentoring circles, intersectional listening groups and leadership training, with regular reviews to assess both impact and unintended consequences. These structures will foster trust, shared learning and collective responsibility for change.

Key Areas of Focus for the Next Phase of the JDS Strategy:

- Membership Diversity Snapshot

The Connexional Council has agreed to capture a snapshot of the diversity within Methodist membership, potentially alongside the annual count. The Committee will work with members of the Connexional Team to design a proportionate and pastorally sensitive approach that provides meaningful insight without placing undue burden on local churches.

- Monitoring Complaints Data

Review the number of complaints made against Black and Brown ministers over the past five years. This analysis will help ensure fairness, guard against systemic bias and strengthen confidence in processes of oversight.

- Committee Diversity Monitoring

Ensure that all Connexional Committee members complete the diversity monitoring form so the JDS Committee can track representation and respond to areas of under representation. Full participation will enable an accurate assessment of progress and highlight where further encouragement or intervention is needed.

- Diversity in the Connexional Team

Ask each work area lead to identify key diversity and inclusion priorities within their area of responsibility, and to work collaboratively with the JDS Committee to address them. This shared approach will embed responsibility for justice and inclusion across the breadth of connexional life.

- Training Oversight

Consider how District Chairs might monitor completion rates of mandatory JDS training within their regions. Consistent oversight will reinforce the importance of formation and ensure that expectations are applied equitably.

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- Accountability and Data

Strengthen systems for monitoring training completion, diversity in leadership and outcomes of complaints processes, using the resulting data to identify patterns, address disparities and report transparently to the Conference. This integrated approach will align governance, safeguarding and justice commitments.

- DARS Development

Complete the DARS staffing profile and agree training plans for Accompanists. Clear role definition and robust formation will ensure that those offering support are equipped, confident and accountable.

- Power and Participation

Build on the SWF finding regarding structural power by developing resources that enable churches at every level to examine who holds power, how decisions are taken and how leadership may be shared more equitably, including mentoring and coaching for those underrepresented in leadership. This work will encourage reflective practice and more inclusive cultures of governance.

- Theological Deepening

In partnership with relevant Connexional Committees, produce accessible Bible studies, preaching resources and small group materials that root JDS principles clearly in Methodist doctrine and discipleship, ensuring availability in formats that serve local churches as well as connexional bodies. Grounding the work theologically will sustain conviction and integrate justice with everyday discipleship.

In addition, the development of resources to support a JDS Sunday across the Connexion, enabling local preachers and worship leaders to engage these themes within the life of worship and proclamation.

The first five years of the JDS Strategy have begun to establish a reasonably strong foundation while recognising continuing variation across the Connexion. The chair of this committee has met the Connexional Committee Chairs and the Secretary of the Conference, in response to the Connexional Council's direction of June 2025 that "The Secretary of the Conference work with the JDS Committee and related bodies to review the relationship between the JDS Committee and the main Connexional Council Committees, to discern a way forward that ensures the governance structure appropriately supports and enables the Committee in carrying out its responsibilities under Standing Order 330, and to identify the next steps necessary to embed the JDS Strategy fully across the Connexion."

In sum, progress has been made in implementing the Conference's recommendations, embedding principles into structures and policies, and beginning to shift culture and

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practice. The independent reviews affirm this progress while also highlighting the need for sustained effort and deeper embedding. The vision remains clear: to be a Church where justice, dignity, and solidarity are embedded in every aspect of connexional life, enabling the full participation of all God's people.

While significant progress has been made, much remains to be done. The next phase requires consistency, commitment, and shared responsibility, ensuring that as implementation continues, the principles of the Strategy are sustained, strengthened, and fully realised into the whole life of the Church.

In receiving this report, the Council reaffirmed its commitment to embedding the JDS strategy as an expression of the Church's discipleship and mission, recognising that EDI is increasingly contested and polarising in wider society, noted with gratitude the Phase III evaluation and, recognising that the JDS Strategy is constitutive of the Church's life and witness, directed ongoing work as set out within this report to strengthen communication, accessibility, theological framing and confidence in accountability mechanisms, supporting implementation across the Connexion, and affirmed that JDS Sunday should be observed as a themed day on a locally agreed date.

*****RESOLUTION**

3/9. The Conference receives the Report.