

Basic Information

Title	Wesley College, Bristol: A report from the Methodist Council
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Status of Paper	Final Report
Resolution/s	41/1 The Conference receives the report. 41/2 The Conference resolves that Wesley College, Bristol should be closed. 41/3 The Conference offers its grateful thanks to the ministers, members of staff and College Council members who have contributed to the life of Wesley College, Bristol over several decades. 41/4 The Conference directs the Methodist Council to take all necessary steps to achieve the closure of the college as soon as is practically possible, taking into account the need for proper processes and pastoral care outlined in this report. 41/5 The Conference directs the Methodist Council to consider the future use of the site and bring recommendations as appropriate to a future Conference.

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	The General Secretary was requested by the Methodist Council to bring a report to the Conference detailing the decisions of the Council following the review of Wesley College, Bristol commissioned for the Council by the SRC.
Main Points	The historical context of Methodist training institutions The contemporary context of Methodist training institutions The cotemporary situation of Wesley College, Bristol The work of the Wesley College, Bristol Review Group Consideration by the Methodist Council Concerns about the review group's main proposal The possibility of closure Conclusion
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	The full report of the Wesley College, Bristol Review Group and the SRC report to the Methodist Council (MC/10/43) can be found at www.methodist.org.uk/wesleycollegebristol

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Having conferred, debated and prayed, the April 2010 meeting of the Methodist Council resolved to recommend to the Conference that Wesley College, Bristol should be closed, and instructed the General Secretary to bring a report and appropriate resolutions to the Methodist Conference to that effect.
- 1.2 The Methodist Council's recommendation was made after more than a year's conferring about the future of Wesley College. This report outlines (a) the range of factors which led to conferring about the college's future, (b) the processes undertaken over the past year to consider the college's future, and (c) the reasons which underpin the recommendation that the college be closed.
- 1.3 The sections which follow are necessarily focused on infrastructure and resources. This should not detract from the conviction that the primary context and driving force for the work of all Methodist training institutions is the work of the Holy Spirit. They are places where the Methodist people are inspired to "covet earnestly the best gifts" and to seek such gifts, above all, "in fervent prayer from God, who is ... the Fountain of wisdom".¹ They are rightly precious places for the Methodist people, and our duty of care towards them should not be exercised lightly.

2 The historical context of Methodist training institutions

- 2.1 Wesley College, Bristol plays an important part in the history of the Methodist Church's ministerial training institutions. That history can be traced back to the decision of the 1834 Wesleyan Methodist Conference to establish the Wesleyan Institution for the Improvement of Junior Preachers. The institution was first based in rented accommodation in London; however, by 1843, funds from the Wesleyan Centenary Fund had been used to establish Didsbury College, Manchester and Richmond College, Surrey. By the end of the nineteenth century, Wesley College, Headingley and Handsworth College, Birmingham had also been established. All four colleges were branches of the connexionally-directed Wesleyan Theological Institution.
- 2.2 In the wake of Methodist Union in 1932, Didsbury College was not the only Methodist training institution in Manchester. During the Second World War, the college became a military hospital, and never reopened as a training institution. The proceeds of its sale were directed by the connexional Ministerial Training Committee towards the establishment of a new college in Bristol. The Henbury Hill site (which remains to this day the home of Wesley College, Bristol) was purchased, and a Georgian house (still standing, but now sold) became the original base for Didsbury College, Bristol in 1946. Plans were soon in hand for a new building on the site, to be funded by the remainder of the proceeds of sale of Didsbury College, Manchester, augmented by connexional funds. By 1953, the now familiar, imposing, red-brick main building at Wesley College, Bristol was completed. The new building contained sufficient space to educate and accommodate 60 single students.
- 2.3 Wesley College, Headingley was closed by a decision of the 1967 Conference (the Conference having chosen between Wesley College, Headingley and Didsbury College, Bristol). More accurately, the educational foundation at Headingley was effectively merged with that at Bristol, and the new foundation adopted the name of Wesley College, Bristol. The site at Headingley was sold and the proceeds were used by the connexional Ministerial Training Committee to establish a Colleges and Buildings Extension Fund. Funds from the Colleges and Buildings Extension Fund were used to build a new tutorial block at Bristol – the low-rise, red brick Headingley Building – which also housed the college's new chapel, thus allowing the previous chapel in the college's main building to be converted into a library.

¹ The "Liverpool Minutes 1820", CPD, Vol 1, Book V, Part 3.

- 2.4 In 1971, Handsworth College, Birmingham was merged with the Queen's College, Birmingham. The 1970 Conference appointed a commission to consider the future of Wesley College, Bristol. The commission reported to the 1971 Conference that it should be closed. The Conference rejected the commission's recommendation and instructed the then President's Council to undertake further work, encompassing the future of Richmond College, Surrey and Hartley Victoria College, Manchester. In the wake of the 1972 Conference, Richmond College and Hartley Victoria College were closed. The site of Hartley Victoria College was sold, but provision was made for the Methodist Church to become a sponsoring member of an ecumenical training institution based in the premises of the Northern Baptist College in Manchester.
- 2.5 Wesley House, Cambridge remained largely above the fray. Its trust deed gave it both a degree of governmental independence from the Methodist Conference (meaning that it could not be considered alongside those colleges directly governed by the Conference) and an obligation to train the Conference's candidates (placing the college's resource perpetually at the Conference's service).
- 2.6 In the years that followed the institutional closures of the early 1970s, different types of training institutions became more prominent in the life of the Methodist Church. The Wesley Study Centre, Durham and the York Institute for Community Theology were both founded during this period as purely Methodist training institutions whose physical existence is as tenants within larger institutions, and a Methodist institution was opened within Lincoln Theological College. Meanwhile, the Methodist Church became a partner in a number of other ecumenical training institutions whose aim was the provision of training pathways which could be undertaken by ministerial students alongside other commitments. In the 1990s, connexional training strategies placed a strong emphasis both on nurturing the capacity of training institutions to deliver life-long learning programmes and also on encouraging regional cooperation between institutions.
- 2.7 By 2005, twenty ministerial training institutions were approved by the Methodist Church. The incremental nature of the growth of the Church's relationships with many of these institutions resulted in a funding framework which included several layers of historic accretions, and which was consequently not transparent and consistent. (For example, by the 2005-2006 connexional year, Wesley House, Cambridge and the Wesley Study Centre, Durham both trained more students than Wesley College, Bristol; however Wesley College received a higher "block grant" from the Methodist Church than the combined block grants of the other two institutions.)
- 2.8 Work undertaken for the 2006 and 2007 Conferences sought to consolidate Methodist involvement at fewer ministerial training institutions and to clarify and reduce the Church's expenditure in this area. Consolidation necessarily involved withdrawal from some institutions and a reduced commitment to others. The criteria used during the 2006 and 2007 processes to differentiate between training institutions included (a) the strength of the institutions' university links, (b) the quality of the institutions' teaching, learning and research facilities, (c) the quality of the formational experience provided at the institutions, (d) the quality of the student experience provided at the institutions, (e) the judgements of the institutions' recent validation and inspection reports, (f) the quality of the institutions' physical resources, (g) the institutions' connexional significance, and (h) the quality and significance of the institutions' ecumenical links.
- 2.9 The 2007 Conference decided to consolidate resources at three institutions: the Queen's Foundation, Birmingham; Wesley House, Cambridge; and the Wesley Study Centre, Durham. Only these three institutions were normally to receive ministerial students undertaking full-time training pathways. These institutions were also to receive specific funds to nurture their development as centres of scholarship and research. Nine other institutions were designated as institutions to which ministerial students undertaking part-time training

pathways could be allocated. Along with Wesley College, Bristol, they were: EMMTC (the East Midlands Ministry Training Course); ERMTC (the Eastern Region Ministry Course); Hartley Victoria College, Manchester; SWMTC (the South-West Ministry Training Course); STETS (the Southern Theological Education and Training Scheme); SEITE (the South-East Institute for Theological Education); UTU (the Urban Theology Unit, Sheffield); and the York Institute for Community Theology. Training networks established in Scotland and Wales were also to be enabled to provide part-time ministerial training pathways. In England each institution was networked with other institutions, other training providers and district representatives within five Regional Training Networks.

- 2.10 Other institutions directly or indirectly governed by the Conference – such as Cliff College, the Guy Chester Centre, the Selly Oak Centre for Mission Studies (and its predecessor), Southlands College and the Westminster Institute for Education, Oxford (and its predecessor) – did not form a central part of the Conference’s conferring when discussing ministerial training institutions. This reflects the manner in which ministerial training institutions were within the remit of the Ministerial Training Committee, succeeded by the Division of Ministries and Formation in Ministry, whereas other training institutions were within the remit of other committees, ‘Divisions’ and areas of the Connexional Team.

3 The contemporary context of Methodist training institutions

- 3.1 As noted above, each of the 12 ministerial training institutions in England are, by a decision of the 2007 Conference, networked with other institutions, other training providers and district representatives, all within five Regional Training Networks. One institution is earmarked as the core institution of each network. The Midlands Regional Training Network includes the Queen’s Foundation, Birmingham (the core institution) and EMMTC; the North-West Regional Training Network includes Hartley Victoria College, Manchester (the core institution); the South-East Regional Training Network includes Wesley House, Cambridge (the core institution), ERMTC and SEITE; the Yorkshire and North-East Regional Training Network includes the Wesley Study Centre, Durham (the core institution), UTU and the York Institute for Community Theology. The South and South-West Regional Training Network includes Wesley College, Bristol (the core institution), STETS and SWMTC.
- 3.2 Each network receives core funding from the Connexional Central Services Budget, amounting to a proposed £114,075 during the 2010–2011 connexional year. Two thirds of this amount is ear-marked for the core institution within the network. In addition, each core institution receives £19,000 per annum towards fixed costs such as the maintenance of premises and library collections; each other institution receives a reduced fixed cost payment of £4,500. The Queen’s Foundation, Wesley House and the Wesley Study Centre each receive an additional payment of £38,025, intended to fund an additional staff post at those institutions to nurture their development as communities of scholarship and research. Lay involvement in the staff team at the Wesley Study Centre has resulted in an additional payment of £10,929 per annum to offset the higher costs of such an appointment. Fees are paid to institutions for each full-time ministerial student of £4,729, and for each part-time ministerial student of £3,161; these fees can be augmented for ministerial students studying for a higher degree (e.g. a masters degree or a doctorate). A portion of the Training Assessment Fund was set aside in 2007 to fund post-doctoral research, and institutions have been able to apply for such funds through a process administered by the connexional Training Strategy and Resources Executive. Probationers following academic courses may do so at one of the twelve training institutions, and their studies attract additional fees from the Connexional Central Services Budget. Exceptional payments totalling £300,000 were and are being made during the 2008–2009, 2009–2010 and 2010–2011 connexional years to Hartley Victoria College, UTU, the York Institute for Community Theology and Wesley College as compensation for the loss of ministerial students on full time training pathways as a result of the decisions of the 2007 Conference. The largest share of this funding (£65,000 in 2008–2009, £43,000 in 2009–2010 and £21,000 in 2010–2011; £129,000 in total) is being made available to

Wesley College. In addition, a one-off exceptional payment of £100,000 was made to Wesley College during the 2008–2009 connexional year, over and above the exceptional payments of £129,000 over three years already agreed. No other funds from the Connexional Central Services Budget are made available to the 12 Methodist ministerial training institutions.

- 3.3 Different funding arrangements currently apply for Cliff College, the Guy Chester Centre and the Selly Oak Centre for Mission Studies. Work led by the Connexional Team during the present connexional year has established a firm foundation for ensuring that the future development and resourcing of these training institutions is strategically managed in a manner which complements and reinforces the development and resourcing of the Church's other training institutions, especially the Queen's Foundation, Wesley House and the Wesley Study Centre.
- 3.4 Ministerial students are allocated annually by the Connexional Allocations Panel to the twelve Methodist ministerial training institutions. Working within the provisions of the 2007 Conference's decision, the panel's 2008–2009 meeting allocated 14 full-time, bursaried ministerial students to the Queen's Foundation, and 11 full-time, bursaried ministerial students each to Wesley House and the Wesley Study Centre. The panel therefore achieved the intention of the 2007 Conference of maintaining a total cohort of 20 full-time students at each of these three institutions. 19 part-time ministerial students were also allocated by the panel, operating within its approved protocols. Of these, none was allocated to Wesley College. (See Table 1 for information about Methodist-sponsored students at the college in previous years.)
- 3.5 The low allocation of students to Wesley College, combined with the level of funding it receives within the South and South-West Regional Training Network, means that the average cost per student is significantly higher at Wesley College than at any other training institution. Calculations undertaken during the 2009–2010 connexional year indicate that the average cost per student at Wesley College is approximately £38,000 per annum. The average cost per student at the Queen's Foundation, Wesley House and the Wesley Study Centre is between £9,000 and £11,800 per annum. The cost per student at SEITE (which, like Wesley College, provides training for part-time ministerial students) is £6,500 per annum. (See Table 1 for information about funding and student numbers at Wesley College from 2005–2006 to 2009–2010.)

Table 1: Funding and students allocated to Wesley College, Bristol

Connexional year	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010
Total funding from the Connexional Central Services Budget <i>Fees, block grants/core funding, transitional funding</i>	£247,567	£261,026	£250,787	£308,028	£150,446
Total number of Methodist-sponsored students <i>Ministerial students and probationers following academic courses</i>	19	20	21	12	4

4 The contemporary situation of Wesley College, Bristol

4.1 Overview

- 4.1.1 Wesley College, Bristol provides education for Methodist ministerial students, independent students, and students sponsored by other conferences and denominations (including the Korean Methodist Church, the Anglican Diocese of Bath and Wells and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Clifton).
- 4.1.2 The college is a member of the Bristol Federation for Theological Education, in which its partners include the Bristol Baptist College and Trinity College, Bristol (a Church of England institution). The college has relationships with overseas institutions, including Hyupsung University in South Korea, Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary in South India, the UCZ Theological College in Zambia and the Reutlingen Methodist Seminary in Germany. The college has links with several organisations, entities and communities within the city of Bristol which offer its ministerial students a broad range of contextual experiences.
- 4.1.3 The college's academic courses are validated by the University of Bristol and St Mary's University College, Twickenham. The college is accredited by the British Accreditation Council.
- 4.1.4 The college's staff (eight salaried full-time equivalents) comprises a principal, a full-time tutor, two half-time tutors, fourteen associate tutors, an ecumenical chaplain, a librarian, a resource centre manager, an academic secretary, a college secretary, a bursar and a receptionist.
- 4.1.5 The college is situated on a ten acre site, five miles to the north of Bristol city centre. The college's premises amount to (a) the main building, which includes meeting rooms, common rooms, a dining room and kitchen, a library, tutorial studies, a two-bedroom flat, 23 single bedrooms (most of which are not *en-suite*), bathrooms and two student kitchens; (b) the Headingley Building, which includes seminar rooms, a vestry and two chapels; (c) Frances Greeves House, which includes 23 one-bedroom and two-bedroom flats; (d) a temperature and humidity controlled archive store; (e) six residential properties. The site also includes substantial car parking space, a play area for children, a football pitch and a small area of woodland. The college is developing alternative tutoring bases in the locality, especially at the Roman Catholic Benedictine abbey at Downside.
- 4.1.6 The members of the Methodist Council act as the site's managing trustees; the custodian trustee is TMCP. The trust deed, executed on 8 January 1946, directs that, in the event of a sale of the site and buildings, the managing trustees hold the proceeds upon trust "to apply the same as income for the general purposes of the Ministerial Training Fund" – now the Fund for Training (see Standing Order 362(4)). A recent informal valuation estimated the open market valuation of the site, for existing use, on a vacant possession basis, to be £8.64 million. The Methodist Council has delegated all powers of management to a College Council, save in relation to sales, mortgages, lettings or any other disposition of property, provided the powers of management are exercised in a manner which does not conflict with Standing Orders.
- 4.1.7 The college's library contains over 30,000 volumes. The Methodist Music Society library and the Clifton Diocesan library are also housed in the college's library. The college's archive comprises some 4,000 printed items, general and Methodist, with 3,000 texts dated between 1730 and 1850. Most of these items originated from the libraries of Didsbury College, Manchester and Wesley College, Headingley. The most important printed volumes come from Didsbury, including books given to the library there in the nineteenth century by the Revd James Everett, J D Fernley, and the Revd W B Pope. The collection also has many editions of works by the Wesleys. Some of these are of special note, such as John

Wesley's annotated copy of his *Primitive Physick*. The extensive Methodist tract and pamphlet collection donated to Didsbury by the Revd S R Hall is of considerable importance. Manuscripts and artefacts provide a further 2,000 items. These are mainly Methodist-related and include some of the most important documents of early Methodism. Most were collected by the Revd George Morley of Leeds and his son (also George), and were donated to Headingley College in 1880. This collection includes items which were originally in the hands of Dr Adam Clarke, a close associate of John Wesley. The college also houses a small number of artefacts and curiosa, including paintings of John Wesley and Susanna Wesley.

- 4.1.8 Wesley Conference Centre Limited, a private limited company created by the college in 2007, undertakes the commercial elements of the college's activity, including the provision of conference facilities, accommodation and catering.

4.2 Students and courses

- 4.2.1 As a result both of the decisions of the 2007 Conference and also the lack of ministerial students which could be allocated to the college by the 2008–2009 Connexional Allocations Panel, only three ministerial students are studying at Wesley College during the 2009–2010 connexional year. One probationer minister is also undertaking academic studies at the college.
- 4.2.2 However, the college continues to offer a full range of higher education courses, validated by the University of Bristol, to which the college is paying a validation fee of £100,000 over a period of five years. The college also offers a foundation degree course validated by St Mary's University College, Twickenham; again, a memorandum of agreement exists between the college and St Mary's specifying the validation fees which the college is to pay to St Mary's. Twenty eight independently funded students were enrolled on such courses at the beginning of the 2009–2010 academic year. When combined with the 4 Methodist-sponsored students, 32 students were enrolled on higher education courses at the college at the beginning of the 2009–2010 academic year. This compares to 48 students enrolled on higher education courses at the college during the 2006–2007 academic year, of which 20 were Methodist-sponsored students.
- 4.2.3 Sixty-four other students were enrolled on non-validated courses at the college at the beginning of the 2009–2010 academic year. This compares to 22 students enrolled on similar courses during the 2006–2007 academic year. The nature of such non-validated courses involves far less intensive use of the college's resources than would be the case, for example, for full-time ministerial students. The Pastoral Carers' Course (on which ten students are enrolled during the 2009–2010 academic year) consists of four residential weekends at the college. The Certificate in Pastoral Liturgy (fourteen students) consists of ten Saturdays of tuition at the college annually, for two years. The course taught at Downside Abbey (eleven students) consists of ten two-hour lectures and discussions. This pattern of more limited use of the college's resources is reinforced by a fall in the college's average per capita student fee from £2,158 during the 2006–2007 academic year to £553 budgeted for the 2009–2010 academic year, and a fall in total fees from £146,768 during the 2006–2007 academic year to £53,046 budgeted for the 2009–2010 academic year.

4.3 Use and maintenance of the site

- 4.3.1 As a consequence of the number and nature of Wesley College's students, the site exceeds the college's present requirements.
- 4.3.2 Frances Greeves House – originally built in 1985 to provide accommodation for ministerial students with families – is now used to accommodate, on a commercial basis, students from other training institutions in Bristol and from the University of Bristol. A wing of the

main building is commercially let to a counselling agency, and (with the exception of tutorial studies, a meeting room dedicated for the use of the Bristol District, and the library) the remainder of the building is normally used for commercial conferencing purposes. Of the college's six manses, four are commercially let.

4.3.3 Wesley Conference Centre Limited undertakes the commercial elements of the college's activity. The company's sole aim is to generate income from the college's site through the provision of conference facilities, accommodation and catering. It was envisaged that, during its first year of operation, the company would make a profit of £16,500, having already paid to the college a service charge of £10,000 and a rent of £40,000. The company was eventually able to pay only £25,000 to the college, and declared a loss of £10,000, which was effectively underwritten by the college. The company's losses during its second year of operation (to 31 August 2009) were £25,000.

4.3.4A recent property appraisal identified that the following work was required to upgrade the main building:

- the heating boilers are in urgent need of replacement and the heating system is likely to have come to the end of its life;
- the building is poorly insulated and none of the windows are double glazed;
- the lighting throughout the building is in need of replacement;
- the fire alarm should be upgraded to a full L1 system;
- none of the residential accommodation (apart from two study bedrooms) has *en-suite* facilities;
- the main rooms – conference rooms, dining room etc – are utilitarian and dated;
- the library, the converted original chapel, is totally inappropriate for its use and in very poor decorative order. Much of the structure inserted to provide the storage for the books does not comply with current building regulations. The large uninsulated windows give rise to unacceptable solar gain in summer and heat loss in winter;
- the archive store is similarly inappropriate with limited environmental control and inadequate space for safe display and access;
- the decoration and floor coverings are in need of upgrading throughout most of the building.

4.3.5 The property appraisal estimated the costs of this work to be in the region of £2.7–£3.5 million (including VAT at 17.5%).

4.3.6 The property appraisal estimated that a similar upgrading of the facilities within the Headingley Building would cost in the region of £2.3 million (including VAT at 17.5%). It noted that an alternative was that the building be demolished and its site landscaped. The appraisal noted that Frances Greeves House is a relatively modern residential building in good condition. With careful planned maintenance this building should continue to provide an acceptable standard of accommodation for the next 20 years.

4.4 The college's financial position

4.4.1 The college's budget for 2009–2010 shows a projected deficit of £64,000. The college's financial results since the 2005–2006 connexional year show a deficit in 2005–2006 (£27,000) and 2006–2007 (£31,000) and a surplus in 2007–2008 (£15,000). A surplus of £69,000 is shown for 2008–2009.

4.4.2 The 2008–2009 surplus includes the first tranche (£65,000) of the three-year exceptional payment package detailed in 3.2 above; it also includes the one-off exceptional payment of £100,000 mentioned in 3.2. The 2009–2010 projected deficit similarly includes the second tranche (£43,000) of the three-year exceptional payment package.

4.4.3 The college has not established reserves sufficient to cover unexpected costs and

periodically recurring costs. Since the 1980s, significant capital investment in the college's site has been enabled by the sale of over half of the original estate. Between 1982 and 1984, £608,000 was raised by selling properties and parcels of land to fund the building of Frances Greeves House. Between 1999 and 2001, a further £339,000 was raised by the sale of four other properties to fund further capital expenditure on the site's existing buildings and to make good deficiencies on the current account.

4.5 A review of the college's future

4.5.1 Neither the Methodist Council nor the College Council (to whom the Methodist Council's powers of management are delegated) undertook an assessment of the likely impact on the college of the proposals brought to the Conferences of 2006 and 2007. It was, however, clear and predictable that the 2006 and 2007 proposals not to consolidate resources at Wesley College would have a significant impact on the future of the college. The financial impact of the decision has been significant, and the college has relied upon additional exceptional funding (totalling £229,000 over three years) to avoid significant deficits.

4.5.2 The decisions of the 2007 Conference therefore combined with a number of other factors (including the number and nature of the college's students and courses, the use and maintenance of the site, and the college's financial position) to suggest that an assessment of the college's future viability was required. Consequently, the Methodist Council's Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC) established a review of the college.

5 The work of the Wesley College, Bristol Review Group

5.1 Terms of reference and membership

5.1.1 The Wesley College, Bristol Review Group's terms of reference instructed it to bring to the Methodist Council a proposal for the future of the college which:

- (a) enables it to fulfil its Conference-agreed vocation as the core institution in the South and South-West Regional Training Network, in an affordable and sustainable form;
- (b) identifies in general or specific terms the geographical location and context of the College and its institutional form [e.g. buildings, assets, staffing, resource-facilities] – having thoroughly reviewed and costed a range of reasonable options;
- (c) recommends the key partnerships which are to be sustained, developed or initiated for the College to fulfil its mission.

5.1.2 The review group sought and obtained the permission of the SRC to its terms of reference being widened to enable it to consider the option of the closure of the college.

5.1.3 The membership of the review group comprised Clifford Bellamy (chair, presbyter and circuit judge), Christine Stones (a member of the College Council of Wesley College, Bristol), James Wisheart (Secretary of the College Council), Martin Broadbent (presbyter and member of the College Council), Siôn Rhys Evans (a member of staff in the Discipleship and Ministries Cluster of the Connexional Team), Gareth Hill (presbyter and member of the Methodist Council's Strategy and Resources Committee) and Richard Lindsey (retired Chartered Public Finance Accountant and lately District Treasurer for the Sheffield District).

5.2 The review group's ways of working and report²

5.2.1 The review group was assembled in February 2009 and completed its comprehensive, 151-page report in January 2010. During this time the review group met three times. Prior to each plenary meeting, tripartite meetings were held comprising the chair, Siôn Rhys Evans

² The report is available at www.methodist.org.uk/wesleycollegebristol

and James Wisheart. Latterly much of the work of the review group was conducted by email, including by means of exchanged written submissions. In conducting its review, the review group regarded the need for transparency to be an overriding imperative, and the review group decided at the outset that its work should not be regarded as confidential.

5.2.2 The review group consulted widely with a number of the college's partners and stakeholders, including members of the South and South-West Regional Training Network, academic partners, ecumenical partners, connexional stakeholders, the college community (including the principal, the staff and the students), and the chair of Wesley Conference Centre Limited.

5.2.3 The review group gathered and analysed a significant amount of evidence. Of the report's 151 pages, 103 pages provide a detailed analysis of the history of the college, the changes introduced by the 2006 and 2007 Conference reports, the present work of the college, its financial position, and the college's land and buildings. This analysis has significantly informed sections 2, 3 and 4 of this report.

5.2.4 The review group explored several options for the future of the college, and made recommendations to the Methodist Council. The options explored by the review group are the subject of section 5.3 of this report; the review group's recommendations are reproduced in full in section 5.4 of this report.

5.3 The options for the future of the college explored by the review group

5.3.1 Having gathered and analysed its evidence, the review group revisited schemes for the development of Wesley College presented to connexional committees in 1971 and 1998. The group also considered a range of alternative options. In total, the group looked at 25 options for the future of the college. This list of 25 was reduced to 8 options.

5.3.2 The review group accepted that "as a result of the decision of the 2007 Conference not normally to send full-time ministerial students to the College, the accommodation available on the Henbury Hill site now exceeds the College's present requirements". Consequently, three of the review group's options concerned the removal of the college to an alternative location within Bristol or elsewhere in the south-west, either through its continued existence as an autonomous college in alternative premises, or through its incorporation within an existing university or centre of theological education. For a number of financial, logistical and educational reasons, the review group concluded that none of these options was viable.

5.3.3 Two options concerned the development of partnerships with other bodies; namely that the work of Methodist International House, Bristol should be merged with the work of the college, and that the college should share its site with the Bristol Baptist College. Both options involve a projected inflow of capital investment, but the review group was satisfied that neither option on its own would be sufficient to enable the college to continue to operate from its present site in an affordable and sustainable form. However, both options appear as components of the review group's recommendations (see 5.4 below).

5.3.4 The review group explored the option of the college continuing in its present premises and developing the work of its conference centre, taking advantage of the college's archive and other Methodist historical associations in Bristol. Again, the review group was satisfied that this option on its own was not sufficient to enable the college to continue to operate from its present site in an affordable and sustainable form. However, this option also appears as a component of the review group's recommendations (see 5.4 below).

5.3.5 The review group considered the option of suggesting that the Conference be asked to revisit its 2007 decision regarding the institutions which normally receive ministerial students undertaking full-time training pathways. The review group highlighted alternatives

to the 2007 decision which could have delivered a reduced connexional training budget, while also securing higher funding for Wesley College from the connexional training budget. Such alternatives necessarily involve the complete or partial withdrawal of funding from several other institutions and areas of the Connexion. The review group judged that the Conference would be unlikely to welcome the suggestion that it be asked to revisit its 2007 decision at this juncture.

5.3.6 The final option considered by the review group was the closure of the college. The review group was not clear how those training opportunities for a range of learners in the south-west of England currently provided by Wesley College would be provided in the college's absence. The review group was also conscious of the risks which would be faced in managing the closure of the college and in disposing of the site. However, the group also recognised that "in the absence of a change of direction by the Conference so far as its training strategies are concerned, the options for securing the financial future of the College are limited."

5.4 The review group's recommendations

5.4.1 The final section of the review group's report to the Methodist Council consists of its recommendations. This section is reproduced here in full. Some abbreviated references to other sections of the review group's report have been expanded and some cross-references to other sections of this report have been inserted; these expanded clauses and inserted references appear in parentheses in non-italic text.

Section 9 of the report of the Wesley College, Bristol Review Group: "The Review Group's Recommendations"

[9.1] *Our terms of reference require us "To bring to the Methodist Council ... a proposal for the future of Wesley College" and "To outline an implementation process once the review report has been approved by the Methodist Council, to be completed no later than August 2011." In this section we set out our proposal. Before doing so, we seek to draw together the many threads that have been woven together to form this report in order not simply to justify our proposal but also to contextualise it.*

Drawing the threads together

[9.2] [As Professor Esther Reed's theological reflections, commissioned by the Review Group, have reminded us,] *John Wesley knew the importance of good stewardship of resources. In Sermon 51, 'The Good Steward' he wrote*

Before all these, even the whole human race, before the devil and his angels, before an innumerable company of holy angels, and before God the Judge of all, thou wilt appear, without any shelter or covering, without any possible disguise, to give a particular account of the manner wherein thou hast employed all thy Lord's goods!

[9.3] *The Methodist Church has a duty to exercise responsible stewardship of its resources. That is a duty owed to the whole of the Church and not simply to one part of it. Our connexional life requires no less. As we consider the future of Wesley College it is important, therefore, to have regard to the wider picture and not just to local needs.*

[9.4] *The reference to 'resources' should not automatically prompt us to think of financial resources. The land and buildings occupied by Wesley College do, of course, have a monetary value; and yet they are also a resource in themselves. Historically, they began as a base from which to provide theological education for those training for ordained ministry, yet that is not necessarily the only purpose (indeed, today it is not even the main purpose) to which they can be put in order to support and enhance the working out of the mission objectives of the Methodist Church.*

[9.5] Moreover, the resources of Wesley College are not confined to its land and buildings. They include a Heritage Collection which is one of the treasures of the Methodist Church; a theological library which is one of the finest in the country; and a network of partnerships that have helped to foster and enrich the provision of theological education in the South & South West Region and an existing lively programme of theological education and a role in vocational discernment from which many continue to benefit. The duty to exercise responsible stewardship applies to all of the resources located at and collectively referred to as 'Wesley College, Bristol'.

[9.6] We have earlier set out in some detail the history of Wesley College [see section 2 of the review group's report; see also a summary of the college's history in section 2 of the Conference report]. That story, too, is part of Methodism's rich heritage and deserving of responsible stewardship. It bears testimony to the dedication of the many men and women who over the course of more than sixty years have committed themselves to the task of providing good quality theological education for the benefit not only of the hundreds of students who have passed through their hands but also for the benefit of the whole Church.

[9.7] Understanding the story of Wesley College is also important in the context of catching a vision for the future, for the story of the rise and development of Wesley College is not the result of chance but of the leading of the Spirit. The task for the Church today is to discern where the Spirit is leading now. We need a new vision.

A new vision³

[9.8] [Professor Jennifer Bone is Pro-Vice Chancellor Emeritus of the University of the West of England and was also a member of the Training Institutions Review Group which reported to the Conference in 2007. Professor Bone was among those consulted by the Review Group. In the light of her response to the consultation, Professor Bone was invited by the review group further to develop her thesis. Professor Bone] sets out a radical and challenging vision of what Wesley College might become.

[9.9] Professor Bone notes that our terms of reference require us to bring forward 'a proposal for the future of Wesley College which ... enables it to fulfil its Conference-agreed vocation as the core institution in the S & SW Regional Training Network ...' She expresses her personal opinion that 'it seems highly improbable that Wesley can have a secure long term future in this capacity alone'. The Review Group agrees with that assessment.

[9.10] Professor Bone moves on from that proposition to set out her vision for the future of Wesley College. The whole of her paper [included as Appendix 5 of the review group's report] needs to be read in order fully to appreciate the rationale that underpins her vision. However it is appropriate to repeat here the helpful summary with which she begins her paper. She says that:

[1] In the contemporary educational, cultural, social and policy environment in the UK, the Churches will need to give increasing attention to nourishing faith-based theological education, at a level and in a manner commensurate with the norms and standards of higher and further education.

[2] The staff of our theological colleges have worked tirelessly and magnificently in recent years to cope with uncertainty and implement change, to achieve results with diminishing resource, to incorporate skills' training in ministry, in accordance with Methodism's in-house agenda. There has been much attention to nurturing the strength and identity of Methodism.

[3] At the same time, 'the people of God' find themselves living in a world in which their faith, belief and all that flow from them are increasingly under question and too readily assumed to lack intellectual credibility, on the assumption that their faith has not been subject to rigorous

³ This sub-section of our report (paragraphs 9.8 to 9.19) represents the views of six of the seven members of the Review Group.

inquiry nor has met the demands of impartial analysis. There is an urgent need for the Churches to give as much weight to the needs of lay people in this respect as to those in ministry.

[4] This is essentially a matter of providing appropriate educational opportunity. Universities and colleges today are well versed in this type of 'short course' provision for both specialists in a field and for the wider community in a way which enables them to keep pace with a fast changing knowledge environment. It can be done.

[5] The proposal embodied in this paper is that the circumstances of Wesley College now offer the potential for the Church to address this need. It could only be done by an institution with the university links to keep its feet on the academic ground, as it were; to be practicable its work would need to be offered nationally, and to all churches, and indeed it would necessarily become involved in international links. The Methodist Church would need to trust it educationally, and guarantee it sufficient operational freedom. On the first of these, the Church has a proud record.

[6] This is not primarily a matter of seeking to sustain public influence (although, arguably, only the laity operating within their various spheres can now do this). It is primarily a matter of using the Church's resources to offer lay people depth in understanding of their faith and of the educational riches which have been, and continue to be, brought to bear upon it.

[9.11] This vision raises four fundamental questions which must be faced honestly, critically and fairly. Although the Review Group considers it to be within its terms of reference to provide tentative answers to those questions, we accept that these questions can only be answered definitively by the Conference.

[9.12] The first question is: is there a need for a national centre for theological education such as that proposed by Professor Bone? Professor Bone has eloquently argued the case for such a centre. The Review Group considers her reasoning to be persuasive and convincing and is content to adopt it. The creation of such a centre would be a radical departure for the Methodist Church. However, it should not be ruled out on that basis. Before coming to a concluded view on the first question it is important to consider the second.

[9.13] The second question is: is a national centre for theological education consistent with the Methodist Church's current training strategies? In Section 3 of our report we set out an overview of the reports Future Use and Configuration of Training Institutions (2006) and Talking of God, Acting for God: Report of the Training Institutions Review Group (2007). We noted that both of those reports underline the importance of the learning and development of the whole people of God and recognise the increasing importance of providing training opportunities more widely for the whole people of God. Although it is undoubtedly true that the 2006 and 2007 reports did not propose the creation of a national centre such as that now proposed by Professor Bone, we regard that as unsurprising given the context in which those two reports were written. As we noted earlier, one of the key drivers leading to those reports was the need to reduce the cost of training. However, as we have already noted, those reports clearly, repeatedly and, in our judgment, properly underline the importance of providing training opportunities for the whole people of God. We consider that the creation of a national learning centre is, therefore, consistent with current training policies.⁴

[9.14] The third question is this: if the creation of a national centre for theological education is consistent with existing training strategies, why should that centre be located at Wesley College,

⁴ We have already noted references in the 2007 report to the important role that Regional Training Networks have within the general scheme of connexional training strategies [see, for example, paragraphs 3.20 and 3.25 to 3.28 of the review group's report]. We also note that the 2006 report referred to 'an opportunity to make learning resources available to the whole Church at district and circuit level in a more widespread and systematic way than before ...' [paragraph 3.4.6 of the review group's report]. The Review Group considers that the kind of national centre now proposed would not stand in conflict with those regional and local training strategies but would provide opportunities to enhance and underpin them.

Bristol, rather than at one of the other training institutions supported by the Methodist Church?⁵

[9.15] Professor Bone herself identifies some answers to this question. She points to the quality of its library which she says 'must now be one of the best theological libraries in the country'. She notes that it has 'extremely valuable Methodist archive material' and says that it would be 'a tragedy if this was lost to a less accessible environment'. She points to the College's conference capacity. She also points to the College's ecumenical links and expresses the view that 'it seems very possible that such a focus on lay education would meet with a co-operative response from other church bodies'. She points to the College's excellent links with the University of Bristol. So far as this point is concerned it is appropriate to bear in mind the very positive comments received from Professor Gavin Da Costa during the course of our consultation process [see in particular paragraphs 5.13 to 5.15 of the Review Group's report]. She refers to Bristol's Methodist heritage and makes the point that 'In British Methodist history, Bristol is second only to Oxford (and many would argue equal to, or ahead of it!); the point is the potential for generating research and conference interest internationally.' So far as this point is concerned we have noted the efforts the College has already made to foster and develop international interest [see paragraphs 4.20 to 4.23 of the review group's report; see also a summary of the college's partnerships in paragraphs 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 of the Conference report].

[9.16] We agree with Professor Bone's analysis. There is one additional point which we regard as fundamental. We have noted several times throughout our report the fact that Wesley College is now the only theological college for initial ministerial learning under the immediate governance of the Methodist Council and whose site is under the exclusive ownership of the Methodist Church in Great Britain. This provides the Methodist Church with what is probably an unrepeatability opportunity to be creative and innovative in the provision of theological training for the whole people of God. We say 'probably an unrepeatability opportunity' since if Wesley College were to be closed and the site sold and if the membership of the Methodist Church in Great Britain continues to contract, it is highly unlikely that the Church would in the future be able to consider such a venture as that now proposed.

[9.17] [During our consideration of the 2006 report, Future Use and Configuration of Training Institutions, we noted that the report] had considered the possibility of establishing a single institution as the only training institution designated to receive full-time residential students but had discounted that possibility on the basis that it 'would be too risky a step to take. It would amount to putting all our future educational resources into one basket.' The report did not attempt to describe or analyse that risk. It is therefore difficult for us to evaluate whether the same concerns would apply to the kind of national centre proposed by Professor Bone. However, the key risk is likely to be financial and that is a risk which can be robustly assessed as part of any implementation process. The initial financial impact assessment undertaken [in Appendix 10 of the Review Group's report⁶] suggests cause for optimism on this issue.

[9.18] During the course of the Review Group's deliberations an issue arose as to whether the College's mission is to be understood as having been confined by the Conference to its 'Conference-agreed vocation as the core institution in the S & SW Regional Training Network' or whether its mission may properly be regarded as being wider. If it is so confined then we accept that the proposal for a national centre of theological education is outwith the College's vocation as presently defined. However, we do not consider that in identifying the College as having a vocation as the core institution in the South & South West Regional Training Network the

⁵ We considered it to be outside our terms of reference to undertake a comparative exercise involving the other training institutions currently funded and supported by the Methodist Church, our terms of reference requiring us to 'bring a proposal ...for the future of Wesley College ...'

⁶ [The outline revenue budget for a national centre for theological education involving the combined operations of Wesley College, Bristol and the Bristol Baptist College is included in Table 2. This outline budget is directly extracted from Appendix 10 of the Review Group's report.]

Conference was in fact seeking to confine the mission of the College.⁷ [The Review Group's consideration of a range of options (supported by financial impact assessments)] demonstrates clearly that to confine the mission of the College to that single vocation would inevitably be to consign the College to early closure since if that were its only vocation it could not be financially viable. We have noted at various points throughout our report the assurances that have been given confirming that that was never the intention. In our judgment, in allocating to Wesley College the role of 'core institution' in the South & South West Regional Training Network the Conference was simply bestowing upon the College an additional vocation.⁸

Table 2: Outline revenue budget for a national centre for theological education involving the combined operations of Wesley College, Bristol and the Bristol Baptist College

	£		£	£
Income		Expenditure		
Fees		Staff		
MCF	13,500			261,000
Self-funding	166,320	Property		
Baptist	97,800	Rates & water rates	21,250	
Rents		Insurance	12,500	
WCC Ltd	45,000	Gas/Electric	71,000	
BTC students	192,640	Grounds	10,000	
Leases	7,871	Cleaning	15,125	
Investment property	43,740	Security	15,500	
Service charges				145,375
Sales	6,000	Operations		
Donations	2,000	Validation	30,000	
Interest	3,000	Publicity	7,500	
		Library & Resources	12,500	
		Computers etc	3,000	
		Other	5,000	
				58,000
		Office		
		Printing & Stationery	6,750	
		Postage	1,600	
		Telephone	7,500	
		Equipment	15,000	
				30,850
		Other		
		Interest to Bristol District	18,000	
		Hospitality	375	
		Bank Charges	1,350	
		Professional Fees	3,062	
		Committee Travel	375	
				23,162
		Total Expenditure		518,387
		Operating Surplus		59,484
Total Income	577,871			577,871
		Operating Surplus		59,484
		Provisions		
		Repairs		18,000
		Renewals		20,000
		Surplus after provisions		21,484

⁷ One member of the Review Group disagreed, believing that the Conference had effectively established a regional vocation and mission for the College.

⁸ We noted earlier that at a meeting held on April 9th 2008 between the then General Secretary of the Methodist Church, the Principal of the College and the Secretary of the Wesley College Council expressly confirm that 'The sole objective of the Review is to ensure that the College can fulfil its core purpose as the lead institution in the South and South West Regional Training Network ... as established by the Methodist Conference, in an affordable and sustainable form in the future'.

[9.19] *The fourth question is: how is the duty to exercise responsible stewardship to be balanced against the apparent calling to pursue a new vision? Responsible stewardship of resources may properly lead to caution and a conservative approach to the commitment of those resources to new work. Yet the reality is that to accept the challenge of the Gospel is to accept the call to take risks – not recklessly or speculatively but responsibly and judiciously in response to the prompting of the Spirit. In this case, the proposal we are about to make is likely to involve the taking of risks. However, an important part of the task of an Implementation Committee will be to undertake a detailed assessment of that risk in order to determine whether, in the exercise of responsible stewardship, it is a risk worth taking.*

The Review Group's Proposal

[9.20] *[In Section 8 of the Review Group's report] we outlined and, in most cases, discounted a number of possible options. [We accepted that there is merit in three options: that the work of Methodist International House, Bristol, be merged with the work of the College, that the College should share its site with the Bristol Baptist College, and that the College should continue on the present site and should develop the Conference Centre. However, we concluded] that none of those three options, taken individually, would provide a viable option for the future of the College. However, Appendix 10 demonstrates clearly that when combined together ('the combined option'), these options merit further consideration.⁹*

[9.21] *[Though inevitably based upon provisional figures and best estimates, the Review Group's financial impact assessment of this combined option] appears to demonstrate that there is good reason to believe that this option could prove to be financially viable. The assessment shows an excess of income over expenditure to an extent which suggests some resilience. The assessment also provides good grounds for believing that the capital required to undertake necessary works of modernisation and repair to the existing structures could be found without putting pressure on already overstretched budgets.*

[9.22] *This combined option has ecumenism at its heart. It would enable our two churches (Methodist and Baptist) not only to continue to offer the theological training which they already provide but to expand the scope of that training. It would enable the College to continue in its role as the 'core institution' in the South & South West Regional Training Network. It would also provide a sound base upon which to build the kind of national centre for theological education proposed by Professor Bone. The new college would continue to provide initial ministerial learning for Methodist ministerial students, though, as now, it is likely that this would account for only a small proportion of its work. There would also be provision of initial ministerial learning for Baptist ministerial students. This would form a larger proportion of the work of the College. The new college would also provide other learning programmes for partner denominations and for 'the whole people of God' in accordance with the vision outlined above. This would have the objectives of equipping Christians in the region for discipleship and mission, safeguarding, developing and utilising the Heritage Collection and library and providing resources and learning opportunities to local, regional, national and international students. This is likely to lead to an expansion of the number of courses currently offered by the College and would together form a large proportion of its work.*

[9.23] *The combined option would enable the development of the existing Conference Centre facilities. This would enable the College not only to exploit the benefits of its location at the heart of a World Methodist Heritage City but would also enable it to extend the College's existing programmes in the way described in [a report from a sub-committee of the College Council, included as Appendix 11 of the Review Group's report]. This would be an important part of the mission of the College.*

⁹ [The outline revenue budget for the 'combined option' (a national centre for theological education involving the combined operations of Wesley College, Bristol and the Bristol Baptist College) is included in Table 2. This outline budget is directly extracted from Appendix 10 of the Review Group's report.]

[9.24] *The work of Methodist International House has been fruitful over many years. Each year it offers accommodation to postgraduate students from over 25 countries. It has provided a much needed resource to international students coming to the City to study. The continuation of that work as part of the combined option would not simply be a means of income generation for the College but would enable the continuation of a valuable work that is undertaken in the name of the Methodist Church.*

[9.25] *For all of these reasons the Review Group is satisfied that the combined option has merit as a practical and feasible plan for the future of the College and that it would be appropriate and proportionate for an Implementation Committee to be appointed to further explore the viability of this option with a view to bringing to the Methodist Council a coherent and costed plan for its implementation.*

[9.26] *The composition of the Implementation Committee will need to be multi-skilled. It will in particular require skills in finance, property, business, project management and theological education. The Principal of the College should be a member of this Committee. The Committee should be ecumenical and must in any event have within it a representative of the Bristol Baptist College or their nominee. It will need good administrative support. This will amount to more than the provision of someone to convene and attend Committee meetings and take minutes. It will require someone with the skill and experience to take forward the work of the committee, for example in liaising with professional advisers. If this Committee is under-skilled or under-resourced the overwhelming likelihood is that it will not be able to complete its task. The final requirement for members of the Committee is that they should understand the vision and that they should come to their task with an open mind.*

[9.27] *The work of the Implementation Committee should be time limited. It should be allowed twelve months to complete its work. During that time it should be required to report on progress quarterly to the Methodist Council. The time limit of twelve months should only be extended by the Methodist Council if the Committee is able to demonstrate that there is some positive and compelling reason for doing so.*

[9.28] *The Review Group considers that the combined option meets fully the aim of this review set out in our terms of reference and recommends that option to the Conference.*

And finally

[9.29] *The Review Group believes that it has considered all reasonable options. We also believe that the combined option is the only credible option that it is appropriate to pursue. If our recommendation is not accepted by the Conference, or if the proposed Implementation Committee is unable to bring this option to fruition, the Review Group concedes that in those circumstances the closure of the College would be the only other alternative. In the event that that should be the ultimate outcome it is the hope of the Review Group that closure would be handled sensitively and compassionately, with due regard to the legitimate interests and concerns of all of those who work at the College (both academic and other staff), to the entitlements of those who are then enrolled on courses run by the College, and to the partnerships from which the College would have to withdraw. In the event of closure of the College we consider that the provision of appropriate pastoral care for those principally involved would be an essential and absolute requirement.*

6 Consideration by the Methodist Council

6.1 The Methodist Council's Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC) discussed the review group's report at its residential meeting in February 2010. Hard copies of the review group's report were circulated to members as soon the report was complete in January, ahead of the remainder of the SRC's papers. The SRC's discussions were lengthy. They were prefaced by a presentation by the chair of the review group, who also contributed to the first part of the discussions. At the end of the SRC's first discussion of the report, four members of the SRC

were commissioned to write independent statements summarising the substantive issues raised by the SRC's discussions and discerning the direction emerging from the discussion. All four statements discerned a similar direction. A second discussion was held, informed by the four statements. After this second discussion, a vote was called, and the committee resolved that the Methodist Council be invited to recommend that Wesley College be closed, and that further work be undertaken regarding the future use of the site.

6.2 In the wake of the SRC's discussions, the review group's report was circulated electronically to all members of the Methodist Council, accompanied by a report from the SRC.¹⁰ Again, these papers were circulated ahead of the remainder of the Council's papers. The printed copies of the Council's papers included sections 1, 8 and 9 of the review group's report, accompanied by the report from the SRC. The full text of the review group's report was also made available on the Methodist Church's website.

6.3 The Methodist Council discussed the future of the college on the morning of Sunday, 11 April 2010. The Council was addressed by the chair of the review group and by the chair of the SRC. A number of members then addressed the Council. Following an adjournment for lunch, the Council was again addressed by the chair of the review group and by the chair of the SRC. The Council then voted on three resolutions:

1. The Council extends its thanks to all the members of the Wesley College Bristol Review Group and particularly its Chair, the Revd Clifford Bellamy, and acknowledges with gratitude the major piece of work they have done for the benefit of the Connexion.
2. With regret, the Council recommends that Wesley College Bristol should now be closed and instructs the General Secretary to bring a report and appropriate Resolutions to the Methodist Conference to that effect.
3. The Council instructs the SRC to prepare contingency plans to implement the closure of the College, should that be the decision of the Conference.

The Council voted unanimously in favour of the first resolution. So far as the second resolution was concerned, of 49 members of the Council present and voting, 33 voted in favour and 10 against. The third, consequent, resolution was also passed by a substantial majority.

6.4 The Methodist Council and the SRC acted thoughtfully, insightfully, carefully and prayerfully. Both bodies engaged fully with the review group's report, bringing to it their own knowledge and experience of the Church's training strategies and various other pertinent expertises. The following sections of this report describe the concerns which were raised by the Methodist Council and the SRC about the review group's proposed national centre for theological education. They also describe the manner in which the Council and the SRC were guided by the review group's work to recommend that the college should be closed.

6.5 It should be noted that both the Methodist Council and the SRC focused on the serious pastoral implications which flow from the closure of the college for its students, for members of the College Council and, especially, for the college's tutors and staff. Both bodies requested that support continue to be offered to the college community as difficult decisions are made about its future.

7 Concerns about the review group's main proposal

7.1 The review group's main proposal involves (a) the establishment at Wesley College, Bristol of a "national centre for theological education", (b) a merger of the college's operations with those of the Bristol Baptist College, and (c) the incorporation within the college of the ministry of Methodist International House (MIH), Bristol. The college would remain at its existing premises, with the Bristol Baptist College and the Bristol District (the latter using the

¹⁰ The SRC report is available at www.methodist.org.uk/wesleycollegebristol

proceeds of sale of the existing MIH building) each providing a significant minority share of the capital sums required for the refurbishment of the premises. Several concerns were raised by the Methodist Council and the SRC about the factors which underpin this proposal for a national centre. These concerns are identified in this section of the report.

7.2 Revenue: income

7.2.1 The proposed national centre's revenue model presupposes a 420% increase in the income generated from fees from independent, self-funding students, compared to the fee income in the college's 2009–2010 budget. Furthermore, the model presupposes that such a high level of income from independent, self-funding students can be sustained in the medium and long term. This involves the regular and continuing recruitment of a large cohort of independent, self-funding students. The review group was not able to undertake any market research to support the viability of such a presupposition, nor to identify how far afield the college would need to look in order to recruit, and continue to recruit, such a large cohort of independent, self-funding students. However, evidence gathered by the review group, upon which this proposal relies, speculates that it is highly improbable that the college could secure a long-term future in a regional capacity alone – hence the review group's proposal for a “national centre”. It is therefore highly likely that such a national centre would operate in competition with other training institutions supported by the Methodist Church which have, or which are developing, a connexional responsibility for the provision of training and theological education. These other centres include Cliff College, the Guy Chester Centre, the Queen's Foundation, Wesley House and the Wesley Study Centre. It is important to differentiate doubts about the supply of independent, self-funding students from a commitment to nurturing a learning Church in which the Methodist people are enabled to deepen their knowledge of their faith (see 7.6 and 7.7. below).

7.2.2 The national centre's revenue model also presupposes the continuing use of income derived from four residential properties which are commercially let by the college. These residential properties have been valued at £1.4 million. Such use of Methodist Council property is unusual and does not accord with practice in other training institutions.

7.3 Capital expenditure

7.3.1 The proposed national centre's capital expenditure model rests upon the availability of £2 million provided by the Bristol Baptist College and the Bristol District. The terms upon which the funds would be made available by both third parties are not clear.

7.3.2 It seems likely that the input of capital from the Bristol District would be in the form of a loan, and based upon an open-ended commitment from the college to make Frances Greeves House available for students who would otherwise have been accommodated at MIH, Bristol. The college would not be in a position easily to repay the balance of the loan, which would amount to 173% of the college's annual income, for some considerable time.

7.3.3 It seems likely that the input of capital from the Bristol Baptist College would be in the form of a permanent investment. While wishing to explore closer cooperation with Wesley College, the governors of the Bristol Baptist College have not indicated their desire to enter into an agreement involving a permanent investment in the college's site. It is likely that the governors of the Baptist College would, as they explore closer cooperation, also wish to consider other arrangements which would allow the Baptist College greater flexibility, such as operating as a lodger unit on the Wesley College site. Clearly, this latter arrangement would not yield the required capital investment. Should the Baptist College decide to make a permanent investment in the Wesley College site, it is highly likely that the Baptist College would wish effectively to purchase a stake in the Wesley College site and to alter the trust deed upon which the site is held. This would necessarily dilute significantly and indefinitely the Methodist Church's control over the site.

7.3.4 The proposed national centre's capital expenditure model requires further capital investment in addition to the £2 million which it is suggested could be provided by the Bristol Baptist College and the Bristol District. The potential shortfall would likely be in the region of £0.7–£1.5 million. The sources suggested by the review group are as follows: (a) a capital investment by the Methodist Church; (b) funding from international contacts; (c) a connexional appeal; (d) realisation of the value of some of the residential properties which are presently leased out by the college. With the exception of the last source, all of these sources are contingent upon other actions and all carry a degree of risk. More significantly, concerns arise about the degree to which funding which may be secured by these routes should be invested at Wesley College, as opposed to being invested at other training institutions which have a connexional responsibility for the provision of training and theological education. As is reiterated in sections 8.5 and 8.6 below, the Church has a duty to be missional in its use of its property and its other resources. As in a circuit context, so also connexionally, the Church has a responsibility to channel its capital expenditure wisely, and towards those properties and projects which best deliver its mission aims. This can mean making difficult decisions about properties which, though cherished, are now inappropriate for use by the Church, and which demand a disproportionate level of capital expenditure in order to be adapted to a more appropriate design.

7.4 Revenue: expenditure

The national centre's revenue model includes expenditure of only £38,000 per annum on renewals and repairs. Given that the college does not currently hold reserves sufficient to cover unexpected costs and periodically recurring costs, the allocation of such a small amount for renewals and repairs seems insufficiently prudent. However, the revenue model shows a surplus of only £21,484 once a provision of £38,000 has been made for renewals and repairs. It is therefore difficult to identify significant, secure, additional expenditure with which to establish and maintain reserves sufficient to cover unexpected costs and periodically recurring costs.

7.5 The balance between Methodist and Baptist ministerial students

7.5.1 The national centre's financial model indicates the degree to which a merger of Wesley College, Bristol's operations with those of Bristol Baptist College creates an entity which relies heavily upon Baptist input. A comparison of the projected fees from Baptist students and Methodist ministerial students indicates that Baptist students (who account for 35% of fee income) would outnumber Methodist ministerial students (who account for 5% of fee income) by a factor of seven to one. Given that Baptist students would also be in residence (whereas the small number of Methodist students would not), the degree of Baptist participation in the life of the proposed national centre under this model is great; indeed slightly over 50% of the total income for this model (including income from the conference centre and Methodist heritage-related activities) is derived from Baptist students. Furthermore, as noted above in 7.3.3, it is likely that the capital investment from the Baptist College would be in the effective form of the purchase of a stake in the site.

7.5.2 The future pattern of Baptist ministerial training is unknown in the longer term. Any changes away from a dominant residential pattern of ministerial training, or reductions in the numbers of those offering for ministry in Baptist churches, would inevitably have negative consequences for the proposed national centre.

7.6 The wider picture

The Methodist Council and the SRC judged that they had a particular duty to place the review group's proposal in the wider context of connexional training strategies. Although a majority of the review group believed that the development of a national centre for theological education at Wesley College was in keeping with connexional training strategies, concerns were expressed both in the Council and at the SRC's meeting about the proposal's compatibility with wider connexional training strategies. The following sections identify two areas of particular concern.

7.7 The wider picture: contextual training resources

7.7.1 In 2006, the Conference affirmed the importance of resourcing local and regional networks “to deliver all kinds of training, not just pre-ordination training”:

The present situation offers an opportunity to make learning resources available to the whole Church at district and circuit level in a more widespread and systematic way than before, while at the same time providing pre-ordination training that will build the skills of enabling and encouraging learning in local contexts.¹¹

7.7.2 This emphasis on contextual training resources must lead to caution about a proposal which seeks to establish a national centre focused on providing theological education for a wide range of Methodist learners. The establishment and maintenance of such a centre would inevitably divert resources from the provision of training resources at district and circuit level. It would also risk diffusing the Conference’s emphasis on nurturing the educating skills of presbyters, deacons and local preachers – an emphasis whose aim is to embed a learning culture within the regular life of every circuit.

7.8 The wider picture: other Methodist institutions

7.8.1 The Conference’s decisions in 2007 consolidated institutional investment at three ministerial training institutions – the Queen’s Foundation, Wesley House and the Wesley Study Centre. Alongside these ministerial training institutions, the Church continues to resource an institutional infrastructure at Cliff College, the Guy Chester Centre and the Selly Oak Centre for Mission Studies.

7.8.2 These six training institutions have a connexional responsibility for the provision of training and theological education. There is no evidence that these institutions are not able to provide the capacity in the sphere of training and theological education which the Church requires at the Connexional level.

7.8.3 Investing in another national centre at Wesley College, outside the context of the Conference’s 2007 decisions, extends the Church’s institutional commitment and potentially weakens the consolidation of resources achieved in 2007. Indeed, it is possible (as noted in 7.2.1) that such an investment would create a national centre which would operate in competition with those other training institutions supported by the Methodist Church, therefore threatening their viability.

7.8.4 Moreover, it is clear that the degree of investment required at Wesley College, and the partnerships which would need to be entered into in order to secure sufficient investment, would require a lengthy commitment to the Henbury Hill site (see 7.3 above). Such a commitment would be likely to have to take precedence over other institutional training commitments for a minimum period of five to ten years. The review group noted that “we considered it to be outside our terms of reference to undertake a comparative exercise involving the other training institutions currently funded and supported by the Methodist Church”. However, the review group’s proposal for a national centre demands a new and lengthy commitment to one training institution, potentially at the expense of several others.

7.9 The weight of the Council and the SRC’s concerns about the review group’s main proposal was such that neither body was able to recommend its adoption. Moreover, the concerns expressed were substantive concerns about issues which are central to the viability of the proposed centre and its place within the wider context of the Connexion’s training strategies. Consequently, neither body was able to agree with the review group’s further recommendation

¹¹ 3.7 (adopted by the Conference) and 3.4.6 (received by the Conference), *Future Use and Configuration of Training Institutions*, Agenda 2007.

that it would be “appropriate and proportionate” for further work to be undertaken to explore the viability of its main proposal.

8 The possibility of closure

8.1 The review group’s report notes, in its recommendations to the Methodist Council:

We also believe that the combined option [i.e. the proposed national centre for theological education] is the only credible option that it is appropriate to pursue. If our recommendation is not accepted by the Conference, or if the proposed Implementation Committee is unable to bring this option to fruition, the Review Group concedes that in those circumstances the closure of the College would be the only other alternative. [9.29]

8.2 The weight of the Council and the SRC’s concerns about the review group’s proposed national centre for theological education was such that both bodies were required to consider the only other alternative deemed possible by the review group: the closure of the college.

8.3 In considering the closure of the college, several serious implications arise. This section of the report both identifies these implications and also offers information about the manner in which they may be addressed or mitigated. As noted above, both the Methodist Council and the SRC focused on the serious pastoral implications which flow from the closure of the college for the community at Wesley College, and both bodies requested that support continue to be offered to the college community as difficult decisions are made about its future.

8.4 The provision of training in the south-west of England

8.4.1 As a Methodist training institution, Wesley College provides training opportunities for a range of learners in the south-west of England. Though its original focus on ministerial training has diminished, it remains able to offer a number of vocational learning opportunities for those exercising lay ministries within the life of the Church, and for Methodist self-funding students wishing to pursue more academic learning pathways. There are also less tangible benefits which arise from the existence of a local training community. The presence of ministerial students within the life of local churches and circuits, for example, can often inspire vocational exploration among others.

8.4.2 Should the college be closed, alternative ways would need to be found to deliver those training opportunities and benefits in the south-west of England which are currently provided by the college.

8.4.3 The establishment of the South and South-West Regional Training Network by the 2007 Conference has created a forum which brings together district officers (primarily district chairs) from the Bristol, Cornwall, Plymouth and Exeter and Southampton Districts, and representatives of training providers in the region. This is therefore a very suitable forum at which to discuss the contextual development of alternative training provision in this part of the Connexion.

8.4.4 Several other training providers already exist in the South and South-West Regional Training Network. Two training institutions (STETS, based in Salisbury, and SWMTC, based in Exeter) are already funded in part by the Methodist Church, and they could be mandated to provide interim or permanent training provision.

8.4.5 However, the importance of enabling the shape of future provision to be determined by the contextual needs of the region should be emphasised. Several respondents to the review group’s consultation noted the geographical and transport constraints which affect the

south-west of England. Such constraints make the resources at Wesley College inaccessible to many living in the far south-west, and have led some to question whether too much emphasis is placed on institutional presence in this part of the Connexion. In Scotland and Wales – two areas of the Connexion which encounter similar geographical and transport constraints – these constraints have led to a move away from institutionally-based training provision. Consequently, in Scotland and Wales, the connexional training budget funds a network of expert training staff who deliver training programmes in both a local and a national context, without a resource-intensive institutional base. The north-west and the north-east of England are also able to offer training opportunities without an institutional infrastructure on the scale of that available at Wesley College. In many other areas of the Connexion, contextual ministerial training programmes are being developed to enable ministerial training to take place in an accessible, context-based manner. Furthermore, since 2007, four half-time connexionally-funded training officers have operated within the four districts of the South and South-West Regional Training Network. Their way of working, echoed by training officers elsewhere across the Connexion, provides another example of the manner in which non-institutionally based training experts can deliver contextual training programmes to assist learning and development in local churches and circuits.

8.4.6 It should also be noted that the preservation of Wesley College's substantial infrastructure can be seen to have diverted resources – both financial and tutorial – away from the primary purpose of training. Releasing that energy from an unnecessarily burdensome institutional infrastructure could, paradoxically, result in greater, not lesser, active training provision in the south-west of England.

8.4.7 The identification of alternative ways to deliver training opportunities in the south-west was identified as a key task in the SRC's paper to the April 2010 meeting of the Methodist Council. There are clear opportunities to learn from the example of other areas of the Connexion, and it is therefore already possible to envisage contextual and appropriate alternatives.

8.5 Maintaining a purely Methodist college

8.5.1 As noted in section 2 of this report, Wesley College, Bristol has strong links to the Wesleyan Theological Institution, established in the nineteenth century. Like the branches of the Wesleyan Theological Institution, the college is under the immediate governance of a connexional committee, and its site is under the exclusive ownership of the Methodist Church. In a contemporary context where training provision is far more diversified than it was in the nineteenth century, the college's historical links and its purely Methodist status are reassuring and cherished elements of its identity.

8.5.2 Wesley College is, however, far from being the Methodist Church's last training institution. Cliff College, the Guy Chester Centre, Wesley House, Hartley Victoria College, the Wesley Study Centre and the York Institute for Community Theology are all purely Methodist training institutions. The capital assets held by the latter three institutions are negligible, meaning that, in those cases, there is no Methodist-owned site; however, the capital assets of the former three institutions are considerable. Moreover, all six institutions have identifiable governance links to the Methodist Council or the Methodist Conference, and all would wish to own their Methodist identity.

8.5.3 Furthermore, the Methodist Church has a real stake in several other training institutions. It is a full member of the charitable companies which control the Queen's Foundation, ERM, SEITE and SWMTC. It also has full representation on the board of trustees of STETS. Recent work by the Methodist Council has sought to ensure that the Methodist Church's governance and management involvement in these institutions is strengthened to a level which reflects the Church's effective co-ownership of these institutions with the Church of England.

8.5.4 It should be noted that the review group's proposal for an association with the Bristol

Baptist College would, in all likelihood, cede exclusive Methodist ownership of the site, and would see significant use made of the site for Baptist purposes. It is important to note that such partnerships are far from being inappropriate in principle. As in a circuit context, so also connexionally, the Church has a duty to be missional, and not territorial, in its use of its property and other resources.

8.6 The future of the site

8.6.1 The site of Wesley College, Bristol is a significant and valuable Methodist asset. The review group's report noted the informal open market valuation of the site, for existing use, on a vacant possession basis, to be £8.64 million. In proposing that the college be closed, it is important to ensure that the value of the site is in no way squandered. The review group's report, and some contributors to the Methodist Council's debate, raised appropriate concerns about the complex and potentially costly processes which would have to be undertaken in order to dispose of the site. Concerns have also been raised about the wisdom of seeking to dispose of the site given current market conditions.

8.6.2 It is important to note that neither the Methodist Council nor the SRC proposed that the college's site be disposed of immediately. Indeed, the SRC's report to the Methodist Council advocated that a decision about the closure of the college be separated from a decision about the future use of the site. This is a reflection of the importance of making a primary decision about the viability of the use of the site by the college. If the proposed use of the site by the college is unviable, only then is it appropriate and necessary to move to the secondary consideration of the future use of the site.

8.6.3 Should the college be closed, it is likely that the Methodist Council would want to explore both the possibility of commercial exploitation of the site, maximising the returns achieved for the benefit of the Fund for Training, and also the possibility of an alternative use by the Methodist Church of the site, within the terms of the trust deed. With regard to the former option, while it is wise to be cautious about the complex processes which would secure commercial exploitation of the site, it should also be noted that the property development advice obtained by the review group indicates that the site is "very suitable" for certain commercial purposes.

8.6.4 As noted above in sections 7.3 and 8.5, the Church has a duty to be missional in its use of its property and its other resources, and to channel its capital expenditure wisely. This can mean making difficult decisions about properties which, though cherished, should now be used to resource the Church's mission in different ways.

8.7 The future of the college's library, archives and historical artefacts

8.7.1 Wesley College houses both a significant academic library and, in its archives and collected historical artefacts, a significant number of items which are central to the history of the Methodist Church. The review group's report, and some contributors to the Methodist Council's debate, raised appropriate concerns about the future of the college's library, archives and historical artefacts, should the college be closed.

8.7.2 It is clear that the college's library, archives and historical artefacts have a wide and substantial missional and educative potential. As such, it is possible to conceive of other Methodist institutions and academic partners being entrusted to release such potential. Indeed, expressions of interest from other institutions have already been received. The nature of such expressions of interest is such that no more information can be given at the time of writing this report. However, they are expressions of interest which, while seeking to exploit the missional and educative potential of the college's collections, also seek to safeguard their integrity and their ownership by the Methodist Church.

8.7.3 The care and missional use of the college's library, archives and historical artefacts were

identified as key tasks in the SRC's paper to the April 2010 Methodist Council. It is already possible to envisage alternative arrangements which would safeguard the collections while making sure that they are able to be seen and used by the Methodist Church, the academic community and all who are drawn to the Methodist story which they tell.

8.8 Ecumenical links

8.8.1 Wesley College's partnerships with other denominations are undeniably valuable (see 4.1.1 and 4.1.2). The review group's report, and some contributors to the Methodist Council's debate, raised appropriate concerns about the ecumenical links which would be lost, should the college be closed.

8.8.2 While it is unfortunate to lose any such links, it is also important to acknowledge that not all partnerships can be maintained, regardless of their cost and of the Methodist resource required to maintain them. Often, the Church is required to prioritise links with a number of partners across a range of institutions and locations. More significantly, it should be noted that the quality and significance of institutional ecumenical partnerships was a criterion used during the 2006 and 2007 processes to differentiate between training institutions (see 2.8). It is therefore important, in this context and others, not to make decisions about the quality and significance of work undertaken at Wesley College without the comparative information which was available to the Methodist Council and the Conference in 2006 and 2007.

8.8.3 Without seeking to repeat the comparative exercise undertaken in 2006 and 2007, the ecumenical links enjoyed by the three institutions at which resources were consolidated by the 2007 Conference are rich and extremely significant. The Queen's Foundation is an ecumenical foundation, incorporating an Anglican and a Methodist training institution. Queen's has strong links with black majority churches, for example through its Centre for Black Ministries and Leadership and through its delivery of programmes sponsored by the Church of God of Prophecy and the New Testament Church of God. Queen's works in partnership on several programmes with St Mary's College, Oscott (a Roman Catholic training institution). Queen's is also seeking to strengthen its inter-faith work in collaboration with the Birmingham District, the local Anglican diocese and a number of para-church organisations. Wesley House, Cambridge is a founder member of the Cambridge Theological Federation. The federation includes ERM (an ecumenical training institution), the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies, the Margaret Beaufort Institute for Theology (an educational foundation for female Roman Catholics), Ridley Hall and Westcott House (Church of England), Westminster College (the United Reformed Church), the Henry Martyn Centre (which focuses on mission and world Christianity) and the Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths. ERM, the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies and the Woolf Institute have offices and share teaching space on the Wesley House site. The Wesley Study Centre, Durham shares part of the site of St John's College with Cranmer Hall (a Church of England training institution), and its students follow a common theology and ministry programme alongside Cranmer Hall's students, Roman Catholic students from Ushaw College and students from the Lindisfarne Regional Training Partnership. The Department of Theology and Religion at Durham University – which received the highest ranking of all theology faculties in the United Kingdom in two categories during the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise – includes the newly-endowed Bede Chair in Catholic Studies. The opportunities for ecumenical partnerships offered at these three institutions can therefore be seen to match and exceed those offered at Wesley College, Bristol.

9 Conclusion

9.1 Given (a) the decisions of the 2007 Conference, (b) the number and nature of the college's existing students and courses, (c) the use and maintenance of the site, and (d) the college's current financial position, it is clear that Wesley College, Bristol is not a viable training

institution in its present form.

- 9.2 A review group was established to consider options for the college's future. The review group undertook its task conscientiously and meticulously, compiling a 151-page report. The group recommended an option which envisages significant capital investment in the existing premises and (a) the establishment at Wesley College, Bristol of a national centre for theological education, (b) a merger of the college's operations with those of the Bristol Baptist College, and (c) the incorporation within the college of the ministry of Methodist International House, Bristol. The review group recommended that this was "the only credible option that it is appropriate to pursue" to secure the college's future. The review group further recommended that if this option was not acceptable, "in those circumstances the closure of the College would be the only other alternative".
- 9.3 The SRC and the Methodist Council scrutinised the review group's recommendations. Both bodies had substantive concerns about the proposal for a national centre for theological education. These concerns focused on the viability of the proposed centre and its place within the wider context of the Connexion's training strategies.
- 9.4 Faced with the review group's recommendation that the closure of the college was the only alternative to the creation of a national centre for theological education, both bodies also considered the serious educational, logistical, financial and pastoral implications of closure. Both bodies determined that a primary decision should be taken about the viability of the college, and that decisions about the future use of the site should be an important secondary consideration.
- 9.5 Having considered the review group's recommendations, the Methodist Council resolved, with regret, to recommend to the Conference that Wesley College, Bristol should be closed.
- 9.6 The future of Wesley College, Bristol is a significant issue, which involves the emotions and sensitivities of many friends and colleagues in our Connexion. It is also a complex issue, demanding that we assess a wide range of information, opinions and strategic developments. The Chairs of the Methodist Council and the SRC, and the General Secretary, are grateful to all who have laboured to gather and assess the information included in this report, and to those who have prepared other reports over the last year. We are confident that members of the Conference will, like their sisters and brothers in the SRC and the Methodist Council, deal with this significant and complex issue with concern, care and prayer, and openness to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

- 41/1. The Conference received the Report noting that Wesley College, Bristol Review Group's original brief was:**
- 1. To bring to the Methodist Council in April 2009 a proposal for the future of Wesley College which:**
 - (a) enables it to fulfil its Conference-agreed vocation as the core institution in the South and South West Regional Training Network, in an affordable and sustainable form;**
 - (b) identifies in general or specific terms the geographical location and context of the College and its institutional form [e.g. buildings, assets, staffing, resource-facilities] – having thoroughly reviewed and costed a range of reasonable options.**
 - (c) recommends the key partnerships which are to be sustained, developed or initiated for the College to fulfil its mission.**
 - 2. To outline an implementation process once the Review report has been approved by the Methodist Council, to be completed no later than August 2011.**

- 41/2. The Conference resolved that Wesley College, Bristol should be closed.
- 41/3. The Conference offered its grateful thanks to the ministers, members of staff and College Council members who have contributed to the life of Wesley College, Bristol over several decades.
- 41/4. The Conference directed the Methodist Council to take all necessary steps to achieve the closure of the college as soon as is practically possible, taking into account the need for proper processes and pastoral care outlined in this report.
- 41/5. The Conference directed the Methodist Council to consider the future use of the site and bring recommendations as appropriate to a future Conference.