

Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity: working towards a fully inclusive Methodist Church

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Inclusive Church Implementation Officer (ICIO) and the EDI Adviser has been delighted by an actively positive response from most Methodists about this strategy. Many people are already taking on board what the report says and beginning to review and make changes to their ways of doing things. Detailed work has been done on the report in the Connexional Team.
- 1.2 From circuits and districts there has been both enthusiasm for the content of the report, and acknowledgement of the need for its recommendations, but also concern about the workload that might come as a result. Nevertheless, districts are beginning to offer to be pilot districts for some of the work and that is very encouraging.
- 1.3 Since Conference the number of EDI Officers or teams has been increasing steadily and we now have somebody as a point of contact in almost every district. The ICIO is actively engaging to support those who still need to find people to work on this. Some districts are beginning to talk about possibility of paid appointments and one Learning Network region has appointed a specialist EDI officer to serve all the districts of the region.
- 1.4 The challenge of the report to appoint EDI Officers in every circuit will come further ahead and may need to be altered to EDI Advocates or Champions. The ICIO is in conversation with the District EDI Officers about this, and they are involved in helping to think how many circuits may have the capacity to appoint Circuit EDI Officers.
- 1.5 The plan is still to conduct all our work online during 2021-22 and then to develop the costs for implementing Year 2 of this work during this connexional year.

2. Recommendations of the Strategy

- 2.1 For each recommendation a task group has been identified, and in most cases started to meet, in order to design the implementation of that particular work. These task groups are drawn from the Connexional Team, members of the Inclusive Church Implementation Group workstreams, and other volunteers from across the Connexion. Nearly all the task groups will have met at least once by the time the Council meets.
- 2.2 Each task group is completing the template (appendix 1) and a time-line.
What follows is a summary of the progress and planning on the recommendations:

R1. The Conference commits itself to systemic, structural and cultural change so that the following recommendations can be achieved

- A review group has been formed to plan out what needs reviewing in Methodist life in order to determine how systemic, structural and cultural change may need to happen.
- The JDS Shadow Committee/the Council's Scrutiny Group will need to set up a system for evaluating the progress that is made through the implementation of this strategy.

R2. To encourage and support the Church in celebrating diversity, the following will be developed

- a) A culture of Festivals and Celebrations, providing examples and resources to support this, in order to encourage each church in celebrating and sharing of good practice.*
- b) A pilot Methodist 'affirmation' scheme, to encourage development in this strategy across the Connexion as an affirmation of what has been achieved*

This work has not yet properly begun but the task group has been have identified. The Youth President will be involved in this work.

The Communications Team have done a lot of work with the EDI Adviser on blogs which celebrate different communities.

The work of the Evangelism and Growth Team, as one example, shows the Council's commitment to represent all Methodist experience within our work.

Awareness of the strategy itself has been encouraging people with this approach to EDI work.

c) Narrative research project

The Susanna Wesley Foundation is supporting this work by giving a day a week of staff members' time to this project. A task group has begun to meet and have agreed that the approach will be to train a range of people across the Connexion in order to record the progress of the strategy's work over the next few years. This will build the capacity of more Methodists to reflect on practice and will enable engagement with a greater number of diverse people in the feedback.

As this group does this work they will also pay attention to what ongoing processes will be needed for this qualitative evaluation beyond the short-term of the initial implementation.

The group will be open to whatever data are shared with them, in narrative form, and those data will become available for the Council to use in any bigger evaluation of the strategy. However, the purpose will be to record and evaluate the changes the strategy brings, whatever those may be.

The methods to be used are not yet finalised but will be multi-method, probably including some 'Most Significant Change' methods.

3. a) Symposia and gatherings

- b) Developing 'partners' or 'catalysts' for these conversations*

This task group is meeting regularly and planning ways in which transformative conversations can be held across differences. These will include longer, more intense, residential type experiences in the future, and also shorter more accessible conversations in various settings.

The group is also planning to develop the skills of 'partners' for these conversations, in cooperation and coordination with Learning Network staff and, it is hoped, other organisations.

4. a) Discrimination Response System (DRS)

- b) Personal Responsibility Covenant*
- c) Tracking the rate of 'discrimination'*

These three are being planned together with one task group and which has begun to identify what needs to happen.

A DRS advocate will be allocated to somebody once it is established that this is an example of discrimination rather than, or as well as, a bullying or safeguarding issue.

An 'integration' plan is needed so that there is one point-of-contact and one flow chart showing which particular process should be followed once the nature of the incident or complaint has been established. It is intended to have a meeting with those involved in Safeguarding, Complaints and Discipline, and other areas of the Church's life, with representatives of the EDI work.

d) Critical Incident response system

This recommendation will be designed and implemented in the second year of the implementation, when there is time for the EDI Adviser to work on this with others

e) Truth and Reconciliation Process

This recommendation will be left till the second stage of the implementation and will begin with targeted areas of work to make it manageable and effective as we will be better placed to undertake this piece of work once the strategy implementation is further underway.

However, the collection of ideas about how it might work and consultation with ecumenical partners about their experience and expertise have begun. Some 'outside' perspective will be important in this work, as will strong chaplaincy support.

f) EDI support systems: sign-posting, listening and learning, Solidarity Circles

Initial conversations have been held with all the support groups within Methodism, and a Solidarity Circle for 'Living with Disability' has begun. This has met three times and is enabling us to see how it will work before we set up others.

Conversations are taking place with the Children, Youth and Families team and with the Youth President and Youth Reps about the best way of ensuring that the voices of children and young people are heard, not just in a Solidarity Circle for these age groups but also in each of the other Solidarity Circles.

Before the 2022 Conference Solidarity Circles will have been established for each of the areas of diversity covered within the strategy and there will be one year of capacity-building and facilitative support while these are established, through online methods, in a self-sustaining way.

5. a) Mandatory training

b) Positive actions

c) Placements and mentoring

This task group has just been established and will work in conjunction with the work on the EDI Handbook. It will first meet in October. The Director of Regional Learning and other Connexional Team members, including some HR, Children Youth and Families and Ministries representation, are involved in planning this work too.

6. a) EDI data collection and monitoring

A task group for this recommendation has been identified and will begin to meet in November. This task is behind schedule in terms of collecting the data for the Methodist membership. However, data collection for ministers, employees and connexional committees is developing all the time, with the EDI Adviser as lead.

b) Equality Impact Assessment

This document, which is a core common practice for all Methodists, has been drafted and will be piloted with one district, across many circuits, as well as with some members of the Connexional Team.

c) EDI handbook

An update of the EDI toolkit was produced over the summer ready for the launch of the User's Guide. A task group is meeting in October and the aim is to produce the draft material for each module, after consultation and adaptation, by March 2022, ready for publication by the connexional year 2022/2023.

7. EDI Officers

A network for EDI Officers is now operating and has met three times.

The first training session was held on 21 September and we have six planned meetings per year, three for training and three for networking more generally. There is also a closed Facebook group which has been set up to share resources and mutual support. This role is crucial to the work of the strategy, but it is already evident that the level of expertise, and time commitment, will vary from person to person as long as the roles remain voluntary. At least one district has begun a conversation about paying for such a role and the Eastern Learning Network region has appointed a Learning Network officer with this specialism to serve across the districts of that region.

8. *The Faith and Order Committee should be directed to review its ways of working in the light of this strategy, and to report back to the Council in January 2022.*

Conversations have begun between the ICIO and the Faith and Order Committee about this recommendation.

9. JDS Shadow Committee

The recruitment for the Chair and two new members of this Committee is underway.

***RESOLUTION

91/1. The Council receives the report.

Appendix 1

Task Group Template

Our new Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity has now been adopted by Conference and the next phase of the work begins! You can find the report as it was presented to Conference at: [Conference 2021 Agenda Volume 3 \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://www.methodist.org.uk/conference-2021-agenda-volume-3)

Having reached the recommendations of the strategy, via 5 different workstreams, we now need to design and implement the separate recommendations. Remembering, all the time, the foundation of our strategy: that a transformation of minds, hearts and wills, is needed for a complete culture shift in our systems, processes and attitudes.

Where at all possible we will aim to create safe spaces for real encounter between people in all our differences, as we put the strategy's recommendations into place. We will pray that our work on the implementation of the recommendations will help to embed a new commitment to justice, dignity and solidarity across the Methodist Church in Britain.

The report aims to help the Methodist Church become as fully inclusive as possible and addresses matters of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), recognising this to be a crucial witness to the Gospel of God's love for all in Christ.

- a) **Recommendation No: (from the report)**
- b) **Recommendation Title: (from the report)**
- c) **Details of the Recommendation: (from the report)**
- d) **How does this recommendation help us to achieve *Our Calling*?**

How will the changes brought about by this recommendation help us to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ, and to live out discipleship in worship and mission, through worship, learning and caring, service and evangelism?

e) Aim of the work? What change will this recommendation bring about?

f) Assumptions

We have discovered, as this work has progressed, that we sometimes start with different assumptions about the work. It may be helpful to check out with each other what your task group's starting points are and what you are assuming before you begin. Please check these out with Bevan and Jill too, so that we start at the same point on the same page! Thanks.

g) Theological implications

What are the theological factors and challenges of this recommendation? Which Biblical references are helpful or challenging in relation to this work? Which theological themes and convictions help people to see the theological relevance of this particular recommendation?

h) Key milestones for the time-line 2021 – 23:

Please use your 'sheet' of the attached JDS Implementation Plan to provide a comprehensive list of task-group activities and milestones (key dates for delivery) in logical order, with start and finish dates for each activity, as the design and implementation progresses.

(Jill and Funmi are available to help with this if needed!)

i) Broader picture

Please identify what the links are with other parts of the strategy, and particularly any inter-dependencies with other recommendations or processes.

j) Imagination and vision

How can we catch the imagination and vision of the Methodist people through this recommendation? How can we help people to engage with this work so that it is appropriately noticed and celebrated?

k) Resources Implications

Please list all the resources that this recommendation will require (over the period 2021-2023 in connexional year terms). What resource questions do you have for Jill, Bevan and the Connexional Team?

l) Communications

What will need to be communicated, to whom, and when, with suggestions for method if you have any in particular? Please consider both internal communications for the Connexion, or the Connexional Team, the churches/circuits/districts and beyond the Church too.

m) Risk

Are there risks that could affect the design and implementation of this recommendation? What are they and how can they be addressed?

n) Indicators

How will we measure progress towards the implementation of the recommendation?

What do you need to be able to measure effectively?

o) Evaluation

How will we know if this recommendation is proving effective in the transformation of Methodist culture? (Please use the indicators in the report on p.787 in Appendix 6, but also feel free to add your own)

p) Learning As you go along please note any learning implications for the local churches, circuits, districts of the Connexional Team

Role of the task group members

To work for the Methodist Council in helping to implement this strategy.

To work with the other task group members

- a) to complete this template
- b) to design the implementation of this recommendation
- c) to work with Jill Marsh and Bevan Powell in overseeing the practical implementation of this recommendation, sometimes with practical input of your own, by agreement