

14. Westminster College Oxford Trust Ltd

Introduction

1. The board has continued to meet each term to scrutinise the operation of the merger agreements between Westminster College, Oxford and Oxford Brookes University, and to discharge its defined duties.

Westminster Institute of Education: Academic

2. Dr David Langford, Dean of Institute, has continued to ensure that the board is fully briefed - and involved as necessary - in academic and institutional developments at the Westminster Institute. He reported that last academic year was somewhat difficult financially, and the decision was taken to operate with two divisions rather than three. In response to the university's direction that there should be greater focus in the academic portfolio of Schools, the Institute had determined to concentrate on those areas in which recruitment was strong: philosophy; communication, media and language; education; childhood and human development; sport and coaching; and theology and religion. At the same time other subjects are to be dropped or not offered as a separate degree courses.
3. Teacher Education is becoming more challenging, and although targets could be met in the short-term by migrating from undergraduate to postgraduate provision in this area, this policy had the disadvantage of having to recruit the full intake each year. Recruitment to the non-teaching programmes has been excellent, with targets being exceeded. The restructuring operation has entailed a number of severances. There is a need to implement some further staff severances in order to balance the budget for the current year.

The Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History

4. As part of the restructuring process, the distance learning activity in Christian Adult Education has been re-located from the Wesley Centre Oxford to the theology and religious studies area within the main Institute. At the same time the Methodist Studies Unit will be subsumed into the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History with a distinguished Church Historian, Professor William Gibson, appointed as Director, and Dr Peter Forsaith as Research Fellow. Its remit has been sharpened, with particular reference to areas in which Methodist interests are served. These areas of potential future activity include research fellowships, sabbatical opportunities for Methodist Ministers, administrative support for the Oxford Institute, and the reinvigoration of links with Methodist Colleges and Universities in the United States of America and the rest of the world. Care for the Methodist collections will continue, protected by the legal agreements that were signed between the university, the company and owners in the course of the year.
5. This strengthening of the Methodist element in the work of the Institute has been fully supported by the new Vice-Chancellor of Oxford Brookes University, Professor Janet Beer, who has herself taught in the Church Colleges and Universities sector. The base for the operations of the Centre, in a prominent site near the entrance of the campus, has been re-named

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Wesley House. The Dean of Institute is now required to present a programme of funded Church related activity to the company at the beginning of each academic year and to report on its implementation at the end of the year. Support for Theology and Religious Studies has been reaffirmed by the university, subject only to the availability of acceptable candidates for the courses. These changes have necessitated a revision to the Agreed Statement of Intent, which has been negotiated through the Liaison Committee. The Connexional Solicitor has been fully involved in this process.

Methodist Studies Unit

6. Dr Peter Forsaith, the Unit's Coordinator, was involved in the organisation and planning of many Methodist Anniversaries that fell in 2007, contributed to related publications and exhibitions, and spoke at several events. Pictures from the art collections have been catalogued and photographed for the Public Catalogue Foundation project. The Oxfordshire volume of the catalogue is forthcoming in 2008. The Methodist Collection of Modern Christian Art was exhibited in Jersey, Marlborough and Cambridge, and also in 'The Colour of Love' exhibition in Oxford. The Unit is the nominated archive for the *Methodist Recorder* and fields a steady stream of related enquiries.

Chaplaincy

7. Following close consultation between the Institute and the Church, the contract of the Chaplain, Revd Dr Robert Bates, has been extended until 2012. The chaplaincy service has been providing pastoral support during a time of great personal anxiety. The pattern of daily morning prayers and a short meditative service on Sunday evenings in term-time has been maintained. A Roman Catholic liturgy is now also conducted in the chapel, on Friday mornings. The value of the chapel as a sacred space within the campus is maintained; and the prayer room also continues to be well used. The chapel has once again hosted celebratory displays of student work at various points throughout the year. Dr Bates has continued to offer services at the Cowley Road and Lime Walk churches within the Oxford Methodist Circuit, and has offered additional services this term to support the Circuit. The Chaplain continues to teach within the Undergraduate Modular Programme, within the Primary PGCE course and as a distance learning tutor for theology and religious studies.

Estates

8. The Leisure Centre has been refurbished, as have some teaching rooms. Mains heating pipes and mains water and gas underground services have been renewed. Among other minor works, signage throughout the site has been improved. Major proposals are in gestation relating to the redevelopment of residential blocks on the Harcourt Hill campus. The plan is to replace poor quality accommodation with modern, self-catered, ensuite provision. Any plans will be submitted to the company for approval in due course. In view of the potential cost and long-term policy implications of this programme, the company is arranging to brief the Strategy and Resources Committee on the subject. The redevelopment proposals include possible provision for the improved storage and display of the art collections and archives. The current arrangements are agreed to be inadequate and are

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under continual monitoring and discussion with the university. Some short-term improvements are being made.

Board

9. The Revd Professor Frances Young has continued to chair the board of the company, and to serve as its representative on the main board of Oxford Brookes University; she has been actively assisted by Susan Barratt as Vice-Chair, who has taken the lead in financial matters. Implementation of the new investment strategy, allowing for the possibility of greater capital growth through some carefully-monitored exposure to equities and bonds, has continued and is proving successful, to date. The Liaison Committee, providing a formal link between the company and the university, has continued to fulfil its function effectively.

*****RESOLUTION**

- 14/1. The Conference receives the Report of the Westminster College Oxford Trust Ltd.