

26. Board of Directors of Westminster College Oxford Trust Ltd

1. Introduction

Westminster College Oxford Trust Ltd is the body whose board is appointed by the Conference to oversee the continuing relationship between the Methodist Church and Oxford Brookes University, following the merger between Westminster College Oxford and Oxford Brookes University approved by the Conference in 1999. It is the managing trustee of the property leased to the university under that agreement.

2. Activities

The board has continued to meet regularly to scrutinise the operation of the merger agreements and to discharge its defined duties. It has been active in setting and reviewing its objectives for each year; these are included in its annual governance report submitted to the Governance Support Cluster in the Connexional Team. The terms of the lease are carefully monitored so that implementation is assured; and there have been periodic discussions about the extension of the lease as reported to the Conference below. In the financial domain, the use made of the subvention funds which support Church-related activity in the university is scrutinised at each meeting, with the related subvention accounts (reviewing actual spend against budget). Investment performance is closely watched and returns are maximised in a way which is consistent with prudence and operational need. Continued efforts are made in the use of endowment fund income to ensure that student awards continue to match current academic and pastoral needs. Reports from key university officers are made on an annual cycle, and periodically from the Executive Committee of the Westminster Society. Each year there is a formal Liaison Meeting with the university Registrar and the Chair of the university board of governors.

3. University Academic Developments

Professor Anne-Marie Kilday, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, within which all Westminster-related activity takes place, has offered to the board full and helpful reports on these areas. From this year all officers reporting to the company have been asked to follow a template to ensure that all matters of interest to the Board are addressed.

Recruitment has been strong in Education, but Philosophy and Religion have slightly under-recruited at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The Faculty is beginning to consider the promotion of theology as a strategic aim. The faculty has established a series of research seminars in Education and in Philosophy and the Student Union has sponsored a cross-disciplinary multi-faith open discussion series on various topics related to religion and theology – all of which have been very well attended and received by staff and students. An enhanced strand in the Philosophy of Religions in the undergraduate Philosophy programme, is being created. National Student Survey scores have been exceptional across the Faculty, with high-performing programmes in every department.

4. School of Education

The School has undergone two successful Ofsted-Focused Monitoring Inspections and awaits a full Ofsted Inspection. There has been substantive growth in School Direct work across primary and secondary age phases. The core secondary Postgraduate Certification in Education (PGCE) has been temporarily suspended, reflecting ever-decreasing allocations, as has work-based undergraduate Initial Teacher Education (ITE), reflecting diminished demand over the preceding three years. In the current year, reductions in core allocations for primary,

undergraduate and PGCE have been dramatic across the ITE sector, and in Higher Education Institutions in particular. National recruitment to ITE has fallen by a quarter across all forms of provision. International links are being developed with the University of Kyoto, the University of Hawaii, and the Yew Cheung Foundation in Hong Kong. Community engagement work has been actively pursued with external partners.

5. **Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History**

The Methodist Church's Director of Scholarship, Research and Innovation, the Revd Dr Stephen Skuce, has been invited to the Centre to discuss ways in which it can contribute to wider Methodist educational and training programmes. The Centre is also in conversation with other centres of Methodist scholarship to explore possible fruitful collaborations, such as the extension of the Oxford-Manchester Methodist Studies seminars to include the Wesley Study Centre, Durham.

Professor Gibson and Dr Peter Forsaith have contributed to many conferences and events, and published and supervised research work in the area of Methodism and Church History. The Centre continued its support (in conjunction with Wesley Memorial Church, Oxford and Lincoln College, Oxford) for the Annual Wesley Day Lecture which was delivered by Professor J R Watson of Durham University on 20 May 2014. Professor Watson spoke on '*Poetry and Piety? John Wesley and Hymns*'. The Centre was the organising and funding partner for a major conference on the tercentenary of the birth of George Whitefield in 1714 at Pembroke College, Oxford 25-27 June 2014. It is anticipated that there will be two major publications from the conference, a collection of essays published by Oxford University Press and a special issue of the *Journal of Religious History, Literature and Culture* to be published in 2015.

In the wake of the decision not to continue to offer an undergraduate programme in religion and theology, it has been agreed that engagement with religion across the department of History, Philosophy and Religion will be supported with a research study leave award which will release a member of the department to work on Centre-related research. The first such research study leave is being held by Professor Joanne Bailey, a historian of the family, from January 2015. Two joint Methodist Studies seminars with the Manchester Wesley Research Centre have been held in 2014. During 2014 the Centre was host to three visiting research fellows, including: Dr Lionel Laborie, working on the French Prophets' connections with early Methodism, and Erika Stalcup, working on the culture of early Methodists.

During 2014 selected works from The Methodist Modern Art Collection have been exhibited as follows: Manchester/Reading – Baptist 'Catalyst Live' event; Swanwick – Bath and Wells Diocesan retreat; Ellesmere Port – Methodist Church and other venues; Haworth – Brontë Parsonage; Leyburn – Tennants; and Banbury – St. Mary's Church [Methodist circuit].

6. **Chaplain**

There is a short service of Morning Prayer each day, during the main semester dates. On Fridays this takes the form of a Roman Catholic liturgy and is led by a colleague in the School of Education. A discussion series has replaced the Sunday evening slot. Pastoral Activity with both students and staff continues to be the main priority for the Chaplain, the Revd Dr Robert Bates.

The Oxford Brookes Music Department uses the chapel for its end-of-semester concerts, which also include performances by the University Choir and Orchestra. A newly-formed student society, the Brookes Early Music Society, used the chapel for a performance of the first part of Handel's 'Messiah' at the end of November. The Oxford Gospel Choir has used the chapel on a

number of occasions throughout the year as a rehearsal space and contributes to the university carol service in return. Another community choir (Oxford Harmony Club) has used the chapel for rehearsals. The chapel has also been used for displays of student work from the School of Education.

The Chaplain continues to be a member of the Brookes Ecumenical Chaplaincy Team and Council and has led lunchtime communion services each semester in the Chaplaincy Centre at the Headington Campus. Dr Bates continues to offer services at the Cowley Road and Lime Walk Methodist Churches in the Oxford Circuit and has led a session for the local preachers. He also continues to act as Director of Studies for the probationers within the Northampton District and has led the probationers' retreat for several Districts. He has led ecumenical semi-quiet days at the Convent of the Assumption in Headington.

The Chaplain has continued to teach within the department of Theology and Religious Studies and also for the School of Education. During his period of sabbatical leave, from May 2015, Dr Bates is pursuing his interest in Anglo-Saxon Christianity.

Mrs Ann Leck, a director of the company, continues to offer pastoral support to the Chaplain and acts as one point of contact between Dr. Bates and the board.

7. Estates

The Director of Estates has continued to report to the Board, outlining improvements and additions to the estate; for some of such works the company's permission is required. The Green Flag Award has been retained for a further twelve months until July 2015. Some of the major works planned for 2015 concern the Chapel: the replacement of windows, *fascia*, guttering and downpipes. It is hoped to incorporate redecoration (including any remedial works) to the clock tower at the same time.

When Planning Consent was granted for the new Westminster Hall residential development, there was a requirement to demolish four of the old residential blocks within two years of completion of the new Hall. Westminster Hall opened in 2012. Four old residential blocks have therefore been demolished in the course of the academic year.

8. University Estates Strategy

Members of previous Conferences may recall that in 2013 a full report was brought upon possible developments arising from the university's evolving Estates Strategy, and the appropriate response to it by the Methodist Church. The consequent discussion resulted in the Conference's resolution of consent, as required under the Declaration of Trust, to the grant of a new lease of 99 years (or an extension of the current lease) subject to stated conditions, if this were to be sought by the university, with the details of any such lease requiring the approval of the Methodist Council. The board was directed to bring a report on any further progress to subsequent Conferences. At the 2014 Conference, it was reported that the university was continuing to explore very carefully the possible options open to it, and that no final decisions had yet been made.

In January 2015, the university announced its ten year estates investment plan, expected to involve expenditure of some £130,000,000 across the whole university over that period. This would entail the withdrawal by the end of that period from all teaching, research and supporting activity at the Wheatley campus. So far as the Westminster campus is concerned, the ten year investment plan would envisage the majority of the current buildings undergoing refurbishment during this time period so that they are all improved to category A/B. Further

consideration will be given to the possibility of enhancing the Learning Resources provision on the campus, which could potentially see a new facility developed (offering similar services to those found in the new award-winning John Henry Brookes Building on the main Headington campus), but that depends upon the conditions necessary to make this feasible, including the level of teaching and research activity carried out on the campus.

The university shared these plans with the board before the public announcement was made, and has indicated that, as anticipated, the level of likely investment by the university in the Westminster campus over the 10 year period is such that it wishes to take further the negotiations to secure a longer lease, to which the Conference gave its consent in 2013.

The board has welcomed this outcome for the reasons set out in its 2013 report, and will therefore continue to work collaboratively with the relevant Methodist bodies on these developments, so as in due course to bring the details of any such lease as may be negotiated to the Methodist Council for approval in accordance with the resolution of consent in 2013.

9. Board

Mrs Susan Howdle (as Chair), Mrs Susan Barratt, Dr Clifford Marshall and the Revd Dr Martin Wellings have continued to serve as members of the board, along with Mrs Ann Leck (General Secretary's nominee).

*****RESOLUTION**

26/1. The Conference received the Report.