

Initial Training for Authorised Ministries: Planning it and Funding it

1. SUMMARY

1.1 The Methodist Council proposes that a principle of regulated funding in respect of the budgets for initial training for authorised ministries be adopted for five years from 2002-03 (*Section 3 below*). It recommends that the level of that funding be fixed at £2.75 million for the year 02-03, with inflation added for the succeeding years as necessary (*Sections 5 and 6 below*).

1.2 The term "initial training for authorised ministries" refers to Foundation Training (which may lead to people seeking appointments as lay workers or offering as candidates for presbyteral or diaconal ministry) and Pre-ordination Training and Probation for ministers and deacons. It does not include continuing development and further training for lay workers, ministers or deacons.

1.3 The discussions at the Council arose because recurrent uncertainties are causing problems with both the planning and the funding of Foundation Training, Pre-ordination Training and Probation. Discussion of the proposed budget for 01-02 at the December meeting of the Council led to a paper entitled Training Options for a *Five Year Plan*. Following discussion at the February meeting of the Council this paper was revised and retitled *Training for Ministry: Planning it and Funding it*. This version was subsequently distributed to District Chairs and District Treasurers for discussion and wider consultation. The Methodist Recorder ran a front-page story about it. The Council returned to these issues at its April meeting and, in the light of responses received, made the recommendations contained in this report.

2. A STRATEGY TO MEET THE CHURCH'S NEEDS FOR TRAINED PERSONNEL

2.1 If the Methodist Church is to maintain its integrity as a provider of theological education, there will have to be a commitment to provide a basic level of resources for that enterprise. This will require networks of training institutions, tutors and training officers which are secure and flexible enough not only to serve the current training needs of the Church, but also any future ones should the Church develop new patterns of ministry and organisation as it seeks to fulfil its calling (see Appendix 1 below).

2.2 What is urgently required is a strategy which commands Connexion-wide agreement and commitment, and which identifies simultaneously:

- the **numbers** of people the Church needs (as opposed to desires) to exercise lay ministry, diaconal ministry and various categories of presbyteral ministry in order for it to engage properly in worship and mission.

- the appropriate levels of **competence** and, therefore, **quality** of training, supervision and support required for people to function properly in the various forms of ministry, lay and ordained.
- an affordable level of **regular funding** from the circuits and districts.

*2.3 Following the introduction of Foundation Training, more students are being trained. Early indications are that the new patterns of training will produce more ministers and deacons. However, the demand for ministers and deacons in the circuits remains even greater than the increased **numbers** of students will provide. Every year circuits seeking ministers are disappointed. The Churches, circuits and districts are therefore looking to increase even further the number of people able to train and function as ministers and deacons (and, to a lesser extent, as authorised lay workers).*

The rise in the number of people discovering and responding to such vocations is therefore a cause for rejoicing, and produces a pressure for us to continue to accept as many as are judged suitable for training.

*2.4 At the same time, there are growing concerns throughout the Connexion about the levels of stress and distress increasingly experienced by ministers and deacons, and about the low levels of **competence** at which many function. These concerns produce a pressure to maintain high levels of **quality** in the training, supervision and support for each minister and deacon, and even to increase them.*

*2.5 Again, at the same time there were strong indications at the December meeting of the Methodist Council that the Churches, circuits and districts believe themselves to be unable or unwilling to increase or even to maintain the levels of the new training assessment that were agreed at the 2000 Conference. There is therefore a severe pressure on **available finance**.*

2.6 These factors have produced years of conflicting pressures and unresolved problems. Attempts to deal with one of the factors outlined above have failed because of proper concerns about the other factors. The upshot is that it has proved impossible to plan strategically.

3. TWO APPROACHES TO FUNDING

3.1 Approach 1: Commitment to training through 'Open-ended Funding'

This approach accepts that the Church should continue to train immediately **all candidates** judged to be suitable for diaconal ministry and for all current and any future categories of presbyteral ministry, and should train them to appropriate levels of competence for those various forms of ministry.

3.2 Unless the quality of training and therefore the competence of those who serve the Church is reduced below acceptable levels, this approach will require the circuits to be willing to rise to the challenge of paying the training costs for an unpredictable number of candidates in the future (no matter how high they may rise). In turning this willingness into a practical commitment in 02-03 and succeeding years, they will have to accept the likelihood of substantial rises in the training assessment proposed for 01-02 (see paragraphs 4.7 to 4.12 below).

3.3 The Methodist Council does not recommend this approach. The circuits and districts are asking for less unpredictability in the levels of assessment, not more. They are indicating that it is hard to meet sudden additional demands. If as a result their commitment to guarantee funding through the assessment is lessened, this fact plus the unpredictability of numbers makes it impossible to manage our training resources and to plan strategically for them.

3.4 Approach 2: Commitment to training through 'Regulated Funding'

This approach accepts that there needs to be a guaranteed base-line of funding for five years which is affordable by the circuits and districts, and is reasonably constant from year to year.

3.5 Training would proceed within the funding available. This would necessarily set limits to the total numbers of students who could be trained. However there would be variations from year to year in the numbers of students in the different categories: Foundation Training, Pre-ordination Training and Probation. A balance would also need to be set between full-time and part-time training (which have different unit costs).

3.6 Criteria would need to be devised to determine who should be declined or deferred from entering training. These would probably include the likely number of years of subsequent service, the readiness for study, and other grading during selection. A decision would also be needed on whether those declined could be permitted to proceed entirely at their own expense.

3.7 The Methodist Council recommends to the Conference that this approach of Regulated Funding be adopted. It would enable proper strategic planning to be done. This in turn would lead to getting best value out of our resources.

4. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

4.1 Numbers of students

The number of students in initial training in 1996-97 was the highest for over a decade at 292, falling to 271 in 1997-98. However, the number of students in Foundation and Pre-ordination Training has risen since the new patterns were introduced in 1999:

- 1998-99 **251**
- 1999-2000 **307**
- 2000-01 **325**
- 2001-02 **356 projected**
- 2002-03 and thereafter **370 projected**

4.2 The projections for 2001-2 and beyond are based on assumptions drawn from the evidence available to us so far that about 120 people will enter Foundation Training each year, and that of these 90 will eventually be stationed as probationer ministers or probationer deacons (an increase on the average

numbers coming through our old patterns of training and selection) with the other 30 being available to the Church as trained lay workers, lay officers, etc.

4.3 Costs of training

The paper presented to the Council in December indicated in detail how the cost per year for a student in initial training had fallen from an average of £8,445 in 1996-97 to £6,978 in 2000-01. This is a major achievement. If we were working with the patterns of training currently operated in the Church of England or United Reformed Church and with their unit costs it would add an estimated £0.5 million to our training budget.

4.4 This means, however, that there are no further savings to be made within our current systems of training. We are now at the lowest possible unit costs. Any further reduction would lead to lower standards of training and, therefore, of competence amongst our ministers, deacons and authorised lay workers.

*4.5 At the same time, many people in the circuits and districts have felt that there has been a steep rise in the costs of training in recent years. This is because for many years they had been cushioned from the full extent of the costs by a decision to meet the difference between the total costs and the moneys available (from the assessment and donations to the Fund for Training) by using up the connexional training reserves. When those reserves ran out, the full cost began to fall on the general assessment and the Fund for Training. The decision of the 2000 Conference means that it should all now fall on the assessment. **This has made the rise in costs seem much steeper than it actually has been.***

4.6 The amounts charged to districts and circuits through the assessment have therefore risen, yet costs have been extremely well controlled. Nevertheless, there has been a rise in the total costs, despite the success in driving unit costs down noted in 4.3 above. This is due to the rise in the number of students being trained.

4.7 The training assessment

The 2000 Conference agreed that a new training assessment (in addition to the 'general' assessment) should be set up to cover the total costs of training (for lay and ordained) in the Connexional Team Budgets. Previously these costs were met partly from the general assessment, partly from donations to the Fund for Training, and partly from capital reserves. The total assessment (general plus training) for 2001-2 would be £9 million plus inflation, making a total of £9.270 million.

4.8 However, the figures given to the Conference assumed that the numbers of those in Foundation Training, Pre-ordination Training and Probation would remain at the same level in 2001-2002 as in the budget for 00-01. This did not take into account the continuing rise in numbers of students. The budget for these forms of training presented to the Methodist Council at its October meeting was therefore significantly higher than the figure given at the Conference. This raised the level of the new training assessment and, therefore, increased the total assessment (general plus training) well beyond the original £9.270 million.

4.9 Many districts then balked at paying any assessment above and beyond the £9.270 million. Some said that they could not even afford their share of £9.270 million. Several said that they could do so only by raiding their own reserves, and could therefore do so only for one year.

4.10 In response the Methodist Council at its December meeting proposed that the total assessment for 2001-2 should be kept to the levels reported at the 2000 Conference plus inflation [ie £9.270 million]. Of this £4.429 million would be for the general assessment and £4.841 million for the training assessment.

4.11 The £4.841 million for the training assessment proposed for 01-02 included £2.443 million for the costs of the following areas of work: the Training and Development Officer scheme; work with children, young people and families; Open Learning, adult education and leadership training; Local Preacher and Lay Worker training; continuing development and support for ministers and deacons; the office costs of the Formation in Ministry and the Pastoral Care and Christian Education parts of the Connexional Team.

4.12 The other figure in the £4.841 million training assessment proposed for 01-02 was £2.398 million towards the costs of Foundation Training, Pre-ordination Training and Probation. These costs have been much more difficult to predict because of the policy of not limiting the number of applicants or candidates to be accepted. In fact, because of the continuing rise in the number of students the total costs of these forms of training for 2001-2 is expected to be £2.625 million rather than the £2.398 million included in the training assessment. The Methodist Council in December therefore agreed to recommend that:

- the costs of the full number of anticipated students on Foundation Training, Pre-ordination Training and Probation in 2001-2 should be funded;
- the amount charged to the training assessment should be kept at £2.398 million (ie the sum reported to the 2000 Conference plus inflation);
- the additional costs should be funded by drawing from connexional reserves, provided that the sum required from reserves did not exceed £227,000.

4.13 The total cost of the current patterns of Foundation Training, Pre-ordination Training and Probation for 01-02 is £2.625 million. This is approximately 13% of the total expenditure in the Connexional Team Budget for 01-02. The Connexional Team Budget is substantially met by the assessment charged to the districts and circuits. The total assessment (general plus training) is in turn a small part of the costs of a typical circuit when compared with expenditure on stipends, ministerial expenses, manses and other property. Thus, for example, a 10% rise in the total connexional assessment on districts when shared out between the circuits would equate on average to a 1% rise in each circuit's assessment.

5. LEVELS OF FUNDING

5.1 The proposal to meet the full costs of Foundation Training, Pre-ordination Training and Probation anticipated for 01-02 by keeping the amount included in the training assessment for these forms of training at £2.398 million and drawing up to £227,000 from connexional reserves could apply only to the year 01-02. The April meeting of the Methodist Council therefore discussed what base-level of funding

should be recommended for these forms of training for the five years from 02-03, should the principle of Regulated Funding be acceptable to the Conference.

The following information is supplied to assist the Conference in its deliberations.

5.2 Current forms of training

The current forms of training are designed to help meet the training needs for the current forms of ordained or authorised ministry (ie ministers, deacons and authorised lay workers) and the current patterns of Church and circuit organisation in the life of the Connexion. At the levels of cost assumed in the calculations for the connexional year 01-02 the following levels of total expenditure would enable the stated numbers of Foundation Training students and Pre-ordination Training students to be trained:

Expenditure - Students in Foundation Training and Pre-ordination Training

£2.936 million - 400

£2.724 million - 370 projected maximum in current system

£2.625 million - 356 as in 01-02 budget

£2.328 million - 315 as in 00-01 budget

£2 million - 270

5.3 As Section 4 above shows, it is proposed to meet the £2.625 million expenditure on these forms of training for 01-02 by taking £227,000 from connexional reserves and charging the remaining £2.398 million to the assessment as part of a total training assessment of £4.841 million. The total training assessment would be added to a further £4.429 million of general assessment to make a total connexional assessment of £9.270 million for 01-02.

The levels of funding outlined in 5.2 above would therefore have the following effects on the total assessment (training and general) charged to the districts and circuits if all the costs were to fall on that assessment:

Expenditure on Foundation Training - Total Assessment (training/general)

Preordination Training & Probation

£2.936 million - £9.808 million

£2.724 million - £9.596 million

£2.625 million - £9.497 million

£2.328 million - £9.200 million

£2 million - £8.872 million

5.4 Forms of training for alternative patterns of ministry (lay and ordained)

As noted in 2.1 above and Appendix 1 below, current debates may lead to a variety of patterns of ministry (ordained and lay) being developed to suit the future needs and organisation of the Church. As noted in 2.1 above, this will require networks of training resources that are flexible enough to meet developing needs. Several potential models for different patterns of ministry and organisation have been envisaged and their effect on the training budgets calculated, taking into account:

- varying numbers being trained to appropriate levels of quality and competence for different ministries (lay and ordained) and different categories of presbyteral ministry.
- the need to at least sustain and, if possible, increase the total numbers of people available for deployment.

It should be noted, however, that an increasing number of ministers and deacons available for stationing will require an increase in other connexional budgets which supply initial grants and loans for those beginning their first appointment on the stations.

5.5 Each of these models produces a total cost for Foundation Training, Pre-ordination Training and Probation at 01-02 unit costs (ie discounting inflation, on the basis that costs and training assessment would both rise by the same amount) of **between £2.5 and £3 million.**

5.6 Base levels of funding if Approach 2: Regulated Funding is adopted

If the principle of Regulated Funding is adopted as outlined in Approach 2 above, the question is immediately raised as to what the base level of funding provided through the training assessment should be.

5.7 Base level set at £2 million

This would reduce the total assessment to £8.872 million.

It would reduce numbers in Foundation and Pre-ordination Training to 270 in the current patterns of training, and would make it very hard to deal properly with any emerging new forms of ministry.

It would cause severe financial problems to several of the training institutions which we own or use, leading to closures and withdrawals.

5.8 Base level set at the level of funding charged to the circuits and districts in 00-01

This would maintain the total assessment at £9.2 million, and numbers of students in the current patterns of Foundation Training and Pre-ordination Training at 315 (as opposed to the numbers of between 350 and 370 which it is projected that those patterns of training will normally produce).

5.9 Base level for these aspects of training set at between £2.5 million and £3 million

£2.5 million would require the training assessment to rise from the £4.841 proposed for 01-02 to £4.943 million, and the total assessment (general plus training) from £9.270 million to £9.372.

£3 million would require the training assessment to rise from the £4.841 proposed for 01-02 to £5.443 million, and the total assessment (general plus training) from £9.270 million to £9.872.

These figures would enable between approximately 350 and 410 students to be trained in our current patterns of training. They would also enable training for new patterns of ministry and organisation to be developed.

On average these figures should equate to a rise of between 50p and £2.00 per member on the circuit assessment beyond the figures charges to the circuits in 00-01.

5.10 The **Connexional Training Strategy and Resources Executive** discussed the above at its meeting on 27 February 2001. It recommended that the base level of funding for Foundation Training, Pre-ordination Training and Probation should be set at **£2.7 million** (compared to £2.625 million in the budget for 01-02, £2.398 million of which will be met from the assessment), for the following reasons:

- This amount will pay for the projected maximum number of students in the current systems: since costs are now cut to the bone, anything less will lead to potential students being deferred or declined.
- It will enable us to maintain and develop a flexible network of training resources able to serve either the present or the future training needs of the whole Connexion as it seeks to respond to Our Calling: anything less will lead to the closure and loss of some precious resources.
- It will enable us to maintain our ecumenical partnerships in these forms of training: anything less will lead to withdrawal from some of them at a time when conversations with the Church of England and others involve a commitment to training together.
- It will enable us to maintain and improve the levels of quality in our training and the levels of competency in our ministers, deacons and lay workers which can be produced by it: anything less will lead to reductions in the levels of skill and competency at a time when stationing shortages and other pressures mean that these are more needed than ever before.

6. THE LEVEL OF REGULATED FUNDING RECOMMENDED BY THE METHODIST COUNCIL TO THE CONFERENCE 2002-2007

6.1 The Methodist Council discussed these matters at its April meeting. It heard from the districts that although the training assessment will replace the major contributions requested for the Fund for Training in recent years, many circuits and districts have reached the limit of the amount of assessment (general or training) which they are able and willing to pay. It was therefore recognised that if the districts committed themselves to funding a particular level of budget in respect of Foundation Training, Pre-ordination Training and Probation for a five year period but were then unable to maintain the total levels of assessment, consequential savings would have to be made in the other budgets covered by the training assessment or in the other parts of the connexional budget covered by the general assessment.

6.2 Nevertheless, the Methodist Council heard that the districts valued training highly and wished to commit themselves as a high priority to maintaining this initial training for authorised ministries at a reasonable level financially through the principle of regulated funding.

6.3 In the light of the above the Council agreed to recommend to the Conference that the level of that funding for Foundation Training, Pre-ordination Training and Probation be fixed at £2.75 million for the year 02-03, with no addition to be made for inflation; and that this be the level of funding for the succeeding four years, with inflation being added for those years as necessary.

7. APPENDIX 1: THE WIDER CONTEXT OF ANY PROPOSED STRATEGY

7.1 The issues outlined in 2.2 above link to parallel debates currently being undertaken.

7.2 There are growing concerns throughout the Connexion about the levels of stress and distress increasingly experienced by ministers and deacons, and about the low levels of competence at which many function. The Methodist Council heard about some of these issues at its December meeting, and asked the Ministerial Committee to investigate them further and to draw proposals for responding to them. These concerns produce a pressure to maintain high levels of quality in the training, supervision and support for each minister and deacon, and even to increase them.

7.3 On average ministers and deacons in the current patterns of ordained ministry serve about twenty years rather than the forty years of those who trained a generation ago. This means that around twice as many now need to be trained if we are to continue to maintain the current number of active ministers and deacons in the medium and long-term future. Although membership (formal and informal) is falling, the number of churches or congregations and of circuits is not falling commensurately. Circuits have therefore only minimally reduced the number of stations in the last thirty years. At the same time, there has been an increase in the number of opportunities for ministers to fulfil their vocations in other sectors. All these factors have contributed to the shortage of ministers on the stations, which in turn increases the levels of stress experienced by those who remain. This leads to further decreases in numbers as people take early retirement, leave on health grounds or resign. There is therefore a downward spiral in which the available resources of funding for training and of people to be trained will never be sufficient to meet the Church's needs as currently perceived and constructed.

7.4 The Church must therefore decide whether to re-affirm the current patterns of circuit and district organisation and current patterns of ministry (lay and ordained), recognising that if it does so an increasing proportion of its resources will need to be expended on training. Or it may decide that in addition to its current lay workers and deacons it needs fewer but better trained ministers in the current categories of presbyteral ministry, supported by a larger number of local pastors. Whether they be lay or locally ordained, such local pastors would be much cheaper to train.

7.5 The *Making of Ministry* in 1996 opened up this debate, but failed to elicit a response. The current crisis over stationing and the responses to the related issues raised in *Flexible Patterns of Ministry* have raised the questions again. The Secretary of the Conference has prompted a discussion in the Methodist Council about patterns of circuit organisation, and the Chairs of District have prompted discussion in the districts of proposals to develop a new category of ordained presbyteral ministry. As the fruit of these or other strategic responses to the issues are brought to the Conference, it may be that the time is now ripe for the Church to decide.

8. APPENDIX 2: CURRENT POLICIES ON TRAINING

Long term policies of the Conference which must be respected or altered through careful process, including consultation:

- Commitment to producing communities of scholarship, education, training and formation
- Availability to ordained and lay
- Ecumenical
- Regional Networks including Training and Development Officers
- A seamless process of training for those in formal ministries

Recent decisions of the Conference which only the Conference can alter:

- Not to cap accepted candidates
- To raise the full cost of training via the assessment

***** RESOLUTIONS**

5/1 The Conference receives the Report.

5/2 The Conference adopts the principle of Regulated Funding set out in this Report in respect of the budgets for initial training for authorised ministries for a period of five years from 2002-03.

5/3 The Conference sets the level of funding for initial training for authorised ministries at £2.75 million for the year 02-03; and at the same level for the succeeding four years, with an increase being added for inflation for those years as necessary.