

6. Westminster College Oxford Trust Ltd

1. Introduction

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.

2. Westminster Institute of Education

As has been reported, in the course of the academic year 2007-08 Westminster Institute was restructured in ways that affected the life of the Wesley Centre Oxford. Although the important Methodist heritage and Chapel-related work was not affected by these changes, the board took the opportunity to negotiate with the university a new version of the Agreed Statement of Intent and to clarify the financial arrangements underpinning the university's support of agreed activities. The new Statement was signed in the course of the year. The result of this has been a very significant sharpening of expectations on both sides and a re-commitment to the common enterprise of enshrining in practice the aims and spirit of the merger agreement.

3. Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History

The most significant of the new developments has been the creation of the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History under a new Director, Professor William Gibson, himself a distinguished Church historian. The Centre is firmly establishing itself within the Westminster Institute in a dedicated block near the site entrance which has been prominently

renamed 'Wesley House'. An Advisory Committee has now been formed under the Patronage and Chairmanship of Lord Griffiths of Burry Port; its distinguished members are drawn from a wide range of relevant areas within Methodism. The Centre embraces the Methodist Heritage Collections located at the Institute, which remain in the active care of Dr Peter Forsaith, who has been appointed as a Research Fellow of the Centre. The staff of the Centre attends conferences, gives lectures and papers, publishes an extensive range of books and articles, and serves on relevant Methodist committees. The Centre hosts a number of new initiatives, one of which involves work with Districts and Circuits to support the development of histories of Methodism in localities; another brings research fellows to the Institute from home and overseas for periods of intensive engagement. The staff of the Centre also makes a contribution to the life of the university through teaching. Dr Forsaith oversees international programmes for Methodist-related colleges and universities, mainly from USA, with which he maintains active personal contact. Links with IAMSCU have been renewed, with support for UK representation and a commitment to attend meetings. Significantly, Professor Gibson provides a vital link with Westminster alumni and The Westminster Society through his membership of the university's Alumni Forum. The promotion and hosting of Westminster Society activities remains part of the Agreed Statement of Intent.

4. New Dean of Institute

Dr Langford, who had been Dean of Institute since the merger in 2000, has

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taken up new duties within the university. As the founding Dean, he oversaw the bringing together of the Schools of Education from Westminster College and Oxford Brookes University into a strong, united, and enterprising faculty within the university. This he achieved with great success and the merger project owes much to him. The Chair of the Westminster board, Professor Frances Young, was a member of the committee which appointed Elizabeth Leo as the new Dean of Institute. Professor Leo had previously served as Dean of Education at the University of Dundee. Soon after her arrival in Oxford she reported to a directors' meeting, in October 2008, and expressed the wish to work closely with the board in pursuit of recently-clarified common aims. Elizabeth Leo regards the Methodist traditions and activities of the Institute as a source of pride and opportunity, and has committed herself to fostering and safeguarding them within the contemporary academic context. At that time she also presented for the board's approval the first formal budget for the allocation of the university's financial subvention to agreed Church-related activities.

5. Chaplaincy

The appointment of the new Dean for the Westminster Institute of Education has affirmed the chaplain's role. Professor Leo has shown an active interest in the chapel by attending morning prayers on a regular basis and by funding a renovation of the floor and a 'deep cleaning' of the pews and other chapel furnishings. This has rejuvenated the appearance of the

chapel. The Dean holds regular meetings with the chaplain, which are greatly valued. The appointment within the Oxford Circuit of a lay worker for students and young adults, Rob Winn, provides a regular Methodist presence at the university's Headington campuses as well as at Harcourt Hill. In addition to daily services at Westminster, the chaplain continues to lead worship at the Lime Walk and Cowley Road Churches within the circuit on a regular basis and contributes to the Northampton District as a member of the Probationers' Committee and the Strategic Management Committee for the District Training and Development and Evangelism Officers. Dr Bates teaches within the initial teacher-training programmes and acts as a tutor for theology distance-learning and Religion, Culture and Ethics modules. During a recent sabbatical, he extended his research into the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the positions of the churches in Germany 1914-1990. He has been invited to give the A.S. Peake Memorial Lecture at the 2009 Methodist Conference.

6. Methodist Collections

In 2008 Dr Forsaith arranged for six exhibitions of the Methodist Church Collection of Modern Christian Art (in Cambridge, Guildford, Ripon, St Austell, Bewdley, and at Wesley College, Bristol). A similar number is planned for 2009. The Centre is working with Microform Academic Publishers to digitise and make available commercially a number of publications in the Centre's collections, including the Methodist Recorder and some nineteenth and early twentieth-century Methodist

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periodicals. As this is a project which will involve a number of partners and stakeholders, the agreement of all parties is being sought. Work has continued on other heritage collections: art works belonging to the former Westminster College were valued during the year and a member of library staff is maintaining the WHS library catalogue, including accessions.

7. Estates

The university has continued to develop its plans for residential accommodation at the Harcourt Hill campus. The company was advised by the Connexional Solicitor of the policy implications of the proposed scheme, which involves the demolition and rebuilding of some existing blocks at substantial cost to the university; these implications were brought to the attention of the Church's Strategy and Resources Committee in the course of the year. A general indication of support has

subsequently been given to the university by the company, with one or two conditions attached. Under the terms of the lease a further stage of approval is necessary.

8. Board

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, whose advice in the financial domain has been much appreciated. Mrs Susan Howdle, who joined the board in 2008, has been identified as its new Chair from August 2009 and as the Church's representative on the university board (subject to formal approvals). The Liaison Committee, providing a formal link between the company and the university, has continued to fulfil its function effectively, holding an additional meeting in the course of the year.

*** RESOLUTION

- 6/1.** The Conference received the Report of the Westminster College Oxford Trust Ltd.