

Wesley Study Centre at St John's College, Durham – the way forward

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Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	Decision
Draft Resolutions	<p>30/1. The Council adopts the recommendations set out in section 5 of the report and directs the Connexional Team to undertake such further work as may be necessary to give effect to the recommendations.</p> <p>30/2. The Council delegates to: (a) The Strategy and Resources Committee responsibility for agreeing the final terms of the Memorandum of Understanding based on section 5 of this report; (b) The Chair of the Council authority to sign a revised Memorandum of Understanding based on the section E of this report and following the approval of the Strategy and Resources Committee.</p>
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	<p>In January 2014, the Council authorised Mr Ian White and Prof David R Matthews to negotiate on behalf of the Methodist Council the termination of the agreement and such other outstanding matters with the Council of St John's College, Durham with a view to the agreement being terminated by 31 August 2014.</p> <p>MC/14/27 Wesley Study Centre, Durham MC/12/56 The Management Committee of the Wesley Study Centre, Durham (WSC) MC/10/72 Memorandum of Association 2010 between the Methodist Council and St John's College, Durham</p>

Wesley Study Centre at St John's College, Durham – the way forward

1. Background

- 1.1 The Wesley Study Centre (WSC) at St John's Durham has, for many years, been one of the iconic centres for the training of Methodist Ministers. Embedded within the walls of the prestigious St John's College, itself part of the University of Durham, the Centre has staff employed both by the College and by the Methodist Council and is led by a Methodist Presbyterian, the Revd Dr Calvin Samuel. The Principal of St John's, the Revd Prof David Wilkinson, is himself a Methodist Presbyterian, who has been highly supportive and instrumental in maintaining the thriving community of ordinands for the Methodist Church. In the past few years an average of 17 ministerial students per year has come through WSC.
- 1.2 St John's and the Wesley Study Centre has a long and expanding tradition of ecumenical partnership, with Roman Catholic, Anglican, Eastern Orthodox and Methodist training a core aspect of the University's academic and training programmes. Within the Department of Theology and Religion, the Roman Catholics have a burgeoning partnership with Notre Dame in the USA. The Centre for Anglican studies thrives under the directorship of Revd Michael Higton. The academic staff have been variously funded directly or by endowment from the denominations, often with other staff (eg lecturers) supported from the University.
- 1.3 The Methodist training has been supported in the WSC by the director's full time stipend, the part-time salary of one of the lead academics, Dr Jocelyn Bryan and the salary of Mrs Penny Bissell (part-time administrator). These roles, and this funding provision, was the subject of an ongoing Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2010, running for 5 years.
- 1.4 With the advent of the Fruitful Field initiative for a more distributed and network-based approach, the need for a continuing role of the Wesley Study Centre has not been regarded as a core necessity by the Methodist Conference. The MoU runs until 2015, but does provide for change in 'circumstances beyond those currently envisaged' and that, in such an event, both parties will 'act in good faith'.
- 1.5 Nevertheless, both the Council of St John's College, and the Methodist Council itself have been careful to strive towards a continuing understanding. In a meeting of 1 March 2013, attended by, inter alia, the Revd David Gamble, Mr Doug Swanney, the Revd Prof David Wilkinson and the Revd Dr Calvin Samuel, it was minuted that 'both parties clearly see the memorandum as continuing, but requiring review in the light of the decisions of the Methodist Conference'.

2. The Methodist Council

The Methodist Council wishes to continue a form of understanding with St John's and the Wesley Study Centre, but no longer to allocate ministerial students to the WSC programme. It wishes to minimise its ongoing financial involvement to allow for resources to be redirected to the Learning Network. In this regard it wishes to break the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding, mindful that that this change is mandated by the Methodist Conference and clearly, therefore, falls within the definition of 'circumstances beyond those currently envisaged' – these words being written within the MoU.

3. St John's and the Wesley Study Centre

- 3.1 St John's and the Wesley Study Centre have expressed overt disappointment at the change of direction of training within the Methodist Church, but wish to continue an association under a revised MoU.
- 3.2 The financial burden of the change comes under a number of headings:
1. Ministerial Students will no longer be supported by the Methodist Church. The current ministerial students will leave in the autumn of 2014. No others have been allocated to WSC. There is thus a loss of previously planned activity beyond the autumn of 2013, with no ordinands studying beyond September 2014
 2. Although the total numbers of ministerial students have halved in 2013-4, by graduation of the year intake from 2011, the course still requires teaching and administration. The costs of personnel have not substantially decreased, though the income has halved.
 3. If there is to be a continuing Memorandum of Understanding, the Wesley Study Centre needs to have some continuing existence and *raison d'être*. St John's envisage the future as being a change in direction, characterised by:
 - a. Keeping the name Wesley Study Centre
 - b. Focusing on research, and attracting students from a world-wide Methodist and theologically aware constituency
 - c. Funding key personnel of the programme
 - d. Continuing to fund the associated CODEC programme (Christian Communication in a Digital Age)
 - e. Continuing the rights of the WSC Director to be on the College Council
 - f. Continuing with a modified MoU with the Methodist Council
 - g. Continuing with ecumenical links and conversations, recognising the wide Christian theological faculty of Durham University, and continuing to work with the University to support the academic degrees: currently BA, MA and Doctoral degrees in Theology and Ministry.
 4. St John's are minded, therefore, to find financial support for the work and academic potential of WSC by undertaking:
 - a. To continue to recognise the Revd Dr Calvin Samuel as Director of the WSC, and to fund his post outside the Methodist Connexion. In this regard he moves to be a minister serving in an appointment outside the control of the church status. They wish him to continue to be housed in the Manse at 55, The Avenue.
 - b. To employ Dr Jocelyn Bryan full time, by replacing the salary lost by the withdrawal of Council funding
 - c. To employ Mrs Penny Bissell – currently funded directly from the Methodist Council.
 - d. To agree to underwrite the financial risk and uncertainty about changing the clientele at WSC from a regular annual intake of student ministers to a putative world-wide market, as yet untested.

4. The Memorandum of Understanding

- 4.1 The Memorandum of Understanding will need modification to reflect the new dispensations, and to reflect the withdrawal of financial support from the Methodist Council.
- 4.2 Nevertheless the MoU should reflect a continuing support for the work of the Wesley Study Centre, and an acknowledgment that the valued and long-standing association with the Methodist Church should be cherished and maintained. It is recognised that links are much wider than ministerial training alone.

5. Managerial, Governance and Financial agreements

There are a number of managerial, governance and financial aspects that should be agreed by the Methodist Council and the Council of St John's:

1. Wesley Study Centre name. St John's wish to keep this name. It is proposed that this should be granted.
2. The Manse, at 55 The Avenue. St John's wish for Dr Samuel to continue to live there, and wish for a five-year agreement that this would be maintained as a Methodist Manse (Landlord responsibilities only) by the Methodist Church. It is currently occupied by Dr Calvin Samuel, director of WSC. St John's would nevertheless not wish the agreement on the manse to be contingent on a named occupant. It is proposed that this should be granted.
3. Current reserves in WSC. St John's wish these reserves to be used as recompense for the financial losses already incurred, and costs and risks of the new programme of activity. It is proposed that this should be agreed.
4. Staff. It is noted that there are some staffing implications which need to be resolved by the Connexional Human Resource and Finance teams. The financial impact of these will not be the liability of the WSC or St. John's College.
5. Intellectual Property. Care is needed to avoid the mistaken assumption that materials (eg teaching programmes) developed in St John's and in WSC can be used elsewhere. This should be acknowledged.
6. Renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The links between St John's and the Methodist Church are much more than ministerial training alone. A new/updated MoU needs to be agreed between St John's College and the Connexion. The wording of this should be carefully agreed between St John's and the Methodist Council.

Conclusions

We believe this dispensation to be straightforward, fair, pragmatic, and in the best interests of the Connexion and of St John's College, Durham and of the Wesley Study Centre. We commend this solution to the Methodist Council.

*** RESOLUTIONS:

- 30/1. The Council adopts the recommendations set out in section 5 of the report and directs the Connexional Team to undertake such further work as may be necessary to give effect to the recommendations.**
- 30/2. The Council delegates to:**
 - (a) The Strategy and Resources Committee responsibility for agreeing the final terms of the Memorandum of Understanding based on section 5 of this report;**
 - (b) The Chair of the Council authority to sign a revised Memorandum of Understanding based on the section E of this report and following the approval of the Strategy and Resources Committee.**