

## **THE METHODIST CONTRIBUTION IN EDUCATION: Asking the right questions in a changing context**

### **The continuing role of the Methodist Church in the nation's education**

The Methodist church has made a remarkable contribution to the education of the nation's children and young people. It has been made through involvement in schools, both state-maintained and independent, teacher education colleges and universities. (The nature of this contribution is discussed more fully in elsewhere in the document). However, while noting the value of this role in the past and being justifiably proud of it, the purpose of this introduction is to stress the need to focus on the present and future role of Methodist Church in education.

But, of course, the past cannot and should not be forgotten. After all, it is part of the context in which any future contribution will be made. The initial Methodist intervention in education came through John Wesley himself. He founded Kingwood School in 1748 and, on its beautiful site in Bath, it remains an independent boarding school that is 'firmly based on the Christian principles of its founder' and on the highest academic standards and results. It can be argued that it was other Methodist initiatives in respect of education of urban poor in the early nineteenth century that encouraged involvement of other churches, notably, that of the Church of England, to engage in educational interventions – and with that involvement came, in 1833, the first state funding for primary schools. After that, came much legislation. The Foster Education Act in 1870, the Education Act 1905, the epoch-making Education Act 1944 and Education Act of 1988 are important milestones in the massification of schooling (and consequently, higher education) in this country. But it is in the last twenty five years or so, that governmental and political involvement across all sectors of education of has become most intense.

It was Margaret Thatcher's Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Baker, who introduced, among other things, the National Curriculum which determined *what* should be taught in schools and subsequently this was widened into *how* things were taught. But what is also significant is the particular emphasis placed on the importance of education by political leaders. On the whole, they have seen education in terms of subsequent employment. Its instrumentality has been stressed. Many, if not most of today's university students have the expectation that a university education will automatically place them in the top half of the labour market. It is after all what they have learnt from all who surround them, politicians, teachers and perhaps most importantly, their own parents. But what is the view of the Methodist Church?

If the Methodist Church does not wholly accept such instrumentality, this would seem to be an appropriate moment for it to consider its perspective, formulate its own educational

strategy and to publicise that position and its strategy for the future. Specifically, it needs to be clear about what it wants to say about:

- the way education is developing in this country, in terms of purpose, content and organisational structure
- on what it considers constitutes good education to be
- and in so doing, to critique (and support, if appropriate) the likely consequences of the government's approach and that of the Methodist Church

It can be argued that the Methodist Church must step up and be counted, as it has done in the past. As the detailed chapters of this document will make clear, it is that time again. It needs to decide on policy for the future; and then agree a strategy for how it will be done. Otherwise, it would seem, it will forfeit not only its unique place in the nation's educational system but also its opportunity to contribute to the preservation and promotion of Christianity and its values in the multi-cultural Britain of the future.

## **Contextual factors in the discussion: schools and teachers, teacher education and higher education**

### **(1) Schools and teachers**

Despite influential beginnings, the Methodist Church is not a major provider of statutory education in the UK. This is borne out by the Department for Education statistics which shows 25330 schools in England (September 2011) of which 78 are Methodist schools. Of these, 64 of these are voluntary Aided and Voluntary Controlled schools in the maintained sector, of which about half have an ecumenical foundation. The other 14 are independent schools. There would seem to be no universally accepted figures that show how many children are educated in Methodist schools and how many Methodist teachers work in schools.

By comparison there are over 4,600 Church of England primary schools, more than 220 secondary schools, 42 academies and 564 independent schools. Nearly one in five primary school children are educated in Church of England primary schools by 19% of all primary teachers, with almost a million pupils attending a Church of England school. Almost as impressive is the involvement of the Catholic Church in statutory education. The Catholic Education Service for England and Wales (CESEW) most recent census *Data for Schools and Colleges* (2010) found that there were 2289 Catholic schools in England and Wales, representing approximately 10% of the total number of schools and colleges nationally and that 784,808 pupils were being educated in maintained Catholic schools and colleges. This is a number that is increasing.

Christian or Church schools are popular with pupils, parents and staff. Local Authority admissions data testifies to the high demand for places in these schools making them oversubscribed and highly sought after by parents. The proportion of Church schools regarded as 'outstanding' by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) is much higher than the national average even though most Church schools are inclusive and attended by pupils of Christian faith, those of other faiths and those with no faith at all.

Methodist schools in line with other denominational schools are recognised for their distinctive welcoming atmosphere, Christian ethos, pastoral care, inclusiveness and discipline which impacts on standards and the all round quality of the education provision. However, the extent of the reach is narrow and it would seem that there have been no public announcements from the Methodist Church about any plans to invest in any more schools. If there are no such plans, if the Methodist Church is to continue make an impact in education and schooling, it will have to work in different ways, including working with other Christian (and perhaps other faiths) groups.

### **So what support can the Methodist church offer to schools and to teachers?**

The Revd Dr John Barrett said that 'the spearhead of Methodism's involvement in education was through the countless Methodists who work in community schools as teachers, teaching assistants, support staff, governors and voluntary helpers, all of whom see their work as Christian vocation'. If this is part of the means through which the Methodist Church intends to make its voice heard, then it will need to find a way of identifying and mobilizing this group. Key messages will need to be agreed which clearly states the Church's view on educational policy, which is then communicated to this 'Methodist schools workforce' that they can share in the numerous situations in which they find themselves. This requires a strategy and careful planning if the church is going to make the differences that it wants/is required to maintain future involvement in the nation's schooling.

### **Key Issues for the Methodist Church to have a position on include:**

**Academies and Free schools** – There are now over 1321 academies in England. This figure is growing and the government has made clear its desire for all schools to achieve academy status eventually. The government claims that academies have opened up new opportunities and new life chances for young people all living in disadvantaged areas. Is this an area that reflects the Church's continuing mission in education?

In September 2011, 24 free schools opened. These included 17 primaries, five secondaries and two all-ages schools. There is no requirement for academies or free schools to follow the national curriculum. Does this fit with the church's view of education provision and does it consider these as areas for future expansion/collaboration?

**National Curriculum Review** - The Church could strive to influence the review especially in making a case for the role of RE which is not currently part of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). The phase two call for evidence is expected in early 2012.

**Department of Education (DFE) review of personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE education)** - This is now in the public domain. The DfE is asking 10 specific questions regarding the curriculum content and outcomes for children and young people. The government has already decided not to make PSHE *as a whole* statutory, but the Department is listening to arguments for making *some elements* statutory. The Secretary of State will publish proposals for public consultation, and it would seem important that the Methodist Church makes a response.

**Impact of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) on GCSE choices.** The EBacc will have a major impact on the way schools plan and make space for different subjects on the post14 education curriculum. This will impact on the vocational pathways available for non academic pupils. What kind of education does the Methodist church support for children and young people?

**Child Poverty Strategy** – Alan Milburn, the former Labour Cabinet Minister, has been appointed as an independent reviewer of social mobility. He has called for evidence to explore how child poverty and social mobility are linked and how to break the cycle. As education is likely to be an important part of any such strategy, the Methodist Church's should be known to all its members and to the general public.

**New Bursaries** – Bursaries are on offer to replace the EMA (Education Maintenance Allowance) for the poorest students are on average worth only half the original EMA. The Church must have a message about funding and its link to student retention rates in Further Education.

**Teaching Schools** – The first 100 teaching schools using the teaching hospital model of training are now in operation since the beginning of September 2011, with a clear remit to find alternative ways of creating a self improving school system by generating a seismic shake up of the current provision. It can be argued that members of the 'Methodist schools workforce' should become members of steering groups and influence the direction of this initiative from inside as well as from the outside.

In addition to having a view on policy, it could be argued that the Methodist Church should also be considering ways of providing tangible support for schools, teachers and young people.

**Practical support the Methodist church could provide to schools and teachers include:**

- Clear messages – articulating a compelling vision and establish a measurable yardstick about the mission of the church.
- Communication strategy tailored to different audiences, pupils, parents, teachers and governors, passed on by the ‘Methodist schools workforce’.
- Resources and materials that can be used by teachers to support lessons which match curriculum topics and themes and modes of assessment, which reflect Methodist values and ethos.
- Website which features overtly the Church’s commitment to education, which houses on-line resource and which links to related websites and materials.
- Educational projects/initiatives or competitions to engage young people and that can be used by schools to support extended/extra curricula schools activities informing about Methodism.
- Proving speakers for schools/ambassadors/experts and voluntareers which will help to get important church leaders /members visiting state schools and inspire student on various topics and extending engagement opportunities between church and school.
- Commission school based practitioner research in conjunction with Methodist ‘teacher education’ Universities
- Networking and influencing - extending partnership relationships in addition to supporting Chaplaincy which supports the spiritual life of pupils and young people in schools.

## **(2) Teacher Education**

Both Westminster College founded in 1851 (now part of Oxford Brooks University) and Southlands College founded in 1872 (now part of Roehampton University) were Methodist training institutes for teachers for Methodist schools. Both have since developed into departments and faculties of universities that offer a wide range of higher education courses especially in the arts, humanities, theology, philosophy and social sciences. The special emphasis on teacher education remains.

With teacher education the founding ‘raison d’être’ of both these universities and constituting the majority footprint of their portfolio, it could be seen as disappointing that the Methodist Church has no audible voice or clearly stated position on this key activity.

The Church may want to consider shaping its public stance on the role of teacher education in universities against the backcloth of the government agendas. In doing so, the Methodist Church needs to voice what it believes makes a good teacher and identify what it wants to say about the preparation and training of teachers in the twenty-first century.

Since the new coalition government in May 2010, teacher education has been placed under the spotlight and is undergoing major changes in terms of perceptions about education that indicate both shifting agendas and shifting roles. For example, the very language used in education is changing and this is significant. Examples are: the focus is on 'teaching' rather than 'learning', 'pupil' rather than 'learner'. Additionally, the policy lens is now focused on 'local' rather than 'central', 'responsive' instead of 'directive'. All of these changes (and more) can be seen as representing the move away from 'big government' to the 'big society'.

Against this backcloth is a list of more unknowns in teacher education than ever before. The **Browne Review on reform of Higher Education Funding**, challenges the financial viability of Undergraduate (UG) routes into Qualified Teacher status. Whilst the direction of travel of current policy that was set out in the White Paper ***The Importance of Teaching*** (2010) is deliberately changing the relationship (funding and partnerships) between schools, local authorities and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Both of these challenges warrant a response from the Church, namely supporting the UG route as a key route for those with a clear vocation for primary teaching and supporting the need to have universities firmly involved in the training and development of future teachers.

While there is some recognition of a continued role for universities (in the idea of University Training Schools, as mentioned above) there appears to be the start of significant erosion in the university/HEI presence in teacher education. The reality of this erosion provokes many questions. For example:

- Given its presence in teacher education institution (as mentioned earlier) should the Methodist Church be challenging this approach whilst supporting partnership and collaboration?

What does the Church specifically have to say about the role of HEIs in teacher education? (The **Ofsted** 2009-10 annual Report indicates that there is more outstanding initial teacher education delivered by HE led partnerships than by any other route; whilst the Cathedrals Group of Universities (15 church HEIs) celebrated that the most recent publication of the Good Teacher Training Guide for England, rates Cathedrals Group institutions as amongst the very best places to train for teaching.

- Specifically, should the Methodist Church be supporting the need for the continued involvement of HEIs in teacher education?

- What is the position of the Church on the expansion of **Teach First**, where it is asserted that this governmental scheme is taking the 'best' graduates and training them to teach in inner city schools?

In these times of economic and social challenges, education and the role that teachers play in educating the next generation of children is paramount. It is self-evident that the Methodist Church recognises that a good education can make a positive impact on the life chances of young people and their communities. Such recognition is consistent with supporting some of the ideas set out in the Government's discussion paper ***Training our next generation of outstanding teachers***. However, should this support go further to establish a view on some of the elements under discussion? These elements include:

- selection and entry testing,
- inspection,
- routes into teaching,
- teaching schools/schools playing an increased role in teacher education
- the targeting of extra financial support on priority subjects.

This is in addition to making recommendations on ways of improving teacher education which would be informed by the values that the church believe teachers need, in order to play a transforming role working with children and benefiting society.

The Methodist church should be able to construct a view of a teacher that includes statements about commitments to equalities, inclusiveness, social justice and engagement with the wider world. The church might then wish to provide training programmes for teachers to update them on Methodist concerns and to support Methodist and Christian teachers in how to translate this into their role. This could take the form of short courses or be along the lines of the Catholic Teacher's Certificate, which is followed in Initial Teacher Training by new teachers wishing to teach in catholic schools.

In parallel to these planned reforms, the current **Review of the Teaching Standards** is also taking place. This is a move to a craft orientated view of teaching which focuses on teacher behaviour rather than child's learning, subjects rather than curriculum and which contains no explicit reference to diversity/equality/inclusion. Instead, it contains a more general statement within the standard '*meeting the needs of all children*'. Is such an open statement enough? Does this sit comfortably with the Methodist Church's values and mission?

As we move into 2012, we will see a **loss of number of teacher support organisations and strategies** such as the Teacher Development Agency (TDA), National College of School Leadership (NCSL), General Teaching Council for England (GTCE) and the National Strategies. Those that remain will have a different focus, such as the New Ofsted Framework for ITE, DfE and BIS. All of these developments will impact student teacher learning, pupil learning, teacher professional learning and development.

There are many challenges for the Methodist Church in teacher education and the manner in which it is changing. A pivotal one would seem to be:

- does the Church want to play an active role in the transformation of children and young people through schooling and teacher education?
- Or, is its content to do so through its own schools and worship?

If the church chooses the former, then it will need to challenge and influence assumptions that the government is making on educational policy based on the core values that it holds. This will require engagement in public debate and the sharing of core beliefs with the wider audience of educational professionals and other interested parties.

### **(3) Higher Education**

The influence of the Methodist Church in higher education is primarily concentrated on supporting chaplaincy in universities. This is achieved through a multi-faith ecumenical provision that serves students and staff of every faith and those who class themselves as having none, by providing quiet space, a listening ear, spiritual guidance, reflection, worship, theological education, social events, and involvement in social justice, human rights, interfaith encounter and dialogue building a sense of community and celebration on campus.

In keeping with its Methodist ethos and values, the Methodist colleges seek to provide an open, valuing, challenging and learning community for all its members and promote values based on an understanding of the wider purposes of universities in their local communities, in society, and the wider world. In doing so, they set out to build community and enrich the experience of university life for students and staff, but does this go far enough?

However, there could appear to be reluctance in this contradictory secular and multi-faith society for those universities and colleges with Methodist origins and links to emphasize their specific Christian traditions in university promotional material. This is despite an emphasis on core values reflected through the history and providence of the institutions.

Again, questions can be asked. For example:

- Should the Methodist Church consider taking on a more prominent role in advocacy on behalf of the student population with an aim to transform society?
- Is it desirable that by campaigning and lobbying stakeholders with a key message and clear communication strategy, the Methodist Church would be seen to be proactive in meeting its mission?
- Should the Church be aiming to influence higher education policy agendas at consultation and discussion stages?

As has been seen earlier in the discussion of school and teacher education, the policy landscape of higher education is rapidly changing. In the first 10 months of 2011 alone, there have been policy directives that have sector-wide impact:

- beginning with the **Comprehensive Spending Review** and the cuts that it delivered in government spending across all public sector activities,
- rapidly followed by the **Browne Report on reform of Higher Education Funding** which is changing the fees and student support regime that will apply to Hefce funded undergraduate courses in 2012, as well as the direction on competition and student numbers.

The longer term consequences of this funding reform on the system as a whole is still unknown. There is likely to be considerable impact, for example, in terms of future recruitment; the knock-on effect on the shape and type of future courses; and the consequent effects post graduate funding.

The recent White Paper on the future of higher education ***Students at the heart of the System*** was responded to by the Rt Revd John Pritchard, chair of the Church of England Board of Education (September 2011). The response clearly sets out his church's position with regard to this pending legislation. It states that the Church of England's involvement in higher education is part of its vocational to work for the good of individuals and society. The response goes on to note that the contents of the White Paper runs contrary to this mission as it is almost totally focussed on the economic contribution that going to university has on the individual and the nation's economy rather than on any wider and deeper purposes concerned with morality, values or ideas of social justice. Specifically, the Church of England response talks confidently about the need of higher education to develop communities and addresses issues of morality and values, and in doing so challenges the narrowly instrumentalist view of higher education that underpins government policy, by referring it to the wider questions about 'how individuals, groups and nations live together with civility in a fragmented, diverse global community'.

The Church of England response systematically considers:

- The purpose of higher education
- Widening participation and fair access
- The place of students within higher education
- The easing of the possibility of taking university title
- Simplifying the process for changing the corporate status of higher education institutions.

For fear of repetition, those arguments are not rehearsed here. However, the conclusion states:

“THE CHURCH IS ONE OF A NUMBER OF STAKEHOLDERS IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM. IT IS MINDFUL THAT HIGHER EDUCATION IS A POWERFUL FORCE FOR THE SHAPING OF INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES. BECAUSE HIGHER EDUCATION IS SUCH A POWERFUL FORCE, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT LEGISLATION AFFECTING IT EMBODIES A VISION OF HIGHER EDUCATION AS ABOUT HOLISTIC HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND WITH A COMMITMENT TO THE COMMON GOOD. THE CHURCH URGES GOVERNMENT TO HAVE BEFORE IT A RICH VIEW OF THE FULL CONTRIBUTION HIGHER EDUCATION CAN MAKE AS IT SHAPES LEGISLATION. FAILURE TO DO SO RISKS CREATING A SYSTEM ILL EQUIPPED TO FACILITATE THE EDUCATION NEEDED IN AN INCREASINGLY COMPLEX AND DIVERSE SOCIETY.”

These conclusions are incontestable, but do they go far enough in providing support to university students? The Methodist Youth Assembly (July 2011) stated that education is ‘a right not a privilege’ when debating the fairness of equal access to all people to education. The young people want words turned into actions with the Methodist Church defending the rights of students and their well-being. Such actions are likely to involve tangible interventions for the Methodist Church. These might include:

- scholarships and other forms of financial assistance
- advocacy, lobbying and championing on behalf of students on issues like student debt, tuition fees, the increase in competition resulting in the reduction of places coupled with the move to more vocationally orientated programmes at the expense of liberal arts places.

It would seem self-evident that the Methodist Church needs to be clear about what it wants to see happen with regard to higher education and establish ways of networking with key stakeholder groups, representatives from government departments, teachers education, the church college networks, Church universities and others, providing the opportunity for participating in consultation, information and expertise sharing.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, the Methodist Church has made remarkable contributions to the education of the nation’s children and young people. It still has a vital role to play in continuing to do so in the future. What is needed now is a set of clearly articulated messages based on its values and ethos which is clearly communicated and audible in public, educational and political places, followed up with practical support and interventions.

**Marilyn Holness**

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## **The Methodist culture/ethos - taken from the Southland's College Webpage, Roehampton University**

The Methodist Church has developed a distinctive culture, which is hard to define though easy to recognise when it is embedded in an organisation. Some, but by no means all, of its characteristics are:

- a warm and natural personal interest in each individual, irrespective of their role or status in the organisation
- practical care and thoughtfulness, shot through with generosity, in mutual relationships and in community service
- respect for authority, but a suspicion of "hierarchy" or pomposity
- concern for justice and fairness, especially for those whose voice is least likely to be heard
- commitment to integrity, truth telling and the highest professional standards
- searching for ways of exercising responsibility towards the world's most disadvantaged people
- a matter-of-fact spirituality, which integrates faith and everyday life, and which becomes focussed in acts of worship which are relatively uncluttered, heartfelt and widely accessible
- a good sense of humour, which avoids hurtfulness and radiates esteem of others

We do not claim a monopoly on these points, recognising that we share them with people of other Christian traditions and other faiths, though they take a characteristic form in the Methodist culture. We also gladly affirm that people who espouse no explicit faith often endorse many of these points in their relationships and daily work.