

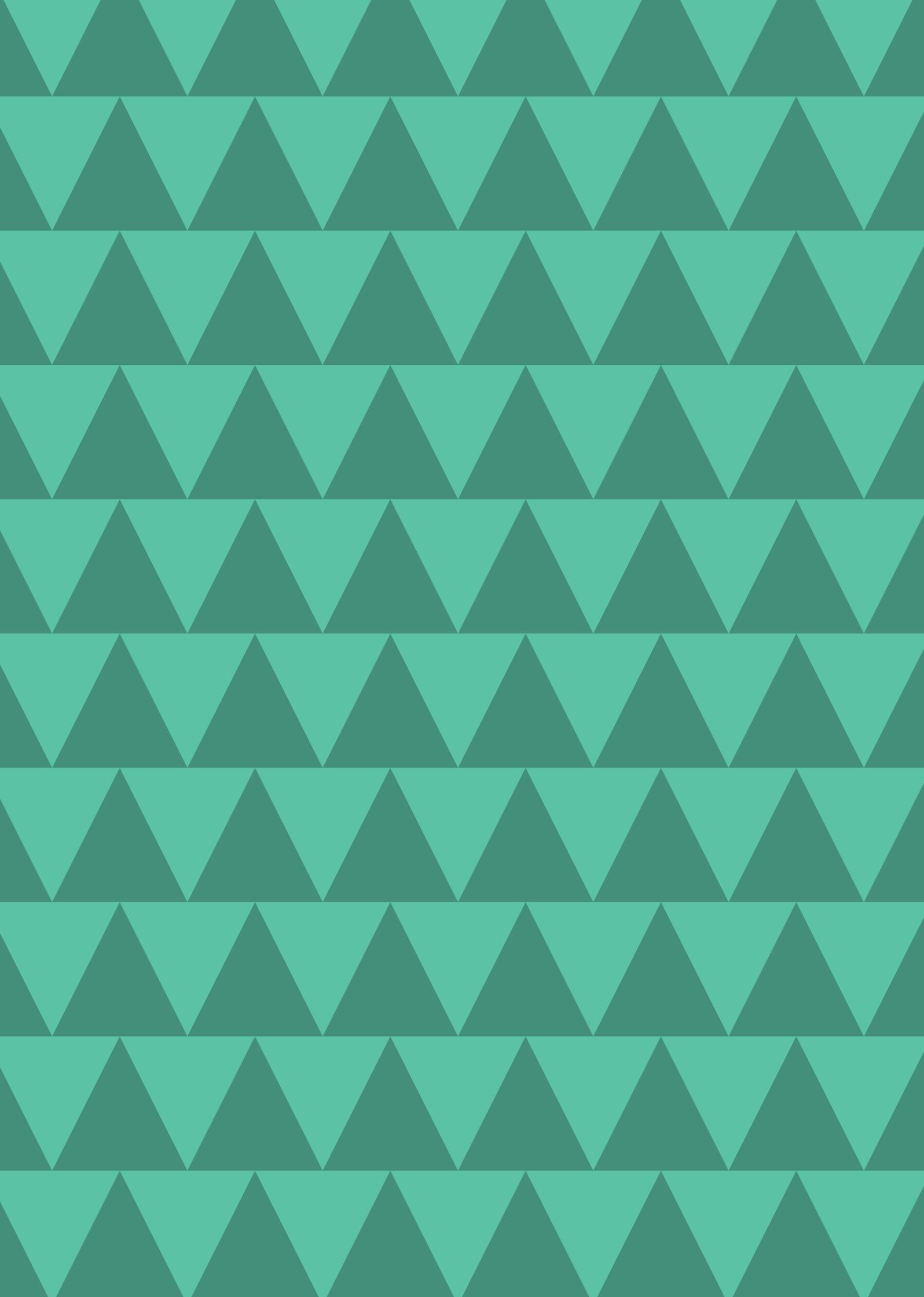
The Fruitful Field

A consultation document

Autumn 2011

From the Ministries Committee of the Methodist
Conference to the Methodist people and to all of our
partners, colleagues and friends

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The Fruitful Field is a project about learning, formation, training, theological education, scholarship, research and development. It's about the future of the Methodist Church's connexional learning resources. It's about equipping the Church and its ministries, equipping the Methodist movement in all of its contexts and formational communities, and equipping God's people for discipleship and mission. We hope that you will take part in this important consultation.

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Foreword

The Methodist Church is called to be a discipleship movement shaped for mission – a movement which makes disciples of Jesus – a movement which deepens the discipleship of God’s people – a movement which helps us all to work out how to be Christlike in an often un-Christlike but never Christless world.

The Methodist Church has always invested heavily in the pathways, the people and the places whose calling is to equip the Church, to equip the Methodist movement and to equip God’s people for discipleship and mission. John Wesley sought to provide rigorous training for his preachers and an empowering Christian education for his followers. Today our connexional resources support a network of learning institutions, educational centres, expert officers and theological educators across the Connexion. Their task is to support, in direct and indirect ways, the ministries of our Church and the growth in faith of God’s people. We can be proud of much that we do as a connexional Church to equip, prepare and support one another for discipleship and mission.

But, driven by a yearning to be a better discipleship movement shaped for mission, the Methodist Church is changing. Revitalised patterns of ministries and worship, a disproportionate emphasis on apt evangelism, new ways of thinking about the use of properties, increasing numbers of fresh expressions of Church and new communities among us, widening ecumenical partnerships, and an increasingly rich and diverse membership from across the worldwide Methodist ‘family’ – in all of these fields we are witnessing change and growth, and encountering corresponding opportunities and challenges.

And as the Methodist Church changes, so also must those connexional resources which seek to equip, support and enrich its leaders and members. The core of this document consists of a vision for a new way of equipping the Church, equipping the Methodist movement and equipping God’s people for discipleship and mission. It comes to you under the umbrella of *The Fruitful Field* – a project of the Conference designed to assist the Church as it assesses our connexional learning resources; and it comes to you from the Ministries Committee – a newly formed committee of the Conference whose remit includes oversight of *The Fruitful Field*. Most importantly, it comes to you as a consultation document and with a request for your prayerful, analytical and prophetic reflections.

You may be receiving this document because of your formal or informal links with one of the many learning resources which are discussed in this document; you may be receiving it because you are an important partner who has walked alongside us on our journey to this point and whose companionship we value; you may be receiving it because you hold office or membership within the Methodist Church, in which case it is you, under God, whom we seek to serve through all that is described in the following pages. I thank you in advance for your care, your attention and your good will as you take part in this consultation. Please be assured of my prayers as you reflect on all that we have to share with you here.

The Revd Dr Martyn Atkins (*general secretary of the Methodist Church, secretary of the Conference*)



Section one

Our direction of travel

*From **Ken Jackson** (chair of the Ministries Committee, former chair of the Stationing Committee), **the Revd Anne Brown** (deputy chair of the Ministries Committee, chair of the Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire District) and **the Revd Dr Martyn Atkins** (convener of the Ministries Committee, general secretary of the Methodist Church, secretary of the Conference), on behalf of the Ministries Committee of the Methodist Conference*

A new responsibility

We write this introductory section as the officers of the Ministries Committee – a new committee of the Methodist Conference. You may think that Methodism has more than enough committees as it is, and we would find it difficult to disagree with that thought! However the Ministries Committee was established by the 2011 Southport Conference in order to gather together, in one place, the work of several committees which had previously shared responsibility for supporting those who exercise ministries within the life of the Methodist Church. That connexional responsibility for helping the Conference to support those ministries now falls to us. And by ‘ministries’ we mean not only the ordained ministries of deacons and presbyters, but the ministries of the whole people of God. It is our exciting and daunting task to help the Conference to support those thousands of people who are called to help us worship and pray, to enable us tell the story of our faith and to aid us to live out our everyday lives as disciples of Jesus – deacons, presbyters, superintendent ministers, chaplains, local preachers, worship leaders, stewards, children and youth workers, small group leaders, pastoral visitors, lay employees, mission partners and mentors – thousands of people across our Connexion and beyond, whose duty and delight it is to inspire us to follow Jesus with passion and conviction.

An exciting time

We take up our responsibilities at an exciting time for the Methodist Church – a time when we sense the Spirit at work among us, raising us up to face new challenges with confidence and faith.

We have all been part of work undertaken across the Connexion in recent years to sharpen our vision and to build a ‘better’ Church – in the sense of a Church that can be a more effective vessel for use by a missionary God. Our reflections and discernment led us, in 2000, to restate *Our Calling* to a life of worship, learning and caring, service and

evangelism. In 2004 we took the further step of identifying *Priorities for the Methodist Church*, vowing to concentrate our “prayers, resources, imagination and commitments” on proclaiming and affirming our “conviction of God’s love in Christ, for us and for all the world”, and renewing “confidence in God’s presence and action in the world and in the Church”. At the connexional *Holiness & Risk* gathering in 2009, representatives from every district confidently proclaimed that God is not finished with the Methodist people, and identified a shared longing to be more courageous Methodist disciples. The district representatives were clear that the challenge of continuing change lay before us – but they were also inspired by their conviction that the Holy Spirit was beckoning us forward, leading us towards a bolder part in God’s mission.

Alongside this unfolding connexional discernment, the work of *Regrouping for Mission: Mapping a Way Forward* – known by different names in different districts – has invited circuits to reflect on their life and witness. Across the Connexion, circuits have mapped the size and growth of their churches, and considered the demography and mission needs of their communities. And, having then reflected on their stewardship of the resources in their care, many circuits have changed their structures so that they can better share in God’s mission to their members, to those seeking Christ, and to the world.

A discipleship movement shaped for mission

It is against this background that the Southport Conference this summer warmly received the general secretary’s report: *Contemporary Methodism: a discipleship movement shaped for mission*. The report boldly states our shared conviction that Methodism is, at its roots, a discipleship movement and a disciple-making movement – a movement which gathers us together to encounter God in the directness and intimacy of worship and fellowship, and a movement which propels us to follow the Spirit of God to live out our faith as disciples of Christ in all the world. Yearning and actively seeking to become better disciples of Christ, and offering him to others, lies at the heart of being a Methodist; and equipping God’s people for discipleship and mission is a core task of the Methodist Church. Indeed, in many ways, the future of Methodism is closely connected to the degree to which it is committed today to being a discipleship movement shaped for mission.

“A discipleship movement shaped for mission”: these are not empty words, nor are they a complete description of what the Methodist Church can and should be. But they are hope-filled words – words which seek to capture the work of the Spirit which we can already see in chapels, churches, circuits and communities across the Connexion, birthing new initiatives, incarnational mission and faithful patterns of Christian service.

“A discipleship movement shaped for mission”: a statement of hope, then, and also a statement of purpose. For we also share the conviction of

the general secretary's report that much must be done – and done urgently – to ensure that the Methodist Church can fully deserve that description and be 'fit' for that great purpose. Of particular relevance to our work as officers of the Ministries Committee are the convictions contained within the report about future patterns of resourcing and ministry in our Church. Equipping and nurturing the ministries of the whole people of God – including the ministry of circuit leadership teams, small group leaders, local preachers and worship leaders, ministry among children and young adults, and the ministry of those in pastoral roles – is a key task, and one where our use of resources must, with some speed, come to match our rhetoric. As the nature, number and size of many circuits change, the identification, training and resourcing of those appointed to be superintendent ministers is also strategically significant and acutely urgent. In a time of change, the leadership and witness offered by all of the ordained are crucial qualities, and ones which demand our support. We are fast moving into a new world, where 'pastoral charge' is also necessarily 'missional charge', and where the role of all who provide a focus of pastoral and missional identity within the life of our Church needs to be revised and equipped. And, where fresh expressions of Church and new communities flower among us, we must be ready to equip and support the patterns of leadership required to support their growth and development for the sake of the whole Church.

“A discipleship movement shaped for mission”: a statement of hope, a statement of purpose and a call to some very practical commitments. As we continue to reshape our life together in faithful obedience to God and for the sake of the world, we will need to remain focused on our purpose and hope, and committed to the costly but necessary actions needed to achieve the change and the growth for which we yearn. The overriding commitment demanded of us, and which we happily make as officers of the Ministries Committee, is to a deliberate use of our energy, resources and vision to facilitate what God is calling us to become, rather than to sustain what we have. This is not a commitment made lightly. When we don't have the resources to do all we would like to do, prioritising some activities over others means facing hard choices and making difficult decisions. However, where our prayerful deliberations offer us a shared vision, and should our careful consultations with sisters and brothers across the Connexion confirm our discernment of God's hand at work, we will commit to play our part in God's purposes for our Church.

The Fruitful Field

The work of *The Fruitful Field* project has an important place on the bigger map of discipleship and mission.

The Fruitful Field began its life during the last connexional year as a project of the Conference. Its aims are to assist the governance bodies of the Church as they exercise their oversight of the Church's activities in the fields of:

- learning
- formation
- training
- theological education
- scholarship
- research
- development.

For the sake of brevity and clarity, we will, in this document, refer to the energy, imagination, assets and resources dedicated by the Conference to support its work in these fields as our 'connexional learning resources'.

This document emerges from the reflections of the Ministries Committee as it has sought, under the auspices of *The Fruitful Field*, to undertake its task of oversight of our connexional learning resources. As it has done so, the committee has kept its focus on four of the values of *The Fruitful Field* project, reported to the 2010 Conference, and has consequently sought to work:

- reflectively
- collaboratively
- ambitiously
- prophetically.

Equipping the Church
Equipping the movement
Equipping God's people

It goes almost without saying that the resources dedicated to the fields of learning, formation, training, theological education, scholarship, research and development by the Methodist Church are very considerable.

We should expect no less of a Church whose roots are in John Wesley's zeal for knowledge in all its forms. Wesley was clear about his priorities – "I would throw away all libraries rather than be guilty of the loss of one soul" – but he saw no conflict between learning and missionary activity. Indeed, he saw them as complementary, as his mix of evangelistic and educative activities at the London Foundery, at the Orphan House in Newcastle and at Kingswood School bear witness. Wesley also clearly identified the importance of the education and equipping of his preachers. His first Conference in 1744 considered the question "Can we have a seminary for our labourers?", and, even though it was to be almost a century until an affirmative answer could be given, Wesley dedicated much of his own energy to ensuring that his preachers were "more holy and more knowing". The minutes of the 1744 Conference record Wesley's vociferous advice to his preachers:

Read the most useful books, and that regularly and constantly. Steadily spend all the morning in this employ, or at least five hours in twenty-four.

"But I read only the Bible." Then you ought to teach others to read only the Bible, and by parity of reason, to hear only the Bible: but, if so, you need preach no more ... If you need no book but the Bible, you are got above Saint Paul: he wanted others too. "Bring the books," says he, "but especially, the parchments," those written on parchment.

"But I have no taste for reading." Contract a taste for it by use, or return to your trade ...

"But I have no books." I will give each of you, as fast as you will read them, books, to the value of five pounds. And I desire the assistants will take care, that all the large societies provide *The Christian Library*, or at least the *Notes on the New Testament*, for the use of the preachers.

Subsequent sections of this document take this story further, and give a detailed account of how we, in our time, direct our connexional learning resources. However there can be no doubt about the link that our Methodist tradition has made between discipleship and mission on the one hand and learning and understanding on the other. A healthy Connexion is properly a community of learning where every disciple is learning about their faith and telling the story of their faith, where every minister is both an educator and a reflective learner, and where every circuit is a learning circuit. Becoming

“more holy and more knowing” is as much a priority for today’s discipleship movement shaped for mission as it was for Wesley’s movement 260 years ago.

It therefore follows that the connexional learning resources which fall within the remit of *The Fruitful Field* are crucial tools for equipping, supporting and enabling the work of discipleship and mission in our Church today. Equipping the Church, equipping the Methodist movement and equipping God’s people requires pathways, people and places which are fit for purpose, in tune with the Conference’s direction of travel, and focused on serving and challenging local churches and circuits in their work of discipleship and mission.

Vision, consultation and process

The remainder of this document offers further information about the ways in which we currently deploy our connexional resources, and offers our vision for the future.

Our vision is summarised in section two and elaborated upon in section seven.

The Ministries Committee’s deliberations as it established this vision were rooted in a deep understanding of our current connexional learning resources. Sections three to six therefore offer the contexts from which our vision has grown. Where possible, we have offered some historical reflections to provide a deeper insight into our existing use of connexional learning resources. Section three, ‘Pathways’, looks at the content, design and framework of our existing learning pathways, programmes and resources. Section four, ‘People’, looks at officers and tutors. Section five, ‘Places’, looks at learning institutions, trusts and gathered resources. Section six looks at some of the key opportunities and challenges which our connexional learning resources face.

We believe that the vision offered here, whilst rooted in a deep understanding of our present contexts, is also ambitious, prophetic, exciting and energising. For many it will seem at first a daunting vision; for some, it will be deeply troubling. If it is to be implemented, it will demand hard choices and difficult decisions. We do not underestimate the costs, but nor do we wish to underestimate the benefits for our Connexion should the vision come to pass.

The vision offered here has emerged from the deliberations of the Ministries Committee. These deliberations were, in turn, resourced in two important ways. First, we benefitted from the fruits of intensive information-gathering and scrutiny conducted within and beyond the Connexional Team over the past nine months. We approached our task with confidence given the amount of data and the depth of analysis which was made available to us. Secondly, we benefitted from the fruits of a series of informal consultations, undertaken over recent months by the general secretary and

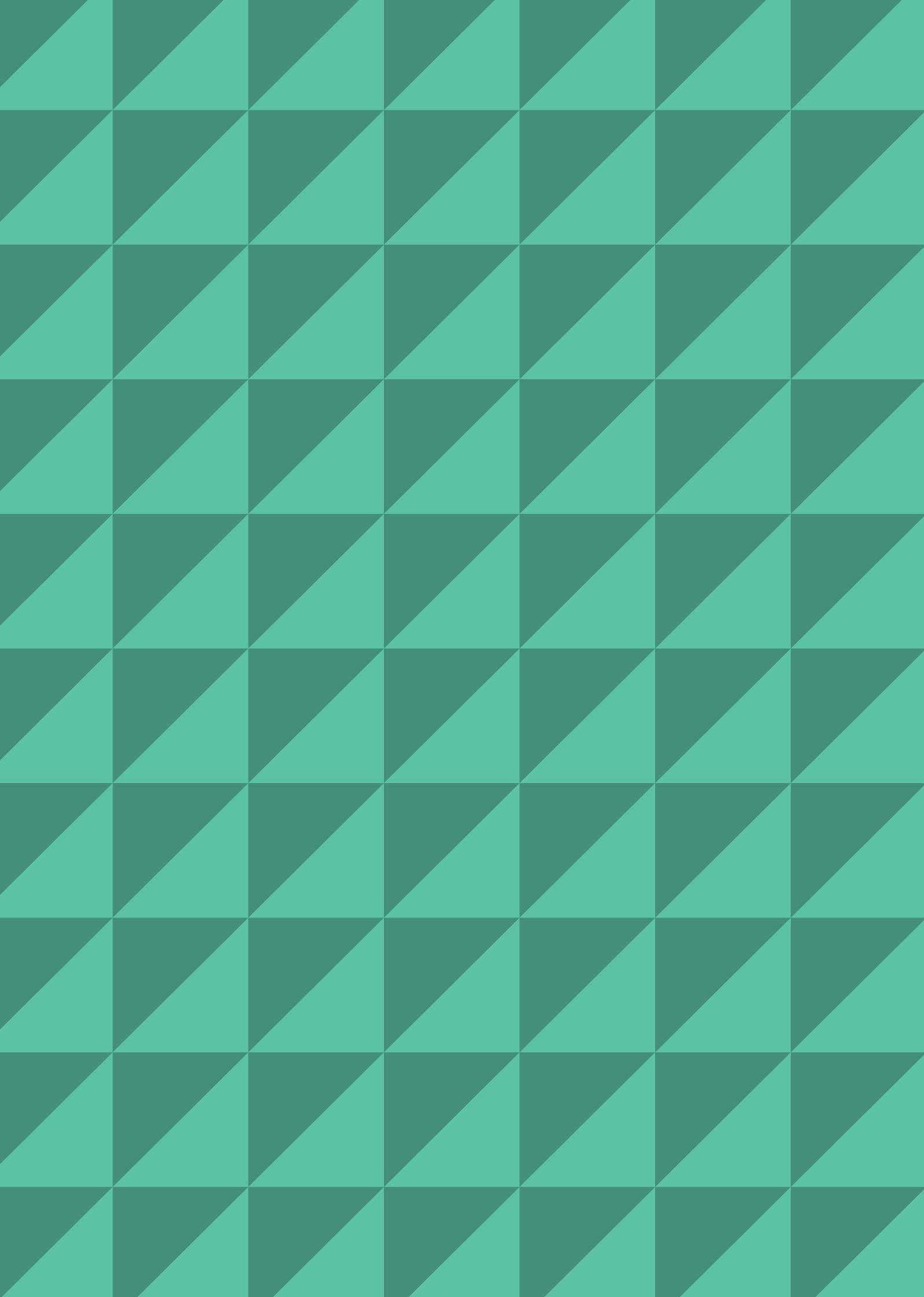
members of the Discipleship and Ministries cluster of the Connexional Team, with many of those working within the institutions and networks discussed within this document. While all of those who have been party to these informal consultations will also have an opportunity to respond formally to this consultation document, we have been thankful that much of what we outline here has emerged from, or resonated with, those informal consultations. The Ministries Committee's deliberations have also been aided by lengthy, prayerful and careful discussions about *The Fruitful Field* at a recent joint meeting of the Connexional Leaders' Forum, the Strategy and Resources Committee of the Methodist Council and the Ministries Committee itself.

Only a fraction of the information shared with the Ministries Committee and with other governance bodies can be included here, and we hope that you will be able to trust in the rigour of the processes which are supporting the work of *The Fruitful Field*, even, and especially, when its conclusions are challenging. That said, members of the Ministries Committee and members of the Connexional Team who support our work can offer further information, and we can be contacted as outlined in section eight of this document.

Section eight also outlines the practical ways in which you can take part in the consultation. We hope very much that you will do so. The Ministries Committee will be meeting in January 2012 to deliberate over the responses and to prepare our report for the 2012 Conference.

Much of what follows is necessarily institutional and organisational, but its roots are in a prayerful, active and intentional commitment to ensuring that our energy, our assets, our gifts and our graces serve the missionary God, whose convicting and converting Spirit is present and abroad in all God has made and in all that we dedicate to God's service.

We commend this document – its analysis and its vision – to the Methodist people and to all of our partners, colleagues and friends, and we look forward to receiving your reflections.



Section two

The vision | A summary

As the Ministries Committee, we understood our task to be to ensure that our connexional learning resources – our connexional pathways, people and places – are fully focused on equipping the Church and its ministries, equipping the Methodist movement in all of its contexts and formational communities, and equipping God’s people for discipleship and mission. We also took seriously our responsibility to ensure that our people and our places should themselves be fully equipped, so that their service to the Church could be creative, energetic and inspiring. We hope that we have been faithful to that task and to that responsibility.

Our vision is outlined in more detail in section seven. We outline in summary here its three main components.

Pathways

We should seek to establish high quality, flexible connexional pathways, which can be delivered in a number of different communities and contexts, and which meet the needs of a discipleship movement shaped for mission and the needs of the ministries of the whole people of God.

People

We should seek to establish a single connexional network of skilled and knowledgeable staff, including both regional staff (coordinated and resourced within regional teams) and tutorial staff based in a learning hub.

Places

We should seek to establish a single connexional hub on one site.

Section three

Contexts | Pathways

Mapping our 'places' and our 'people' is a much easier task than mapping our 'pathways'. Much attention has been paid at various points over our history to our connexional institutions and colleges, and many of those employed as officers and theological educators have justifiably been held in high regard by many across the Connexion or within the districts which they have served.

However, much less is recorded about the pathways with which both people and places engaged. That itself is instructive. We seem, as a Church, to have found it easier or more interesting to discuss bricks, mortar and staffing structures than to discuss pathways, programmes, courses and curricula.

Our current provision centres on two key sets of pathways:

- **Pathways for initial ministerial learning**

Diaconal and presbyteral candidates accepted by the Conference enter either a two-year or a three-year initial ministerial learning pathway. This is offered at ten learning institutions, though only three of these are normally able to offer the full-time pathway. Every effort is made to structure each student's programme so that it is appropriate for individual learning needs and for personal circumstances. However, it is anticipated that ministerial students following the full-time pathway do so as their primary occupation, while ministerial students following the part-time pathway are likely to be doing so alongside other commitments, and not as their sole undertaking.

All students seek to meet a common set of competencies clustered around six headings: Vocation (call and commitment); Being in relationship (with God, self and others); The Church's ministry in God's world; Leadership and collaboration; Learning and understanding; Communication. Although the competencies are common for all students and across the ten learning institutions, the courses and curricula offered at each institution are different and designed by the learning institution itself. The vast majority of courses and curricula involve the student working towards a Higher Education award. Students who are judged by the local and the connexional oversight committees to have met the required competencies are recommended to the Conference for stationing, usually as ministerial probationers.

Initial ministerial learning pathways were last discussed by the Conference in 2007. The Conference decided at that time to plan to support 120 ministerial students at any one time, half of which were projected to follow full-time pathways, and half to follow part-time pathways. This projection has proved largely accurate over the intervening five connexional

years, though a higher proportion of ministerial students have opted to follow full-time pathways than envisaged.

- **Pathways for preachers on note and on trial**

Preachers on note and on trial must follow an authorised learning pathway in order to be admitted as local preachers. For the majority of preachers on note and on trial, this will mean following the connexional *Faith & Worship* course. *Faith & Worship* is designed to be delivered in local contexts with the support of a mentor and circuit tutor, though a majority of the course's assessments are also marked connexionally. Some alternatives to *Faith & Worship* have been validated and are being delivered in some districts and institutions. As well as successfully completing a training course, preachers on trial must also successfully complete two circuit interviews held at the Local Preachers' Meeting, which will draw on an assessment of two trial services. There are currently approximately 1,500 preachers on note and on trial across the Connexion.

Beyond these major pathways, several other pathways have recently been supported, or are currently supported, by connexional resources. These include:

- **Foundation Training**

This was adopted by the 1999 Conference as a pathway for those “judged to have a strong sense of Christian vocation to exercise their discipleship through some form of ordained or authorised lay ministry”, and aimed “to enable the particular form of vocation and the person's ability to exercise it to be more accurately discerned”.

- **Extending Discipleship, Exploring Vocation (EDEV)**

A successor to Foundation Training, adopted by the 2006 Conference, *EDEV* was “a new approach to exploration of discipleship and vocation for a wider group of people, located closer to their home circuit or area, with the support of training institutions”.

- **Continuing ministerial learning pathways**

These are enabled both through grants (annual grants to districts for each ordained minister stationed to circuit ministry in the district, and application grants to ministers and probationer ministers studying for Higher Education awards) and through connexional courses (including courses in supervision skills for superintendents, the annual superintendents' conferences, and pathways for ministers from other denominations or Partner Churches selected to serve the Methodist Church in Britain).

- **World Church-related pathways**

These include pathways for those selected to become mission partners, and for leaders from overseas Partner Churches sponsored for study in Britain as part of the Methodist Church in Britain's *SALT (Scholarship and Leadership Training)* programme.

Other pathways which have recently been supported, or are currently supported, by connexional resources include:

- *Core Skills for Churches* - for workers with children (launched 2006)
- *Creating Safer Space: Foundation Module* - for office-holders who require safeguarding training (launched 2011)
- *Disciple* - a course designed to nurture and deepen discipleship through Bible study (launched 1993)
- *Don't Panic* - for church stewards (launched 1998)
- *Encircled in Care* - for pastoral visitors (launched 2007)
- *Mission Shaped Intro (MSI)* - an introduction to fresh expressions of Church
- *Mission Shaped Ministry (MSM)* - for those launching and leading fresh expressions of Church
- *Spectrum* - for workers with young people (launched 1996)
- *Step Forward* - a course for small groups (launched 2009)
- *Talking of God* - a course on faith-sharing for individuals and congregations (launched 2011)
- *What Shall We Do Now?* - for those working with older people (launched 2002)
- *Worship Leaders Training Pack* - for those seeking to become worship leaders (launched 1996)

Connexionally-resourced officers also design and deliver pathways within circuits, districts and regions in the areas of: adult education, candidating, change, children and youth, collaborative working, discipleship, faith-sharing, leadership, Methodist identity, the missing generation, mission, safeguarding, visioning and vocation.



Section four

Contexts | People

Tutors

The longest-standing cohort of officers supported by our connexional learning resources are tutors deployed within learning institutions to support initial ministerial learning pathways. The existence and distribution of tutorial posts have naturally been closely connected to the existence and distribution of learning institutions, and these are considered at greater length when looking at 'places' in section five. Today a nominal 18 tutorial posts are supported from connexional resources across 10 institutions primarily to deliver initial ministerial learning pathways, but which also nurture and contribute to communities of formation, scholarship and research.

As well as tutors overseeing initial ministerial learning pathways, our connexional learning resources also support tutors within a wider range of institutions and whose emphasis is on training, theological education, research and development for a wider audience. The *Inspire Network*, a connexional project of the Methodist Church, has its roots in the work of tutors at Cliff College. Similarly the *Step Forward* course is designed and supported by staff within the Guy Chester Centre.



The tutors at ministerial learning institutions at the time of Methodist Union

1950

1955

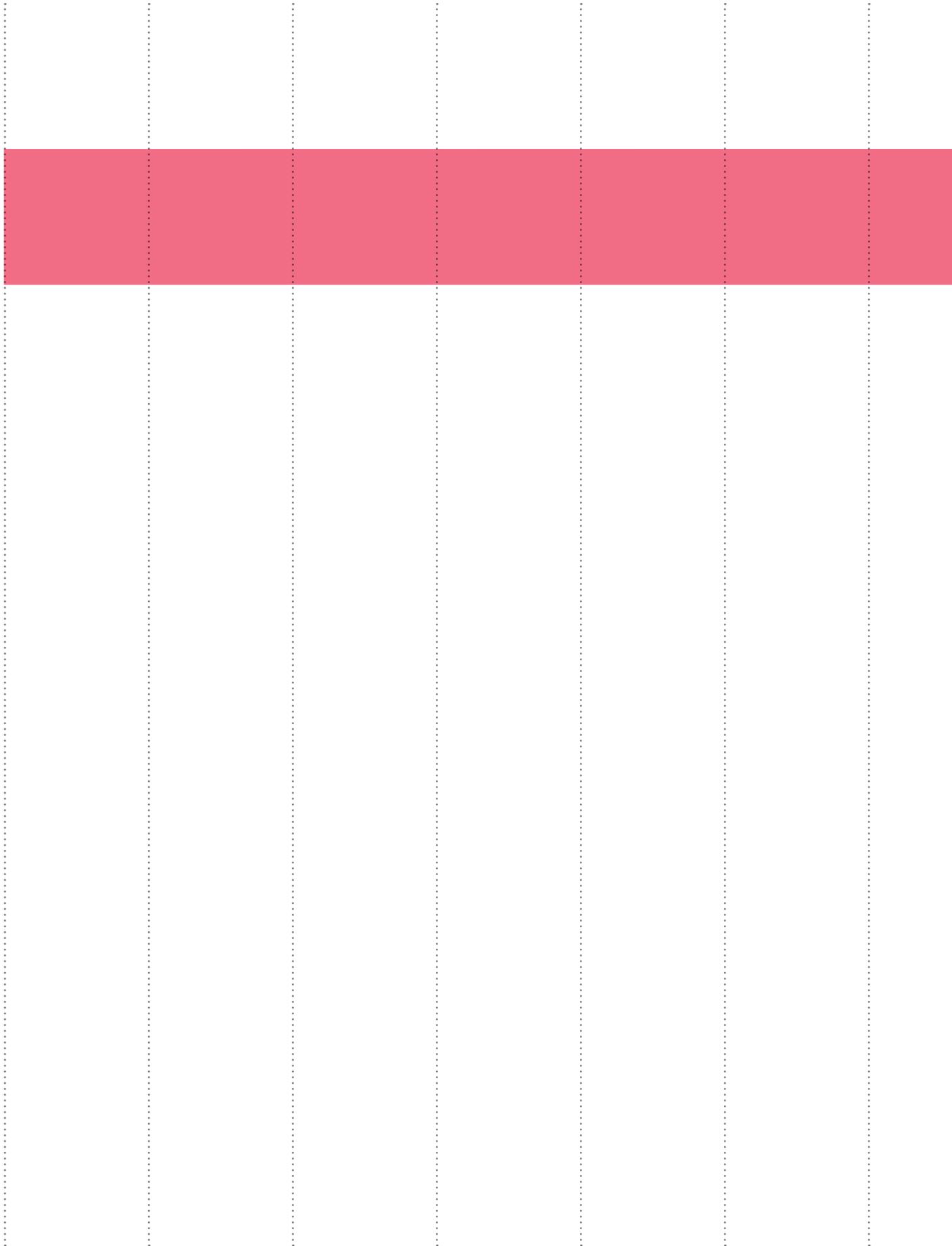
1960

1965

1970

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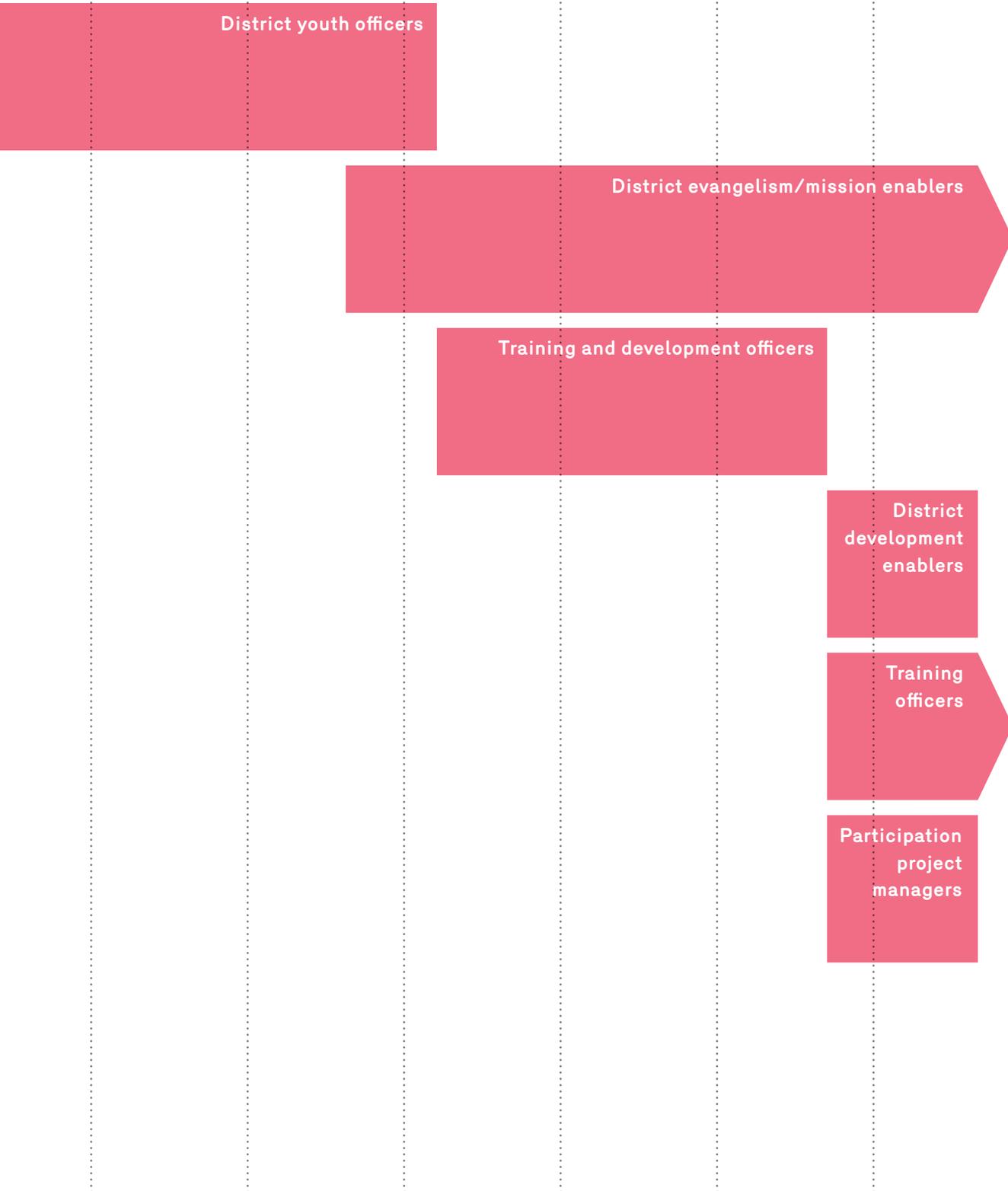
1995

2000

2005

2010

2015



District youth officers

As well as tutors at learning institutions, Methodism has a long tradition of supporting officers working within and across districts. This tradition began in the 1950s with the post of district youth officer. The first district youth officer, Beatrice Rabbage, was appointed in the London South West District. The post was funded by a combination of grants from the district, the Joseph Rank Trust and the local authority youth service. New officers were appointed as funding became available. Eventually district youth officers were employed in the Bolton and Rochdale, Bristol (3 officers), Cornwall, East Anglia, Lincoln and Grimsby, Liverpool, London (3 officers), North Lancashire, Plymouth and Exeter, Southampton and Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury Districts, and in groupings of northern and Yorkshire districts. A report from the Division of Education and Youth to the 1996 Conference noted that the strengths of the provision of district youth officers included:

- the development of strong ecumenical working relationships in youth and children's work
- the establishment of training programmes, including *Kaleidoscope* and *Spectrum*
- the promotion of the safeguarding of children and young people within the whole Church community
- the development and sustaining of youth projects.

District evangelism/mission enablers

Meanwhile, a report from the Home Mission Division to the 1993 Conference urged every district "to consider appointing a district evangelist/mission enabler/team to encourage and assist churches in their evangelistic task". The report suggested that "people, not paper, are our best resource" and encouraged every district to explore making an appointment, "in order that local churches may be motivated, guided, trained and resourced in the development and implementation of their evangelistic strategy".

Since 1993, many districts have invested in district evangelism/mission enablers and have been able to supplement their own funds with connexional grants. During 2010/2011 there were 17 district evangelism/mission enablers working in 15 districts. Of these 17 individuals, 12 were presbyters, many of whom were also serving in a part-time circuit appointment.

Training and development officers

In 1996, district youth officers were replaced by training and development officers (TDOs) – a move made in response both to the changing needs of the Church, and to the development by local authorities of their own youth provision. The Division of Education and Youth’s report to the 1996 Conference report envisaged that:

- all churches and circuits should have access to a team of TDOs who will co-operate with and utilise ecumenical links and theological resource centres
- the officers should enable the whole people of God to become more effective in mission and ministry, particularly among young people
- the officers should encourage the local church to develop as a learning community.

By 2000 every mainland district had access to a half-time TDO, who were all members of the Connexional Team, and were supported by a number of other Connexional Team staff in a variety of implementation and coordination roles. Each TDO had a strategic management committee with a membership that included representation from the district and a member of the Connexional Team.

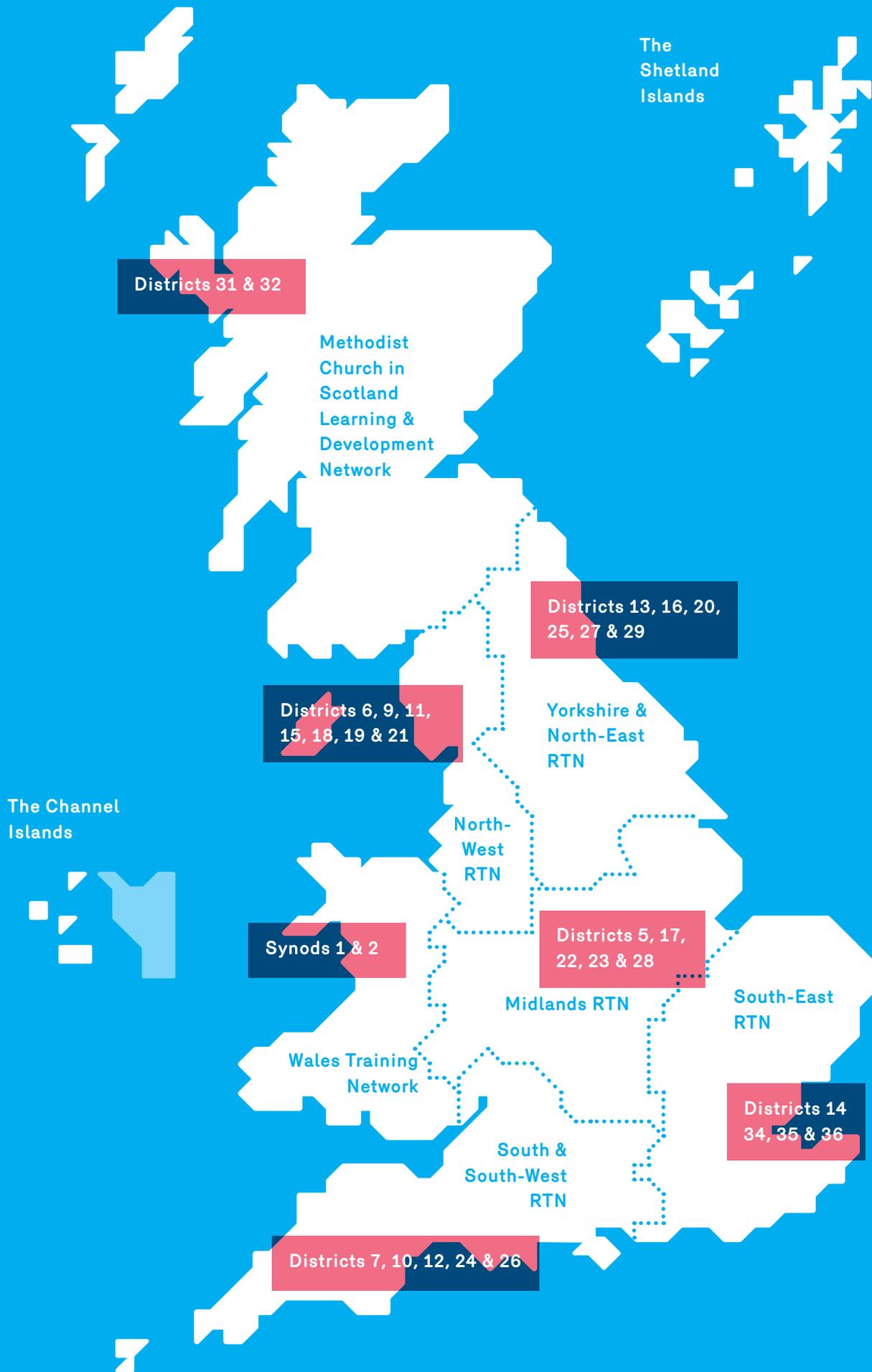
District development enablers and training officers

The *Team Focus* report from the joint secretaries group to the 2007 Conference assessed the role of TDOs and “overwhelmingly pointed to the appreciation in the districts for the work of TDOs, for two main reasons: (1) the capacity to do vital work that having a TDO provides and (2) the way in which the TDOs strengthen a sense of connexionalism within the Church”. However the report also concluded “that the current TDO scheme is unnecessarily complex in its management structure”.

The conclusion of a number of reports to the 2007 Conference was that the training and development functions previously held together within the role of the TDOs should be split into two district roles, that of the district development enabler and that of the training officer.

The district development enabler role was:

- to facilitate and organise the district’s implementation of initiatives arising from the *Priorities for the Methodist Church*
- to facilitate changes within the district in response to the changing context of its mission and ministry, including support for the *Regrouping for Mission: Mapping a Way Forward* process



- to encourage the implementation of these initiatives across the district and within the circuits, in particular the use of resources – people, property and finance.

Each English district received funding for a half-time district development enabler with separate arrangements being made for Scotland, Wales and the island districts. Twenty-one district development enablers were appointed in England, nine of whom had been TDOs.

The district development enabler posts are funded as a fixed-term project, finishing at the end of the 2012/2013 connexional year.

The creation of the role of training officer was closely tied to the simultaneous creation, by the 2007 Conference, of regional training networks. The report of the training institutions review group to the 2007 Conference led to the creation of five regional training networks in England and one each in Scotland and Wales. The networks were to:

- assess the training needs of the region
- deliberate on the distribution of connexional and other resources to meet those needs across the network
- maintain the best possible training systems for the region
- be connexionally accountable to the Methodist Council
- coordinate the work of the training officers.

Each English regional training network received funding for two full-time training officers, whose role was “to assist the network in the delivery of connexional needs for the whole people of God”. It was assumed that training officers would be regional officers, working collaboratively across the network, but the underlying district structure made this difficult, and most officers were based in one or two districts. To achieve this, some networks added local funding to enable each district to have a half-time training officer. Eighteen training officers were appointed in England, seven of whom had been TDOs, and separate arrangements were again made for Scotland, Wales and the island districts.

The outcome of discussions in Scotland and Wales was the appointment in each case of three officers to cover both the district development enabler and the training officer roles, one of whom was to be the director or manager, coordinating the work of the other two officers. The island districts responded in different ways, some paying staff and others funding more localised input.

Participation project managers

One of the integral parts of the Youth Participation Strategy, as identified by a report to the 2007 Conference, was that each of the regional training networks would also have at least one fully paid youth participation worker, whose role would be:

- supporting youth enablers, now known as One Programmes Participants (OPPs)
- delivering training at church, circuit, district and connexional levels
- project development and networking with external and ecumenical bodies and agencies
- providing additional support to training officers and theological colleges for children's and youth work training and coordination
- project development and networking with external and ecumenical bodies and agencies.

These posts were entitled participation project managers. Each English regional training network has a full-time participation project manager; however funding was not available for the envisaged roles in Scotland and Wales.

The participation project manager posts are funded as a fixed-term project, finishing at the end of the 2012/2013 connexional year.

Other district posts

It should be noted that, over recent years, most districts have moved to employ administrators, and some have created salaried posts for other specialities (eg youth, safeguarding, property and finance).



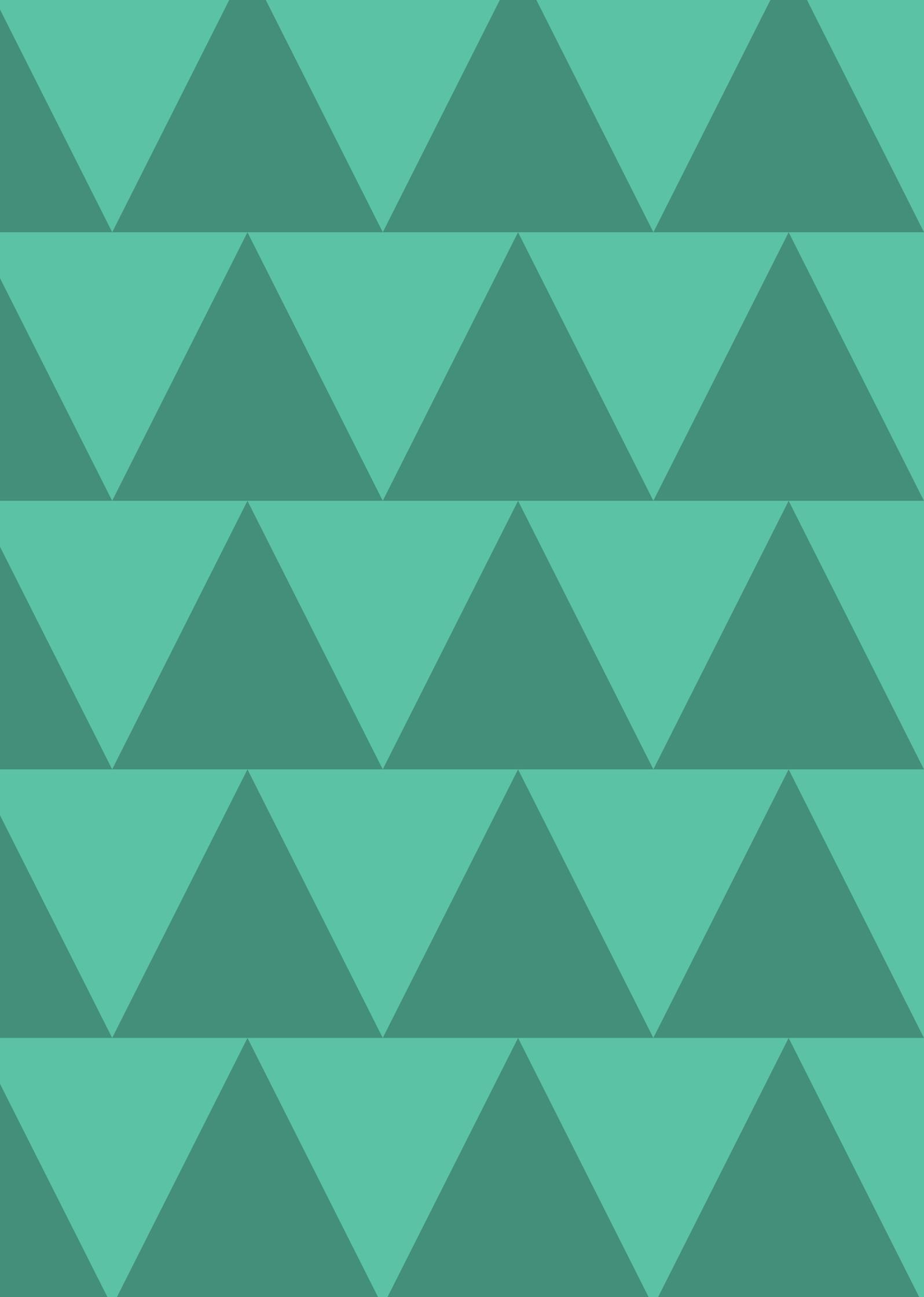
Above:
Training and development officers (TDOs) and other Connexional Team staff at a gathering to mark the end of the TDO scheme



Right:
John Boyd (a participation project manager) at the 2010 Youth Assembly

Right:
Lynne Norman (a participation project manager) and Mark Bagnall (a training officer and a former TDO and district youth officer) at the 2010 Youth Assembly





Section five

Contexts | Places

John Wesley spent part of March 1749 at Kingswood School. His journal for that time notes:

My design was to have as many of our preachers here during the Lent as could be spared: and to read lectures to them every day, as I did to my pupils in Oxford. I had 17 of them in all. These I divided into two classes, and read to one Bishop Pearson *On the Creed*, to the other Aldrich's *Logic* and to both *Rules of Action and Utterance*.

This gathering probably constitutes the first course for Methodist preachers. Something more intense and sustained – indeed, the establishment of a seminary – had been in the mind of the first Conference convened by Wesley in 1744. At the turn of the nineteenth century, there was renewed pressure for “some kind of seminary for educating workmen for the vineyard of our God”, and the 1806 Leeds Conference went as far as to circulate a sort of consultation document advocating the same. However it was not until the 1830s that nervousness about the dampening effect of a college on the evangelistic zeal of young preachers gave way to recognition of the need for those younger preachers to be equipped to offer an apologetic to an increasingly literate population within a growing Wesleyan Connexion. The 1834 Wesleyan Conference therefore agreed to the establishment of a theological institution, and, by January 1835, students were beginning their studies at the institution's first home in rented premises in Hoxton. The next 50 years saw a radical growth in learning institutions across the Methodist connexions. The Wesleyan Methodists opened four large establishments: Didsbury in Manchester; Richmond in Surrey; Headingley in Leeds; Handsworth in Birmingham – all deemed branches of the Wesleyan Theological Institution. The Primitive Methodist Church, the United Methodist Free Churches and the Methodist New Connexion also moved to establish learning institutions, with a strong focus on the north of England. A century after the beginnings



Headingley College, the first ministerial learning institution erected in its entirety by the Methodist Church

1830 1840 1850 1860 1870 1880 1890 1900 1910 1920

Hoxton
Insti-
tute &
Abney
House

Ranmoor College
Sheffield

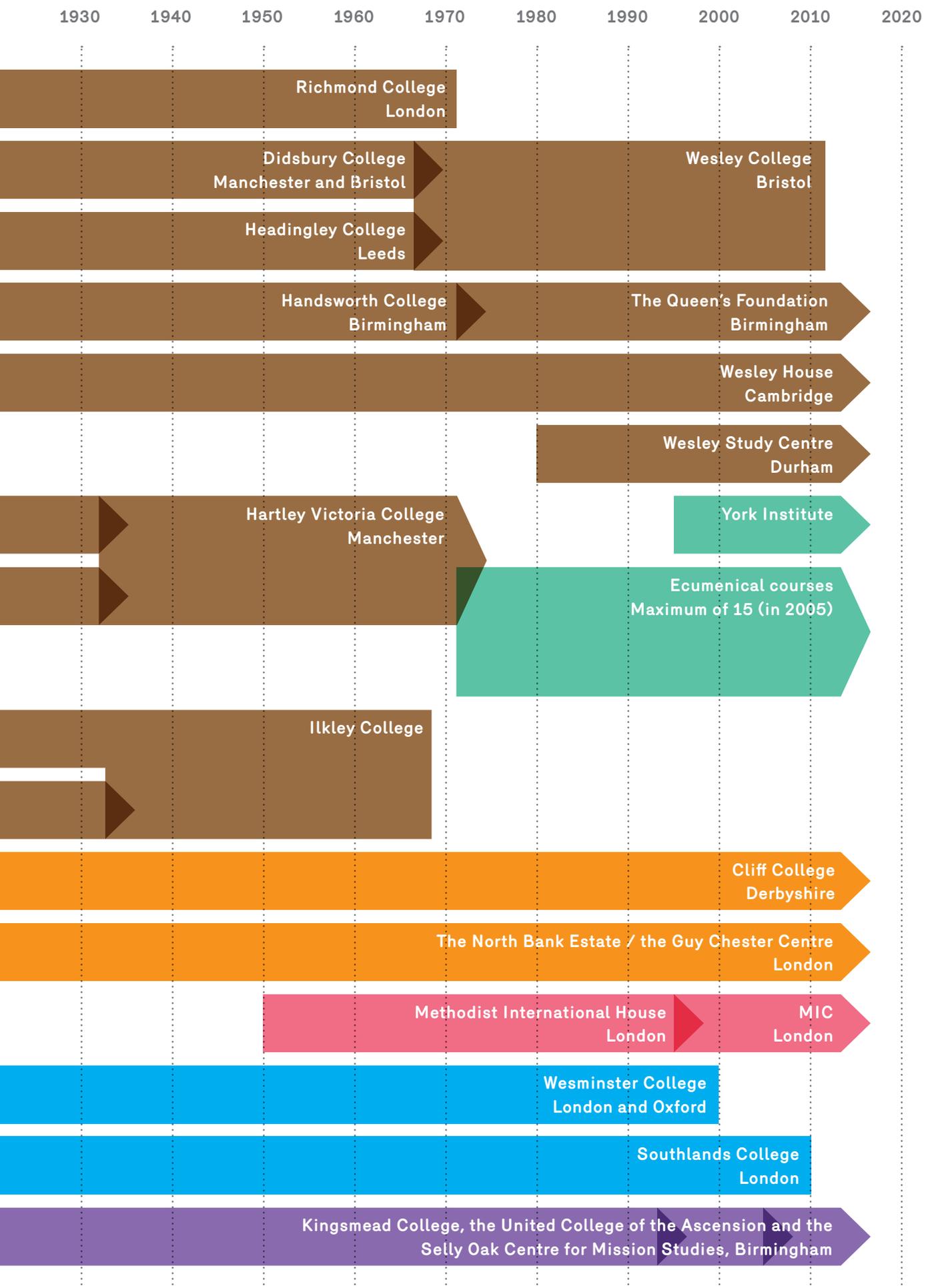
Victoria Park College
Manchester

Sunderland
Institute

Hartley College
Manchester

Bowron House
London

Joyful News
Bolton and Rochdale





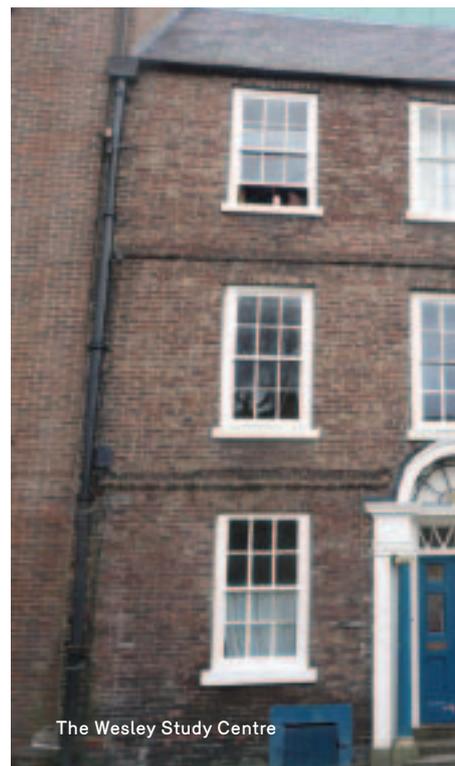
Hartley Victoria College, within Luther King House Theological College



Cliff College



The Guy Chester Centre



The Wesley Study Centre



Wesley House



The Queen's Foundation

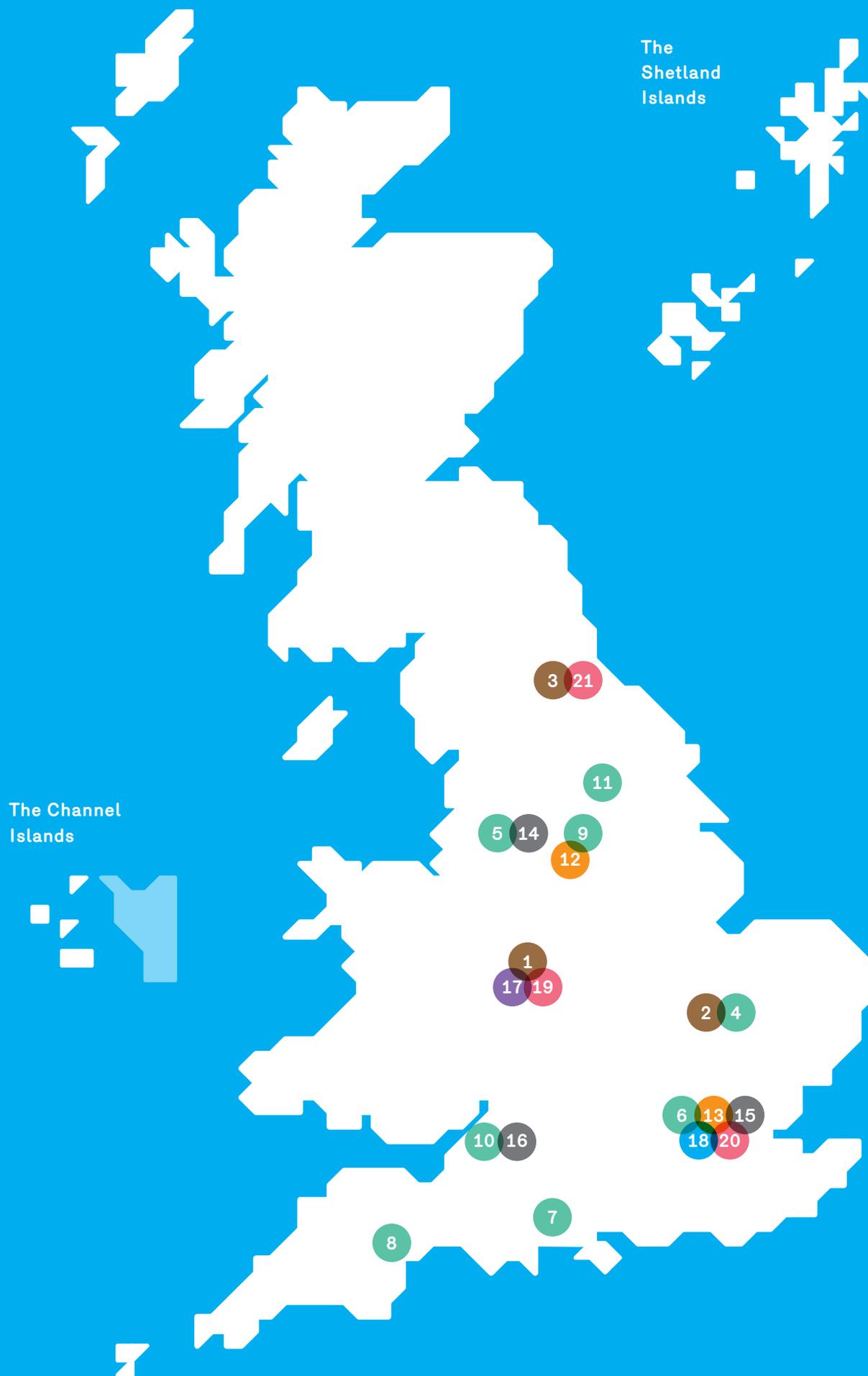
at Hoxton, and thus a few years after Methodist Union in 1932, Hartley Victoria College in Manchester (from the non-Wesleyan traditions) served the united Church alongside the four original Wesleyan establishments at Didsbury, Richmond, Headingley and Handsworth and the newer Wesleyan foundation of Wesley House, Cambridge.

Looking beyond presbyteral learning institutions, Cliff College was, by this time, established at its present site in Derbyshire, having moved from its roots in Bolton and Rochdale; Ilkley College was providing a base for the training of deaconesses; Southlands College and Westminster College were training teachers. Also a partnership in Birmingham was allowing some Methodist missionaries to be trained at Kingsmead College, Guy Chester's first gift of land in Muswell Hill in London is only a few years away, and Hilda Porter's vision of a Methodist International House in London is surely in gestation.

The late 1960s and early 1970s were years of significant change for ministerial learning institutions. The 1967 Conference closed Headingley College, merging its activities with those of Didsbury College, already relocated from Manchester to Bristol. The 1971 Conference approved the merger of Handsworth College and the Queen's College (an Anglican theological college), to establish what is now known as the Queen's Foundation. Finally, the 1972 Conference elected to close Hartley Victoria College.

Though the site of Hartley Victoria was sold, the college itself maintained an existence through a pioneering relationship with the Free Churches in Manchester. Luther King House Theological College, of which Hartley Victoria College now forms a part, was the first in a series of ecumenical ventures in which the Methodist Church participated, which saw new forms of initial ministerial learning pathways developed – pathways which largely did not rely on residence in a college community. This development led to a proliferation in the number of institutions sponsored by the Methodist Church for the delivery of initial ministerial learning pathways. In 1955, six colleges provided a base for Methodist ministerial learning. By 2005, 20 institutions were being used by the Church for initial ministerial learning pathways – 2 of them recently established by the Methodist Church itself, in the form of the Wesley Study Centre in Durham and the York Institute for Community Theology.

Major decisions about our learning institutions were made by the 2007 Conference (the 2006 Conference having rejected proposals brought for its consideration). The decision of the 2007 Conference located full-time, bursaried initial ministerial learning pathways at three institutions (the 2006 Conference having been asked to locate such pathways at only two institutions). The most recent decision of the Conference in this context was the decision of the 2010 Conference to close Wesley College, Bristol. Today's distribution of Methodist-sponsored learning institutions is as follows:





Learning institutions receiving full-time ministerial students



The Queen’s Foundation, Birmingham

The Queen’s Foundation receives ministerial students from the Methodist Church and the Church of England, the latter as full-time students and, in higher numbers, as part-time students from the Midlands region. It also hosts SOCMS (the Selly Oak Centre for Mission Studies; see 17), the Centre for Black Leadership and Ministries (largely sponsored by Anglican funding streams) and a research centre.

Governance Independent ecumenical entity with both the Methodist Church and the Church of England having seats on the governing body

Premises Leasehold site



Wesley House, Cambridge

Wesley House forms part of the Cambridge Theological Federation with ten other Cambridge-based or regional learning institutions from the Anglican, Reformed, Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions; teaching and aspects of common life are shared across the federation. Several of the other institutions rent space within the confines of Wesley House.

Governance Independent Methodist entity where the Methodist Church appoints the governing body

Premises Freehold site



The Wesley Study Centre, Durham

The Wesley Study Centre is linked by a memorandum of understanding to St John’s College, Durham – a college of the University of Durham. St John’s is also the parent body of Cranmer Hall, a theological college serving the Church of England; teaching and aspects of common life are shared by Cranmer Hall and the Wesley Study Centre.

Governance Methodist Conference entity

Premises Provided by St John’s College, Durham

B**Learning institutions receiving part-time ministerial students****4****ERMC (the Eastern Region Ministry Course)**

ERMC is a provider of part-time ministerial learning for the Church of England and the Methodist Church, based in Cambridge and the surrounding region.

Governance Independent ecumenical entity with both the Methodist Church and the Church of England having seats on the governing body

5**Hartley Victoria College, Manchester**

Hartley Victoria College is part of the Luther King House Theological College, within which it works in partnership with the Northern College (serving the United Reformed Church and the Congregational Federation), the Northern Baptist Learning Community and Manchester Unitarian College.

Governance Methodist Conference entity

Premises Provided by Luther King House Theological College

6**SEITE (the South-East Institute for Theological Education)**

SEITE is a provider of part-time ministerial learning for the Church of England and the Methodist Church, based in London and Chatham.

Governance Independent ecumenical entity with both the Methodist Church and the Church of England having seats on the governing body

7**STETS (the Southern Theological Education & Training Scheme)**

STETS is a provider of part-time ministerial learning for the Church of England and the Methodist Church, based in Salisbury.

Governance Independent ecumenical entity with both the Methodist Church and the Church of England having seats on the governing body

8

SWMTC (the South-West Ministry Training Course)

SWMTC is a provider of part-time ministerial learning for the Church of England and the Methodist Church, based in Exeter and the surrounding region.

Governance Independent ecumenical entity with both the Methodist Church and the Church of England having seats on the governing body

9

UTU (the Urban Theology Unit)

UTU is a provider of part-time ministerial learning for the Methodist Church, based in Sheffield. UTU also seeks to nurture alternative approaches to theology and a consideration of the place of the Church within contemporary urban cultures.

Governance Independent ecumenical entity

10

Wesley College, Bristol

The 2010 Conference made the decision to close Wesley College, Bristol. Initial ministerial learning activities have now come to an end at the college, even though the college site continues to be used during the 2011/2012 connexional year for a limited number of academic and commercial purposes.

Governance Methodist Conference entity

Premises Freehold site

11

The York Institute for Community Theology

The York Institute for Community Theology is a provider of part-time ministerial learning for the Methodist Church, based within the precincts of York St John University. The institute also offers a number of postgraduate programmes in the fields of leadership and consultancy.

Governance Methodist Conference entity

Premises Provided by York St John University



Lay learning institutions



Cliff College, Derbyshire

Cliff College offers a range of learning opportunities, from summer schools and short courses to residential undergraduate programmes and post-graduate awards.

Governance Methodist Conference entity

Premises Freehold site



The Guy Chester Centre, London

The Guy Chester Centre offers a range of short courses and day courses in a number of spiritual, pastoral and organisational fields. The centre is also a major provider of student accommodation.

Governance Methodist Conference entity

Premises Freehold site



Archival and heritage-focused institutions or resources



The Methodist Archives and Research Centre

deposited with the John Rylands University Library, Manchester

Historic and contemporary archives pertaining to the life and witness of the Methodist Church in Britain are held for the Church by the John Rylands University Library.



The Methodist Missionary Society Library

deposited with SOAS (the School of Oriental and African Studies), London

Historic and contemporary archives pertaining to the overseas missionary work of the Methodist Church in Britain are held for the Church by SOAS.

16

The New Room, Bristol

The governing body of the New Room is considering developments on the site in order to be able to improve its educational facilities. In order to determine whether such developments might include more formal learning activities delivered with connexional support, the New Room has, at the request of its governing body, been included within the remit of the project.

E

World Church-related learning institutions

17

SOCMS (the Selly Oak Centre for Mission Studies)

SOCMS exists as a centre within the Queen's Foundation. SOCMS provides a base for the Methodist Church in Britain's learning pathways for mission partners and pathways for leaders from overseas Partner Churches sponsored for study in Britain as part of the Methodist Church in Britain's *SALT (Scholarship and Leadership Training)* programme. SOCMS has no legal status apart from the Queen's Foundation.

F

Institutionally-associated trusts providing research provision

18

Southlands Methodist Trust

associated with Southlands College and the University of Roehampton

The Southlands Methodist Trust exists to support research and other activities of relevance to the life and witness of the Methodist Church through the making of grants. The work of the trust has an emphasis on the Methodist Church's engagement in the Higher Education sector.

19

The Methodist Diaconal Order Centre, Birmingham

The Methodist Diaconal Order Centre provides a base for some of the activities of the Methodist Diaconal Order, including some of its formational activities.

Governance Methodist Conference entity

Premises Freehold site

20

MIC (Methodist International Centre), London

MIC is a major provider of student accommodation. It is also seeking to establish a bursary fund to support the academic studies of students from overseas Partner Churches. MIC's activities are supported by the activities of MIC Ltd, which provides hotel accommodation in part of the MIC building.

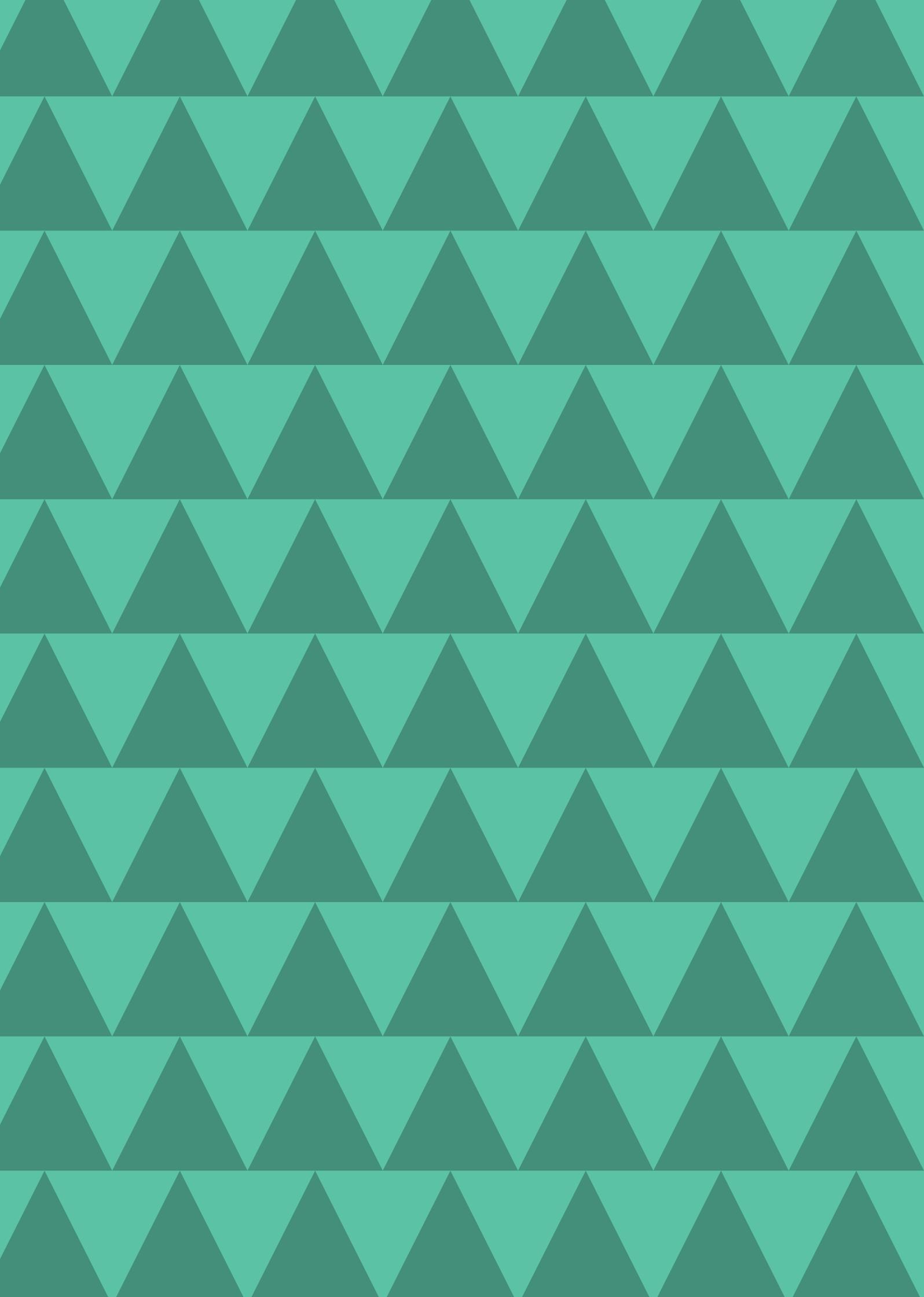
Governance Methodist Conference entity

Premises Freehold site

21

CODEC (the Centre For Biblical Literacy and Communication), Durham

CODEC is a research and development centre, exploring scriptural holiness in a digital age. CODEC is a centre within St John's College, Durham and has no legal status apart from St John's.



Section six

Contexts | Opportunities and challenges

This section looks at the opportunities and challenges facing the Connexion as we seek to ensure that our connexional learning resources can properly equip, support and enrich the Church.

Funding

A series of challenges emerge from ways in which the Church's resources are distributed across the pathways, people and places outlined above.

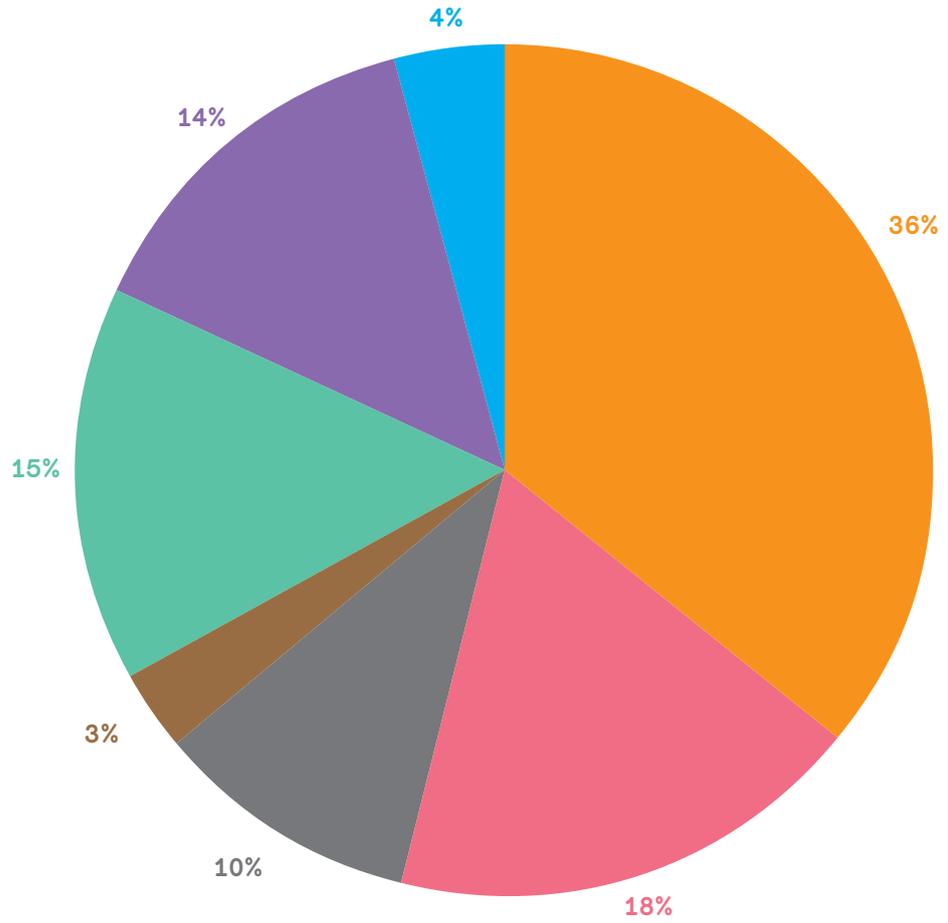
The Church spends approximately £6.2 million each year on its connexional learning resources. The division of that expenditure is illustrated in the first chart over the page. The vast majority of the grants and fees to learning institutions are paid to those responsible for initial ministerial learning. When these grants are seen alongside the payments made to ministerial students (in the form of bursaries, maintenance payments and expenses), it is evident that approximately 50% of our expenditure is focused in initial ministerial learning.

The second chart over the page illustrates the funding streams which provide £6.2 million each year to support our connexional learning resources. Approximately £3 million is received more or less directly from the district assessment (contributed by circuits through districts to support the central functions of the Church). There is therefore a direct link between the funds expended on our connexional learning resources and the assessment payments made by circuits across the Connexion.

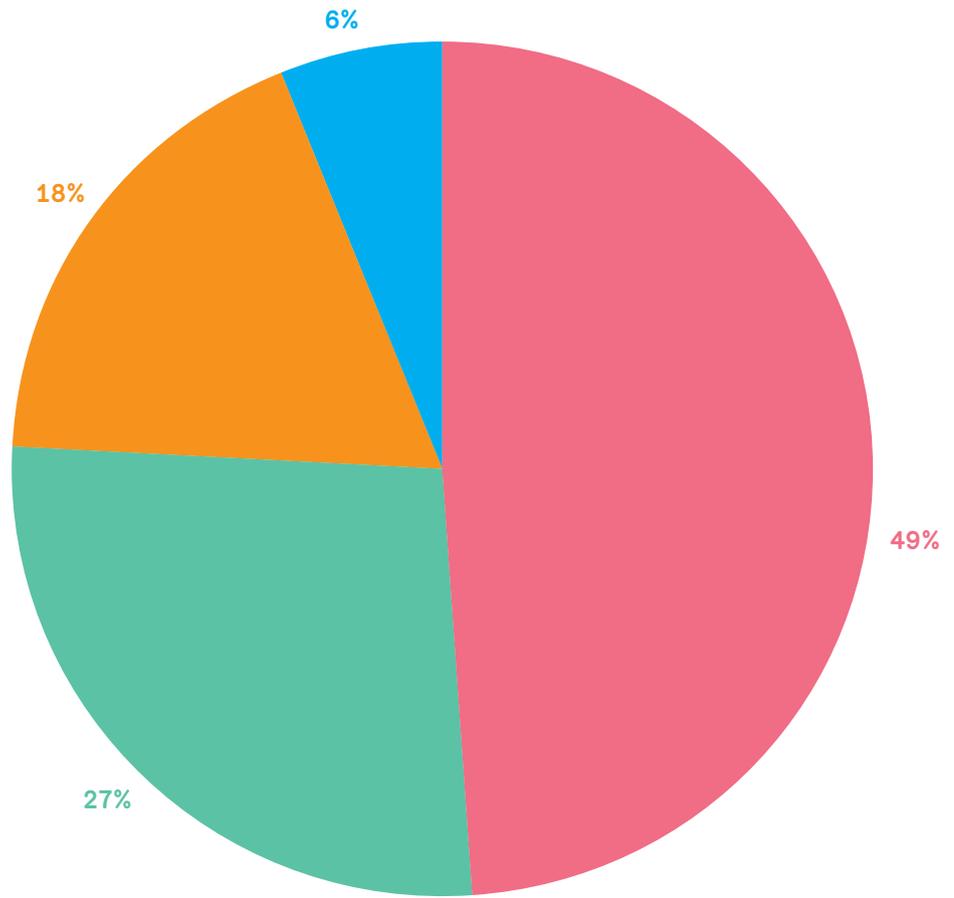
The remainder of the £6.2 million is received from four funds. The Connexional Priority Fund (CPF), the Mission in Britain Fund and the World Mission Fund are three connexional funds which receive income largely from levies (in the case of the CPF) and donations. The Methodist Conference's agreement to the use of these funds to support our learning resources is a time-limited commitment. The continuation of support from these funds beyond the end of the 2012/2013 connexional year cannot be guaranteed.

The remaining contribution from funds is received from the Training Assessment Fund. This was built up at the turn of the millennium and has been used over recent years, with the Conference's permission, to sustain a high level of connexional expenditure on connexional learning resources. However, the Church no longer solicits donations towards the Training Assessment Fund, so the balance of the fund is diminishing and will be exhausted by the end of the 2012/2013 connexional year.

Clear challenges emerge from this analysis. Primary among them is the significant reduction in funds available to support our connexional learning resources from the end of the 2012/2013 connexional year. When



- 36% Grants and fees to learning institutions
- 18% Payments to ministerial students
- 10% Continuing ministerial learning grants
- 3% District evangelism/mission enabler costs
- 15% Training officer costs
- 14% District development enabler costs
- 4% Participation project manager costs



- 49% Methodist Church Fund (district assessment)
- 27% The Training Assessment Fund
- 18% The Connexional Priority Fund
- 6% The Mission in Britain Fund and the World Mission Fund

current fixed-term commitments come to an end, and when the Training Assessment Fund is exhausted, over half of the funding which currently supports our connexional learning resources will have ceased.

It is therefore clear that the funding of our connexional learning resources will need to be placed on a new footing. As existing funding streams dry up, we will necessarily face the challenge of planning for lower expenditure. However, the opportunity also lies before us to identify and nurture new funding streams. In this context, it is likely that we will need to assess, with some urgency, the future use of those capital assets of the Church which are dedicated to learning, formation and training, to ensure that the Church's funds held in this way are focused on our contemporary needs.

This financial climate also emphasises the need to ensure that our connexional learning resources are used and distributed effectively. There can be no room for duplication of effort or competition between different components. On the contrary, it is now essential to maximise collaboration and coherence in order to exercise good stewardship of limited but still considerable resources.

Institutional premises

An ongoing challenge for the leaders and governing bodies of learning institutions is that of maintaining a balance between expenditure on educational activity and tutorial staff, on essential administrative and support staff, on premises, and on domestic and catering activities. The proportion of expenditure which many of our institutions have been able to dedicate to educational activity and tutorial staff has been higher than that achieved in the secular sector, which has brought significant benefits. However it has also meant, within a wider context of tight budgets, that expenditure on premises, in particular, may not have been as high as it ought to have been to maintain buildings, teaching spaces and student accommodation to a good standard. Added to these is the need to be proactive in meeting new requirements and expectations (eg the 2010 Equality Act enabling disabled students to take part in the full range of activities of student life at learning institutions). These accumulated pressures mean that several institutions are contemplating the need to make a significant investment in their premises. Five institutions directly or indirectly governed by the Conference currently face the need to embark on projects to maintain, refurbish and improve their premises which involve expenditure of approximately £12.3 million. The free reserves available within these institutions to support this work stand at approximately £4.5 million.

For some institutions, the need to improve their premises means making use of reserves to finance the work. For others, it means appealing to connexional funds for additional support within a context of diminishing connexional resources. For yet others, it means contemplating difficult

decisions about the overall viability of existing premises. Some institutions are questioning whether it is wise stewardship to invest significant amounts of money in updating premises which are largely configured for the needs of an earlier age.

This scale of investment across the Connexion challenges the Church to respond in a coherent and holistic way to a number of significant decisions within different institutions. The challenge is a bold one – to make sure that we are making the best use of the premises which the Church dedicates to learning activity.

Changes in the Higher Education sector

A further set of challenges emerges from the changes taking place within the Higher Education (HE) sector. The withdrawal of teaching grants from the government to HE institutions for the teaching of a range of subjects, including theology, means that a form of hidden subsidy which has supported the Church's educational activities has now been removed. It is extremely likely that the costs for the Church of engaging with theology departments in the HE sector will increase. It is also very likely that serious questions will be raised about the future of theology departments within many such institutions.

The long-term consequence of the HE sector changes currently being implemented are likely to be more far-reaching still. A more competitive and diverse sector is envisaged by the government's reforms. Therefore, as well as navigating a reactive path through present insecurities as universities absorb the effects of a significant change of culture, the Church will be required to engage with the HE sector in a manner which moves away from established assumptions. It is likely that this will require the Church, however regrettably, to place a monetary value on relationships and links which have previously been based on good will and shared priorities. However, it is also possible that there will be opportunities for the Church to develop new, innovative partnerships in response to emerging needs. In short, the Church is being challenged to reassess its presence and impact in a rapidly developing sector, to search out emerging opportunities which make the best use of the Church's resources – and to reconfigure its resources accordingly.

Ecumenical and international partnerships

Our connexional learning resources are often shared with those of other denominations and traditions. Several of our learning institutions, for example, are deeply embedded in partnerships with other institutions affiliated with the Anglican, Reformed, Baptist, Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions.

Many who supported the organic union between the Queen's College (an institution serving the Church of England) and Handsworth College, which produced the Queen's Foundation in 1971, may have expected other examples of such close cooperation to follow. It was not to be, and most Methodist learning activity occurs within a context of collaboration rather than union. However loose the ties between Methodist institutions and those serving other denominations, there can be no doubt that there are great benefits to learning in such an ecumenical environment. Methodist staff and students benefit from the breadth and capacity of affiliated institutions, and those institutions benefit in turn from the contribution which Methodism brings to the partnership. However there are also costs to this way of working, not least in developing strategies and visions which can be fully owned by all the sponsoring denominations.

Regional training partnerships (RTPs) - which often include learning resources from the Methodist Church, the Church of England and the United Reformed Church - were seen by many as offering the possibility of coherent, systematic ecumenical collaboration across regions in England. However it is by now clear that RTPs have delivered only patchy and sporadic successes, and are sometimes seen as demanding a disproportionate amount of energy for minimal results.

Ecumenical partnerships in Scotland and Wales have often found more effective ways of releasing energy and resources for shared learning and development. The success of the *Mission Shaped Intro* and *Mission Shaped Ministry* courses, developed by the Fresh Expressions agency and used across the nations, offers an example of energising pathways which can emerge from ecumenical partnerships.

Any assessment of our connexional learning resources must take seriously the opportunities offered by ecumenical partnerships, and an alignment of visions across denominational boundaries will be crucial for future growth and development. It is also important to note the opportunities offered by a wider ecumenical agenda. Many of our learning institutions are already reaching out to new ecumenical partners in the black majority churches, para-church organisations, large non-aligned churches and smaller denominations in the holiness tradition.

Similarly, it is important to act on the opportunity for more structured partnerships with the learning activities of overseas Partner Churches. Over recent months, several of our institutions have sought to implement exchange programmes with seminaries which serve the United Methodist Church, with positive results. During the same period the Methodist Church in Britain has been approached by learning institutions which serve other Partner Churches seeking national partnerships and structured collaboration. There are rich opportunities here for the Methodist Church in Britain to be able to respond to the desire of our partners for a richer and more accessible British base - a base at which the Methodist family can gather and within which insights and challenges from across the world can be shared and nurtured.

Making the most of our people

The resources of skilled and knowledgeable staff in learning institutions and in regional and district teams have been a catalyst for many developments within the life of the Church in recent years. The role of tutors in developing supervision courses for superintendents, the role of district development enablers in the *Regrouping for Mission: Mapping a Way Forward* process, and the role of a range of officers in delivering *EDEV* pathways are three examples of activities which have made a real impact within circuits and local churches. Office-holders and staff have been able to operate effectively to enable connexional priorities to be interpreted contextually and appropriately within local churches, circuits and districts.

As the funding packages for some of these posts come to an end, it is important to seek a secure footing for some of these activities in the future. As we do this, it will be important to include, alongside paid staff, the great contribution made by volunteers within the life of the Church. In this area, as in many others, building up effective teams of lay, ordained, salaried and volunteer individuals will be crucial for future effectiveness and sustainability.

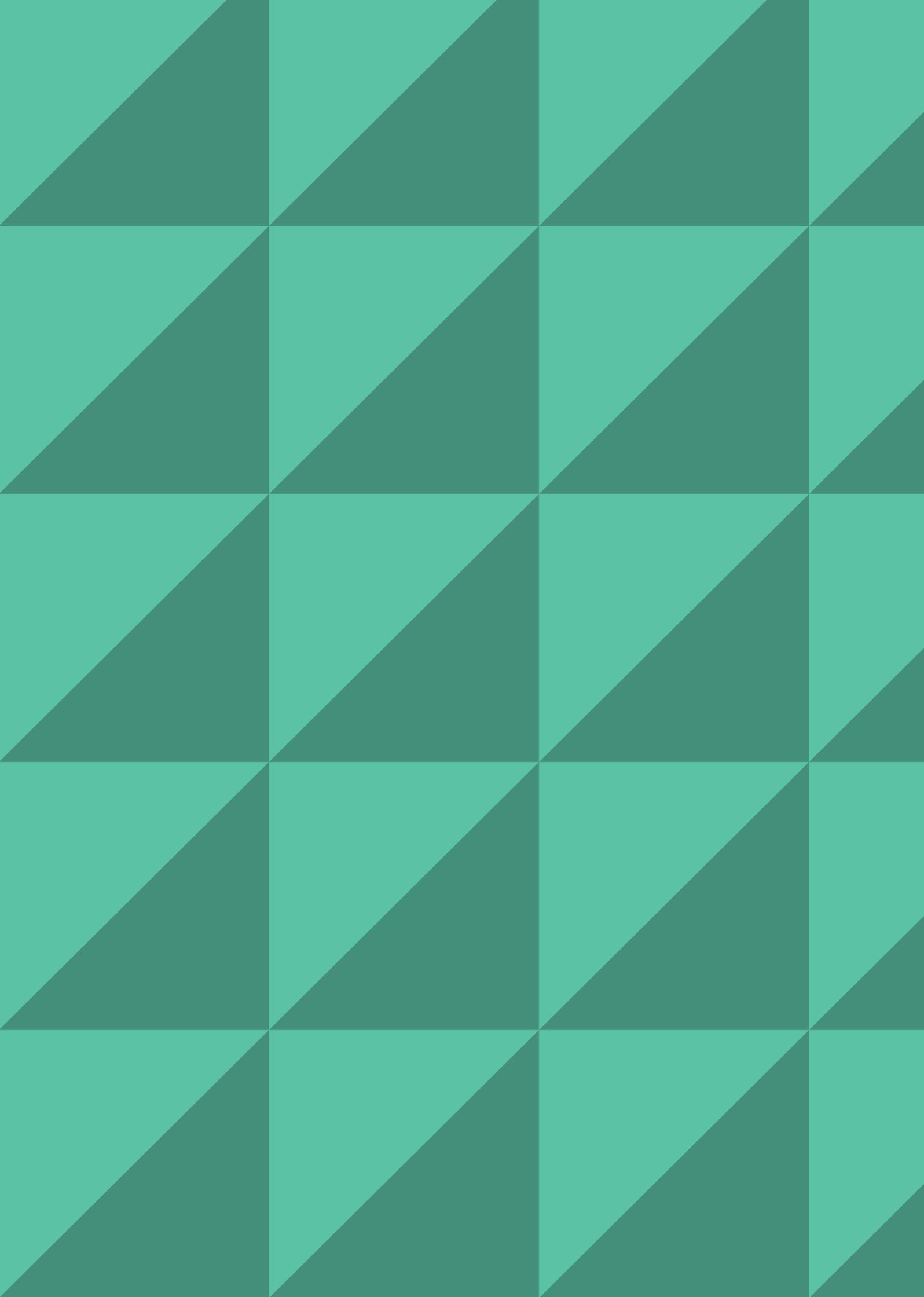
Learning in communities

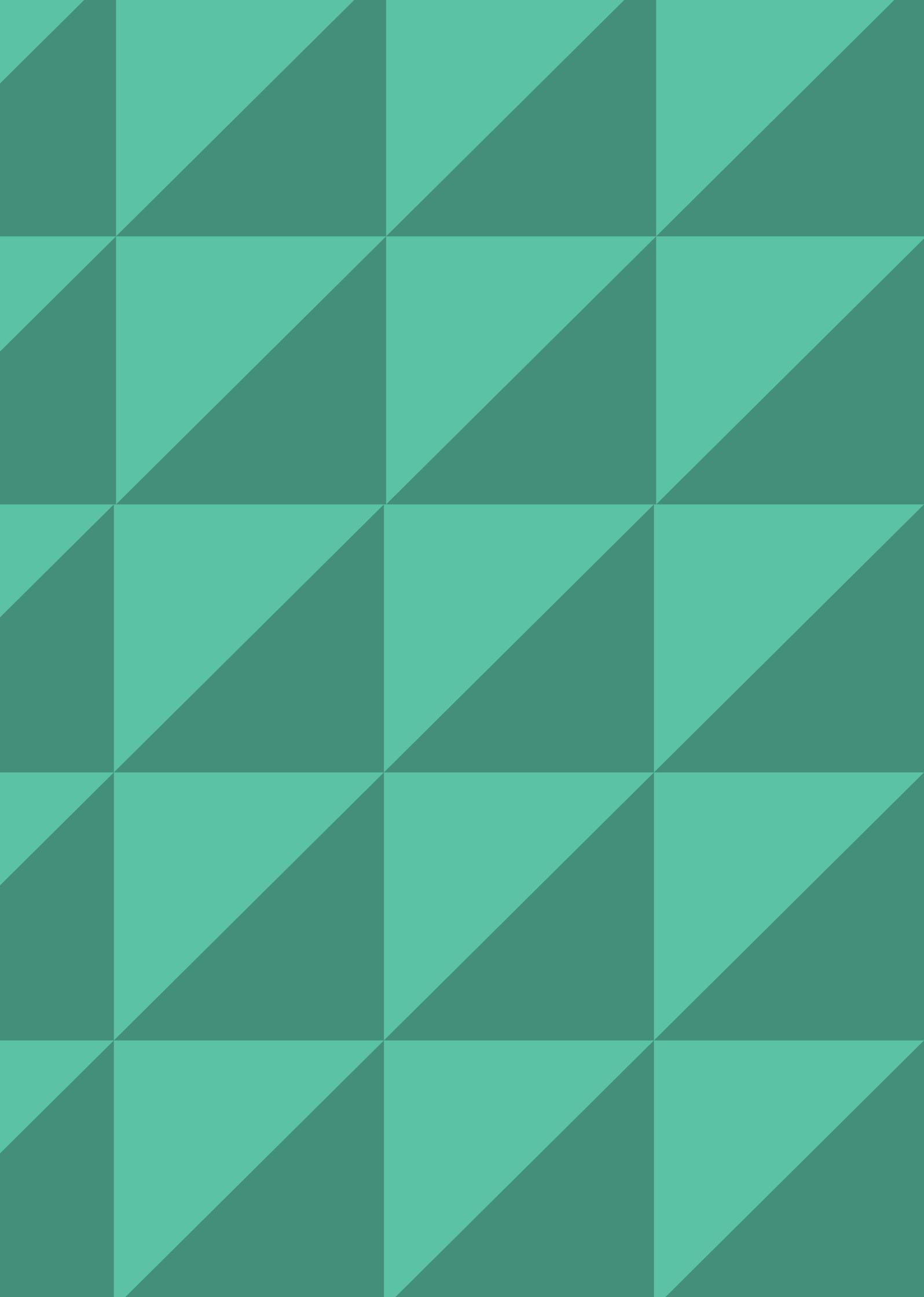
A final opportunity arises from the hunger discerned across the Connexion for more of the work of learning and equipping to take place within a greater number of communities. Such an appetite is, in many ways, a natural corollary of an emphasis on the Church as a discipleship movement shaped for mission. This invites the widest range of people to receive and share in the ministry of God, and invites the Church, in turn, to prioritise the wherewithal to equip and resource this vibrant activity.

The result is that our connexional learning resources need to be deployed to sustain or create a wide range of formational communities. In addition to the collegiate communities of our institutions and the ad hoc gathered communities required for certain training events, we want and need to be able to support and sustain formational communities within the circuit, the district or region, and web based virtual communities. Our tradition of small groups, classes and bands – and even of the watch-night and the covenant renewal service – gives us rich examples of what it means to have and to support formational communities within the life of circuits and local churches.

There is a link to be made here to the analysis of our expenditure on connexional learning resources noted above. Working within the 2007 Conference's projections of ministerial student numbers, a significant proportion of our existing connexional learning resources are dedicated to supporting full-time and part-time pathways for 120 ministerial

students within an institutional context. We should not underestimate the challenge of redirecting our resources to sustain or create a wider range of formational communities within the circuit, the district or region, and online. However neither should we underestimate the potential benefit of redirecting our energy in this way, because there is great potential here to make our learning pathways more accessible to a wider range of our people. Opening up our learning pathways in this way provides us with the opportunity to make our ministries (both lay and ordained) more accessible to all who hear God's call. It also provides us with the opportunity to support a culture of formation within the life of our Connexion, in which every disciple is encouraged to learn about their faith, to deepen their discipleship, to grow in faith and love, and to share the good news in all the world.





Section seven

The vision | In detail

*From **Ken Jackson** (chair of the Ministries Committee, former chair of the Stationing Committee), **the Revd Anne Brown** (deputy chair of the Ministries Committee, chair of the Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire District) and **the Revd Dr Martyn Atkins** (convener of the Ministries Committee, general secretary of the Methodist Church, secretary of the Conference), on behalf of the Ministries Committee of the Methodist Conference*

As we considered the information outlined above, we understood our task to be to ensure that our connexional learning resources – our connexional pathways, people and places – are fully focused on equipping the Church and its ministries, equipping the Methodist movement in all of its contexts and formational communities, and equipping God’s people for discipleship and mission. We also took seriously our responsibility to ensure that our people and our places should themselves be fully equipped, so that their service to the Church could be creative, energetic and inspiring. We hope that we have been faithful to that task and to that responsibility in the vision which we outline now.

Pathways

We should seek to establish high quality, flexible connexional pathways, which can be delivered in a number of different communities and contexts, and which meet the needs of a discipleship movement shaped for mission and the needs of the ministries of the whole people of God.

Why?

We envisage pathways which help us as a Church to become a better discipleship movement shaped for mission.

- We therefore envisage pathways which help to deepen the discipleship of the Methodist people.
- We envisage pathways which will help us to be more confident in making new disciples of Jesus Christ.
- We envisage pathways which can equip and nurture the ministries of the whole people of God – including the ministry of circuit leadership teams, small group leaders, local preachers and worship leaders, ministry among children and young adults, and the ministry of those in pastoral roles.

- We envisage pathways which will help us to identify, train and resource those appointed to be superintendent ministers.
- We envisage pathways which serve a new world where ‘pastoral charge’ is also necessarily ‘missional charge’ – pathways will help all who exercise ministries within the life of our Church to provide a renewed focus of pastoral and missional identity within our churches and communities.
- We envisage pathways which equip and support the patterns of leadership required to sustain the growth and development of fresh expressions of Church and the new communities which are flowering among us.
- We envisage pathways which will support the work of the Connexion as we seek to revitalise our worship, enhance our evangelism and make better use of our resources for kingdom purposes.

We envisage pathways which can be delivered in a number of different communities – the local community of the circuit, the regional community of the district or region, the virtual community of the Internet, and the gathered community of a learning hub. We envisage pathways which can be delivered by a number of different people and by effective teams of lay, ordained, salaried and volunteer individuals.

We envisage pathways which are flexible and coherent enough to encourage and enable initial and continuing learning. Whereas our existing learning pathways (for example, for local preachers) focus on initial learning, having flexible and coherent pathways for continuing and ongoing learning will enable greater access and a more balanced pattern of growth and development in ministry over several years.

We envisage pathways of a consistently high quality, which are supported by sufficient resources to ensure that quality can continually be assessed and enhanced.

What else did we consider?

We considered maintaining our existing ad hoc approach to the development of pathways. New pathways are currently developed by individuals or groups within local churches, circuits, districts, learning institutions and the Connexional Team in response to a discerned need. Such developments can easily be reactive, as opposed to being a proactive response designed to help us meet declared outcomes or visions. Such developments can also frequently lead to under-resourced pathways being developed simultaneously across the Connexion, with insufficient sharing of knowledge and skills. Such an approach can easily starve new developments – such as online learning – of the energy and resources required to get them off the ground. We envisaged that the coherence which would be provided by the establishment of connexional pathways would release energy and enable much greater collaboration.

People

We should seek to establish a single connexional network of skilled and knowledgeable staff, including both regional staff (coordinated and resourced within regional teams) and tutorial staff based in a learning hub.

Why?

Connexional

We envisage a network which is focused on the priorities of the Church – focused on equipping the Church, equipping the Methodist movement, and equipping God’s people. We envisage a network which is coherently coordinated so as to enable information to be shared between colleagues (regional and tutorial staff) and across regional and institutional boundaries. We envisage this contributing to the design and implementation of connexional pathways, and avoiding duplication of work. We envisage some of the energy released by this way of working enabling a greater focus on the needs of circuits and local churches.

Open

We envisage a network which shares its knowledge and skills with lay, ordained, salaried and volunteer individuals across the Connexion, and which learns from their experiences. We envisage a network with the capacity to nurture effective links with ecumenical partners within regions and localities, taking the initiative to instigate and create such links where they don’t already exist. We envisage a network which can develop knowledge of and links with best practice both within and outside the Church.

Broad

We envisage a network which includes a broad range of knowledge and skills among its practitioners in the fields of learning, formation, training, theological education and development. We envisage a network which has the capacity to make the Church think, and to do some creative thinking and some detailed research and development on the Church’s behalf. We envisage a network which can continue to assist our districts, circuits and local churches as they change and grow. We envisage a network which can strive to be representative of the diversity of the Church, and which can engage with the diversity of the Church, helping us all to belong together.

Sustainable

We envisage a network marked by warm collegiality, collaboration and mutual support. We envisage a network which draws on the experience of good

and weak practice over recent years, so as to minimise the need for radical overhaul in the near future. We envisage a network which, as an organic unit, can respond in an evolutionary manner to the changing needs of the Church.

Excellent

We envisage a network made up of appropriately qualified practitioners, ably managed and coordinated. We envisage a network of individuals interested in their own professional development, and whose professional development is resourced. We envisage a network which can create and sustain an ethos of quality assurance and enhancement – a network which can design, deliver and offer pathways of the highest quality for the Methodist people.

What else did we consider?

We considered a radical reduction in the level of connexional resource dedicated to dispersed staff posts. We recognised the financial savings which this would produce, and we envisaged that some districts would be able to resource some provision from their own funds. However we also acknowledged the level of acceptance and high regard for dispersed officers which has grown since the creation of training and development officers in 1996. We also acknowledged the ethos of connexionalism which undergirds the provision of such posts, funded from connexional resources and deployed with a degree of parity across the Connexion. We also acknowledged a crucial role for a dispersed staff function in supporting a desire to enable greater learning and development in circuits and local communities.

We considered maintaining the status quo, acknowledging that doing so would see the district development enabler and participation project manager posts cease at the end of the 2012/2013 connexional year. We believed that wider change should be considered in order not to lose an emphasis on development, change and growth within our connexional learning resources. We also believed that wider change was required in order to seek to bring together our tutors and our dispersed staff within one network. Maintaining the status quo would risk maintaining an existing divide between tutorial and dispersed staff.

We considered alternative patterns of coordination. We acknowledged that there would always be a tension between connexional coordination and more local management patterns. We believed that grouping dispersed staff in regional teams, while ensuring that those teams were also part of a connexional network alongside tutorial staff, would sustain the links with local needs while also enabling involvement in the development and implementation of connexional pathways and policies. We emphasised the importance of drawing on the experience of good and weak coordinating practice over recent years.

Places

We should seek to establish a single connexional hub on one site.

Why?

Connexional

We envisage a hub which is focused on the priorities of the Church – focused on equipping the Church, equipping the Methodist movement, and equipping God’s people. We envisage a hub which is configured to equip, support and challenge circuits in their work of discipleship and mission. We envisage a hub which is responsive and accountable to the Conference – and whose well being is also the responsibility of the Conference. We envisage a hub of which the Methodist people can be proud – and a hub, at the heart of a network of learning, which can worthily appeal to the generosity of the Methodist people for support.

We acknowledge that such a hub will play a new and distinctive part in the life of our Connexion, and envisaged much care being taken to locate its activity and charisms within our existing patterns of life, witness and leadership.

Open

We envisage a hub which can choose to dedicate its resources to initiate and sustain key partnerships. We envisage a hub which is open to links with partner denominations and with Partner Churches, at home and overseas. We envisage a hub which can nurture intentional and mutually-beneficial links with the Higher Education sector, allowing the Church to listen to and learn from theologians and academics in the secular sphere, and enabling the Church to contribute to the discourses of academic theology and professional practice. We envisage a hub which can help the Church to be a presence in the world, not least by helping the Church to update its apologetic and to exist in places where culture is formed.

Broad

We envisage a hub which has the capacity to engage in activities across the field of learning, formation, training, theological education, scholarship, research and development. We envisage a hub which is comfortable equipping the discipleship of the Methodist people, and which is comfortable supporting both lay and ordained ministry. We envisage a hub which, working through the connexional network of skilled and knowledgeable staff, can have an impact across the Connexion. We envisage a hub which is representative of the theological breadth of Methodism. We envisage a hub which can strive to be representative of the diversity of the Church, and which can engage with the diversity of the Church, helping us all to belong together.

Sustainable

We envisage a hub with a sound educational and business model, set up to succeed for 25-35 years, not 3 or 5. We envisage a hub which, as an organic unit, can respond in an evolutionary manner to the changing needs of the Church.

Excellent

We envisage a hub which is an excellent environment for learning and formation. We envisage a hub which can offer accessible hospitality to the Methodist people, and to our partners, colleagues and friends. We envisage a hub which, through the design and operation of its premises, helps us to reduce our carbon footprint. We envisage a hub steeped in an ethos of quality assurance and enhancement, designing, delivering and offering pathways of the highest quality for the Methodist people. We envisage a hub which can be a beacon of excellence for the Methodist Church and even for other denominations and traditions.

We acknowledged the advantages of locating the hub within a new and customised space, designed and properly configured to meet today's learning needs. We acknowledged that energy and resources might be released by the creation of the hub on a new site. We considered issues of geographical location, and accessibility. However we did not move to make a recommendation at this stage, as it was our preference to focus in the first instance on the principles and ethos of the hub and on the needs which it will meet, before moving on to consider the secondary issues of location and configuration.

What else did we consider?

We considered the radical option of not maintaining any connexional hub or learning institution, relying instead on patterns of regional and dispersed learning supported through a range of networks and partnerships. However we acknowledged our tradition of gathering together connexionally and our need for a place which can help us to be formed as connexional people. We acknowledged that the ability to offer connexional hospitality of this sort was not only important for our common life, but as a base from which to build relationships with partner denominations and Partner Churches. We also acknowledged the pragmatic need to house and care for the physical resources which we presently hold connexionally, including libraries and collections.

We considered maintaining the status quo, acknowledging that budgeting pressures and issues of institutional viability would, in all likelihood, lead to some attrition and institutional failure over coming years. Such an outcome would inevitably prove very painful for the institutions concerned. We wished to exercise our duty of care for our institutions in a more proactive, strategic and holistic manner than could be envisaged within such a laissez-faire approach. Maintaining the status quo would also

potentially mean that the Connexion would be forced to revisit the issue of the use of learning institutions again in the near future, as several systematic challenges would be left unaddressed. We were eager to identify a vision at this stage which had lasting potential and the promise of stability.

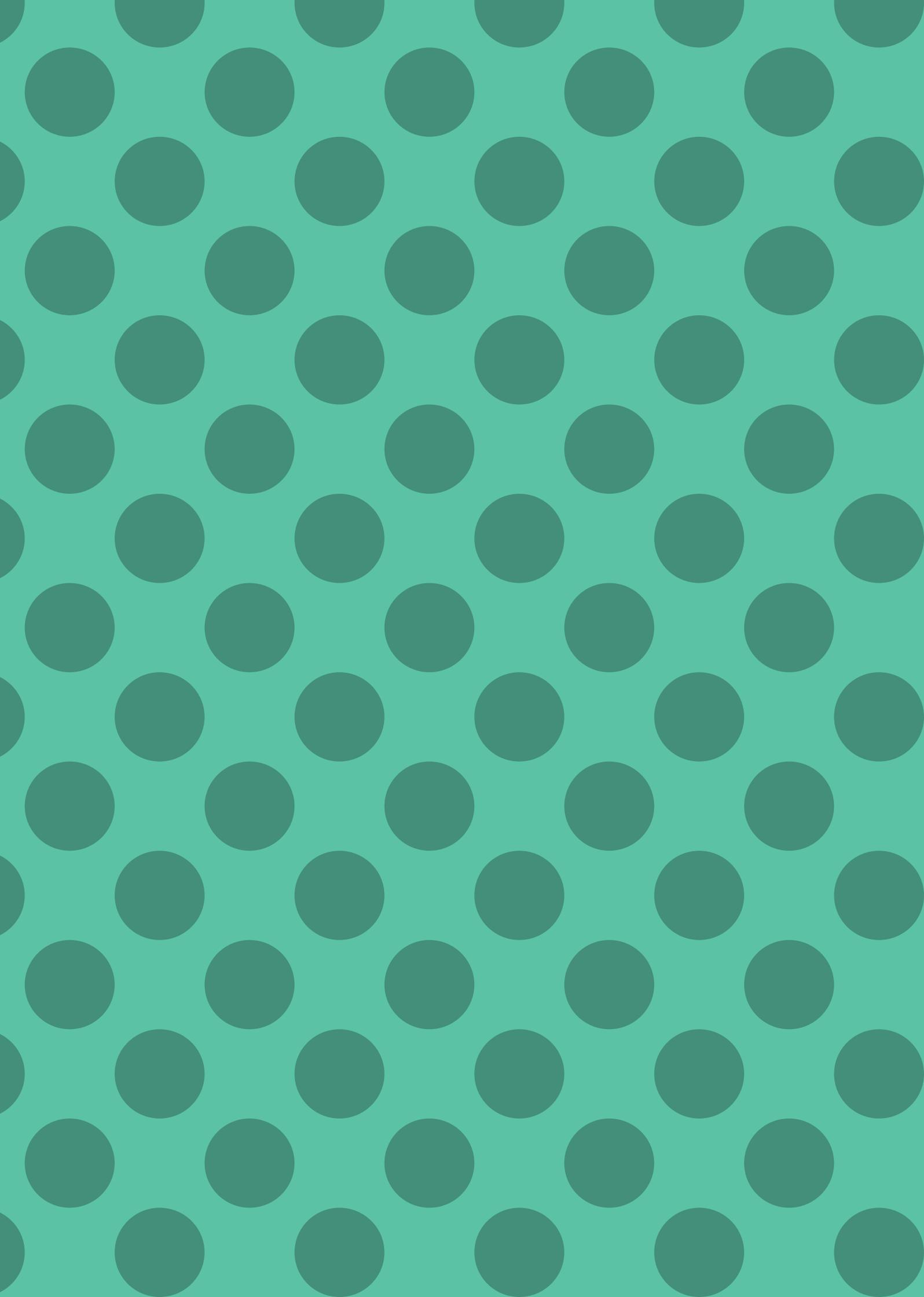
We grouped our existing institutions in various ways, and considered alternative patterns of future use, favouring some groupings over others. As part of this exercise we also considered the possibility of supporting more than one connexional hub. We acknowledged the risks of being tempted by newness, and we acknowledged the powerful ties of history, tradition, collegueship and partnership. However we also acknowledged the territorialism and competition which can exist between institutions, and the complications which the Church faces as it relates to institutions which are differently configured and controlled. We acknowledged the opportunities and challenges which we face, and believed that our desire to respond with vigour to the hope set before us made the identification or establishment of more than one hub counter-intuitive.

Ploughing, planting, pruning and reaping

We acknowledge the challenges which our vision brings. To return to the image from the prophecy of Isaiah which has underpinned our prayers and our deliberations, we are clear that the work of ploughing, planting, pruning and reaping is hard and difficult work. We have finite resources – as a field or a garden has finite space and energy for growth – and, as we prioritise some activities over others, we will have to face hard choices and make difficult decisions. We will need to consider uprooting some familiar components and cutting back on some of the growth of previous years so that new seed can fall into good soil and bring forth grain. Some things will end so that new things can begin. Implementing our vision will involve a period of change, with all the insecurity, vulnerability and hurt which change can bring.

However we have also consistently acknowledged that we need to tend the field, as all is not as it ought to be at the moment. And we have also consistently acknowledged that – should our vision be confirmed and affirmed by partners, colleagues and friends within our Connexion and beyond – we will commit to play our part in God’s purposes for our Church, led by the Spirit of light and life, the Spirit of challenge and growth.

And being deeply sensible that, in order to the revival and extension of the work of God, the great thing to be desired is an abundant effusion of the Holy Spirit on ourselves and our families, our societies and our congregations; we solemnly agree to seek that blessing by humble and earnest prayer; in our private supplications, in our family devotions, and in the pulpit; and we desire to “continue with one accord in prayer and supplication” “until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest”. (*From the “Liverpool Minutes”*)



Section eight

Taking part in the consultation

We want and need to hear your reflections on the vision laid out by the Ministries Committee in this consultation document.

We welcome reflections from anyone with an interest in our proposals. We especially welcome reflections from institutions and colleagues mentioned in the document. We also welcome reflections from partners, organisations and other committees, within Methodism and beyond, as well as from representatives of other denominations and Partner Churches. Last but not least, we welcome reflections from those who hold office or membership within the Methodist Church. Please tell us how the vision we have outlined can best support your ministry and equip your journey of discipleship.

It would be very helpful when responding to indicate whether you are responding as an individual or representing the views of an organisation, a meeting, or a group of people.

We welcome reflections from 17 October 2011 to 23 December 2011.

We would prefer reflections to be submitted online at:

www.methodist.org.uk/fruitfulfield

Reflections can also be sent to:

**The Fruitful Field
Methodist Church House
25 Marylebone Road
London NW1 5JR**

fruitfulfield@methodistchurch.org.uk

Doug Swanney, Siôn Rhys Evans and Paul Taylor from the Connexional Team, as well as the officers of the Ministries Committee, can be contacted about *The Fruitful Field* at the above email and postal addresses, and through the Helpdesk on 020 7486 5502.

Further copies of this document can be provided by writing to the above email or postal addresses, and through the Helpdesk on 020 7486 5502.

A PDF of this document is available from:

www.methodist.org.uk/fruitfulfield

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