

Training for Ordained Ministries in the Methodist Church 2017-18

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Action Required	To note
Resolution	58/1. The Council receives the report.

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	To provide the Council with an update regarding training for ordained ministries.
Main Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • The nature of ministerial formation • Academic programmes • Length of training • Governance and accountability

Introduction

1. Following the decisions of the Conference in 2012, the Queen's Foundation is responsible, under the oversight of the Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee (MCPOC), for the initial ministerial training of all accepted candidates for ordained ministries, as well as working with probationers and some others referred to Queen's oversight. In the connexional year 2017-18, the Foundation has worked with 68 student presbyters and deacons (30 part-time and 38 full-time; 9 deacons and 59 presbyters) and 46 probationer ministers. For the purposes of comparison, the numbers in initial ministerial training in 2016-17 were 65 (35 full-time and 30 part-time; 9 deacons and 56 presbyters) and, in 2015-16, 78 (37 part-time and 41 full-time; 10 deacons and 68 presbyters). They form about 40% of the Foundation's learning and formational community, alongside a similar number of Anglican ordinands and curates, and a smaller number of Anglican Readers, Pentecostal ministerial candidates and pastors, and independent students, including those undertaking continuing ministerial development programmes and PhD students.
2. The majority of Methodist student ministers on programmes of initial ministerial training at the Queen's Foundation are accepted candidates of our Conference. A small number each year are at Queen's as recommended candidates from other Churches or Conferences, or transferring ministers for whom a transfer panel has identified a particular training and formational need.
3. There are three basic pathways, among which there is considerable flexibility to respond to the needs of student ministers and the Church.
 - On the **full-time pathway**, student ministers may move to Birmingham, or they may commute daily from nearby areas, or commute weekly, to engage with the Monday-Thursday timetable of courses and activities. Student ministers are able to engage in the weekly commuting pattern from a large area of the country, with some arriving on Sunday afternoon to help with travel. This pathway is supported by a bursary given by the Methodist Church, in ways currently unchanged from the system before 2012, though the Ministries Committee has recently approved changes which are

due to take effect from September 2018, to give further support to groups who have found the financial constraints particularly difficult, especially families with children.

- The **part-time pathway**, the Queen's Connexional Course (QCC), enables student ministers to engage with initial ministerial training through periods of residence and online/distance learning. The course consists of seven weekends and one residential week each year, with a pattern of online learning including seminars via Skype, as well as other elements of engagement with local churches. The course is named as 'connexional' not only because it is designed specifically for the learning and formation of Methodist student ministers, but also because it is designed to enable access to learning and formation from across the whole of the Connexion. In the last three years, student ministers from the Channel Islands, the north of Scotland, Cornwall, the north-east of England, Kent – and all places in between – have been enabled to undertake ministerial training through this pathway.
- The third pathway is the **Circuit-based Learning Pathway (CBLP)**. This pathway began in September 2016 and is still developing, in a pilot phase. Students are initially allocated a place on the full time or part time pathway (as above) but may express an interest in CBLP, either at allocation or early in their training. Following a discernment process student presbyters can be given permission to continue their ministerial formation through CBLP. This involves them in intensive learning in two contexts: first, in a Circuit chosen for this purpose, where they engage in planned ministerial practice and learning for about half their time; second, in learning through Queen's, again for about half their time. As full time learners they are supported by a bursary. All learning pathways engage with ministerial practice in Circuits, but CBLP gives a particular extended opportunity for this, strengthening the partnership in learning between a Circuit and Queen's, and strengthening a way of learning that particularly benefits some students.

4. The staff team at the Queen's Foundation consists of nine Methodist members of staff (seven of them full-time; six presbyters, two deacons and a lay person) as well as 11 others (Anglican; Pentecostal; a mix of lay and ordained). Three tutors have particular responsibilities for supporting BAME students. The Principal is an ordained Anglican and has served the Methodist Church in an authorised category for over 20 years. The Director of Methodist Formation is stationed to The Queen's Foundation as an appointment under the control of the Council. The Methodist staff at the Queen's Foundation are involved to varying degrees with local Circuits, through preaching appointments, particular targeted pastoral support, and responding to requests. Many are involved connexionally with a number of committees (including Faith and Order; Safeguarding, Ministries and Heritage), projects and one-off events. The staff team is in these varied ways a resource for the whole Connexion.
5. With all student ministers now at the Queen's Foundation for their ministerial training and formation, it has been noted, by members of the committees concerned, that processes of the Allocations Panel and the Initial Stationing Sub-Committee have become more efficient and more focused. Overall strategic planning is also more straightforward. This has led to developments for instance in probation studies and in the development of new proposals for financial support for those on full-time pathways.
6. At the request of the Ministries Committee in 2015, consultation began on the development of a programme of probation studies that could take advantage of the larger, gathered cohort of probationers who had trained at Queen's and build coherently on their initial ministerial training. This includes enabling those who choose and are given permission to do so to continue to completion of a BA or MA with the Common Awards programme (or in a small number of cases a Newman University MA programme). The programme began in September 2016 and was fully operative by September 2017. The programme, which fulfils the requirements of probation studies, is built intentionally around the shape and dynamics of the experience and practice of ministry in its early years. It consists of two residential periods of 3-4 days each in the year, and this pattern of

gathering probationers together for residential periods has enabled support, the sharing of experience and a deepening of theological reflection that is rooted firmly in the ministerial practice of probationers. Most probationers choose to follow this programme because it provides continuity of learning and because of the value of being part of a cohort which was developed during initial training. In formal terms the programme consists of two modules per year, which can be taken for academic credit or not. Some probationers take the option of one module each year which structures their engagement with the 'Orientation Project' (in year one of probation) and 'Gospel in Context Project' (in year two) required by standing orders, rather than both modules. For those working for academic credit with Common Awards/Durham University or Newman University, this study programme represents a reduction in workload from some previous patterns. Since this is a programme of probation studies, all matters of the oversight of probation remain in the hands of District Probationers' Committees and MCPOC.

The nature of ministerial formation

7. The programmes of initial ministerial training and other programmes at Queen's operate with a number of key formational principles:
 - Queen's is an ecumenical foundation and values diversity in many forms. Most students at Queen's come from the Methodist Church, the Church of England and Pentecostal or independent churches. There is also a smaller number of independent students and research students who come from wider denominational backgrounds. Queen's has an explicit commitment to supporting the leadership of Black and Minority Ethnic Christians and church leaders, especially through partnership with Pentecostal and Black Majority Churches in the region and beyond.
 - Ministerial formation at Queen's is designed to integrate many elements: the study of theology that is vocationally-focused; the worshipping community; links to ministry in local situations through weekly engagement and more concentrated periods of placement; attention to mission through all the 'five marks of mission' drawing together cross-cultural awareness, practices of evangelism and commitment to leadership in social justice; and personal development.
 - Queen's has a long history of engagement with World Church partners. It has a particular relationship with the Theological College of Lanka, through a capacity building programme in theological education where faculty members have been enabled to study at post graduate level with four completing MA studies and two currently undertaking doctoral research, studying 'at a distance' but coming to Queen's for periods of intensive learning. Queen's is also active in MTSE (the Methodist Theological Schools in Europe) with two members of staff having been its chair in the last 4 years. This enables us to build connections with European Methodism which is beginning to foster student exchanges and the possibilities of some shared learning through the e-academy. A Global Christianity programme is designed to support student exchanges and encounters, capacity building through partnerships with other theological colleges, especially ecumenical institutions in hard pressed circumstances, and a leadership development programme of opportunities for sabbatical and scholarship study. Stringent visa regimes and reduction in funding for these programmes make sustaining this work a challenge, but it is essential to the learning for student ministers to be engaged with, learning from and belonging to the wider world church.
 - Teaching and learning at Queen's are designed to enable students from very varied educational starting points to develop and learn in ways that suit them. In Methodist terms, Queen's takes all accepted candidates through programmes which enable them to be ready for stationing and for continued formation and training in probation. It is an educational principle that students are on a path where they learn to learn, and begin to practise enabling others' learning.
 - Every student is supported and challenged by a personal tutor, and all tutors are skilled in responding to the needs of individuals as well as the work of forming a learning and worshipping community.

Academic Programmes

8. Most student ministers at Queen's and a number of probationers follow a suite of awards validated by Durham University. This is known as 'Common Awards': programmes designed in conjunction with theological education institutions, with the involvement and endorsement of the Methodist Church and the Church of England, to engage theological study with mission and ministry. A small number of student ministers and probationers engage with Newman University programmes, particularly the MA in Theology and Transformative Practice, for those with particular specialist interests. For the majority, accredited programmes are an effective way of shaping rigorous and accountable learning, but in a small number of cases (six in 2017-18) a student minister may have a more flexible, bespoke programme designed for them, which ensures that they cover a good range of disciplines and approaches and continue to engage with their formational cohort. There is also a range of mechanisms for learning support, for instance English language tuition and support for students with specific learning needs, such as dyslexia or dyspraxia. Provisions for learning support have been made for eight students this year.
9. The Common Awards programme enables student ministers to study for academic credit towards a Certificate or Diploma in Higher Education and towards a BA. There is also a range of other programmes available for those with prior learning – a Graduate Diploma, a Post Graduate Certificate, and a Post Graduate Diploma. Those who have previously studied to Diploma or degree level in theology may be able to pursue Masters programmes, either through Common Awards or through Newman University. (Post-graduate programmes are more easily accessed by those on a full-time pathway.) Most student ministers study up to Diploma level over the course of either 2 years' full-time or 3 years' part-time, and those who continue learning with Queen's as probationers have opportunities to complete a BA or a PG programme. There are currently 8 Methodist student ministers and 15 probationers on postgraduate programmes.
10. Decisions about the suitability of particular programmes are made through admissions processes with advice from the Methodist Church's Allocations Panel. There is also regular review as student ministers engage with theological study so that some may be encouraged to progress from engagement with the Certificate in Higher Education straight to a Masters programme, or from the successful completion of a Diploma to Masters studies. Such decisions are always guided by the overarching priority of determining what constitutes the best way to prepare a person for ordained ministry.
11. Programmes at the Queen's Foundation are supported by a strong focus on research. A Director of Research oversees not only the PhD programme but also supports all staff in their continued research and scholarship. Queen's is unusual among the Churches' theological education institutions in having a strong PhD programme, with typically 30 students pursuing doctoral research at any time over the last 20 years. They are supported by Queen's staff as supervisors as well as others engaged in our research community as Honorary Research Fellows and International Research Consultants, including seven Methodist scholars. Senior Methodist Scholars, such as Professor Frances Young and Professor Clive Marsh, are involved in forming a strong research culture of seminars and public events. The PhD programme is possible because of the creative partnership with the Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam, whose theological faculty of over 30 professors and 400 PhD students is ranked 5th in the world in the latest listing.¹ The research culture also enables the identification and support of those with the potential to study at higher levels and develop as theological educators. Through and beyond Queen's, staff are involved with the Methodist Studies Seminar and with a range of theological societies and conferences.

¹ In the QS Top Universities ranking for Theology, Divinity and Religious Studies:
<https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/university-subject-rankings/2018/theology-divinity-religious-studies>.

12. Queen's is one of the few Alternative Providers of Higher Education among Churches' theological education institutions. This means that Queen's is subject to exactly the same academic oversight and accreditation as a University, with accreditation by the QAA and institutional oversight by the Higher Education Funding Council. The benefits of this are that Queen's is rigorous and focused about quality assurance, that it can access public funds for Disabled Students' Allowance and Student Finance (for self-funding students), and is licensed as a Trusted Sponsor for Tier 4 student visas. All of these are of direct benefit to the Church but the financial costs and administrative burdens of compliance with the regulatory framework have increased hugely over the last five years.

Length of training

13. Since the ending of Foundation Training in 2007², there has been a basic pattern of two years' training for full-time students (effectively 21 months) and three years' training for part-time students. The Allocations Panel may allocate to a different pattern where it sees particular reason to do so, for instance to an expected three year full-time pathway for someone beginning doctoral studies as happened in recent years. The period of training can also be extended for formational reasons, including the potential for further study, where the local Oversight Committee and MCPOC deem it appropriate. This would happen after a student minister has begun their formation.
14. The Training Review Group recommended that the standard expectation for length of ministerial training should extend by one year for each of the pathways. There was a positive response to that recommendation from the Methodist Council. While that proposal could prove helpful for some students, the Ministries Committee would need time to consider all the implications of such a change. The question of whether *all* student ministers, regardless of their previous background and experience, need longer in training should be examined. There would be questions about how the extra year could most profitably be used (it is not necessarily obvious that requiring full-time students to study to degree level in that further year would be of benefit to all student ministers and to the church). There would also be financial and other resource implications to be examined if student ministers spent longer in initial ministerial training.

Governance and accountability

15. The Queen's Foundation prepares Methodist student ministers for initial stationing under the oversight of two (local) Oversight Committees, accountable for their work to MCPOC. 45 lay and ordained people from beyond Queen's itself are involved in this work, most as accompanists for individual student ministers. Together they examine and make recommendations on the progress of individual students and offer critical companionship and advice to the Methodist tutorial staff in the work they undertake.
16. The curriculum and learning pathways are developed to meet the learning outcomes for those at the point of stationing and ordination which are stipulated by the Church, using the framework of Common Awards, whose modules and programmes have been created by practitioners for this purpose. The pathways and programmes offered by Queen's are validated and reviewed through the Quality in Formation processes and practices which the Methodist Church is part of; through the processes agreed with the University of Durham of external examiners and annual reporting; and through the processes determined by the QAA for Higher Education Alternative Providers.

² 'Talking of God, Acting for God: Report of the Training Institutions Review Group', par.3.2.1, *Agenda of Conference*, 2007

Queen's institutionally is subject to Periodic Review (often called inspection) by the Quality in Formation panel (the last review was conducted in 2013 with a team of Methodist and Anglican reviewers).

17. The Foundation and the Methodist Church share a Memorandum of Understanding to define and describe their partnership, which is currently under review.
18. The Foundation is governed by a Governing body of 14 people. The Methodist Council nominates two governors; the Church of England nominates two governors. The remaining governors are co-opted to provide the range of skills and experience necessary, and to maintain ecumenical balance. There are currently four Methodist governors, four Anglican governors, and three governors from other Churches (and three vacancies). The Articles of Association were amended in 2013 to ensure this strong Methodist representation, the nominating role of the Methodist Council, and to ensure that the Articles cannot be changed without the consent of the four nominated governors. The current president of Governors is a senior Methodist minister, the Revd Ken Howcroft. The Principal and Director of Methodist Formation currently report to the Network Committee and the Ministries Committee.

*****RESOLUTION**

58/1. The Council receives the report.