

## 40. Westminster College Oxford Trust Ltd

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### 1. Introduction

Westminster College Oxford Trust Ltd is the body whose board is appointed by the Conference to oversee the continuing relationship between the Methodist Church and Oxford Brookes University, following the merger between Westminster College Oxford and Oxford Brookes approved by the Conference in 1999. It is the managing trustee of the property leased to the university under that agreement.

### 2. Activities

The board has continued to meet regularly to scrutinise the operation of the merger agreements, including careful monitoring of the implementation of the lease, and to discharge its defined duties. Each year there is a formal Liaison Meeting with the university Registrar and the Chair of the university board of governors. Besides all these regular activities, the board has been actively engaged with the university as it develops its estates strategy and seeks discussions leading to the agreement of a new lease.

The board has been active in setting and reviewing its objectives for each year; these are included in its annual governance report submitted to the Conference Office. In the financial domain, the use made of the subvention funds which support Church-related activity in the university is scrutinised at each meeting, with the related subvention accounts (reviewing actual spend against budget). Investment performance is closely watched and returns are maximised in a way which is consistent with prudence and operational need. Continued efforts are made in the use of endowment fund income to ensure that student awards continue to match current academic and pastoral needs. Reports from key university officers are made on an annual cycle, and periodically from the Executive Committee of the Westminster Society.

### 3. University Academic Developments

Professor Anne-Marie Kilday, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, within which all Westminster-related activity takes place, has offered to the board full and helpful reports on these areas.

The Faculty's financial position has improved dramatically in the last year (significantly ahead of schedule) and therefore financial pressures have lessened. Among the areas of current achievement are a successful series of research seminars in Education and in Philosophy and a cross-disciplinary multi-faith open discussion series on various topics related to religion and theology. Recent appointment policy reflects the Faculty's commitment to support the continuation of matters religious and theological in the context of Philosophy.

### 4. School of Education

Primary allocations have been significantly lowered by the National College for Teaching and Leadership across Higher Education institutions in the current year, with recruitment to primary places down 25% nationally. As a consequence of these external shifts, the School is working to increase recruitment in other areas and to create alternative revenue streams through consultancy, and through its varied offer of continuing professional development courses to targeted sections of the teaching profession. The Primary Science Teaching Trust

has been funding research and development work within the School worth over £200,000 over a three-year programme. The Faculty is strengthening its link with Kyoto University in Japan, with two staff members recently visiting Kyoto to develop a project focused on the mentoring of new teachers.

#### **5. Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History**

The Centre has been engaged with the Director of Scholarship, Research and Innovation (SRI) in the Connexional Team in discussing possible collaboration. The Centre has agreed that it will support the SRI activities of the Church by appointing a number of Methodist Church Fellows. The first two of these, the Revd Dr Peter Howson and the Revd Dr Tim Macquiban, have been appointed. Following the extension of the Oxford-Manchester Methodist Studies seminars to include the Wesley Study Centre, St John's College, Durham, it has subsequently been agreed that Wesley House, Cambridge will also join in the organisation of the seminar which will happen biennially in each centre. There are plans to include other Methodist institutions in these seminars.

Professor Gibson and Dr Peter Forsaith have contributed to many conferences and events, and published and supervised research work in the area of Methodism and Church History. The Centre continued its support (in conjunction with Wesley Memorial Church, Oxford and Lincoln College, Oxford) for the Annual Wesley Day Lecture, which was delivered by Professor J C D Clark on 26 May 2015; he spoke on 'John Wesley and Jacobitism'. The Centre's annual Ecclesiastical Colloquium took place on 4 June 2015, and among the speakers were: Dr Peter Forsaith on 'The Methodist debt to the Huguenots', and Dr Lionel Laborie on 'Huguenots and Early Methodism at the Fetter Lane Society'. In November 2015 a special issue of *The Journal of Religious History, Literature and Culture* was published including papers from the Tercentenary George Whitefield Conference, sponsored by the Centre in 2014.

In the wake of the decision not to continue to offer an undergraduate programme in religion and theology, it has been agreed that engagement with religion across the department of History, Philosophy and Religion will be supported with a study-leave award which will release a member of the department to work on research related to religion. Among the three visiting research fellows hosted by the Centre during 2015 was Dr Ulrike Schuler from Reutlingen Methodist Seminary in Germany in April 2015, working on 'Women in European Methodism'.

During 2015 selected works from the Methodist Modern Art Collection were exhibited as follows: Wrexham – University and Church; Ballymena – The Braid Arts Centre; and Epworth – Old Rectory (seven works). Eighteen larger works from the collection are currently stored at the National Conservation Service, Upper Heyford, the Methodist Church having full membership of this organisation. In October 2015 the Centre was given a collection of papers relating to opposition to the 1960s Anglican-Methodist unity scheme, including many from Professor A K Barrett, and subsequent church relations and groups.

#### **6. Chaplaincy**

The chapel was surrounded by scaffolding for the summer and most of the first semester, for essential work to the roof and guttering; this rendered the main entrance to the chapel unusable for several months, although a regular pattern of worship has been maintained. Morning Prayer is said in the Westminster Chapel daily, with a Roman Catholic liturgy led by a staff member of the School of Education on Friday mornings. Among the special services held in the chapel were those for Remembrance Day and Holocaust Memorial Day. The Carol Service attracted very large numbers as did a Memorial Service for an Old Westministerian from the early 1960s, Bob Martyn. (The Chaplain serves as Honorary Secretary for the

Westminster Society.) The Chapel has been used by the local community, for instance by the Oxford Gospel Choir, which subsequently took part in the Carol Service.

The Revd Dr Robert Bates, as Westminster Chaplain, continues as a member of the Chaplaincy Council and of the Multi-Faith Advisory Board. The Chaplain is a member of the planning group for the Oxford Cathedral Civic Service (October 2016) which will celebrate 125 years of nursing education in Oxford. He has also accepted an invitation to join the Oxford Diocese Education Advisory Group. He has led quiet days at the Convent of the Assumption and will lead the last of these in May 2016 prior to the sale of the House and the dispersal of the remaining members of the Community.

The Chaplain continues to act as Director of Studies for the Northampton District Probationers and to offer services to the Oxford Circuit; he regularly leads worship at the Cowley Road and Lime Walk Methodist Churches.

## **7. Estates**

The Director of Estates has continued to report to the board, outlining improvements and additions to the estate; for some of such works the company's permission is required. The Green Flag Award has been retained for a further twelve months until July 2016. Some of the major works in 2015 concerned the Chapel: replacement and refurbishment of windows, fascia, guttering, downpipes, and rotten timbers; roof repairs and external repainting of some areas; repairs to the bell tower and the clock face.

The Estates Department is starting to plan for significant investment in the coming years to bring buildings up to a higher standard and to ensure they are fit to meet the teaching, service and accommodation needs for the site.

## **8. University Estates Strategy**

Some members of the Conference may recall that in 2013 a full report was brought upon possible developments arising from the university's evolving estates strategy, and the appropriate response to it by the Methodist Church. The consequent discussion resulted in the Conference's resolution of consent, as required under the Declaration of Trust, to the grant of a new lease of 99 years (or an extension of the current lease) subject to stated conditions, if this were to be sought by the university, with the details of any such lease requiring the approval of the Methodist Council. The board was directed to bring a report on any further progress to subsequent Conferences. At the Conferences of 2014 and 2015, it was reported that the university was continuing to explore very carefully the possible options open to it, and that no final decisions had yet been made. The university has now declared its commitment to the Harcourt Hill site and has approached the Trust with outline terms for a new lease. Discussions on these terms are ongoing with appropriate professional advice and support being sought to inform the negotiations where necessary.

## **9. Board**

Mrs Susan Howdle (Chair), Mrs Susan Barratt, Dr Clifford Marshall and the Revd Dr Martin Wellings have continued to serve as members of the board, along with Mrs Ann Leck (Secretary of the Conference's nominee). Dr Clive Norris has joined the board.

## **\*\*\*RESOLUTION**

### **40/1. The Conference received the Report.**

### **Additional Report (Daily Record 8/17)**

Section 40 of the Agenda contains the main report of Westminster College Oxford Trust Ltd (WCOT). Section 8 of that report refers to the earlier decision of the Conference of 2013, consenting to a new lease of 99 years (or extension of the present lease) by the Trust to Oxford Brookes University (OBU), with approval of the final form of the lease being delegated to the Methodist Council within certain parameters.

Since the 2016 report went to press, negotiations have been continuing, and as a result of those negotiations and following discussions between representatives of WCOT and of the Methodist Council, it has been agreed to bring this supplementary report, recommending a resolution which amends in certain aspects the effect of the 2013 resolution of delegation to the council. This would authorise the council to approve, if the council thought this to be appropriate, certain terms for the lease which differ from those originally envisaged. The relevant provisions are as follows:

- a) First, the originally proposed terms included one providing that “the permitted use would be use in accordance with the educational purposes currently specified by the Declaration of Trust”. It is now recommended that the lease could encompass a somewhat broader use of the property by the university than originally envisaged, although still in “social areas” connected with teaching and learning. This would enable a more flexible use of the estate by the university, which would be reflected in the income available to the Trust to fulfil its primary charitable educational purposes under the Declaration of Trust by which it is governed.
- b) Secondly, the originally proposed terms included a provision for the payment of a commercial rent (instead of the current subvention) whilst also anticipating a premium in the form of a cash sum payable by OBU for the grant of the new lease. It is now possible that the premium may be paid in instalments rather than as a lump sum or be encompassed in the level of rental payments recommended by the surveyor acting for WCOT.
- c) Finally, it was expected that the lease would be within the security of tenure provisions of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 Part II (enabling OBU to obtain a renewal at the end of the lease, subject to the landlord’s rights to refuse on certain statutory grounds). It is now less certain that the lease will contain this provision, and flexibility on this point is requested.

### **\*\*\*RESOLUTION**

**40/2. The Conference received the additional report and, pursuant to the delegation by the Conference of 2013 (Daily Record 2013 5/16/3) to the Methodist Council of the approval of a new lease or, alternatively, the extension of the current lease by Westminster College Oxford Trust Ltd to Oxford Brookes University on the basis of the terms set out in paragraph 5 of the Trust’s Supplementary Report to that Conference (DR 2013 5/16/2), amended its delegation so as to authorise the Methodist Council to approve the new or extended lease with further discretion over the terms as set out under paragraphs a) to c) above.**