

REVIEW OF WESLEY COLLEGE BRISTOL

Basic Information

Contact Name and Details	Ken Wales, Chair of the SRC Ken@wales9421.freemove.co.uk
Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	Decision
Draft Resolution	<p>1. The Council extends its thanks to all the members of the Wesley College Bristol Review Group and particularly its Chair, the Revd Clifford Bellamy, and acknowledges with gratitude the major piece of work they have done for the benefit of the Connexion.</p> <p>2. With regret, the Council recommends that Wesley College Bristol should now be closed and instructs the General Secretary to bring a report and appropriate Resolutions to the Methodist Conference to that effect.</p> <p>3. The Council instructs the SRC to prepare contingency plans to implement the closure of the College, should that be the decision of the Conference.</p>
Alternative Options to Consider, if Any	Further development of the Review Group's preferred option (see ¶12).

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	This paper outlines the analysis and recommendations of the SRC, in response to the report of the Wesley College Bristol Review Group. Three sections of the Review Group's report are also included.
Main Points	<p>A. The issues raised during the SRC's discussion of the Review Group's report [¶4-11], including the emphasis placed on physical institutions over and against more contextual models of learning [¶7], the other institutions over which the Church has effective control [¶9], and the high cost of the model of learning provided by the College [¶10].</p> <p>B. The key factors that led the SRC to feel the Review Group's preferred option could not be recommended [¶12-15], including (i) the over-optimistic forecast of student numbers and income, (ii) the major destabilising effect the preferred option would have on other institutions, (iii) the richer ecumenical learning environment available at other institutions, (iv) the reliance on Baptist capital investment and revenue expenditure, (v) the need to invest several million pounds in the existing buildings thus prioritising the College over other learning institutions to which a commitment has been made, and (vi) the difficulty of making a ten year commitment to the College, especially in the present financial circumstances.</p> <p>C. The SRC's recommendations to the Council regarding the closure of the College and the future use of the site [¶16-18, 21], including further work with regard to the needs of the South & South West Regional Training Network and the College's library and heritage collection [¶19-20].</p> <p>D. Strands of work which would become immediately urgent if the Conference is minded to agree with the recommendation for closure [¶22-24].</p>

Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	The full report of the Wesley College Bristol Review Group NB Sections 1, 8 and 9 of the report – comprising its introduction and executive summary, the options considered by the Review Group, and the group’s proposals – are included here, after the SRC’s paper.
Consultations	A list of those consulted during the review is included as Appendix 3 (p. 93) of the Review Group’s report

Summary of Impact

Standing Orders	None
Faith and Order	None
Financial	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Proceeds from the sale of the site would likely revert to the Methodist Council’s restricted Fund for Training (see SO 362(4)). 2. Transitional costs (eg mothballing costs) would likely be incurred during the process of implementing the closure of the College, though these could be offset in part by revenue expenditure savings. 3. Accepting the Review Group’s preferred option would involve long-term financial commitment to the College, including but not limited to (a) a continued substantial capital investment through the site and buildings, and (b) a commitment to invest several million pounds in the existing buildings; in the short and medium-term, a commitment to higher revenue expenditure would also be required. Concerns about projected student numbers and income (see ¶13.i and ¶13.iv) raise concerns about the overall financial viability of the preferred option.
Personnel	Four presbyters are appointed to the College, and some of the lay staff employed at the College are Methodist Council employees. Personnel advice would form a key part of work on the formal legal, financial and human resources components of closure (see ¶22.iii).
Legal	Some of the College’s educational and commercial partnerships are on a formal footing, and legal advice about their termination would form a key part of work on the formal legal, financial and human resources components of closure (see ¶22.iii).
Wider Connexional	The College is of great historical significance, and has played an important part in the formation of Methodist identity more widely, not least through being the place of ministerial training for generations of Methodist ministers.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Some of the College’s educational and commercial partnerships are with ecumenical partners, and any withdrawal from such partnerships would form a part of the orderly and sensitive winding down of the educational foundation (see ¶22.i).
Risk	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. See factors identified above. 2. The Review Group and the SRC agree that it is urgent, in the interest of many parties, that some decisions are now made about the future direction of the College (see ¶11).

REVIEW OF WESLEY COLLEGE BRISTOL

Background

1. The 2007 Conference decided that full-time pre-ordination training would be concentrated at three institutions. It chose not to include Wesley College Bristol amongst these three, meaning that the college would not normally receive such students. This removed from the College a previous principal focus and a significant income stream which inevitably brought major challenges about its future direction. In 2008 the Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC) agreed with the College the terms of a review of the College, to be brought to the Methodist Council.

2. The report of the Review Group is now complete and is available for download from the Methodist Council's pages on the Methodist Church's website (www.methodist.org.uk). This paper outlines the analysis and recommendations of the SRC, produced after the committee's detailed consideration of the full Review Group report. Sections 1, 8 and 9 of the Review Group report – comprising its introduction and executive summary, the options considered by the Review Group, and the group's proposals – are also reproduced here.

3. The Review Group was given a major and complex task and the SRC would first of all wish to place on record its gratitude to the group for a clear and helpful report within the Terms of Reference that were agreed. Particular thanks are due to the Revd Clifford Bellamy, who chaired the Review Group and undertook the bulk of the drafting of its report in the midst of a busy professional life.

Consideration by the SRC

4. At its February residential meeting, the SRC devoted a substantial amount of time to consideration of the Review Group report, which all its members had received well in advance. The Chair of the Review Group attended the SRC, offered a substantial exposition of the report and shared in discussion with the committee. The committee subsequently had two further sessions of discussion amongst its own members. This process makes clear the immense contribution the Review Group has made in addressing, and helping wider understanding of, the issues now before the College and hence the Connexion.

5. The SRC was conscious of the need to proceed carefully with regard to an institution that is of great historical significance. Wesley College has not only been important to the life of Methodism in the Bristol area and South West region, but also in the formation of Methodist identity more widely, not least through being the place of ministerial training for generations of Methodist ministers. Nonetheless, the SRC also noted the concerns reported by the Review Group about the condition of the buildings on the Bristol site, and acknowledged that, even before the 2007 Conference decision, questions had been raised about the viability of the College.

6. Like the Review Group, the SRC was attracted to thinking expounded to the review by Professor Jennifer Bone and summarised in Appendix 5 of the report. The committee was enthusiastic about a vision for the learning of the whole people of God, which seeks to make creative use of the opportunities provided by our setting in contemporary British culture and world Methodism.

7. The SRC was, however, less confident than the Review Group that future learning patterns for the whole people of God would be as strongly based around physical institutions as they have been in the past. The growth of distance learning, for example, which has indeed been part of the Wesley College story, may well accelerate as the options for online communication multiply. Moreover, the SRC kept in mind the Conference's emphasis on nurturing the educating skills of presbyters, deacons and local preachers, so that a learning culture becomes firmly embedded in the regular life of every circuit.

8. Certainly the SRC was clear that from now on, any decisions about individual institutions must be made in the context of emerging thinking about the Connexion's overall approach to learning and development. The proposed Ministries Committee will provide a focus for thinking in this area.

9. The SRC noted that the report frequently makes use of the point that "Wesley College, Bristol is now the only theological college for initial ministerial learning under the immediate governance of the Methodist Council and whose site is under the entire ownership of the Methodist Church in Great Britain" (paragraph 4.4). Without doubting that this is strictly speaking true, the SRC felt that the more relevant point was that there remain a number of other institutions over which the Church has effective control, and that a number of these (for example Cliff College and the Guy Chester Centre) have a mature expertise in the provision of educational opportunities for the whole people of God.

10. The SRC also noted how expensive the model of training provided at Wesley College has now become, given the concentration of full-time pre-ordination training at other institutions. The Review Group point out (page 135) that in the current connexional year the number of ministerial students at Wesley College is identical to the number enrolled with the ecumenical course in the South East (SEITE); however the average annual cost to the Connexion of a SEITE student is £6k while the average cost of a Wesley College student is £38k.

11. In considering the report, the SRC also recognised that there would never be a time when there was complete information on all relevant aspects relating to the review and shared the view of the Review Group that it is urgent, in the interest of many parties, that some decisions are now made about the future direction of Wesley College.

The Preferred Option

12. The SRC discussed very thoroughly the Review Group's preferred option. The option envisages the College performing a new role within the Connexion as a major provider of part-time lay and ministerial learning, working in close partnership with Bristol Baptist College, and incorporating the ministry of Methodist International House, Bristol (MIH). The College would remain based in the existing premises but on the understanding that the Baptists and the Bristol District (the latter using the proceeds of sale of the existing MIH building) would each provide a significant minority share of the capital sums required for urgent refurbishment of the premises. Significant additional revenue funding, most notably from a major projected increase in student numbers, is also envisaged under this option. However as the SRC explored this composite option, it increasingly came to the conviction that, sadly, the problems with it were, when taken in aggregate, prohibitive.

13. Some of the key factors that led the SRC to feel the preferred option could not be recommended were the following:

- i) The Review Group seemed very optimistic about potential student numbers and therefore the income that would accompany them. Although the report notes (paragraph 4.10) that since 2005 the number of students has increased by over 50%, this is only true of a simple headcount. The growth has been concentrated in part-time students and those on short courses; the number of residential students, for whom the facilities had originally been designed, has fallen. If the more normal measure of student full-time equivalents is used, it is clear that the overall student usage of the college has been in decline.
- ii) The Chair of the Review Group confirmed that for the preferred option to be educationally or financially viable, it was likely to require a cohort of students drawn from well beyond the local catchment area of the College or the South & South West Regional Training Network. The SRC concluded that, in practice, the preferred option

was only realistic if Wesley College Bristol became a prime centre for the whole Connexion for lay and ministerial learning. If this were achieved, it would have a major destabilising effect on the policies and developments of other institutions, whose current viability depends on attracting students from beyond their local area.

- iii) While the SRC was attracted to the ecumenical richness of sharing learning facilities with the Baptists, it noted that a still richer ecumenical learning environment was already available at several other institutions and that the ecumenical factor in itself did not justify investing in the Bristol site.
- iv) The report is clear that the viability of the preferred option critically depends on the provisional conversations with the Baptists producing not only a substantial initial capital injection, but also a very large cohort of Baptist students on a sustained basis into the future. The SRC noted the additional risk created by the fact that the Baptist College was an independent institution with no guaranteed support from the Baptist Union.
- v) The SRC noted that current estimates suggest that several million pounds would need to be invested in the existing buildings in the short term before the preferred option could be implemented. The SRC felt that even if the Connexion were able to raise this amount of money for investing in training institutions, priority would most probably be given to those institutions that the Conference has chosen for full-time pre-ordination training or to those institutions which already provide lay and ministerial training for the whole Connexion.
- vi) The SRC believed that acceptance of the preferred option, with the direct financial implications and the indirect consequences for other institutions, could only possibly be justified if the Connexion were in a position to make at least a ten year commitment to supporting Wesley College. In present financial circumstances, the SRC did not feel able to so recommend, even if some of the other issues could be resolved.

14. Overall, the SRC was not persuaded that crucial assumptions behind the preferred option were realistic or realisable, in the short, medium or longer term, given that the decisions of the 2007 Conference are unlikely to be reversed. Indeed the financial implications of even sustaining the pattern agreed at that Conference are proving extremely challenging. The SRC was therefore not able to support the preferred option as a viable way forward for Wesley College Bristol.

15. The SRC was content to accept the Review Group's assurances that it had considered all reasonable options, and that none of the other options outlined in the report were viable. Having concluded that it was not able to support the preferred option, the SRC concluded that it had to concur with the Review Group's conclusion that the closure of the College was the only other alternative.

Recommendations to the Council

16. In the light of its study of the Review Group's comprehensive report, the SRC believes that, with great regret, it has to recommend to the Council the closure of Wesley College and the relinquishing by the College of the site.

17. The SRC noted the concern expressed by the Review Group about any attempt to sell the existing site in the current economic and planning climate. However, it is clear to the SRC that immediate sale is not an option, as there will need to be a period for an ordered wind-down of the College's educational and commercial activities. More importantly, the SRC believed that the priority should be to make a strategic decision about the future of the College as an educational institution, without being unduly influenced by the potential for liquidating assets.

18. Indeed, the SRC would make as its second recommendation that the Council, having decided to close the College, makes no immediate decisions about the future of the site. It may be that some future work, either sponsored by the Methodist Church or by some other training agencies, might be able to use some or all of the existing facilities. Furthermore, the SRC will be bringing to the Council further details of a project to assess various aspects of training and learning, including the wider viability of the full range of physical learning institutions over which the Church has effective control. This work will enable decisions to be made about the appropriate degree of continued capital investment in physical institutions, and the appropriate focus for ongoing revenue expenditure. The need for this work has been underlined by the Review Group report itself. The SRC strongly recommends it would be better to see the fruits of this work before making a decision about the Bristol site.

19. Another component of the project mentioned above will be to consider the needs of the South & South West Regional Training Network, of which Wesley College is currently the core institution. The comments from the Review Group about the difficulties of the geography of that particular region underline the importance of the proposed work on modes of delivery and the place of physical institutions in such a territory.

20. Whatever the long term future of the Bristol site, the SRC would draw the attention of the Council to the College's important library and heritage collection. Proper provision for those unique assets would need to be made as part of any proposals for the longer term.

21. Given the importance of this decision, and the way that this is derived from previous Conference decisions, the SRC recommends to the Council that a final decision about the closure of the College should be taken by the Conference.

Implications of Closure

22. If the Conference is minded to agree with the recommendation to close Wesley College Bristol, the SRC agrees with the Review Group that there will be several important strands of work which would become immediately urgent. They would include:

- i) The orderly and sensitive winding down of the educational foundation, not least with regard to its existing courses, students and relationships with other educational foundations, including the University of Bristol.
- ii) The pastoral care of staff and the College Council, and the appropriate recognition of the College's great historical significance within the life of the Methodist Church.
- iii) The formal legal, financial and human resources components of closure, including the status of tenants using the buildings and the College's commercial partnerships and the funding of the College in the interim.
- iv) The immediate future care of the library and the heritage collection.

23. These strands of work are in addition to the work of the wider project regarding the future use of the site and the future provision of Methodist learning in the region.

24. The SRC suggests that if the Council is minded to support the proposal for closure, it might remit to the SRC work to identify which existing or new groups should be established to undertake the important and sensitive areas of work identified above.

Resolutions

1. The Council extends its thanks to all the members of the Wesley College Bristol Review Group and particularly its Chair, the Revd Clifford Bellamy, and acknowledges with gratitude the major piece of work they have done for the benefit of the Connexion.
2. With regret, the Council recommends that Wesley College Bristol should now be closed and instructs the General Secretary to bring a report and appropriate Resolutions to the Methodist Conference to that effect.
3. The Council instructs the SRC to prepare contingency plans to implement the closure of the College, should that be the decision of the Conference.

THE REPORT OF THE WESLEY COLLEGE BRISTOL REVIEW GROUP

SECTIONS 1, 8 & 9

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report *Future Use and Configuration of Training Institutions 2006*¹ prepared by the Training Strategy and Resources Executive ('TSRE') and presented to the 2006 Methodist Conference, made proposals for the future use and configuration of training institutions. The report's main proposals were not adopted by the Conference. Instead, the Conference remitted the proposals to the Methodist Council and instructed the Council to undertake further work on the proposals, to appoint a review group to undertake that task and 'to bring a new, reasoned and objective set of proposals to the Conference of 2007'.
- 1.2 A review group was duly set up. Its report, *Talking of God, Acting for God: Report of the Training Institutions Review Group*², was presented to the 2007 Methodist Conference. So far as the future of Wesley College, Bristol ('the College') is concerned, both the 2006 and the 2007 reports proposed that the College should normally no longer receive students for full-time pre-ordination training.³ The proposals set out in the 2007 report were adopted by the Conference.
- 1.3 One of the key drivers for the proposals set out in the 2006 and 2007 reports was the need to reduce the initial training budget as part of the process of reducing the expenditure of the Connexional Team by 30%. The consequence of the proposals, so far as the College is concerned, has been to increase the pressures upon its own financial position to such an extent that its continuing viability – or, at the very least, its continuing viability in its present form – has been brought into question. This led the Strategy and Resources Committee ('SRC') to determine that there should be a review of the College.
- 1.4 The terms of reference for the Review Group, agreed between the SRC and the College, set out the aim of the Review in these terms⁴:
- 1.1 To bring to the Methodist Council in April 09 a proposal for the future of Wesley College which:
- (a) enables it to fulfil its Conference-agreed vocation as the core institution in the S & SW Regional Training Network, in an affordable and sustainable form;
 - (b) identifies in general or specific terms the geographical location and context of the College and its institutional form [e.g. buildings, assets, staffing, resource-facilities] – having thoroughly reviewed and costed a range of reasonable options;
 - (c) recommends the key partnerships which are to be sustained, developed or initiated for the College to fulfil its mission.'
- This report sets out the work undertaken by the Review Group, the options it has considered, and the conclusions it has arrived at.
- 1.5 There was slippage in the time taken to set up this Review Group. The Review Group was not finally assembled until February 2009. This, in turn, has meant that it was not possible for us to comply with the requirement to report to the Methodist Council in April 2009. At its meeting in March 2009 the SRC extended to October 2009 the time for delivery of our report. The time was subsequently further extended to January 2010.

¹ 2006 Conference Agenda p.383

² 2007 Conference Agenda p.156

³ Although the 2007 report refers to 'pre-ordination training', in current usage the expression now used is 'initial ministerial learning'. That is the expression that will be used throughout the remainder of this report.

⁴ The full terms of reference are set out in Appendix 1 to this report.

- 1.6 The Review Group has met three times. Prior to each plenary meeting, tripartite meetings were held comprising the Chair, Siôn Rhys Evans and James Wisheart. Latterly much of the work of the Review Group has been conducted by e-mail, including by means of exchanged written submissions.
- 1.7 In conducting this review we have regarded the need for transparency to be an overriding imperative. Conscious of current guidance on confidentiality⁵ we decided at the outset that the work undertaken by the Review Group should not be regarded as confidential.
- 1.8 Wesley College, as the successor to Didsbury College, Manchester (founded in 1842) is the oldest theological college in world Methodism. It is now the only theological college for initial ministerial learning under the immediate governance of the Methodist Council and whose site is under the exclusive ownership of the Methodist Church in Great Britain. It is appropriate that our proposals should acknowledge the College's history. Section 2 provides a brief history of the College and outlines the arrangements for its governance.
- 1.9 The need for the present review arises directly from the impact upon the College of the proposals set out in the 2007 report. In the context of this review it is helpful to understand the reasoning which underpinned those proposals and the Conference's expectations of the College's future role as a training institution. This is discussed in Section 3.
- 1.10 As noted earlier, the terms of reference for this review require that proposals be made which will enable Wesley College 'to fulfil its Conference-agreed vocation as the core institution in the S & SW Regional Training Network'. We are also required to recommend 'the key partnerships which are to be sustained, developed or initiated for the College to fulfil its mission'. Section 4 describes the work of Wesley College today, including its work as the 'core institution' for the South and South-West Regional Training Network, and the key partnerships in which it is currently engaged.
- 1.11 The terms of reference also require that in undertaking the review, the Review Group should 'consult widely and especially to include in their consultation the College Principal, the College staff, the Wesley College Council, the S & SW Training Forum, the University of Bristol and other existing ecumenical and educational partners, the Chair of the TSRE and the relevant staff in the Connexional Team'. Section 5 sets out an outline of the responses received from those who have been consulted.
- 1.12 Determining and evaluating the range of options for the future of the College requires that there must first be a robust assessment of the present financial state of the College. Section 6 addresses the current finances of the College.
- 1.13 It is implicit in our terms of reference that we should consider not only the future of the College but also the future of the site and buildings which have been home to the College for the last sixty years. Issues relating to the site and buildings are addressed in Section 7.
- 1.14 Our primary task has been 'to bring to the Methodist Council...a proposal for the future of Wesley College'. In the process of determining what that proposal should be, the Review Group was also charged to thoroughly review and cost 'a range of reasonable options'. The options considered are reviewed and assessed in Section 8.

⁵ See *With Integrity and Skill: Confidentiality in the Methodist Church*, 2008 Conference Agenda pp. 138 to 175 at p. 169 para. 12.10

- 1.15 The Review Group has concluded that there is only one viable option if the College is to continue in being. That option involves the sharing of the present site with the Bristol Baptist College with the longer-term possibility of eventual organic union of the two colleges, the relocation onto the College site of the services currently provided by Methodist International House, Bristol, and the development of the existing Conference Centre. The Review Group recommends that an Implementation Committee be set up to further explore and, if achievable, implement that option.
- 1.16 The Review Group has been assisted by a significant number of people as it has researched and written up this review. Those we have approached have given willingly of their time, their knowledge and their skills. To each of them we offer our grateful and sincere thanks.
- 1.17 The membership of the Wesley College Review Group comprised:
- Clifford Bellamy (Chair), *Presbyter and Circuit Judge*
Christine Stones, *Member of the Wesley College Council*
James Wisheart, *Secretary of the Wesley College Council*
Martin Broadbent, *Presbyter and member of the Wesley College Council*⁶
Siôn Rhys Evans, *a member of staff in the Discipleship and Ministries Cluster of the Connexional Team*
Gareth Hill, *Presbyter and member of the Strategy and Resources Committee*
Richard Lindsey, *retired Chartered Public Finance Accountant and lately District Treasurer for the Sheffield District*
-

SECTION 8: OPTIONS

- 8.1 Our terms of reference require us to bring a proposal for the future of the College which enables the College 'to fulfil its Conference-agreed vocation as the core institution in the S & S W Regional Training Network, in an affordable and sustainable form' and which 'identifies in general or specific terms the geographical location and context of the college and its institutional form [e.g. buildings, assets, staffing, resource-facilities] – having thoroughly reviewed and costed a range of reasonable options. The terms of reference also require us to recommend 'the key partnerships which are to be sustained, developed or initiated for the College to fulfil its mission'.
- 8.2 As we noted earlier (see paragraph 2.11 above) the Commission on the Future of Wesley College, Bristol, which reported in 1971, considered four possible schemes for the future of the College but came to the conclusion that none of those schemes would be effective and viable. It concluded, with evident regret, that the College should be closed and sold. We also noted earlier (see paragraph 2.14 above) that in 1998 the college itself undertook a review of its future. It considered eight options. Closure and sale was one of the options considered.
- 8.3 Our terms of reference appear to be premised upon an acceptance that the college should continue to exist and that it should continue to be the core institution for the South & South-West Regional Training Network.⁷ It therefore seemed to us that consideration of the possibility

⁶ Martin Broadbent was indisposed for the first two meetings of the Review Group and Ward Jones, *Presbyter, Chair of the Bristol District and Chair of the Wesley College Council*, attended in his place.

⁷ It is important to make the point that our terms of reference do not suggest that the purpose of the review is to consider whether closure of the College may be appropriate. Indeed, notes of a meeting held on April 9th 2008

of closing the college could not be amongst the 'range of reasonable options' we were entitled to consider. We have no doubt that there are those who believe that the College should be closed. We are equally in no doubt that if we do not consider that option then some will argue that our report is incomplete and therefore flawed. With that in mind, we have sought and obtained the agreement of the SRC to our terms of reference being widened to enable us to consider the option of closure.

- 8.4 The review group has revisited the schemes considered in 1971 and 1998. It has also considered a range of alternative options. In total, the review group looked at twenty-five options. This was reduced to eight. These eight options are considered in the remainder of this section.

Option 1: relocation of the College to an alternative site in Bristol

- 8.5 We noted earlier the difficulty we faced in understanding what is expected of the College as the 'core institution'⁸ for the South & South-West Regional Training Network. It is clear from the 2007 report of the Training Institutions Review Group that the core institution is to have a teaching responsibility. The report said that 'Core funding will be allocated to each network with the aim of supporting two teaching staff members (full-time equivalent) at the core institution to resource a Methodist community of scholarship'.⁹ It is clear that that teaching responsibility is not confined to initial ministerial learning but is much wider than that and is intended to include teaching for the whole people of God.¹⁰ It is equally clear that a 'core institution' has administrative responsibilities towards both the Regional Training Network and the Methodist Training Forum.¹¹

- 8.6 We noted earlier (see paragraph 3.25 above) that the Chair of the Training Institutions Review Group has indicated to us that the role of a core institution includes responsibility for

'administering the finance for the Region and allocating it as agreed by the Training Forum and the Connexion; allocation of staff including any Training Officers who would be deployed around the Region as agreed by the Forum.'

The intention of this was to ensure that resources, human and financial

'would be made available to the various centres for training for programmes such as EDEV; Local Preacher Training and Development; Worship Leaders; Lay Ministry; Pre Ordination...and such other areas as the Forum had agreed upon.'

- 8.7 The College's fulfilment of those responsibilities is not the Review Group's only concern. We must also consider the College's relationships with the South & South-West Regional Training Network, the South & South-West Methodist Training Forum and the five Methodist Districts served by those bodies, all of which is part of its remit as the core institution for this Region.
- 8.8 The question of which 'key partnerships' are to be maintained is a more difficult issue. We have no doubt that the college regards all of the partnerships described in Section 4 of our report to be 'key partnerships'. We bear in mind the very positive comments made by those with whom

between the then General Secretary of the Methodist Church, the Principal of the College and the Secretary of the Wesley College Council expressly confirm that 'The sole objective of the Review is to ensure that the College can fulfil its core purpose as the lead institution in the South West Regional Training Network...as established by the Methodist Conference, in an affordable and sustainable form in the future'.

⁸ See paragraphs 3.22 to 3.26 above.

⁹ 2007 Conference Agenda p. 162 para. 3.1.9

¹⁰ See, e.g., p. 162 para. 3.1.6, p. 163 para 3.1.14 and p.166 para. 4.2

¹¹ See, e.g., p.163 para. 3.1.12

we have consulted (see Section 5) and the significant contribution which those partnerships make to theological education in the South & South-West Region. However, we consider that the practical reality is that any claim for a partnership to be a 'key partnership' must be based in no small part upon the extent of the financial contribution which that partnership can make to the College and (the opposite side of the same coin) which the College can afford to maintain.

- 8.9 Notwithstanding the work that might be expected of the College as described in the preceding paragraphs, the Review Group accepts that as a result of the decision of the 2007 Conference not normally to send full-time ministerial students to the College, the accommodation available on the Henbury Hill site now exceeds the College's present requirements. Removal to an alternative location within Bristol requires a determination to be made of the accommodation required to enable the College to fulfil its present core activities while also allowing scope for expansion of that work.
- 8.10 On its present ten-acre site the College has available to it 28,000 square feet of accommodation in the Main Building, 5,000 square feet of accommodation in the Headingley Building, together with the residential accommodation available in Frances Greeves House. For the purpose of investigating the feasibility of relocating to a new site, the Review Group makes the assumption that in any new premises the College would not require
- (a) residential accommodation¹²; or
 - (b) full kitchen and catering facilities.
- 8.11 For the purposes of this exercise, the College has indicated to the Review Group that it considers that it would require alternative premises with a minimum of 11,500 square feet of accommodation available. This includes 6,600 square feet for teaching and for tutors' offices, 500 square feet for central services offices and reception and 4,400 square feet to accommodate the present library and Heritage Collection.¹³
- 8.12 In Section 7 of our report we set out the advice we have received concerning the land and buildings presently occupied by the College. In the event that the decision were taken that the College should relocate to another site, a number of issues would arise concerning the logistics of such a move:
- (a) The purchase of new premises would involve capital expenditure. Given the uncertainties relating to the sale of the existing land and buildings¹⁴ the Review Group foresees difficulties in arranging for the synchronisation of the sale and purchase. That may mean that the Connexion would have to provide bridging finance to enable the purchase of the new premises to be completed in advance of the sale of the existing premises.
 - (b) Even if new premises were leased rather than purchased, the Review Group considers it likely that there would be some capital expenditure involved in acquiring, converting and equipping those new premises. It is likely that that expense would have to be funded prior to completion of the sale of the existing site.
 - (c) We have noted that the impact of the decisions of the Conference to move from block grant to core funding and not normally to send full-time ministerial students to the College has adversely impacted upon the financial viability of the College in its present form on the present site. If the College were to relocate to a new site it would be

¹² That assumption is not accepted by the College. The College points out, for example, that residential accommodation is necessary for students undertaking the Foundation Degree in Mission and Ministry.

¹³ The Review Group accepts that a case needs to be made out for retention by the College of the library and Heritage Collection. This issue is considered in Section 9.

¹⁴ See Section 7.

essential that sufficient revenue funding were made available to sustain the College on the present site until such time as the move to new premises could take place.¹⁵

- (d) If the College moved to new premises in advance of the sale of the existing site, the Methodist Council (as Managing Trustees) would have to accept full responsibility for managing the existing site until such time as it could be sold. This would involve the run-down, 'moth-balling' and security costs referred to at paragraph 7.24 above.

- 8.13 Appendix 10 of our report contains a financial impact assessment of the proposals considered in this section. It can be seen from the first table in that Appendix that whereas the budgeted income and expenditure account for 2009/10 shows a shortfall of around £64,000 if the College remains on its present site, that shortfall would be likely to rise to in excess of £334,000 if the College were to relocate to an alternative site¹⁶ in Bristol. In other words, the figures currently available to the Review Group indicate clearly that the relocation of the College in a reconfigured form at an alternative site in Bristol could not be achieved 'in an affordable and sustainable form'.¹⁷
- 8.14 Having concluded that Option 1 is not a viable option, the Review Group decided that it would be inappropriate to invest either time or money in a search for a suitable alternative site.

Option 2: relocation of the College to an alternative location within the South & South-West Region

- 8.15 It is clear that our terms of reference intended us to consider the possibility of relocation of the College to an alternative location outside Bristol. In Section 5 of our report we have noted the views of some of those with whom we consulted that, from their perspective, the College is not ideally situated in the South & South-West Regional Training Network. For example, the Revd Dr Stephen Dawes expressed the opinion that 'The simple fact of geography in this region means that Wesley College Bristol is not well-located for a "core institution" role'. He went on to make the point that 'The geographical centre of the South & South-West Regional Training Network is unquestionably Exeter, or to be precise Cullompton, ten miles north of Exeter on the M5'. However, he also acknowledged that the population of the whole of Cornwall is less than the population of Bristol.
- 8.16 It is also clear from the results of our consultation that in terms of the College's existing partnerships, some of the most significant of them would not survive relocation to a different part of the region. That would not only be the case with the College's relationship with the University of Bristol but also with its membership of the Bristol Federation for Theological Education and its pioneering relationship with the Roman Catholic Diocese of Clifton.

¹⁵ This is a crucially important point. The SRC approved an additional £100,000 of funding for the College for the Connexional year 2008-09 in addition to the transitional tapering relief made available to those colleges adversely affected by the decisions of the 2007 Conference. The Review Group has invited the SRC to consider further additional funding for the College until decisions about its future are finalised. That request was refused by the SRC at its meeting on 25th August 2009. The Minutes of that meeting (Minute SRC/09/37) record that 'There was also a more general question about whether there should be further transitional funding for the College agreed at this point in time. The SRC declined this request, on the basis that the Methodist Council had been clear about the terms of the current funding'.

¹⁶ i.e. an alternative site providing a minimum of 11,500 square feet of accommodation. The Appendix shows that even if there were an exceedingly minimalist approach to the configuration of a re-located college limiting it to accommodation (6,600 square feet) simply for two tutors, an administrator and some teaching space, there would still be a shortfall of in excess of £62,000.

¹⁷ The Review Group discussed the possibility of seeking a radically reduced cost base for the College by entering into a partnership with another education provider resulting, for example, in shared reception and teaching space. This is considered at paragraphs 8.18 and 8.19 below.

- 8.17 The Review Group is satisfied that even if relocation to a different part of the South & South-West Regional were a viable option financially, the negative consequences of such a move far outweigh the positive consequences. However, for the reasons set out in paragraph 8.13 above, the Review Group is satisfied that relocation to a different part of the South & South-West Region is not financially viable.

Option 3: that the College should be incorporated within an already existing university or centre of theological education

- 8.18 The Review Group does not consider this option to be feasible.¹⁸ The only serious possibility for such an outcome would be with the University of Bristol. Though such a merger would preserve the wholly academic aspects of the College's present work, it would also have the effect of leaving the Region without a 'core institution' able and willing to undertake the requirements of a core institution as described earlier in this section of our report.
- 8.19 Notwithstanding this last point, an informal approach has been made to the University of Bristol. The Principal of the College, the Revd Dr Jonathan Pye, has consulted with Professor Gavin D'Costa¹⁹. Professor D'Costa has indicated that the University 'would not be inclined to have Wesley as a Centre within the Department in physical and intellectual terms for all sorts of reasons, not per se, because of Wesley but to do with internal issues'. The Review Group considers it unlikely that any other educational institution would take a different view. In any event, as we have already indicated, such a solution would not enable the College 'to fulfil its Conference-agreed vocation as the core institution in the S & SW Regional Training Network' but would simply be a means of preserving the College's academic business as a provider of university-validated theological education.

Option 4: that the work of Methodist International House, Bristol, should be merged with the work of the College

- 8.20 Methodist International House, Bristol is a hall of residence situated in the Clifton area of the city. It accommodates mainly international postgraduate students and attracts students from over 25 countries each year. The building is owned by the Bristol District of the Methodist Church.
- 8.21 The Bristol District Trustees have already taken the decision to close Methodist International House as it currently operates from its present site, to sell the property and to invest the proceeds of sale in future support of students within the area served by the District. Current estimates suggest that the proceeds of sale are likely to be in the region of £1m. The District Trustees have been charged by the District Synod to bring forward recommendations about the future use of the proceeds of sale.
- 8.22 The Revd Ward Jones, Chair of the Bristol District and Chair of the Bristol District Trustees, has informed us that the District Trustees are willing to explore the possibility of a formal arrangement which would link the work currently being undertaken at Methodist International House with that currently undertaken by the College. The College would be willing to consider making Frances Greeves House available for students who would otherwise have stayed at

¹⁸ That is the view of six of the seven members of the Review Group including all of those with local knowledge.

¹⁹ Professor D'Costa is one of those with whom the Review Group has consulted – see paragraphs 5.13 to 5.15 above.

Methodist International House.²⁰ As part of any such arrangement the District Trustees would be able to make the proceeds of sale of Methodist International House available to the College.

- 8.23 In Section 7 of our report we outlined the advice contained in a Property Appraisal. It is clear from that advice that £1m would be insufficient to meet the cost of undertaking necessary refurbishment of the Main Building. The Review Group is satisfied, therefore, that this arrangement on its own would not be sufficient to enable the College to continue to operate from its present site 'in an affordable and sustainable form'.

Option 5: that the College should share its site with the Bristol Baptist College

- 8.24 Bristol Baptist College is part of the Bristol Federation for Theological Education. Its Principal is the Revd Dr Stephen Finamore. We noted earlier (see paragraphs 5.25 and 5.26 above) Dr Finamore's very positive comments about Wesley College and his expression of interest in the two colleges working closer together and perhaps sharing a site.
- 8.25 At the request of the Review Group, Dr Pye has held preliminary conversations with Dr Finamore to establish whether there may be a basis for entering into formal discussions about sharing a site. We are advised by Dr Pye that Bristol Baptist College is willing to enter into formal discussions concerning the possibility of shared provision, the preferred site being the site currently occupied by Wesley College, with significant investment in the development of new learning and teaching facilities.²¹ It has been made clear to Dr Pye, however, that a precondition for a move to a shared site must be that the Methodist Church nationally²² can demonstrate that it would be a reliable partner with a commitment to Wesley College²³ and theological education in Bristol and that adequate protection could therefore be given to any Baptist investment.
- 8.26 Bristol Baptist College operates from premises in Clifton, Bristol, which it owns but which no longer provide adequate teaching space or resources to meet current and projected needs. In the event that agreement could be reached about the sharing of premises, it is likely that the premises at Clifton would be sold. It is understood that in addition to making additional revenue available as a part of any such sharing arrangement it is likely that there would also be a capital investment of somewhere in the region of £1m.
- 8.27 The Review Group is of the opinion that further exploration of a sharing of the present site by Wesley College and the Bristol Baptist College has much to commend it. It is ecumenical. It would strengthen the provision of theological education not only in Bristol but in the South & South-West Region. It would provide opportunities to develop new courses, to strengthen existing partnerships and to initiate new ones. It would not only enable the College to fulfil its Conference-agreed vocation as the core institution in the South & South-West Regional Training Network but would be likely to enhance the services and support it could offer to the Regional Training Network and to the Methodist Training Forum.
- 8.28 Whilst such a development would have much to commend it, the projected inflow of capital (£1m) would not be sufficient to enable the College to undertake the refurbishment of the Main Building which, as Section 7 of our report makes clear, is much needed. The Review Group is

²⁰ We have indicated elsewhere in our report that Frances Greeves House is currently used by students of colleges belonging to the Bristol Federation for Theological Education and to students of Bristol University.

²¹ Although any commitment at this stage would be to a sharing of premises, Bristol Baptist College is willing to explore future organic union within an agreed timescale as a serious possibility.

²² The necessary assurance would need to be given by the Methodist Council as Managing Trustees of the site and the body with responsibility for oversight and governance of the College.

²³ Such commitment would need to be for a minimum of 5 years. There would need to be appropriate safeguards to protect the Baptists' investment.

satisfied, therefore, that this arrangement on its own would not be sufficient to enable the College to continue to operate from its present site 'in an affordable and sustainable form'.²⁴

Option 6: that the College should continue on the present site and should develop the Conference Centre

- 8.29 We noted earlier in our report the setting up in 2007 of Wesley Conference Centre Ltd. That company was set up to take legal responsibility for the commercial element of the College's activities. Part of that commercial element is the occasional use of the College's surplus capacity as a Conference Centre. As a contribution to our review, a sub-committee of the College Council²⁵ has explored the possibility of expanding the Conference Centre facilities at the College. The full report of that sub-committee is set out at Appendix 11.
- 8.30 The sub-committee's proposal highlights the unique material contained within the Methodist Heritage Collection held by the College and suggests that 'Their potential is particularly significant with Bristol also containing the New Room, the oldest Methodist chapel in the world, and Charles Wesley's house'. The sub-committee's report envisages the utilisation of the Heritage Collection, together with the College's library, in partnership with the New Room and Charles Wesley's House, as a basis for expanding the current Heritage courses already offered by the College and for exploiting the potential for Heritage tours and weekends and other Heritage 'markets'. As part of this vision it would be necessary to undertake the refurbishment of the facilities currently available in the Main Building.
- 8.31 In the course of its work the sub-committee took professional advice in order to assess whether this option has any real commercial potential.²⁶ The advice received was sufficiently positive to persuade the sub-committee to prepare the report which appears as Appendix 11 and to seek to persuade the Review Group to explore the matter further.
- 8.32 The Review Group accepts that there are likely to be significant as yet untapped marketing possibilities for the College given its possession of the Heritage Collection and the fact that it is situated in a World Methodist Heritage City. However, the Review Group is satisfied that this proposal on its own would not be sufficient to enable the College to continue to operate from its present site 'in an affordable and sustainable form'.

Option 7: that full-time ministerial students should be trained at the College

- 8.33 The Review Group accepts that the process of reviewing training institutions in 2006 and 2007 was a painful process. We also accept that the Conference would be unlikely to welcome the suggestion that its decisions concerning the future of training institutions should be re-visited quite so soon. However, having undertaken a thorough and detailed review of the College and of the factors which led to the decision that the College should be subjected to further review, we consider that it would be remiss of us if we failed to highlight steps which could have been taken by the Conference which would not only have enabled the College to continue to play a key role as a provider of training for the whole people of God – in Bristol, in the South & South-West Regional Training Network and nationally – but which would also have reduced the current burden on the connexional training budget.

²⁴ Without detailed information concerning the financial position of the Bristol Baptist College it is not possible to consider in detail the financial viability (in revenue terms) of Wesley College and Bristol Baptist College moving to a completely new site (purchased or leased). However, we consider it likely that such a move would face similar revenue difficulties to those set out in Appendix 10.

²⁵ The sub-committee has been chaired by Christine Stones, a member of the Review Group

²⁶ That advice was obtained from Ms Jo White, Executive Director of Co-Operative Futures.

- 8.34 It is demonstrably the case that the present financial predicament of the College – and thus its need for supplementary support from the Connexion – is the direct result of the adoption of a policy which provided that full-time ministerial students should not normally be trained at the College and which also replaced the block grant with core funding.
- 8.35 During the year 2009-10, 104 students distributed over 14 institutions, will be undertaking initial ministerial learning at an overall cost of £1,469,614. This includes core grants amounting to £804,429, £149,000 towards fixed costs, and compensation to four institutions (including Wesley College) amounting to £100,000. Had preference in assigning full-time ministerial students been given to Methodist Institutions, namely Wesley House, Cambridge, Wesley Study Centre, Durham and Wesley College, Bristol (which has suitable accommodation for 27 residential students), and funding restricted to only those institutions allocated students for initial ministerial learning, the cost of initial ministerial learning in 2009-10 could have been as little as £975,393.²⁷ The average cost per student would have fallen from £14,131 to £8,632.²⁸ Such a policy would not preclude placing students at colleges owned by ecumenical partners but would demonstrate intent to maximize the use of Methodist assets.
- 8.36 Although this would reduce student choice, we consider that in times of decreasing numbers of students offering for training for ordained ministry and increasing pressure on connexional budgets, the need to be sensitive to student choice must be balanced against the need to be good stewards of the Church's limited resources. We have firmly in mind the understanding of stewardship outlined by Professor Reed in Appendix 5. We also note the observation made in the 2005 Conference report *The Nature of Oversight* that 'Good stewardship entails the wise use of resources, material and human. It may not always mean choosing the cheapest option. It involves seeking effective and efficient ways of working. It means minimizing waste...'²⁹ The corollary implies maximizing the use of assets, and not favouring other external providers of services.

Option 8: that Wesley College be closed

- 8.37 We have already noted the assurances given to the College both generally within the 2006 report and specifically by the former General Secretary of the Methodist Church³⁰, that there was no proposal that the College should be closed.
- 8.38 Having made that point, the Review Group also wishes to acknowledge that in evaluating whether the time has come when the College should be closed, sentimentality has no place. In Section 2 of our report we describe occasions in the past when the Conference has been invited to consider whether the College should be closed. The fact that on those occasions the Conference was not persuaded that closure was appropriate does not mean that we should not recommend closure now if the evidence we have gathered points unerringly in that direction.
- 8.39 Both the 2006 and 2007 reports saw a future role for the College, albeit that that role did not include the training of full-time ministerial students. The Conference has decided that there has to be a core institution in the South & South West Region. It has decided that Wesley College, Bristol, should fulfil that role. The evidence we have gathered makes it clear that the College is

²⁷ The detailed calculation of these figures is set out in Appendix 10.

²⁸ We accept that this saving is not immediately achievable as it disregards existing commitments. It is also accepted that the averages can be criticised for covering both full-time and part-time students, but the error is consistent.

²⁹ 2005 Conference Agenda p.110 para 4.5.2

³⁰ See footnote 121 above.

fulfilling that role conscientiously and ably. Importantly, the evidence we have gathered also makes it clear that there are no other institutions in the South & South West Region ready, able and willing to take on this role. Closure of the College would leave a vacuum. The Review Group is not immediately clear how that vacuum would be filled.

- 8.40 Despite the last few years of uncertainty and planning blight, the College has been able to launch new courses, initiate new partnerships, develop existing partnerships and generally enhance its reputation as a centre of excellence for theological education in the region. In the past, concerns have been expressed about the consequences of complete withdrawal from a particular region.³¹ Notwithstanding the changes in training strategies approved by the Conference, it is the judgment of the Review Group that those past concerns are still valid concerns.
- 8.41 Furthermore, in evaluating the option of closure it is important to bear in mind the likely difficulties that would be faced in achieving an early sale of the site (see paragraphs 7.20 to 7.24 above) and the management responsibilities involved achieving an orderly run-down of the work of the College. There is a real risk that closure of the College could leave the Methodist Council with a millstone around its neck.
- 8.42 Having said all of that, we recognise that in the absence of a change of direction by the Conference so far as its training strategies are concerned, the options for securing the financial future of the College are limited.

SECTION 9: THE REVIEW GROUP'S RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 Our terms of reference require us 'To bring to the Methodist Council...*a proposal* for the future of Wesley College' and 'To outline an implementation process once the review report has been approved by the Methodist Council, to be completed no later than August 2011.' In this section we set out our proposal. Before doing so, we seek to draw together the many threads that have been woven together to form this report in order not simply to justify our proposal but also to contextualise it.

Drawing the threads together

- 9.2 As Professor Reed has reminded us (see Appendix 4) John Wesley knew the importance of good stewardship of resources. In Sermon 51, 'The Good Steward' he wrote
- 'Before all these, even the whole human race, before the devil and his angels, before an innumerable company of holy angels, and before God the Judge of all, thou wilt appear, without any shelter or covering, without any possible disguise, to give a particular account of the manner wherein thou hast employed all thy Lord's goods!'
- 9.3 The Methodist Church has a duty to exercise responsible stewardship of its resources. That is a duty owed to the whole of the Church and not simply to one part of it. Our connexional life requires no less. As we consider the future of Wesley College it is important, therefore, to have regard to the wider picture and not just to local needs.

³¹ See, for example, the 1998 Connexional Training Strategies report, *Implementing the Making of Ministry Report and Concept 2000*.

- 9.4 The reference to ‘resources’ should not automatically prompt us to think of financial resources. The land and buildings occupied by Wesley College do, of course, have a monetary value; and yet they are also a resource in themselves. Historically, they began as a base from which to provide theological education for those training for ordained ministry, yet that is not necessarily the only purpose (indeed, today it is not even the main purpose) to which they can be put in order to support and enhance the working out of the mission objectives of the Methodist Church.
- 9.5 Moreover, the resources of Wesley College are not confined to its land and buildings. They include a Heritage Collection which is one of the treasures of the Methodist Church; a theological library which is one of the finest in the country; and a network of partnerships that have helped to foster and enrich the provision of theological education in the South & South West Region and an existing lively programme of theological education and a role in vocational discernment from which many continue to benefit. The duty to exercise responsible stewardship applies to all of the resources located at and collectively referred to as ‘Wesley College, Bristol’.
- 9.6 We have earlier set out in some detail the history of Wesley College (see Section 2). That story, too, is part of Methodism’s rich heritage and deserving of responsible stewardship. It bears testimony to the dedication of the many men and women who over the course of more than sixty years have committed themselves to the task of providing good quality theological education for the benefit not only of the hundreds of students who have passed through their hands but also for the benefit of the whole Church.
- 9.7 Understanding the story of Wesley College is also important in the context of catching a vision for the future, for the story of the rise and development of Wesley College is not the result of chance but of the leading of the Spirit. The task for the Church today is to discern where the Spirit is leading now. We need a new vision.

A new vision³²

- 9.8 In her supplemental report (see Appendix 5) Professor Jennifer Bone sets out a radical and challenging vision of what Wesley College might become.
- 9.9 Professor Bone notes that our terms of reference require us to bring forward ‘a proposal for the future of Wesley College which...enables it to fulfil its Conference-agreed vocation as the core institution in the S & SW Regional Training Network...’ She expresses her personal opinion that ‘it seems highly improbable that Wesley can have a secure long term future in this capacity alone’. The Review Group agrees with that assessment.
- 9.10 Professor Bone moves on from that proposition to set out her vision for the future of Wesley College. The whole of her paper needs to be read in order fully to appreciate the rationale that underpins her vision. However it is appropriate to repeat here the helpful summary with which she begins her paper. She says that:
- (1) In the contemporary educational, cultural, social and policy environment in the UK, the Churches will need to give increasing attention to nourishing faith-based theological education, at a level and in a manner commensurate with the norms and standards of higher and further education.
 - (2) The staff of our theological colleges have worked tirelessly and magnificently in recent years to cope with uncertainty and implement change, to achieve results with diminishing resource, to incorporate skills’ training in ministry, in accordance with

³² This sub-section of our report (paragraphs 9.8 to 9.19) represents the views of six of the seven members of the Review Group

Methodism's in-house agenda. There has been much attention to nurturing the strength and identity of Methodism.

- (3) At the same time, 'the people of God' find themselves living in a world in which their faith, belief and all that flow from them are increasingly under question and too readily assumed to lack intellectual credibility, on the assumption that their faith has not been subject to rigorous inquiry nor has met the demands of impartial analysis. There is an urgent need for the Churches to give as much weight to the needs of lay people in this respect as to those in ministry.
 - (4) This is essentially a matter of providing appropriate educational opportunity. Universities and colleges today are well versed in this type of 'short course' provision for both specialists in a field and for the wider community in a way which enables them to keep pace with a fast changing knowledge environment. It can be done.
 - (5) The proposal embodied in this paper is that the circumstances of Wesley College now offer the potential for the Church to address this need. It could only be done by an institution with the university links to keep its feet on the academic ground, as it were; to be practicable its work would need to be offered nationally, and to all churches, and indeed it would necessarily become involved in international links. The Methodist Church would need to trust it educationally, and guarantee it sufficient operational freedom. On the first of these, the Church has a proud record.
 - (6) This is not primarily a matter of seeking to sustain public influence (although, arguably, only the laity operating within their various spheres can now do this). It is primarily a matter of using the Church's resources to offer lay people depth in understanding of their faith and of the educational riches which have been, and continue to be, brought to bear upon it.
- 9.11 This vision raises four fundamental questions which must be faced honestly, critically and fairly. Although the Review Group considers it to be within its terms of reference to provide tentative answers to those questions, we accept that these questions can only be answered definitively by the Conference.
- 9.12 The first question is: is there a need for a national centre for theological education such as that proposed by Professor Bone? Professor Bone has eloquently argued the case for such a centre. The Review Group considers her reasoning to be persuasive and convincing and is content to adopt it. The creation of such a centre would be a radical departure for the Methodist Church. However, it should not be ruled out on that basis. Before coming to a concluded view on the first question it is important to consider the second.
- 9.13 The second question is: is a national centre for theological education consistent with the Methodist Church's current training strategies? In Section 3 of our report we set out an overview of the reports *Future Use and Configuration of Training Institutions* (2006) and *Talking of God, Acting for God: Report of the Training Institutions Review Group* (2007). We noted that both of those reports underline the importance of the learning and development of the whole people of God and recognise the increasing importance of providing training opportunities more widely for the whole people of God. Although it is undoubtedly true that the 2006 and 2007 reports did not propose the creation of a national centre such as that now proposed by Professor Bone, we regard that as unsurprising given the context in which those two reports were written. As we noted earlier, one of the key drivers leading to those reports was the need to reduce the cost of training. However, as we have already noted, those reports clearly, repeatedly and, in our judgment, properly underline the importance of providing training opportunities for the whole

people of God. We consider that the creation of a national learning centre is, therefore, consistent with current training policies.³³

- 9.14 The third question is this: if the creation of a national centre for theological education is consistent with existing training strategies, why should that centre be located at Wesley College, Bristol, rather than at one of the other training institutions supported by the Methodist Church?³⁴
- 9.15 Professor Bone herself identifies some answers to this question. She points to the quality of its library which she says 'must now be one of the best theological libraries in the country'. She notes that it has 'extremely valuable Methodist archive material' and says that it would be 'a tragedy if this was lost to a less accessible environment'. She points to the College's conference capacity. She also points to the College's ecumenical links and expresses the view that 'it seems very possible that such a focus on lay education would meet with a co-operative response from other church bodies'. She points to the College's excellent links with the University of Bristol. So far as this point is concerned it is appropriate to bear in mind the very positive comments received from Professor Gavin Da Costa during the course of our consultation process (see in particular paragraphs 5.13 to 5.15 above). She refers to Bristol's Methodist heritage and makes the point that 'In British Methodist history, Bristol is second only to Oxford (and many would argue equal to, or ahead of it!); the point is the potential for generating research and conference interest internationally.' So far as this point is concerned we have noted the efforts the College has already made to foster and develop international interest (see paragraphs 4.20 to 4.23 above).
- 9.16 We agree with Professor Bone's analysis. There is one additional point which we regard as fundamental. We have noted several times throughout our report the fact that Wesley College is now the only theological college for initial ministerial learning under the immediate governance of the Methodist Council and whose site is under the exclusive ownership of the Methodist Church in Great Britain. This provides the Methodist Church with what is probably an unrepeatable opportunity to be creative and innovative in the provision of theological training for the whole people of God. We say 'probably an unrepeatable opportunity' since if Wesley College were to be closed and the site sold and if the membership of the Methodist Church in Great Britain continues to contract, it is highly unlikely that the Church would in the future be able to consider such a venture as that now proposed.
- 9.17 At paragraph 3.18 above we noted that the 2006 report had considered the possibility of establishing a single institution as the only training institution designated to receive full-time residential students but had discounted that possibility on the basis that it 'would be too risky a step to take. It would amount to putting all our future educational resources into one basket.' The report did not attempt to describe or analyse that risk. It is therefore difficult for us to evaluate whether the same concerns would apply to the kind of national centre proposed by Professor Bone. However, the key risk is likely to be financial and that is a risk which can be robustly assessed as part of any implementation process. The initial financial impact assessment undertaken in Appendix 10 of our report suggests cause for optimism on this issue.

³³ We have already noted references in the 2007 report to the important role that Regional Training Networks have within the general scheme of connexional training strategies (see, for example, paragraphs 3.20 and 3.25 to 3.28 above). We also note that the 2006 report referred to 'an opportunity to make learning resources available to the whole Church at district and circuit level in a more widespread and systematic way than before...' (paragraph 3.4.6). The Review Group considers that the kind of national centre now proposed would not stand in conflict with those regional and local training strategies but would provide opportunities to enhance and underpin them.

³⁴ We considered it to be outside our terms of reference to undertake a comparative exercise involving the other training institutions currently funded and supported by the Methodist Church, our terms of reference requiring us to 'bring a proposal...for the future of Wesley College...'

- 9.18 During the course of the Review Group's deliberations an issue arose as to whether the College's mission is to be understood as having been confined by the Conference to its 'Conference-agreed vocation as the core institution in the S & SW Regional Training Network' or whether its mission may properly be regarded as being wider. If it is so confined then we accept that the proposal for a national centre of theological education is outwith the College's vocation as presently defined. However, we do not consider that in identifying the College as having a vocation as the core institution in the South & South West Regional Training Network the Conference was in fact seeking to confine the mission of the College.³⁵ Appendix 10 demonstrates clearly that to confine the mission of the College to that single vocation would inevitably be to consign the College to early closure since if that were its only vocation it could not be financially viable. We have noted at various points throughout our report the assurances that have been given confirming that that was never the intention. In our judgment, in allocating to Wesley College the role of 'core institution' in the South & South West Regional Training Network the Conference was simply bestowing upon the College an additional vocation.³⁶
- 9.19 The fourth question is: how is the duty to exercise responsible stewardship to be balanced against the apparent calling to pursue a new vision? Responsible stewardship of resources may properly lead to caution and a conservative approach to the commitment of those resources to new work. Yet the reality is that to accept the challenge of the Gospel is to accept the call to take risks – not recklessly or speculatively but responsibly and judiciously in response to the prompting of the Spirit. In this case, the proposal we are about to make is likely to involve the taking of risks. However, an important part of the task of an Implementation Committee will be to undertake a detailed assessment of that risk in order to determine whether, in the exercise of responsible stewardship, it is a risk worth taking.

The Review Group's Proposal

- 9.20 In Section 8 we outlined and, in most cases, discounted a number of possible options. We accepted that there is merit in option 4 (that the work of Methodist International House, Bristol, be merged with the work of the College), option 5 (that the College should share its site with the Bristol Baptist College) and option 6 (that the College should continue on the present site and should develop the Conference Centre) but concluded that none of those three options, taken individually, would provide a viable option for the future of the College. However, Appendix 10 demonstrates clearly that when combined together ('the combined option'), these options merit further consideration.
- 9.21 Appendix 10 of our report contains a financial impact assessment of this combined option. Though inevitably based upon provisional figures and best estimates, the assessment appears to demonstrate that there is good reason to believe that this option could prove to be financially viable. The assessment shows an excess of income over expenditure to an extent which suggests some resilience. The assessment also provides good grounds for believing that the capital required to undertake necessary works of modernisation and repair to the existing structures could be found without putting pressure on already overstretched budgets.

³⁵ One member of the Review Group disagreed, believing that the Conference had effectively established a regional vocation and mission for the College.

³⁶ We noted earlier that at a meeting held on April 9th 2008 between the then General Secretary of the Methodist Church, the Principal of the College and the Secretary of the Wesley College Council expressly confirm that 'The sole objective of the Review is to ensure that the College can fulfil its core purpose as the lead institution in the South West Regional Training Network...as established by the Methodist Conference, in an affordable and sustainable form in the future'.

- 9.22 This combined option has ecumenism at its heart. It would enable our two churches (Methodist and Baptist) not only to continue to offer the theological training which they already provide but to expand the scope of that training. It would enable the College to continue in its role as the 'core institution' in the South & South West Regional Training Network. It would also provide a sound base upon which to build the kind of national centre for theological education proposed by Professor Bone. The new college would continue to provide initial ministerial learning for Methodist ministerial students, though, as now, it is likely that this would account for only a small proportion of its work. There would also be provision of initial ministerial learning for Baptist ministerial students. This would form a larger proportion of the work of the College. The new college would also provide other learning programmes for partner denominations and for 'the whole people of God' in accordance with the vision outlined above. This would have the objectives of equipping Christians in the region for discipleship and mission, safeguarding, developing and utilising the Heritage Collection and library and providing resources and learning opportunities to local, regional, national and international students. This is likely to lead to an expansion of the number of courses currently offered by the College and would together form a large proportion of its work.
- 9.23 The combined option would enable the development of the existing Conference Centre facilities. This would enable the College not only to exploit the benefits of its location at the heart of a World Methodist Heritage City but would also enable it to extend the College's existing programmes in the way described in Appendix 11. This would be an important part of the mission of the College.
- 9.24 The work of Methodist International House has been fruitful over many years. Each year it offers accommodation to postgraduate students from over 25 countries. It has provided a much needed resource to international students coming to the City to study. The continuation of that work as part of the combined option would not simply be a means of income generation for the College but would enable the continuation of a valuable work that is undertaken in the name of the Methodist Church
- 9.25 For all of these reasons the Review Group is satisfied that the combined option has merit as a practical and feasible plan for the future of the College and that it would be appropriate and proportionate for an Implementation Committee to be appointed to further explore the viability of this option with a view to bringing to the Methodist Council a coherent and costed plan for its implementation.
- 9.26 The composition of the Implementation Committee will need to be multi-skilled. It will in particular require skills in finance, property, business, project management and theological education. The Principal of the College should be a member of this Committee. The Committee should be ecumenical and must in any event have within it a representative of the Bristol Baptist College or their nominee. It will need good administrative support. This will amount to more than the provision of someone to convene and attend Committee meetings and take minutes. It will require someone with the skill and experience to take forward the work of the committee, for example in liaising with professional advisers. If this Committee is under-skilled or under-resourced the overwhelming likelihood is that it will not be able to complete its task. The final requirement for members of the Committee is that they should understand the vision and that they should come to their task with an open mind.
- 9.27 The work of the Implementation Committee should be time limited. It should be allowed twelve months to complete its work. During that time it should be required to report on progress quarterly to the Methodist Council. The time limit of twelve months should only be extended by the Methodist Council if the Committee is able to demonstrate that there is some positive and compelling reason for doing so.

- 9.28 The Review Group considers that the combined option meets fully the aim of this review set out in our terms of reference and recommends that option to the Conference.

And finally

- 9.29 The Review Group believes that it has considered all reasonable options. We also believe that the combined option is the only credible option that it is appropriate to pursue. If our recommendation is not accepted by the Conference, or if the proposed Implementation Committee is unable to bring this option to fruition, the Review Group concedes that in those circumstances the closure of the College would be the only other alternative. In the event that that should be the ultimate outcome it is the hope of the Review Group that closure would be handled sensitively and compassionately, with due regard to the legitimate interests and concerns of all of those who work at the College (both academic and other staff), to the entitlements of those who are then enrolled on courses run by the College, and to the partnerships from which the College would have to withdraw. In the event of closure of the College we consider that the provision of appropriate pastoral care for those principally involved would be an essential and absolute requirement.