

# Education and Learning Committee

## Still walking the way

### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Mr Alan Yates, Convenor: <a href="mailto:alan.yates@urc.org.uk">alan.yates@urc.org.uk</a> The Revd Fiona Thomas, Secretary: <a href="mailto:fiona.thomas@urc.org.uk">fiona.thomas@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	To note and commend
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	None

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	A summary of activities pursued by the education and learning committee since the General Assembly of July 2018.
<b>Main points</b>	In tune with the intentions and ethos of <i>Walking the Way</i> , the committee has made considerable progress in the development and provision of the Stepwise programme, while emphasising cooperation and collaboration with the Resource Centres for Learning and a wide range of committees and networks to achieve its aims.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Education and learning committee report July 2018
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	A range of committees, networks and task groups mentioned in the report

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	The committee worked according to the budget allocated
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	

The education and learning committee seeks to provide integrated education and training to equip the whole people of God for mission. It does this through liaison with relevant officers in synods and other Assembly committees; supporting Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs); providing programmes such as Stepwise; and maintaining positive relationships with ecumenical partners. The committee supports the initial and ongoing professional development of Ministers of Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers, Assembly-accredited lay preachers, and other lay ministries including eldership.

Committee members

Convenor: The Revd Dr Neil Messer [2015-2019], Mr Alan Yates [2019-2023]

Secretary: The Revd Fiona Thomas

Members: Mr Robert Pettigrew [2020]; Ms Adella Pritchard [2022] CRCW; The Revd Dr Rosalind Selby [2022] Resource Centre for Learning; The Revd Mary Thomas [2019] Synod Training & Development Officer; The Revd Martin Truscott [2022]; Mr Rudolph Wontumi [2021]; Mrs Sandra Ackroyd [until 2020].

The committee also invites all the principals of the RCLs, the convenors of its subcommittees, a representative of the Methodist Church, and a representative of the CYDO+ team to its meetings. The Secretary of the Resource Sharing Task Group, Mr Chris Atherton has been a co-opted member during this period. The General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship) are members *ex officio*.

## Part 1: Progress since 2018

### 1. Developing discipleship

1.1 The United Reformed Church's emphasis on missional discipleship is expressed through its commitment to *Walking the Way. Living the life of Jesus today* as commended by General Assembly in 2016. The work of the education and learning committee is all about discipleship – helping followers of Jesus in the URC to shape their lives in response to God's call with the help of the Holy Spirit. From the committee's discipleship development strategy endorsed by Mission Council in 2018 came the discipleship development fund in May 2019. Managed by the Mission Council's resource sharing task group in conjunction with synods, this began to offer small grants to individuals to help them with their growth in discipleship in the latter part of 2019. The committee has gone on to address other aspects of the strategy, based on encounter, equity, enabling, and equipping. Concretely the strategy is being implemented through the development of the Stepwise programme, described in greater detail later in this report. The three Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs) which serve the URC are an integral part of the committee's life. They have been actively refocusing their work through the prism of discipleship in the past two years, observing that almost everything they do could sit under this title.

- Westminster College helps discipleship through its "In the company of..." scheme. This welcomes individuals and groups to Westminster for short stays of a day to a week. Participants give advance notice of a topic they wish to explore and one of the teaching team is allocated to act as conversation partner and advise on suitable resources. Westminster has also developed plans to offer an ongoing programme for pioneer ministries and started in 2020 to run, three times a year, a residential for those involved in pioneering projects in the URC, in partnership with the URC mission team.
- Northern College has been involved with *Walking the Way* since its initial stages and has kept in touch with the Assembly staff most closely involved in its development. The RCL is beginning to work with others on a day event on 24/7 discipleship that can be offered in synods.
- The Scottish College has taken up the theme of discipleship in events, retreats and meetings.

## 2. Stepwise

### Introduction

- 2.1 Stepwise is a programme within *Walking the Way*. The opening Stepwise stream, *Faith-filled Life*, was launched in September 2018, with further streams becoming available in 2019 and 2020. More than 100 participants have enrolled for Faith-filled Life in 15 groups across nine synods so far.
- 2.2 Stepwise has a clear coherent framework, is built upon firm foundations, and is implemented in a careful and consistent way. Arrangements for robust evaluation and review have been established, drawing on feedback from early participants in Stepwise streams and a wide range of evaluation data. The overall aim has been to provide a URC discipleship learning and development programme to benefit both individuals and the Christian communities to which they belong.

### Staff team

- 2.3 The Stepwise Programme Manager was appointed in October 2018, joining the Stepwise Programme Assistant (part time) appointed in August 2018. The development of Stepwise has benefitted from the Education and Learning Instructional Designer appointed in July 2018, as well as the support of the three existing members of the Education and Learning team.

### Stream development

- 2.4 The five Stepwise streams have each been created by their own design group comprising of people with a range of experience and backgrounds. Included in the design groups are those who represent children and youth, TeamURC, ordained and lay ministries and theological diversity. The committee is grateful to the members of these design groups and their convenors for their diligence and capable work.
- 2.5 At the time of writing, *Faith-filled Life* and *Faith-fuelled Leadership* are both fully available. A review of *Faith-filled Life* is scheduled, based on the experiences and feedback of the participants who have completed this stream. *Faith-fuelled Leadership*, which uses the Church Pastoral Aid Society's *Growing Leaders* course as its core, is currently being road-tested by a group of elders in Bristol, whilst being available to others who have completed *Faith-Filled Life*. In permitting the use of their material, CPAS have been impressed with the way Stepwise has adapted its course, including the online element of blended learning.
- 2.6 *Faith-filled Confidence* and *Faith-filled Community* will both be ready in Spring 2020, with the bulk of the material now written. Final editing and adaptation of the material so it can be uploaded to the Stepwise Hub is taking place at the time of writing. *Faith-filled Worship* is currently in the design phase, and will be ready for launch in Autumn 2020 as planned.

### Advocating Stepwise

- 2.7 Promoted initially by flyers and fold-out cards, information about the programme was distributed widely throughout the Church. The Stepwise pages on the URC website were reworked in early 2019, and have been kept up to date with relevant information. The video *A taste of Stepwise*, explaining how Stepwise works and how to get involved, is available on the URC website and YouTube channel. The Stepwise team has attended synod gatherings and meetings of various URC networks to introduce the programme, explaining what it offers for developing discipleship and deepening faith.

- 2.8 A series of taster events for potential group facilitators has been part of the advocacy strategy. Eight of these days have taken place so far in different locations, engaging with more than 80 potential facilitators and those in synods who have responsibility for advocating and coordinating Stepwise regionally. This is proving to be a very worthwhile exercise and further events are planned.

### **Stepwise group experience**

- 2.9 Stepwise is intentionally an intergenerational programme, and the group in Bolton has children as well as adults working through *Faith-filled Life* together. The group is facilitated by the CYDO for North Western Synod, in partnership initially with the CRCW who was based at the church. They have been creative and flexible in how they have organised the group, and the participants are gaining much from this approach. Other groups are based around local churches, pastorates or wider mission areas. In two synods, groups have been formed by people who are interested in facilitating their own group as an opportunity to work through the material and experience Stepwise for themselves.

### **Stepwise Hub**

- 2.10 This online platform which hosts the material for Stepwise is continually developing as streams are added and material revised. An accessibility audit was carried out on the Hub in 2019 to ensure that it is compliant with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act as well as following best practice. We've also commissioned work to review and edit the Stepwise material as presented on the Hub to ensure consistency, coherence and readability. All this seeks to ensure that the online offering of Stepwise is accessible and of high-quality, giving participants a good experience of online learning.

### **Stepwise as a denominational programme**

- 2.11 The *Stepwise task and finish group* has continued to meet approximately four times a year, with overall responsibility for the programme. Reporting to the Education and Learning Committee, it has been invaluable in setting direction and maintaining momentum as the programme has moved from initial planning to stream roll-out. Over the coming months, the task and finish group will become the Stepwise development group, with revised terms of reference and a new convenor. Stepwise is moving to a different phase in its lifecycle from scoping, construction and promotion to continuing development and sustainability. This will be a long-term programme which continues to resource the URC and meets the needs of people who wish to develop further their discipleship and faith.
- 2.12 The Stepwise Learning Standards Board has met regularly to review and monitor the overall quality of the material and other processes and procedures associated with the programme. It is a subgroup of the task and finish group, with members drawn from the three RCLs and other networks including CYDO+ and synod training officers. It has prepared guidelines for participants and churches on how to make the most of their Stepwise experience; produced guidance on portfolios and journaling; and considered how participants can show evidence of learning where they are seeking to use Stepwise as a route to recognised roles or ministries in the church.
- 2.13 The RCLs have all played their part in Stepwise by active participation in the Task and Finish Group and Learning Standards Board, hosting and supporting of advocacy meetings, and significant input of time in some cases. They have a particular interest in ensuring that the material and extension tasks for Stepwise

develop in ways that will help to support the formation and accreditation of lay preachers and pave the way for some participants candidating for ministry.

### 3. Lay preachers and worship leaders

- 3.1 Working closely with the Ministries Committee, we have sought to equip people as worship leaders and preachers. The Secretary attends the annual meeting of synod lay preaching commissioners which is organised by the Ministries Committee. An annual letter to Assembly-accredited lay preachers was revived in 2019, in conjunction with the Assembly Advocate for Worship Leading.
- 3.2 The final year of Gateways into Worship will be completed in July 2020, with eight students participating from four Synods. The committee is deeply grateful for the support given by group tutors, regional coordinators, Westminster College, and the voluntary Course Manager. Depending on the route through which they reached Gateways into Worship, some of the students will achieve their Assembly Accreditation in July 2020 and others will be expected to complete a further year of mentored reflective practice first.
- 3.3 The cancellation of the March 2020 Mission Council delayed discussion of a paper drafted with the involvement of the Ministries Committee and the synod lay preaching commissioners regarding the ways in which synod-recognition and Assembly-accreditation as lay preachers could be achieved in future using Stepwise streams. The drafting of the paper highlighted the need to formulate 'marks of lay preaching' which would offer a basis for consistency of standards throughout the denomination.
- 3.4 The RCLs have been paying increasing attention to this constituency, often in direct partnership with synods:
- Northern College, through Luther King House Educational Trust, offers an annual ecumenical conference for lay preachers and worship leaders. Recent themes have been 'Preaching on the Old Testament,' and 'Preaching in "Ordinary Time"'. The RCL's 'Worship Basics' course for EM1 students who come with little prior preaching experience has been opened up to people from local churches alongside students. It is also being offered to groups of churches, and in the last year nearly 100 people have participated in such events. This is in addition to offering a 'preparing to preach on the lectionary Gospel' event in response to synod requests.
  - Westminster College has continued to develop summer conferences for lay preachers and worship leaders, offering the same material mid-week and over a weekend, and devoting significant teaching resource to these events. Most of the six-strong Westminster teaching team are involved. 'Our links to local bookshops ensure available resources are keyed into the theme. We focus major biblical input around the lectionary gospel for the coming liturgical year. Other teaching has recently explored such topics as inter-generational worship, creativity and imagination within worship and hymnody.'
  - The Scottish College sees lay preaching as a strong and valued feature of life in the Synod of Scotland. The College organises an annual residential

consultation for lay preachers on the Isle of Cumbrae every year, and has also provided training for lay presidency, funeral services and other opportunities.

### 4. Elders

- 4.1 During 2019, it became apparent that the *Resourcing our Elders* material on the URC website would benefit from significant overhaul and redesign, to take into account both new materials and better ways of online presentation. Being responsible for commissioning this material, the committee prepared terms of reference for a task group to implement the work. An established Elders group in the synod of Yorkshire is undertaking this work, with the intention of a revised resource becoming available during 2020-21.
- 4.2 Most support for Elders is provided locally by synod officers, drawing on Assembly and RCL materials and personnel as appropriate.
- Westminster College shares fully in Synod-based support for elders, responding to invitations to deliver material and run workshops locally. Individual elders' meetings and the leadership of local pastorates increasingly call upon the teaching team to resource their planning. This has included sharing in events locally and welcoming elders and others to Westminster for reflection shaped by their specific needs.
  - Northern College has played a particular part in the development of Eldership in the newly-formed Missional Partnerships in NW Synod, attending various Steering Group meetings and offering pastoral care training.
  - The Scottish College has provided refresher training for Elders, responded to Synod requests, and been involved in training for presiding at Communion and guidance for Interim Moderators.

### 5. Education for Ministry Phase 1 (EM1)

- 5.1 Mission Council adopted in November 2019 new 'marks of ministry' replacing papers from 1982 and 1991. The marks had been worked on jointly by the Education & Learning and Ministries Committees over a number of years. Mission Council further resolved to encourage the two Assembly committees, RCLs, and relevant committees in the synods to use this paper as the basis for consistency in expectations and reporting in relation to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments. A similar paper was already in existence for the ministry of Church Related Community Work. The 2019 paper is the basis for a standard format for the annual reports of EM1 students at all three RCLs, which has been welcomed by synod moderators. There is mention later in this report of how the marks of ministry are being used in later phases of ministerial development.
- 5.2 In November 2018, Mission Council agreed a ministries committee resolution on a new local model of non-stipendiary service known as NSM4. This significant expression of collaboration between the two Assembly committees, synods, and RCLs continued with the subsequent release of guidelines for establishing the ministry and formation of individuals called to this model of ministry.

5.3 The first draft for both the marks of ministry paper and the NSM 4 formational approach were provided by the staff team at Northern College in consultation with the other two RCLs.

5.4 Teaching and formational work with EM1 students continues to be a core calling for all three RCLs:

- Northern College's student body has varied between 19 and 27 students over the past two years. Their formational programme has been significantly developed to include specific work on resilience and extend existing work on self-awareness. For many years, Manchester University had been the validator of degrees provided through the Luther King House Educational Trust (LKHET) but following Manchester's decision to pull back from partnerships with smaller institutions, LKHET have sought alternative validation. After a great deal of work, it can be confirmed that (subject to the final stage of the approval process) diploma, BA and MA teaching will be validated by Durham University from September 2020. As part of LKHET, Northern College will continue to teach to its outstanding ethos of contextual theology in an inclusive environment which has been welcomed by Durham.
- Westminster College currently has 11 candidates for the Ministry of Word and Sacraments. Most students are with it for four years, undertaking a wide range of placements, formational programmes and academic courses. All of these are constantly evolving as the RCL responds to changing denominational needs and requirements. Most students undertake an undergraduate degree in Mission and Ministry awarded through Durham University, with the College continuing to share in programmes validated through the Universities of Cambridge and Anglia Ruskin. Much teaching and learning takes place within the ecumenical classrooms of the Cambridge Theological Federation, with 11 institutions representing a rich range of traditions. The Durham awards can be delivered in block weeks with students attending college for six to seven weeks each academic year, and extensive use of online learning. This enables the delivery of EM1 to be highly flexible, with students no longer needing to relocate to Cambridge. Placements are arranged near to where a student lives.
- The Scottish College currently has four URC students pursuing EM1. Placement and formational programme are complemented with accredited qualifications pursued with either the Scottish Episcopal Institute or the University of Glasgow as partners. College staff are involved in teaching in both places.

## 6. Education for Ministry phases 2 and 3: Continuing Ministerial Development

6.1 In the past two years there has been steady implementation of the EM2/3 programmes, assisting ministers in individual and collective ways to address the changing facets of ministry. In a new development, the marks of ministry endorsed by Mission Council in November 2019 are being used as a basis for a new self-assessment tool in EM2/3, which will carefully move on from reporting formats used in EM1.

- 6.2 In 2020, the Continuing Studies Fund, originally created from legacies given for ministerial development, was reframed as a routine part of the committee's budget. It offers financial support for higher degrees and longer term activities. One of these is the Church Leadership Programme (CLP), which is now well established as a key learning opportunity for leadership. In all, 14 participants completed this in 2018/19, of whom four were lay people; nine participants are in the process of completing it in 2019/20, of whom four are lay people. The Education and Learning Committee has set aside bursaries for lay people to enable them to undertake the programme.
- 6.3 It was agreed at General Assembly 2012 that there would be mandatory training in EM3, and in 2014 it was agreed that safe sexual boundaries, under the title Safer Sacred Space (SSS), should be the first mandatory EM3 training. All ministers have now participated in SSS initial training, and update training is active. Each synod and RCL uses *The Professionalism Game*, a resource commissioned by the committee, covering all aspects of boundary safety, warning or infringement, for use in many environments, well beyond mandatory SSS. Safeguarding training already widely available through synods became mandatory with acceptance of the Past Case Review recommendations (Mission Council November 2018), and an implementation plan is in progress. The E&L Programme Officer is a member of the Safeguarding Advisory Group, and works in close liaison with the URC Safeguarding Officer to ensure a cohesive approach to all safe boundary issues across the URC.
- 6.4 The RCLs have continued to take an active part in EM2/3:
- The Scottish College held a Synod of Scotland ministers' conference in May 2019 in Northern Ireland with the theme 'Ties that Bind'. The College co-operates with the General Assembly's EM2 Officer in the support of ministers in their early years of ministry, and is grateful to those who act as pastoral advisers through regular meetings with their colleagues and offering a listening and responsive ear at other times. With increasing pressures of time and commitment, it is hoped that experienced ministers will continue to agree to serve in this role.
  - Northern College staff have contributed bible studies and resilience sessions to ministers' schools in various synods. They also provide a tutor for ministers on the MA course at Luther King House, and offer tailored sabbatical/study reading guidance.
  - Westminster College reinstated the annual Ministers' Refresher Course in spring 2019 when Revd Dr David Cornick helped participants to explore John's Gospel. The 2020 event was due to explore inter-faith issues. The RCL has welcomed a steady stream of ministers for formal sabbaticals and more informal shorter periods of study and refreshment.

## 7. Supporting synods in discipleship development

- 7.1 The practice continues of holding regular meetings of the training and development officers from synods, which are useful for peer support and sharing ideas and practice. For the past two years, all three RCLs have had staff members who are directly members of this gathering, which has assisted

collaboration and closer relationships. For their part, the RCLs have strengthened their direct contacts with synods, building on existing relationships and initiating new ones:

- The Scottish College has seen changes to its life in the past year through the purchase of premises to serve as the common offices of the College and the National Synod of Scotland. The new premises include a dedicated office for the Principal with meeting space, as well as a training suite with audio-visual facilities. The new office arrangements provide an opportunity for Synod and College to renew and reframe their relationship. The College acknowledges with thanks the many years when the College enjoyed office accommodation without cost in return for offering training and development support for the Synod. Opportunities for the whole people of God to reflect and learn together have included series of lunchtime lectures, as well as public workshops. In February 2019, seminars on “Brexit and the Book of Ruth” were offered at Glasgow University and an Edinburgh church.
- Westminster College has offered input for a wide range of events in various synods, with an exciting new initiative in the form of a ‘Roadshow’. A team of four teachers spent a week in summer 2019 resident in South Western Synod, leading workshops around topics the local churches had identified. A similar week-long visit was due to take place in Wales in June 2020.
- Northern College’s response to specific requests has included offering training on conducting funerals, ‘worship basics’, events for groups of lay preachers, input at synod meetings such as worship/bible studies/presentations, and participation by staff in various synod committees through general membership or by invitation for a particular session.

## 8. Ecumenical work

8.1 Three direct ecumenical relationships are maintained on behalf of the committee by the Secretary – involvement with the Ecumenical Liaison Group for Ministerial Training, which was started by Churches Together in England; board membership of the Luther King House Educational Trust; and work with the Appreciating Church Development Group. Each of the RCLs is involved in specific ecumenical networks:

- Northern College works significantly with the British Province of the Moravian Church, offering the equivalent of EM1 to their students, and continuing ministerial development (eg Safer Sacred Space). Since the Unitarian College formally withdrew from Luther King House, Northern College has supported Unitarian students studying through the LKH Open College by offering training on specific subjects and advising the denomination on formation for non-stipendiary ministry. One tutor is involved in Congregational Federation training, and another is giving support to local Methodist Districts. The cross-fertilisation across the denominations is fruitful.
- The continued development of the Westminster campus means that the greater proportion of members of the Cambridge Theological Federation are based there, giving the College access to richly diverse ecumenical and inter-faith relationships. The past two years has seen major restructuring in

the Federation, with Westminster taking an active and positive role in negotiations.

- The Scottish College relates to the CTBI China Forum, is a participant in ACTS Education meetings, is a board member of the Scottish Episcopal Institute, has pursued conversations with the Congregational Federation Scotland, and is part of the CTBI Programmes Reference Group.

## 9. Vocations

- 9.1 The Secretaries for Ministries and Education and Learning have taken the lead in coordinating two vocations events each year since 2017, in place of similar events which synods used to organise. These are hosted and resourced by Northern College and Westminster College in rotation, and have seen a regular gathering of about a dozen participants who explore diverse ministries including eldership, lay preaching, pioneer ministry, chaplaincy, church-related community work, children and youth ministry, and the ministry of word and sacraments. The Scottish College organised a Vocations Enquiry Day in Glasgow, in conjunction with others in the Synod of Scotland, in June 2019. All the RCLs are open to individual visits from people considering candidating for ministry as they seek to explore their sense of calling.

## 10. International work

- 10.1 The committee Secretary attended the World Appreciative Inquiry Conference in Nice in March 2019, presenting an academic poster showing the work of Appreciating Church. It was a remarkable opportunity for learning from practitioners from all parts of the world.
- 10.2 The Belonging to the World Church programme, which is coordinated by colleagues in the Global and Intercultural Ministries team, has continued to aid learning for all ages and ministries in the church. The RCLs organise placements for EM1 students through this programme, as well as maintaining contacts with the Council for World Mission (CWM), World Communion of Reformed Churches and World Council of Churches.
- Northern College students have visited, or are planning to visit, Taiwan, Canada, Netherlands, Zimbabwe, Cuba, Eastern Europe, Israel/Palestine, and Germany. Tutors have attended CWM Conferences and contributed papers at international conferences.
  - Westminster College offers the Cheshunt sabbatical programme, which continues to fund several visitors each term, from the URC and world churches, at the college. Uptake has broadened, and the first sabbatical visitor from Botswana was welcomed in early 2020. The RCL benefits greatly from a reciprocal term abroad with Columbia Theological Seminary in Georgia, US. An ongoing study programme with Wessex Synod and the Lusaka Presbytery of the United Church of Zambia has, to date, welcomed two Zambians into the Westminster community. Two EM1 students were due to attend the programme at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute outside Jerusalem in summer 2020. Teaching staff on sabbatical have been

enabled to study abroad, and in summer 2019 the College welcomed its newly appointed Tutor in New Testament from the US.

- At the Scottish College, both staff and students have pursued contacts and opportunities beyond Great Britain, with visits to Germany, the Czech Republic, Italy, Ireland and Taiwan. The principal presented a paper at the CWM Discernment and Radical Engagement (DARE) Forum in Taiwan in June 2019.

## 11. Preaching engagements

- 11.1 Members of the Education and Learning team respond to requests to lead worship and preach in their personal capacities, and have used the opportunities this offers to explore the themes of *Walking the Way*.
- 11.2 The tutors of the RCLs are in regular demand for leading worship, which may be local or further afield. On most Sundays, and at other times, a good proportion of the RCL tutors are likely to be preaching and leading worship. Conversations with congregations before, during and after services help to earth the RCLs in the life of the local church.

## 12. Writing material

- 12.1 Most members of the Education and Learning team have been involved in producing material for Stepwise, including drafting news stories for the URC website. Some have also contributed to Daily Devotions.
- 12.2 Most of the public output of the Education and Learning Committee is provided by the RCL tutors, who regularly contribute to *Reform* with bible studies and longer articles, write for Daily Devotions, and provide content for publications directed at local churches. Northern College has a particular emphasis on environmental issues in theological and policy work, both within and beyond the URC. Westminster staff have provided a diverse range of material, including book reviews and articles for academic journals, alongside biblical reflections for the online Visual Commentary on Scripture.

## 13. The 20-40 age group

- 13.1 The committee discussed the report of the 20-40 task group presented to General Assembly 2018, concluding that the actions which the committee could take would be to find an appropriate way to connect Stepwise and Youth Assembly, and to continue to explore intergenerational thinking with the Children and Youth Work Committee. Progress on both these actions has been modest yet persistent, complemented through the RCLs:
- The Scottish College has pursued engagement with Synod Youth in Scotland, and local youth and children's workers.
  - Westminster College's Tutor in Old Testament took part in the 2020 Youth Assembly, and is Chaplain to the current Youth Moderator. Preparations are continuing to launch a vocational community for those aged 18-25 from

across the denomination to be based as full residents of the college for 11 months at a time. These plans have been developed in careful consultation with the Mission and Discipleship departments, alongside synod and ecumenical experience of such intentional communities. It is hoped that the first cohort of participants might arrive in September 2021.

- Northern College hosted an event in December 2019 to hear from URC Youth, CYDOs and practitioners about the needs of the younger people who are active and committed to this church. New ideas are emerging, and a further similar event may be on the horizon. The College is involved in discussions about online church in conjunction with Walking the Way, who are keen to see what emerges from the consultation.

## 14. Interfaith work

- 14.1 One of the main elements within the Stepwise stream *Faith-filled Confidence* is about encountering world faiths, and the design group for this stream has consulted people in the URC who are experienced in inter-faith understanding. This includes tutors from the Northern and Scottish Colleges, who variously participate in the CTBI Inter-Faith Theological Advisory Group, the URC Inter Faith Enabling Group, and InterFaith Scotland.
- 14.2 The Woolf Institute for Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue is now based in its own building on the Westminster campus. It offers an excellent library and access to a wide range of expertise in many aspects of such work. Cambridge Federation students gain first-hand experience on interfaith matters through visits and teaching led by Institute staff. Major Woolf conferences make use of the dining facilities of Westminster, creating many informal opportunities for interfaith conversation. Students have also shared in Scriptural Reasoning groups based at the Divinity Faculty in Cambridge.

## 15. Ongoing scholarship

- 15.1 Research mapping started in 2015, and a URC research conference was hosted by Northern College in 2017. The committee's search for ways of sustaining a research network came to fruition in 2019 when Northern College undertook to include coordination of the denominational research network in the job description of the incoming Old Testament tutor.
- Northern College's output from tutors in recent times has included a book on theologies of religions, regular publishing in journals, particularly on the Old Testament and the emerging field of trauma and the Bible, as well as significant work alongside the CRCW network, the English Standards Board and Durham University to update CRCW modules to bring new areas of community development theory into teaching for students.
  - A number of Westminster College students, from across the denomination and beyond it, are engaged in research degrees. Tutors prepare material that encourages further research and writing in a variety of theological disciplines, and teaching to URC and other groups often demands tutors' own research ahead of the material being delivered. Staff have offered

papers at the Society for Biblical Literature conference in the US, given Bible studies at Mission Council, taught at the annual conference for the United Board of Armed Forces Chaplains, and contributed to the British and Irish Association for Practical Theology.

- The previous Principal of the Scottish College continues as Emeritus Research Professor of Nordic Theology, and since retirement has built up an impressive record of publications and conference participation on an interdisciplinary basis, as well as giving input to the College's own programmes. Partners at the Scottish Episcopal Institute and Glasgow University are at the cutting edge of pastoral and theological scholarship, and one of the College tutors leads a renowned team of scholars at the University alongside contributing to College teaching and events. The current Principal has published a theological commentary on issues related to Scotland and Brexit, and presented papers at a number of academic conferences.

## 16. Cooperation and collaboration

- 16.1 The past two years have been characterised by increasing cross-committee work within the discipleship department and beyond. The committee participated actively in the second gathering of the main Discipleship committees in 2019. The redevelopment of Church House is bearing fruit by the whole department sitting together encouraging natural collaboration and serendipity. Further work remains to be done on working closely with synod committees and task groups on implementing the discipleship development strategy endorsed by Mission Council.
- 16.1 The RCLs are integral to the wider work of the committee, taking part in the education and learning boards at Assembly Assessment Conferences, and being active in Stepwise oversight. They have attended meetings of the northerly synods, and now have an annual meeting with the synod Moderators and representatives of the Ministries and Education and Learning committees. Additionally, Westminster College currently provides a member of the Faith and Order Committee and the Walking the Way Steering Group.

## Part 2: Looking forward

- 17.1 In September 2019, the committee started on a strategic review of its intentions, activities and ways of working. The results of this so far are discussed in the Way Forward paper given as a paper with resolutions for General Assembly. The key to the committee's strategy for the coming four years is greater integration between committee, synods and RCLs, in order to enhance intergenerational and life-long learning.
- 17.2 This is likely to involve:
- a) the implementation of the discipleship development strategy;
  - b) pursuing Stepwise;
  - c) further collaboration in the provision of learning opportunities;
  - d) formulation and adoption of lay preaching standards and recognition routes;
  - e) agreement on an education and learning environmental charter;
  - f) further work on blended learning;
  - g) participation in a digital review group;

- h) adjustments to the financial support model for RCLs; and
  - i) recommendations for the reconfiguration and ways of working of the committee so that it is fully effective in doing the work for which it has been established.
- 17.3 The RCLs are already working together, and this is a trend which will be strengthened as they seek to respond to the needs of the church. In addition to continuing the work described in this report, Northern College sees itself in a position to offer supervision training as the URC moves to a model of mentoring and supervision, whilst Westminster hopes to offer a Durham BA block-learning course in pioneering and fresh expressions in the 2020-21 academic year, and the Scottish College is developing close relationships with ecumenical partners in educational provision for all parts of the church.
- 17.4 At the time of writing, the whole church in three nations is in lockdown due to Covid-19. We have already seen that this is likely to have a transformational effect on the church, and there will be much learning to draw together in the coming months. The committee is well placed to help the church to learn from experience, and to make changes that will reduce our carbon footprint, enhance our inclusivity, broaden our intergenerational appeal, and make us more agile.