

Paper D1

Education and Learning report

Education and Learning Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Pippa Hodgson, Convenor pippahodgson147@gmail.com Jenny Mills, Secretary for Education and Learning jenny.mills@urc.org.uk
Action required	Note.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Update on the work of Education and Learning.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Report to General Assembly 2022.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	Costs to Assembly of the various work is covered by the Education and Learning budget.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Education and Learning general report

Here we are now!

'To everything, turn, turn, turn

There is a season, turn, turn, turn

And a time to every purpose under heaven.'

The Byrds (words: Peter Seeger)

These words, taken from Ecclesiastes 3, are words that speak into Education and Learning (E and L). We have seen a lot of changes since 2022 when we last reported to GA, and we have also increased collaboration, conversation and cooperation. So many changes, initiatives, opportunities and possibilities – all very exciting and challenging at once!

CHANGE! This sums up the past two years!

Personnel changes

As the Convenor of the Education and Learning Committee changed (big thanks to Alan Yates and big welcome and thanks to Pippa Hodgson), we have had to work out what the team would look like without Anne Hewling (she retired August 2022), then the Revd David Salisbury (who was appointed to the role of the Moderator for the National Synod of Wales October 2023), then more recently the Revd Jenny Mills (she was appointed to the role of Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship) March 2024 and begins this role after this General Assembly); working with a new Principal of the Northern College (we said goodbye to the Revd Dr Rosalind Selby and welcome to the Revd Dr Adam Scott), and Interim Principal for Westminster College (big thanks to the Revd Dr Robert Pope and welcome, from June 2024, to the Revd Dr Peter McEnhill); more changes in our Training and Development Officer+ (TDO+) Network as some moved on to new roles or retired and new people joined us (retiring or moving on: the Revd Peter Ball, Lindsey Brown, the Revd Stuart Scott, the Revd Andy Twilley, and new: Emma Howarth, Lucy Cooke, the Revd Jo Clare-Young, the Revd Julian Templeton).

Finally, big thanks to Marion Brown and Philippa Linton as they continue to offer stability!

Other changes are in relation to: URC Requirements of EM1; a revised EM2 programme; changes to EM3 grant allowance process; closer working relationships with the Resource Centres for Learning including continuing conversations around funding, capital costs, governance, as well as establishing the College Connective (a space for the Principals working more closely with E and L and other teams); the refining of the AALP programme with Northern College and the You're Welcome course, alongside Ministries; more joined up conversations between the TDO+ Network and the RCLs; the Newbigin Hub for lay Pioneer training; the introduction of an E and L bi-monthly newsletter; one revised and one new Stepwise stream; more resources on the URC Learning Hub; and moves in progress to fulfil the 2006 commitment to the RCLs so that they are the places where education, learning and training opportunities are coordinated from (rather than via the Church House team).

It is clear that life never stands still, and there is a season for all things. The words from Ecclesiastes both reassure and challenge us.

Updates from E and L

Discipleship Development Fund (DDF) grants

DDF grants given or agreed since GA 2022, total: £91,610.

- Hodge Hill Stations of the Cross for artwork to reflect the Church's commitment to pursuing racial justice, using a local artist
- Leeds URC Partnership retreat Days
- West Thamesmead Community Church young people attending the Limitless festival 2023 and 2024
- Northerly Synods 2nd LYCiG conference
- Northern Synod Intergenerational Greenbelt attendance
- Yorkshire Synod Eldership development 24 hour conference
- North Wales Worship and Bible Hub
- 20-40s Gathering at Westminster College September 2023
- Children's and Youth Work Committee grants for young people or groups
- Mersey Synod pilgrimage to Corrymeela

- Wooler URC discipleship development activities in the community
- Northern College Envisioning Worship Conference
- North Western Synod Lay Preacher Away Days
- URC Greenbelt team to support BAME young people to attend
- West Leicestershire Resource Area Churches' Quiet Day
- St Columba's URC to support, for one more year, the role of Outreach and Development worker for Trans and Gender non-conforming people
- Redcar Missional House pioneering team members' learning
- Flourishing Churches Initiative in North Western Synod.

The total of grants given since 2021 is £184,000.

The Large Grant Awarding Group meets quarterly, and considers all applications received. We would always welcome more applications. For further information go to: <https://urc.org.uk/your-faith/developing-your-faith/discipleship-development-fund/>

Education for Ministry 1 (EM1) Requirements

One issue that arose from the RCL Funding conversations in 2021 was a need for clearer guidelines about the URC's requirements of RCLs in relation to EM1. E and L and Ministries met with the College Connective, and it was clear that we did not want to develop a curriculum (as we value the autonomy of the three RCLs) but we needed clearer information about what was being covered during ministerial formation. See Appendix 1 for the document, which will, by its very nature, be subject to changes as the world and the URC changes.

Education for Ministry 2 (EM2)

EM2 begins when a Minister of the Word and Sacraments (MWS) or Church Related Community Worker (CRCW) is ordained or commissioned. It is a supported three-year programme where the Minister (from this point 'Minister' applies to both MWS and CRCW) engages with Synod and wider URC opportunities to develop a practice of lifelong learning, building on EM1. The Minister is accompanied by a Ministry Mentor (previously a Pastoral Adviser) as well as the Synod EM2 Officer. The new EM2 programme aims to ensure that all EM2 Ministers have similar experiences, and that support is given during the first three years of ministry. All EM2 Ministers have access to their £350 EM2 grant annually, as well as an annual funded EM2 Summer Retreat, run by the EM2 chaplains. The revised EM2 programme was produced in collaboration between E and L, the College Connective and the TDO+ Network, with reference to the Moderators' meeting. The revised programme includes a one-page information sheet for churches who have a Minister in EM2, as well as a simplified reporting process, and engagement with the RCLs and the Children and Youth Development Officers+ Team. It is hoped that the EM2 Ministers' experience of the revised programme will be of a time where they are surrounded by support and encouragement as they are settling into a new setting and way of being. Those Ministers on Certificates of Eligibility are also included in this revised programme, to support their transition into the URC. For more information contact your Synod EM2 Officer.

Education for Ministry 3 (EM3)

The grant for EM3 (Ministry after EM2) continues to be set at £700 per annum. The grant can be applied for in each calendar year and cannot be carried over without dialogue with the TDO+ (or equivalent) in your Synod, and completion of a Rollover form. Historically, it has not been possible to apply for it in a sabbatical year. From January 2024, the guidelines were altered, and it can now be applied for in a Sabbatical

year. We encourage all Ministers to access and use their EM3 grants to support their discipleship journey, and are also looking to offer specific EM3 opportunities for training to make the learning more easily accessed (ie when an opportunity drops in your inbox, Ministers may be more inclined to attend than having to go seeking the opportunity, whilst being busy in role).

Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers (AALPs).

In June 2023, our first cohort of AALPs finished the course run through Northern College. We had seven people undertake and complete the two-year part-time training. The course offers a comprehensive preparation for AALPs, and has been extremely well received. We are grateful for all the work that has gone in to making this so positive, from staff, students and Synod Representatives.

E and L committed to fund training, if required, so that cost was not a barrier. We have to thank the students, local churches and Synods for their generosity in enabling students to undertake the course, and below are the figures showing the contributions made from a central fund.

The course will continue to be offered through Northern College, but with a review around content and costings as part of the E and L future discussions.

AALP training costs	Total course fees paid per annum	Total payments made	Amount to claim from E and L fund
2021-2022	£ 7,000	£ 5,600.00	£1,600.00
2022-2023	£17,000	£15,100.00	£1,900.00
2023-2024	£17,000	£15,200.00	£1,800.00

Stepwise

(Appendix 2 statistics for engagement in SW.) As you can see, there is a steady flow of people engaging with the streams and benefitting from the discipleship development that occurs when doing Stepwise. We are also beginning to see some of those who are accessing Stepwise stepping into new roles, further study or greater engagement with mission through the life of their churches. This is a small but exciting and encouraging outcome of the programme. We are preparing a video for Autumn Synod meetings that gives a 'moving on' flavour of Stepwise, and the fact that we have listened to feedback on Faith Filled Confidence, have made changes and adaptations, and will be launching Faith Filled Conversations. This will be an exciting new stream, taking on the best of FF Confidence, and encouraging the exploration of greater articulation of faith for those participating. A brand new stream coming in is Faith Filled Environment, a stream looking at green issues especially in relation to the theology, effects, justice, action and responses. We hope to launch this in early 2025. We have been encouraged by the interest in Stepwise by Synods who are committed to the programme as a discipleship development tool, and by those seeking to train as Facilitators. The future oversight and management of Stepwise is part of the E and L future conversations (see below), and this will have an effect on the Stepwise Development Group who have worked hard to

refine, advocate for, develop and champion Stepwise. As the journey of Stepwise continues, we give thanks for the large number of people who have been a part of it, and have given of their time, expertise and talents to make it the current URC Discipleship Development Programme.

URC Learning Hub

This is the space that holds the Stepwise Programme, but we have expanded its reach and it has a space for EM2 Ministers where they can access relevant documents, for the TDO+ Network to access and share documents, and for other learning opportunities from the URC: Conversation Starters (Where are the Young People and Call and Vocation) so far, as well as Exploring Eldership and Safeguarding sessions that can be accessed. The E and L future conversations are also looking at the Hub (see below). It can be accessed **at <https://www.urclearninghub.org.uk>** with some open access material and an overview of Stepwise.

TDO+ Network

It has been so encouraging to be able to work so closely with the TDO+ Network and to hear all that is going on in Synods, as well as their desire to encourage learning and training more widely across the URC. We meet formally on a regular basis, and the TDO+s meet informally in between times. The cooperation, participation and encouragement of learning for all God's people is good to witness in this Network. Sharing ideas, resources, thinking and feeding into the wider E and L documents has been a blessing.

Next year (2025), the TDO+ Network is joining in the 'Conversations at the Crossroads, towards new Christian communities', a gathering of mission and discipleship animators. This gathering will bring together the TDO+ Network, the CYDO+ Team, the Mission Enablers, and others from Synods and Church House, to think about strategy, focus on the Resolution 51a from General Assembly 2023, and on strengthening relationships and joined up working.

This increased collaboration is part of the E and L future conversations (see below), and continuing the increased communication between the RCLs and the TDO+ Network is something that we wish to see more of. The biggest struggle we have is keeping contact and communicating with those Synods who do not have someone in a TDO or equivalent role, which means that much is lost to that Synod, but also to the wider URC.

E and L Newsletter

This is a bi-monthly production from E and L, has been going since February 2023, and contains all sorts of information about opportunities and possibilities for learning, as well as sharing news about learning and E and L across the URC. To register to receive the e-newsletter, please email **marion.brown@urc.org.uk**

The Newbigin Pioneering Hub

The Pioneering Hub has been offering lay learning and training opportunities for those within the URC for two years. Pioneering seeks to find new paths, imagine different possibilities, respond to injustices, can help release the gifts and talents and passions of people so they can be a blessing, and Pioneers look for what is strong, not for what is wrong. As the work of the Church Life Review continues, this work with the NPH, with Mission, Ministries, E and L, and the Congregational Federation, working together and exploring ways to connect up this learning with our RCLs, is more exciting and necessary than ever! The next Pioneering course, run in conjunction with the Church

Mission Society, begins in September. For more information go to <https://seedbeds.org/newbig-in-pioneering-hub-2>

Where have we found the challenges?

'By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down

Yeah, we wept, when we remembered Zion...

Now how shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

Let the words of our mouth and the meditation of our heart

Be acceptable in thy sight here tonight.'

Songwriters: Brent Gayford Dowe / Frank Farian / George Reyam / James Augustus Mcnaughton

Rivers of Babylon lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, TuneCore Inc., Universal Music Publishing Group

These words, immortalised by Boney M among others, speak into wondering where God is when we find ourselves in tough places, finding God in places we did not expect to be, and seeking to remain faithful and focused.

For many of us involved in E and L in the past two years, it has been challenging and frustrating, as well as deeply rewarding and inspiring. Sometimes in the Church, we shy away from the tough stuff, from the hard things, from the issues that drain us, and only report on the positive. But that is not life, that is not reality, and that is not what God calls us to. God is with us in the messiness, the struggle and the pain. Even if we lose sight of God!

Sometimes when we have a plan, when we think we have it all sorted, things change. This has been the experience for the E and L Team in the past two years. It comes back to 'change': mostly changes in staff and expectations of roles. The E and L Team has had to continue to adjust as people leave and roles change – plans change, roles change, expectations change. What now? See below!

Closer communication with the RCLs (as well as E and L changes) has led us to seek ways of sharing work more fully (see below the future of E and L). But the URC is also dealing with the issue of fewer people coming forward to train for stipendiary ordained or commissioned ministry, and a reducing budget in the light of reducing numbers of people attending our churches, more churches closing, and less money being given through the Ministry and Mission Fund. This means that the RCLs have fewer students and need to find new ways of funding, new opportunities for learning and other income streams. This adds anxiety and pressure on staff and Governors, especially as they need to make long term plans. Education and Learning has been working with Finance and the RCLs for a number of years (even before Covid-19) to review the Funding model to see whether it is still the best model. There have been many conversations, not all of them straightforward and we are dealing with three different institutions with their own ways of doing things, which is an absolute blessing as they each bring something unique and special to the learning and training table. But the hope of bringing a joint Funding Model that will work and is viable, to General Assembly 2024, has not been realised. The current model is not transparent, involves different amounts, different structures and different understandings. What to do when something doesn't work? Rethink, review, reconsider and try again. And that is what we are all doing, together, in partnership, with the intent to work together well. Watch this space for 2025!

What now?

So this is us! We have two new Principals in 18 months, we have the RCLs facing a funding squeeze, we have E and L in a new place because of staff changes, and we have new possibilities that we hope can bring flourishing.

This is our story. And we invite you to look below for the hope.

*'I waited patiently for the Lord
He inclined and heard my cry
He lifts me up out of the pit
Out of the miry clay
I will sing, sing a new song
How long to sing this song?'*

U2 Songwriters: Paul David Hewson / Adam Clayton / Larry Mullen / Dave Evans
"40" lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Int. B.v

This song sets us right, in an uncertain place but trusting in God's grace and mercy, trusting in God's eternal presence, trusting that if we sing the song, and we turn to God, patiently and faithfully, we will be raised up. How long to sing this song? Who knows, but the hope that we have in this paper, in the other GA papers and presentations that speak of growth, evangelism, sharing of resources, collaboration, worship, new Christian communities, of learning for all God's people, of community, of love. All these things and more make the URC (and E and L playing its part) able to offer a different way, a justice-focused, love-filled, hope-full, inclusive and diverse, welcoming and encouraging way that allows God to be known, seen, felt, heard and experienced, as widely as possible.

The biggest change, and that referred to in many places above, is **the future of Education and Learning**. Following the resignation of the Stepwise and Digital Learning Programme Manager, the E and L Committee decided that learning should be offered by those who are trained and employed to provide it and these people are located in the RCLs and Synods, in line with the 2006 GA resolution. So from January 2024 there have been conversations about how to facilitate the work being transferred to the RCLs and how to involve the TDO+ Network more closely as this shift happens. The areas of work that will move are Stepwise, the URC Learning Hub, the Church Leadership Programme (review and revision with no course running 2024-25 to enable this to happen), formalising the Assembly Accredited Lay Preaching being offered through the Northern College, and other pieces of work, including advocacy, to be explored and discussed. This transfer of work honours the 2006 resolution: 'General Assembly in line with the Training report, welcomes the commitment of the Northern, Scottish and Westminster Colleges to act for the United Reformed Church in a new role as Resource Centres for Learning, and to undertake dispersed, integrated training and Christian education for the whole people of God. General Assembly agrees to keep its relationship with these Resource Centres for Learning under ongoing review and asks the Training Committee (*Now Education & Learning Committee*) to report on them to the Assembly [of 2012].'

This transfer of responsibility comes with funding, freed up by changes in staffing. The process to realise these changes is already under way, but will need careful conversations and clear expectations and accountability structures. It is about collaboration and doing our best together. The E and L Committee is clear that there needs to be a reporting body, made up of RCLs and others, to oversee, manage and report the work being done. This will all have further impact on the E and L Team which,

in turn, leads to further questions arising within the Discipleship team. Please hold this work, and the people involved, in your prayers at this time of transition.

Add to the work above the **ongoing funding and governance conversations between the URC and the RCLs**, and we have a continued period of challenge. Finalising a sustainable RCL funding solution that addresses the issues raised in the conversations over the past two years, and enables E and L to manage its budget and the RCLs to flourish as increasingly independent colleges, is vital.

It is anticipated that a paper will come to GA 2025 that addresses all these issues together so that the RCLs can seek to move forward with opportunities for growth, as well as journeying with the URC through the Church Life Review, and offering increased learning opportunities for people lay and ordained, all ages and all stages.

Other work going forward:

- Lay Learning Portal – working with the Leadership in Worship Advocate, RCLs and others to produce a ‘one-stop’ space signposting lay learning opportunities and funding
- Developing portfolio software to be used by all the RCLs and EM1 training and future rollout to all learners
- Training updates and opportunities, in conjunction with Ministries – Safer Sacred Space training and Lay Preacher refresher sessions. New opportunities: Pulpit supply training and mental wellbeing sessions.

How long to sing this song? We trust in God’s grace to guide and enable us – as E and L and as part of the wider URC. We don’t know how long anything will take and exactly where we will end up, but let’s do it together, in harmony and as loudly as possible!

Reports from Our Resource Centres for Learning: Northern College, Manchester; The Scottish College, Glasgow; Westminster College, Cambridge.

Report from Northern College

Northern College offers learning to the whole people of God by working alongside the other Resource Centres for Learning and Synods in the United Reformed Church, as well as our ecumenical partners. We are committed to providing relevant and contemporary ministerial formation, lay training and continuing ministerial development, and believe theological education is best experienced by helping people learn from their own context.

We have gone through a time of transition over the past two years as we have a new principal, but more importantly, as we have been seeking to creatively respond to the changing shape of church life across Britain. We are keenly aware that all the mainstream denominations are experiencing a decline in the size of their congregations, and this is impacting on their resources and ability to live out the Gospel story in ways they have done in the past. This in turn has affected the number of candidates presenting for ministerial formation, and also the type of resourcing churches require. While we share the understandable concerns and anxieties many are experiencing, we are optimistic for the future, working alongside others to follow God into new adventures and towards new horizons, and seeking to build a resilient future.

The following are some of the ways that we have been doing that since General Assembly last met:

Greater commitment to inclusion

We have always sought to be an open and inclusive community of learning, worship and fellowship. But we are trying to find ways of broadening our inclusive ethos across theology, gender, sexuality, disability, neurodiversity, ethnicity and educational backgrounds. This is happening through academic teaching, changing the ministerial formation programme, developing lay training and providing funding for specific projects relating to inclusion. We have also sought to offer training in areas such as resilience, wellbeing, trauma-informed approaches to faith (generally and in ministry practice and biblical studies), alongside further developing our approach to embodied spiritualities.

Rethinking ministerial formation

Historically, the mainstay of our work has been preparing candidates for Church Related Community Work and the ministry of Word and Sacraments. But we recognise that we also have a responsibility in supporting and preparing lay people for the essential leadership they are offering our church communities. We have sought to achieve this through our work with TDOs and Synods, as well as supporting individuals by reducing barriers to accessing theological learning. Northern College has been instrumental in the development of non-stipendiary (NSM) CRCW training, a new approach to CRCW ministry which we hope will open up this important and unique ministry to more people within the church. We are very much looking forward to the time when we can welcome our first cohort of these students.

Equipping preachers and worship leaders

We are particularly proud of the work we have undertaken to develop the Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher (AALP) programme on behalf of the denomination. This programme has received excellent feedback from students, and is being adapted continually for the changing needs of those preaching and leading worship. Northern College has sought to keep the programme relevant to local contexts by using visiting speakers who are actively engaged in ministry, in addition to the academics who teach the programme. We have also innovated through mixing the AALP cohort with our NSM students to provide formation weekends where they learn together.

Making theology accessible

Our tutors work hard to maintain their academic standing, with staff members publishing popular theology books and textbooks, as well as contributing to academic conferences, journals and sitting on subject-related academic boards. Our staff team works hard to make high quality theological education accessible to all by facilitating online learning, Elders training, Ministers' Schools, Synod Bible Studies, speaking at Greenbelt, and our own annual 'Envisioning Worship' Conference. Northern College also offers bursaries for those wanting to engage in Higher Education for the first time, those seeking to do doctoral studies, as well as individual grants for accessing conferences and training.

Ecumenical working

We form part of the ecumenical learning community based at Luther King Centre, a theological educational institution operating within Durham University Common Awards. We have also been actively trying to develop our wider ecumenical work, for example with the Moravian Church, through participation in the Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher programme. We are also offering ministerial training and development for other denominations, and renewing our ministerial formation programme so that our

students are formed alongside Baptists, Unitarians, Moravians, and Pentecostals. This creates challenges, but students have reported that it is also helping them to flourish.

Collaborating with others

As an ecumenical institution, we always seek to collaborate where we can. We have put significant time and commitment into developing our relationships with Education and Learning, Ministries and the other Resource Centres for Learning. It has been a delight to build new partnerships and see the development of healthy working relationships. Many of our staff team sit on committees within the URC and offer support. Examples include convening the Stepwise Development Group, sitting on Synod Ministry Committees, offering training for URC National Safeguarding Committee, being part of the Interfaith Enabling Group, offering line management and pastoral supervision for CRCWs and ministers, and organising the URC Research Network.

We are aware that the United Reformed Church is in a time of creative flux, with a careful consideration on how our resources can be best used. This has led the Governors and staff team at Northern College to seek ways of building a resilient future through innovation, partnership and risk taking. We feel the areas outlined above show our commitment to this course of action. We are grateful for our good relationship with the URC, particularly with Education and Learning, Ministries and the other Resource Centres for Learning, and want to serve the denomination in the best ways we can as it seeks a resilient future.

Report from Westminster College

Since our last report to General Assembly, there have been many exciting developments in the College.

Although the College had term-time and block-week students prior to the Covid lockdown, the experience of placing all learning and formational activity online, as well as learning new skills associated with platforms such as Zoom, have changed our practice. Through a combination of on-site meetings and online activity, we have sought to integrate the two sets of EM1 students as fully as possible. At certain points during the year, such as the beginning and end of the academic session, all our students are on site for formational and other activities. During the term time, we meet in hybrid form for morning prayer (Monday to Friday), community bible study or tutor group (alternate Thursdays), and for some community evenings. This seems to have been appreciated by the students and, with low numbers, has enabled a sense of a single cohort regardless of someone's year of study.

There have been a number of staff changes. Peter Ball retired from his post as Director of Church Resource Development at the end of 2023. Peter pioneered the role which was designed to help the College and the wider URC to be more connected. Though the Covid lockdown set the work back, much has been achieved, and the College looks forward to continuing to develop this work under Peter's replacement, Robin Barden.

Rick Mearkle will retire fully from his post as Director of Pastoral Studies at the end of July 2024. Rick stepped in at a time of uncertainty, and his long experience of pastoral ministry and education, as well as his flexibility and calming presence, have provided a stability for staff and students. We welcomed his replacement, Dan Pratt, in February 2024.

We thank Peter and Rick for their work on Westminster's behalf and for their collegiality, and wish them well for a long and happy retirement.

Our block weeks are advertised widely, and attract interest. The annual Lay Preachers and Worship Leaders weekend filled the College in 2022 and 2023, and looks set to do so in 2024. In 2022, we tried hybrid; in 2023, online attendance proved not to attract much interest. Westminster has hosted three public lectures organised by the Cheshunt Foundation, which have been hybrid events.

A Ministers' Refresher Week was held in March 2023. As a result of staff changes, one was not offered in 2024, but we plan to return to this in 2025. Our commitment to holding learning events which are relevant to ministry in the modern world can be seen through hosting three Cheshunt Lectures (on theology and depression; theology and the body; theology and refugees and migrants), as well as organising study days, jointly with the Faraday Institute for Science and Theology on 'Living with Chronic Pain: A Christian Response' (November 2022) and on 'Mental Health: A Christian Response' (November 2023). We were also delighted to host a day of Celebration of Black and Womanist Theologians (October 2023).

Westminster has been the location for a number of denominational and Synod events, some of which have had input from the tutors. These have included:

- South West Synod Ministers Summer School (September 2022)
- Eastern Synod Ministers Refresher Week (September 2022); Ministers Gathering (September 2023)
- West Midlands Synod Ministers Summer School (June 2023)
- The denomination's 'You're Welcome' programme for those serving the URC from other denominations;
- An event for 20s to 40s in September 2023, with the aid of the Discipleship Development Fund.
- Wessex Synod young people 'Telling our story and God's story'.

Hopefully this gives some sense of our activity over the past two years. It is not exhaustive, and it is true to say that there have been significant challenges to overcome during that period. We know challenges lie ahead. But we at the College continue to consider its primary mission to be serving the URC and the wider church in every way we possibly can. As such, we pray that in future we will go from strength to strength.

As this report was being written, we are preparing to welcome Peter McEnhill as the new principal. We look forward to working with him and supporting his vision for the College in service of the church in the 21st century.

Report from The Scottish College (Congregational and United Reformed) SCIO

The life of the College ebbs and flows. In common with much of ecclesial life, there seems to be always more to do as we learn to work better and more efficiently with partners and stakeholders.

Recent years have revolutionised our ways of working as we have become familiar with using remote conferencing for so much of our learning, administration and support. We have become closer partners with our sister colleges – Westminster College, Cambridge

and Northern College in Manchester. We have developed increasingly close working relationships with the United Reformed Church's Secretaries for Education and Learning, and for Ministries. We appreciate the wisdom, encouragement, gifts and resources that each partner brings, and hope that our involvement adds value to our common endeavours. Our desire is to be a community of learning and companionship rooted in the Scottish context, where our national conversations give substance and strength to the contributions we make to the wider ecclesial bodies to which we belong.

Our student body of ministerial trainees recreates itself continually, as we welcome and send out candidates for all modes of Ministry of Word and Sacrament. Summer 2023 saw four of our number receive leaving certificates, a bumper year for us. The Scottish College relates to the denomination through our partnership with our National Synod and through Assembly-level relationships, and supports congregational learning and leadership training, as well as continuing ministerial education (EM2 and EM3), primarily in Scotland. This means that we seek to provide an integrated offering to the church in Scotland, as well as welcome ministerial trainees from further afield, and – increasingly importantly – co-operating with colleagues across the church in taking responsibility for areas of URC Education and Learning. The latter is an area of growth and excitement for us as the church considers the future shape of this aspect of its life.

Since our last report, Patsi Dickie, our College Administrator, finished working with the College on 31 December 2022. Patsi worked with the National Synod of Scotland and the Congregational Union of Scotland for more than 40 years, and the College for ten. We thank her for the decade she spent with us, and for the friendship, good humour and kindness that she showed to a generation of students, as well as the support she gave to all of her colleagues.

Our team of tutors, working in support of the Principal, has been consolidated. Andy Braunston, who assisted in a locum capacity while Fiona Bennett served as Moderator of General Assembly, has continued with us following Fiona's welcome return. Professor Scott Spurlock brings wisdom and support as the fourth member of the core team.

Our way of working involves co-operative relationships, and each of these has changed and developed since our last report. Our closest operational partnership continues to be with the Scottish Episcopal Institute. Our collaboration continues in initial ministerial education for those ordinands for whom this is the most appropriate pathway, but the association has been diverse and continues to develop beyond the scope of EM1. We also work with the Universities of Aberdeen and Glasgow. We are involved in discussions that may result in more integrated co-operating among providers of theological in Scotland, and in the Glasgow region especially.

The College, having become a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation in 2021, has consolidated its governance. Douglas Hay retired after as a trustee many years. Wendy Bowen has begun a first term of service.

Where possible, we have sought synergies, and opportunities for those in different roles and phases of training to learn together. In May, we held a joint training weekend to bringing together students in the first and second phases of Education of Ministry. Our EM1 'Worship Workshops' were also offered to lay preachers and others. Ministry

students joined ministers in the Scottish Synod for an overnight learning event in October 2023.

We hope this report gives some sense of the spirit and means of working at the Scottish College. It doesn't cover everything, of course. We have achieved much against a background of substantial obstacles during recent years. We see challenges ahead, but are confident that we can still, with the whole church and our colleagues in other places, dream Kingdom dreams and support the church as it moves forward.

Appendix one: Education and Learning

EM1 URC Requirements from RCLs

URC requirements for learning and preparation for accredited ministries. The RCLs will provide these requirements in partnership with the Synod TDO+ Network and Education and Learning.

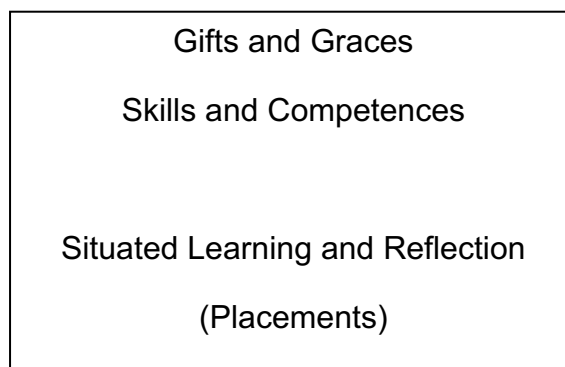
Pre-study

- Attendance at You're Welcome (E&L and Ministries)
- DBS / PVG
- Safeguarding – Synod / RCL confirm training date, if required arrange attendance
- College 'Induction'.

Also consider:

- individual circumstances
- prior learning
- wellbeing/resilience.
- awareness of self and others.

*Ministerial Formation and Accredited & Non-Accredited Study
(in college community)*



Requirements	S.MW&S	CRCW	NSM 1-3	NSM 4	NSM CRCW
Things to be done					
Qualification: Diploma in Theology (minimum)	√	√	√	x	x
Placement hours (minimum) F/T expect to be on placements 2/7	800	800	400	400	400
Safer sacred space	√	√	√	√	√
Biblical studies – new and old testaments	√	√	√	√	√
Summer retreat (annual)	√	√	√	√	√
Portfolio (G, G, S, C)	√	√	√	√	√
Church history	√	√	√	√	√
Pastoral care	√	√	√	√	√
Leadership	√	√	√	√	√
Skills to gain					
Public speaking	√	√	√	√	√
Conflict resolution	√	√	√	√	√
Reformed theology – why the URC does things this way	√	√	√	√	√
Theological reflective practice	√	√	√	√	√
Multi Church pastorates	√	√	√	x	x
Team working – including response to change	√	√	√	√	√
Political social engagement	√	√	√	√	√
Wellbeing and resilience	√	√	√	√	√
Experiences to have					
Children and Youth – Intergenerational	√	√	√	√	√
Interfaith (exposure)	√	√	√	√	√
Equality, diversity and inclusion	√	√	√	√	√

World Church +	√	√	√	√	√
New and alternative Christian communities	√	√	√	√	√
Anti-racism	√	√	√	√	√
Elderly Care / Ageing	√	√	√	√	√
Closing Churches	√	√	√	√	√

+this could include a trip/visit/placement overseas and would be decided during training, by the RCL.



Appendix two

Number of people engaged with Stepwise – up to and including May 2024			
<i>Faith-filled Life</i>			
Active groups: 15	Participants: 115	Facilitators: 26	
Completed groups: 37	Participants: 215	Facilitators: 54	
Groups that didn't continue due to Covid-19: 2	Participants: 12	Facilitators: 3	
Total groups: 52	Total participants: 342	Total facilitators: 83	
<i>Faith-fuelled Leadership</i>			
Active groups: 0	Participants: 0	Facilitators: 0	
Completed groups: 3	Participants: 20	Facilitators: 5	
Total groups: 3	Total participants: 20	Total facilitators: 5	
<i>Faith-filled Community</i>			

Active groups: 1	Participants: 5	Facilitators: 1	
Completed groups: 2	Participants: 11	Facilitators: 4	
Total groups: 3	Total participants: 16	Total facilitators: 5	
<i>Faith-filled Worship</i>			
Active groups: 3	Participants: 21	Facilitators: 6	
Completed groups: 5	Participants: 35	Facilitators: 8	
Total groups: 8	Total participants: 56	Total facilitators: 14	
Groups participating by year: February 2024			
Groups 2021	Groups 2022	Groups 2023	Groups 2024
23	11	15	6

Number of Synods engaging – 12 (of 13)