

This paper is offered 'for information', expanding on AD1 which contains a precis of the three Resource Centres for Learning (RCL) responses to questions from the Business and Education and Learning Committees. This paper is the full responses from the three RCLs.

Northern College response to the Business Committee questions



Response to questions from URC Business Committee

The Officers at Northern College recognise that the United Reformed Church is in a challenging situation regarding financing the Education and Learning and welcome the continued discussions with the Resource Centres for Learning on potential ways forward. This short report is a response to the four questions proposed by the Business Committee.

Do we carry on as we are, knowing it is financially unsustainable?

Northern College recognises that the continued funding of the current RCLs model is unsustainable in the medium to long term. We base this view on the information we have received from Education and Learning during our discussions around the future of funding, as well as our analysis of our financial resources. For example, while Northern College is financially stable, we subsidise the training of URC ordinands and CRCWs by about £250,000. With the prospect of funding cuts from the URC our costs would become financially unsustainable.

Do we still need three RCLs or would we be better served with one residential RCL?

Northern College feels that the URC is best served by three RCLs. The different patterns of training and geographical locations, mean we can creatively respond to the diverse needs and requirements of those seeking education, whether this be lay training, ministerial formation or continuing ministerial development.

In terms of finance, it would seem to make sense to have one RCL that potentially worked from different sites. Northern College Governors saw the benefit of this approach and warmly welcomed the possibility of having one English RCL on two sites. We felt that this may reduce costs, enable the different patterns of training to continue and offer a geographical spread. However, it became apparent that this would not become a viable option because of varied reasons, although, Northern College remains committed to working collaboratively with Scottish College and Westminster College, as well as our other partners.

Should we outsource all training and just pay for the cost of EM1 training at one provider (eg Queens, as the Methodist Church does)?

While this may seem like an expedient solution, we feel it would result in the URC losing ownership and influence over the content and quality of lay training, ministerial formation and continuing ministerial development. It could also result in impoverished learning environments; for example, Northern College have found that training lay people alongside ordinands has greatly enriched the education offered, as has training CRCWs alongside ordinands. We think that outsourcing all training could result in more fundamental issues, such as working with educational

partners that are not rooted in the Dissenting traditions, and potentially partners who are focused on academic, rather than confessional theology. There is also a historic aspect to the RCLs with all the Colleges finding their origins within the heritage of the Presbyterian and Congregational witness within Britain.

Do we go for the flourishing option with seed funding?

Northern College welcomes the possibilities that seed funding may have on its ability to flourish in the future. If offered, we feel, with careful planning, that it would give us the opportunity to further develop our educational offering. Northern College already has strategic and dynamic plans to flourish, and any seed funding would be used to enhance these plans.

The Officers of Northern College understand that any seed funding would come from the New College Fund and would like the URC to consider holding back half of this fund and use the rest for seed funding. We would propose that this money is invested and the interest from these investments used to employ three members of staff, one for each College (on a URC stipend). These members of staff would represent the URC within the Colleges and the Colleges to the URC. At the moment the principal of Northern College fulfils this role, and we feel by having these posts the URC would maintain a level of influence in each semi-independent College.

Conclusion

The Officers of Northern College would like to thank Education and Learning for the opportunity to respond to these questions, and for the ways in which they have involved Northern College in the ongoing discussions. We welcome any comments or questions.

*The Revd Dr Adam Scott, the Revd John Grundy and Paul Barrett,
on behalf of Northern College, August 2024*

Scottish College response to the Business Committee questions



The Scottish College (Congregational and United Reformed)
A Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC051195

Introduction

The Scottish College, through the current Principal and Treasurer, have been involved in discussions about funding since an exercise to arrive at a new model of funding was begun in February 2018. We, along with others, have gone through the often-turbulent processes, expended time and effort, and managed the accompanying uncertainty.

Amidst this, we believe that we have sustained and developed a scalable and robust model of educational provision, especially in EM1, focussed on our Scottish context and partnerships but available through the denomination.

We have often been conscious that we could have done more or done better. Some of the constraint is natural and arises from our site in a national context away from the highest concentration of population. Our situation is also strongly determined by an historic level of resourcing that has limited our full-time teaching establishment to one member of staff (who, additionally, manages Synod-facing responsibilities and commitments).

We believe that the assumptions developed through extensive consultation by a working group (involving the three RCLs and Education and Learning, with input from the General Secretariat) in 2020 continue to represent a compact upon which we can move forward:

1. We remain committed to a Church alive in three nations.
2. We will retain a core competence of training in URC ethos, practice and theology.
3. We aim to enhance the resilience of our education and learning provision to enable increases in demand to be addressed efficiently and effectively.
4. We will continue to implement the 2006 GA goal of 'integrated provision of life-long education and learning for the whole people of God'.
5. Where possible and practical, ministers and lay will be trained together.
6. Our focus is on the development of disciples in the URC, but we will not restrict access to people from other denominations, subject to financial considerations.
7. Our primary focus is 'front office delivery, not back office administration'.
8. We aim to reduce the complexities in managing and delivering education and learning.
9. We value the diversity within our denomination; unity not uniformity.
10. We aim to work with a blended approach to education and learning using both virtual and physical methods.
11. Governance is needed to support our aims, not define them.
12. Where practical, hold training events close to where those being trained live, to minimise trainees' time investment.
13. Where possible, hold training events in a location which minimises total travel for environmental reasons.

Do we carry on as we are, knowing the funding situation is financially unsustainable?

We note that the existing funding arrangements were not designed with us in mind, and an 'imbalance' in funding levels has been acknowledged since the beginning of our discussions in 2018. We can say that within our level of resourcing (mostly Assembly and some Synod) we have managed to be flexible, scalable and responsive especially in our provision of education for ministry in its various phases (notably EM1). Thus, we would want to say that *as they apply to us* the current arrangements are not unsustainable for the denomination. We do not believe that our arrangements require change *from our side*. We note this only to record our observation that our model has developed within a situation of general resource constraint.

We relish the opportunity to take on further work for the denomination and our partner RCLs, and to grow our offering as we are able and resourced to do so.

At the same time, having been involved since 2018 in this process, we are aware of the crisis in learner numbers (especially EM1), and in funding. We accept that changes must come about. After such an extended period of uncertainty we hope to see a new settlement developed as smoothly and rapidly as possible, and we appreciate the efforts of all in making this happen. Throughout the past six years our interest has been in seeing a fair and reasonable arrangement emerge. While recognising that our size, location and particularities would mean that a new system would not be designed around our needs, we have hoped not to be crushed by the unintended effects of changes initiated in response to challenges elsewhere in the system. Thus, we recognise that funding arrangements will not continue as they are and, on a broader scale, are not sustainable. The 'as we are' of the past six years has inhibited planning and consumed much energy on all sides and we agree that it cannot continue.

Do we still need three RCLs or would we be better served with one RCL?

The Scottish College believes that the United Reformed Church benefits from having three RCLs. Each existing College offers a distinct pattern of training and access to the resources of an ecumenical and academic ecosystem that benefits the wider denomination. Our different contexts allow us to respond creatively to the diverse needs of those seeking education, whether in lay training, ministerial formation, or ongoing ministerial development. In particular, we believe that maintaining a training establishment in Scotland vouchsafes the United Reformed Church's desire to be a church in multiple nations. We would also maintain that the close association that the College has with the National Synod of Scotland strengthens both bodies and offers a pattern of integration to the whole denomination.

The Scottish College has never sought to dictate the pattern of relationships among its RCL partners, but were supportive of the idea of a single English RCL operating from two locations. However, it became clear that this option would not be feasible for various reasons. The Scottish College remains committed to collaborating closely with Northern College, Westminster College and our other partners.

We believe that the loss of any RCL to the church would diminish our joint offering. The original form of this question referred to 'residential RCLs'. On this score we would note that the church benefits greatly from having guaranteed (and, if possible, primary) use of multiple residential facilities but believes that the profile of those coming forward for EM1 will never again sustain a viable long-term residential cohort. With very rare exceptions, those training will insist on varying patterns of block week, part-time, and two-day a week 'in person' learning, complemented by online provision and placement-based situated learning. Any future configuration will need to take account of this, whether such accommodation is provided in existing College facilities or otherwise.

Should we outsource all training and just pay for the cost of EM1 training at one provider (eg Queens, as the Methodist Church does)?

No. We do not believe that the United Reformed Church can thrive without 'in-house' expertise and provision in all areas of learning. While we delight in our ecumenical partnerships, our learning networks – RCLs, Training and Development plus Network, Education and Learning (in transition), Ministries, and Children and Youth – are vital places where we site our conversations and contextualisation. They are, we maintain, an indispensable part of the 'glue' that holds us together.

Should we pursue the flourishing option with seed funding?

'Flourishing' is a goal and aspiration with which it is impossible to disagree. For some Colleges it may be read as being freed to seek 'customers' beyond the United Reformed Church, leveraging an inheritance of resources in buildings, connections and finance. We do not begrudge this possibility. For ourselves, the Scottish College is clear that any flourishing *for us* will be within the context of service to the United Reformed Church. We expect the type of funding will evolve to some degree. It is likely that the balance between EM1 fees, core denominational funding and

Synod-directed training will change. However, we do not (unless our resourcing through 'seed funding' was increased to a degree beyond current imagining) see any possibility of attracting outside 'customers' in viable numbers. This view does not arise from a lack of confidence in what we do but from the knowledge that our Scottish partners (ie ecumenical partners, other training institutions and the university divinity schools) are struggling with the same issues. Partners would be also be potentially 'competing' with us from a resource base considerably stronger than we are expecting the United Reformed Church will be able to provide. Our partners in the Congregational Federation in Scotland are also in a weak situation, organisationally and financially. Flourishing depends on resources, and we believe that we have been 'faithful in small things' for the Church. This is only to say that we see our flourishing is inescapably linked to our ability to be useful in service to the United Reformed Church. For us, given the historic resources (personnel, accommodation, etc) at our disposal and our local landscape, the United Reformed Church at Synod and General Assembly level is 'the only game in town' and we would be dishonest to pretend otherwise.

The digital developments of recent years have revealed new opportunities, and we are encouraged to be able to begin serving the church through administering the Learning Hub and, hopefully, through rolling out a new Portfolio/Learning Management System for the whole church. In terms of flourishing, we would submit that our model of service (especially EM1) cannot function with a lower real level of funding than at present and this means that the absolute minimum seed funding required would need to yield an income that could replace our block grant. That would be maintenance. Beyond that we are prepared to bid for areas of work and to co-operate in building robust networks of complementary provision, with an eye to sustaining the overall diversity we currently prize.

We have creative ideas that we would like to develop with others, such as – perhaps – the development of a small number of cohort-sized residential/educational hubs (say, six to ten rooms with teaching space) available to all of the RCLs in strategic locations across the differing contexts of Great Britain to allow for stimulating contextual learning for groups on weekends and residential weeks.

Perhaps this is not the place for setting out plans and visions in detail but we do wish to indicate our willingness to expand and grow if the resources to do so are truly there.

2 September 2024

Westminster College response to the Business Committee questions

Response to questions set by the Education and Learning Committee in relation to the future of RCL funding:

Do we carry on as we are, knowing the funding situation is financially unsustainable?

Westminster College recognises the considerable financial pressures on the Education and Learning budget, and indeed the general funds of the United Reformed Church as M&M income declines. And thus, the obvious answer to the question thus posed is, 'No, we cannot carry on as we are, knowing the funding situation is financially unsustainable.'

However, not 'carrying on as we are' can mean a variety of things. For example, Westminster College has already sought to cut its staffing costs by reducing the numbers of its of teaching staff by one full-time equivalent post. Furthermore, it has in recent years sought to maximise income from its non URC or E&L business, and although this was understandably hit by Covid, the signs are that revenues from the trading side of the business are back on track and projecting to be in excess of two and a quarter million pounds of revenue for this year. This has been achieved through growth in our B&B trade, hospitality and events, and by entering into key partnership leases onsite with related institutions whose activities overlap closely with those of Westminster, and which provide strategic opportunities for Westminster to develop going forward. These partnerships also create a rich and diverse set of ecumenical and interfaith relationships which provide a flourishing and stimulating context in which our training – in all its dimensions occurs. We believe this benefits the URC by providing a richer and more diverse training environment wherein engagement with other traditions occurs naturally and spontaneously whilst being rooted in a thoroughly Reformed approach to theological education. In short Westminster is not passive in relation to the funding question, but is actively engaging with the financial realities it faces and is seeking to make the most of its abundant assets in defraying the cost of its operations.

However, as indicated in a previous paper offered by the Westminster Governors on a similar topic, the question put thus points to the need for a more strategic answer. That is to say, the question the URC is facing concerns the strategic priority it places upon theological education as an activity for the whole church. Only once it has determined the answer to that question, can it then ask itself how such training is to be delivered, and how – from the totality of funds available to the URC – is it to be funded?

This is not as such an argument for the status quo, but it is to say that focussing on the current funding model as the only possible way of funding theological education for the whole church is to misstate the options available. The question must surely be (i) is theological education a key priority for the church, (ii) If it is adduced to be a priority, how is it then to be delivered on behalf of the church? If the URC wishes to retain the capacity for training its own authorised ministries in house, and, also to provide for denominationally specific opportunities for lay training in a similar fashion – what resources are required to do that? Funding flows can then be determined according to the stated strategic priorities of the church.

In short, the funding situation is only unsustainable insofar as (i) RCLs' funding presently flows from E&L via M&M, which is in permanent decline; and (ii) that is accepted as the only possible way of funding RCLs.

Do we still need three RCLs, or would we be better served with one RCL?

There is an obvious conflict of interest in asking the RCLs themselves for an answer to this question. But, having stated the conflict as it were, Westminster believes that a case can be made for retaining the three RCLs. Not least because we are given to understand that there is an acceptance that the Scottish College is a case apart due to the particular and different aspects of

the Scottish church context and the need therefore for a continuation of Scottish based training. If that premise is accepted, then we could only ever realistically be thinking of a minimum of two RCLs rather than one. Unless, that is, we were cutting to one RCL in Scotland, but that then would be to suggest that England and Wales do not similarly form a distinctive context and culture unto themselves, analogous to the Scottish situation, such that a south of the border facility must be retained.

Formerly, there was a much stronger geographical imperative for having a 'Northern' and a 'Southern' college in reasonable proximity to where candidates might live. And although it is true that divergent patterns of course delivery, particularly hybrid and online modes of delivery, have weakened the geographical argument they have not entirely removed it, particularly for lay training. Moreover, the different training options (residential, part-residential, weekend/online, and blocks, means that the various RCLs appeal to people with a wide range of family and work commitments as well as varied student preferences re modes of learning.

Similarly, the range of specialities covered by the college staff groupings provides a rich resource for the wider URC to draw upon. The diversity in the educational and theological approach of the RCLs also mirrors the diversity of the URC constituency at large. If the URC wants to continue to recruit a diverse range of people for ministerial training, it is best served by all three Colleges as something important would be lost in the homogenising effect of a single institution. It is hard also to envisage a scenario wherein a merger leading to a single RCL would not reduce the staff complement of any ensuing institution. Thus, critical skills of academically informed theological reflection would be lost to the wider church.

It is also true that both the church and the colleges have benefitted from the historic close and covenantal working relationships over a long period of time. The church has maintained a ready pool of specialists to call upon for membership of its committees on doctrine, faith and order, liturgy and worship, mission, etc. Increasingly, this has also meant the delivery of academically credible courses that are tailored appropriately for lay needs. The RCLs have benefitted from a steady stream of church nominees to their governing bodies with the required professional and technical skills to enable them to function well. The positive impact of these enduring 'soft' connections over many years cannot be overstated.

It is also true that Westminster has not been persuaded thus far that a merger of two colleges would necessarily produce a stronger single college as a result. Recent decades, at least in North America, have shown such mergers of supposedly equal seminaries, theological colleges, etc to be extremely difficult to enact effectively. Insurmountable financial, legal, geographic, and simply cultural problems commonly surface, frequently killing the merger itself or leaving the surviving merged entity on weaker footing than the previously separate institutions would have been if they hadn't merged.

Should we outsource all training and just pay for the cost of EM1 training at one provider (eg Queens, as the Methodist Church does)?

The comparison to the Methodist Church and Queens is not entirely accurate. Queens was already (from 1970) a Methodist training college, albeit within an ecumenical structure, but with Methodist staff tutors on the faculty. This is not the same as 'outsourcing' training. Outsourcing training would involve sending all students to a theological college that did not have any URC tutors. Presumably there would need to be at least one URC tutor at such a college, so that ordinands learnt something about the denomination to which they belong, just as Queens currently has representatives from both Anglicans and Methodists. Any theological college would therefore have to be willing to accept one (or two?) URC tutors to join their staff team. How would the URC decide whom and how many tutors to appoint? While this may seem cost effective, the potential impact on the denomination could be disastrous. And unless URC tutors were to be appointed at the chosen theological college, potential ministers in the URC might well wonder why their own

denomination was not able/willing to provide their own training, or why the denomination did not consider it important to support its own ministerial formation.

This option would surely be a retrograde step for a denomination comprised of church traditions that have always prized the concept of an 'educated clergy' and a 'biblically and theologically informed' laity; traditions which have hitherto prioritised achieving that through the creation and support of denominational colleges that trained ministers to the highest standard and which now increasingly support the theological education of lay people.

It is also the case that the URC would have considerably less say over the curriculum offered in such an outsourced training setting. The current RCLs can and do respond very quickly to the emerging training needs of the denomination and see themselves as 'covenantal' partners in a joint enterprise with their wider church colleagues. This responsiveness should not be downplayed. To cite the practice of the Church of Scotland as an example; it has long used external universities for its academic training of ministers and it has found it increasingly difficult to get the traditional universities to provide new training modules in areas such as mission, pioneering and new church communities. Topics which the church very much wants and needs, but subjects in which its university partners are considerably less interested. As such, the C of S has moved in the opposite direction to the URC in significantly beefing up the work of its E&L equivalent to ensure that the requirements of the C of S re the formation of its ministers are met.

This option would seem to suggest that the denomination does not value the work of the current RCLs and does not see any purpose in having its own theological college. The fact that this option exists points to a lack of desire for the URC to have a distinctive voice in global theological education or research. Does the URC still have a sense of mission or purpose within the wider church/society or within academia?

It is also the case that the Methodists historically maintained a further College – Cliff College -for their lay ministry training in mission and evangelism. This link continues. Unless something similar was contrived for the URC, outsourcing would result in the loss of all RCL educational activity that is not EM1 related. And, as stated above, it would be exceedingly difficult to do that EM1 training at a non-URC institution without diluting the training's URC flavour and ability to form future ministers. Ministers who are informed by and able to articulate their place within the Reformed tradition and the URC more specifically.

Do we go for the flourishing option with seed funding?

As indicated at the outset of our response to these questions Westminster has already embarked upon a course where it seeks to maximise the return on its considerable asset base. The campus can indeed be seen as an asset or a liability, and we believe the balance tilts towards a considerable asset – both for the ongoing work of the College and in service to the wider URC. We do believe that there is a 'flourishing' future to be sought. Westminster sits at the heart of a rich and diverse context in Cambridge, wherein strategic partnerships can be formed. Indeed, such partnerships are already forming on its campus site – and more can be developed, adding to the already rich ecumenical context that is the Cambridge Theological Federation.

We have a talented and committed staff body which constitutes significant intellectual capital. We plan to grow a student community from the wider UK and all around the world by being a centre of theological excellence in the Reformed tradition. We think that the traditional candidates for such a centre of Reformed excellence in the UK university sector have increasingly become faculties of Religious Studies. Consequently, a vacuum is being created for theological colleges that are consciously doing theology in service to the church to fill. We believe there is an attractive 'offer' to be made that can attract Reformed students from around the world. And at the heart of such a rich community of learning we foresee a cohort of URC students preparing for various

ministries of the church, colleagues pursuing EM2 opportunities, and sabbatical guests here for renewal and refreshment.

We will continue to upscale our lay offerings to individuals and congregations and believe that the Cambridge site is an attractive and stimulating place for people to access. For those unable to get here physically, we will enhance our digital presence, and we look forward to shaping the Stepwise programme going forward. All this is part of our vision of a 'flourishing future' in which we seek to form and build ministries – lay and ordained – that are themselves becoming flourishing ministries in their local contexts.

The question then is how much 'seed-funding' is required and over what period of time to ensure a 'soft landing' that enables the RCLs to reconfigure their relationship with the URC and cease to be dependent upon block grant funding from the church? The URC then simply becoming a purchaser of whatever training it requires at cost price? As a previous letter from the Chair of the Board of Governors argued, 'If a significant amount of the capital of the Ministerial Training Fund could be made available to Westminster' – (and in this process to the other RCLs as well) – 'it would allow a prompt preventative response to the capital works needed ... this approach could also give Westminster a buffer against the decline in core funding from M&M while the longer-term options are considered.'

The precise quantum of 'seed-funding' is still to be determined in the continuing process via consideration of RCL 'vision' papers, and it is accepted that, as has been stated, this constitutes a 'gift of grace' on the part of the wider church. But it also reflects prudent stewardship by the church in relation to a process of 'decoupling' from partner bodies in the RCLs which have been in close covenantal relations of service to the URC and its preceding bodies for many, many years. A responsible and carefully managed transition will enable the RCLs to successfully pilot themselves to a new position, taking much more responsibility for their own funding needs, but continuing to provide high quality theological education for the URC.

Westminster College, August 2024

Northern College Flourishing paper



NORTHERN
COLLEGE

URC Flourishing document

Introduction

This report is written in response to a request from Education and Learning and the URC Business Committee. We understand that we have been asked to present an overview of the ways in which Northern College is responding to the challenges of the changes in funding for its activities from the URC. Whilst these changes present obvious challenges, we are approaching them as an opportunity to safeguard training of URC ministerial candidates, CRCW candidates, ministers in EM2 and EM3, as well as a strong offering for lay people within the church.

We feel it is important to note that Northern College is currently undergoing a merger with the Luther King Centre and Northern Baptist College. We see this merger as fundamental in our future, as it means that we will continue to train our students alongside those in the other dissenting denominations (including, Moravians, Baptists, Unitarians, Congregational Federation and independent churches). This means that we can continue to serve the needs of ministerial students and lay people in the URC, both theologically and ecclesiologically. This will put us in a very strong position to continue to provide support to the URC as we will function as an independent Theological Educational Institution (TEI) under Durham University's Common Awards scheme, allowing greater control and flexibility in what we can provide, as well as accessing governmental Student Finance – please see the appendix for the latest communication update. We realise this may raise questions and we will be happy to answer these.

In discussions with relevant people, we would like to ask that you consider funding four areas which we feel will enable us to develop and grow:

- 1) Fund a denominational lead within each College.
- 2) Fund development in online learning provision.
- 3) Fund development in disability support and engagement.
- 4) Fund development of lifelong learning provision for lay people and ministers.

The URC alongside Northern College are full members of the 'Luther King House Educational Trust' with representation on its board. Both have part ownership (16% each) and responsibility for its buildings. Northern College have paid significant amounts of money towards the upkeep of the buildings for the last 20 years, and have been in conversations with the URC around its responsibilities in terms of investment in the buildings. This means that we have not included any capital costs for renovations of buildings in this paper. In point of fact, the original brief requested that we did not submit these costings. However, we recognise there is significant need and the appropriate plans and costings are currently being worked on, and will be submitted in due course to the appropriate committee, alongside other funders. Renovation of the buildings, especially educational facilities and some accommodation, would have a significant impact on our future flourishing.

1) Principal/denominational lead

Overview

Northern College recognises that the principal does a significant amount of denominational work and we feel it is essential that this continues. Therefore, we are asking that the denomination consider funding a denominational lead in each of the Colleges. We would request that this is an ongoing agreement, with some of the New College funding being held back in order for this to be achieved.

Expected impact

Northern College would argue that having a funded role in an RCL will enable a flourishing organisation to continue to offer the support and engagement that the denomination requires. It will also enable the URC to have a voice within a semi-independent organisation, so that the denomination's needs and requirements can be advocated for.

Indicative costs

At least, a stipend in line with the Plan for Partnership (including ongoing costs and benefits). But preferably a salary that is equivalent to a senior management role.

2) Developing online learning

Overview

As a denomination, we have seen a growth in lay people and ministerial students accessing learning online. This has included formal, as well as informal learning. We feel that investment in our infrastructure and IT support services, would enable us to grow and develop whilst meeting the evolving needs of the denomination. Online learning can also reduce costs, particularly in regards to travel.

Current evidence suggests that this would encourage flourishing in the following ways:

- i) Online study options have engaged students from India, Africa, America – this helps all students engage with the word-wide church and Christian communities which better helps them be prepared for ministry in diverse contexts.
- ii) Online learning has engaged students unable to access other modes of study, including those marginalized due to disability, caring responsibilities, geography or any other barriers to engagement. We would build on these successes.
- iii) Online learning has enabled us to offer bespoke learning to the URC, for example, training in facilitation, resilience and ministerial boundaries.

We would like to develop our online offering in the following ways:

Development of IT infrastructure

- Chapel to be upgraded for hybrid teaching and disability inclusion
- Three teaching rooms to be upgraded for hybrid and inclusive teaching
- Two study rooms upgraded for digital learning.
- Indicative costs: £40,000 – teaching rooms; £15,000 – chapel; £3,000 – study rooms
- Financial support to enhance online learning resources (eg journals and ebooks) to ensure accessibility to all. £5000.

IT and Digital engagement support officer

- Support the infrastructure
- Accessibility support for students

- Advise on online learning and teaching resources
- Link with changes in URC IT infrastructure
- Indicative costs: £50,000 (inclusive of oncosts) for five years.

Lead for online learning

- Develop and lead on online learning
- Academic or admin lead?
- Indicative costs: £50,000 (inclusive of ongoing costs) for a five year period.

Expected impact

We feel that this investment would enable us to increase student numbers across our course, which would broaden learning for lay people and ministerial students, and supports our long-term financial stability to ensure continuity of provision to denomination.

We also feel that this investment would mean marginalized student groups are supported to access life-long learning, which could improve representation in the denomination, and upskilling wider membership for service.

Further development of Online learning would enable us to develop stronger links with our partner denominations and Colleges in the Worldwide Church. We could develop the Research Network to engage with partners in other countries.

3) Disability support and engagement

Overview

As a denomination, we have a strong commitment to inclusion and we would like to further embed this in our work as an educational institution. We already have strong reputation for providing accessible learning to those with disabilities and specific learning needs, as well as those who have not accessed Higher or Further Education previously often due to obstacles.

We would like to develop our disability support and engagement provision in the following ways:

Disability officer

- Liaison with Ministries and Education and Learning
- Offer student interventions and support
- Provide pastoral support and mentoring
- Offer guidance on institutional and strategic development for inclusion
- Provide support in complete applications for Disabled Students Allowance
- Indicative: a stipend in line with the Plan for Partnership (including ongoing costs and benefits). For five years to imbed shared learning and create sustainable changes.

Improve provision of learning facilities and accommodation for people with disabilities

- Enhancing physical accessibility to onsite learning and accommodation facilities, including:
 - Ground floor accommodation upgraded to meet current and future requirements
 - Automating the doors to main entrance, library and select teaching rooms
 - Provision of study room computer to Zoom into class – fixed webcam
 - Study space for people with disabilities, including sit/stand desk, screen adaptations for the visible impaired
 - Making toilets accessible toilet, enhanced
 - Indicative costs: allocation of £30,000.

Accessible pastoral support room

- Upgrading of current room to offer pastoral support creating a facility that is accessible
- £2000.

Evidence

- We have gained a wealth of experience through supporting multiple students with disabilities including wheelchair use and deafness. Negotiating the systems and provision of support services which are appropriate to theological learning (rather than generic educational provision) has been vital in ensuring the success of these individuals.
- Trials of providing targeted neurodiversity support and development of support networks have proven very effective, receiving very positive feedback from students involved, and significantly improving the submission and pass rates of students concerned.
- Over the last five years we have 100% success rate in our supported applications to the DSA. We have strong expertise in this area but need greater capacity.
- Innovative research into disability is undertaken by students at our institution, either due to their lived experience or specialist roles (for example, Martin Hobgen – ‘Vocation, participation and empowerment of people excluded by physical disability: a critical analysis of factors, past and present, shaping the future for people with disabilities within the Baptist Union of Great Britain’ and Naomi Hewardine: ‘Exploration of Sallie McFague’s Models of God with a Small Group of Women who have Intellectual Disabilities: ‘Hidden Treasure Project’

Expected impact

- The impact of this additional support will be to help support recruitment as well as retention of students, and a commitment to equip and serve all the people of God. It will also enable us to welcome students who may currently continue to feel excluded because of disability challenges, and whose past narratives of accessing learning and training have been negative due to barriers they have experienced. These require high quality, targeted support, to mitigate the effect of past experiences and will be important to ensure genuine inclusion within the denomination’s offer for life-long learning.
- This in an area in which we could then offer advice to, and training for, the denomination.

4) Lifelong learning

Overview

The URC has expressed a strong commitment to learning for the whole people of God and we would like to further develop our training for both lay people and ministers. We want to create bespoke training for Synods, Ministers’ summer and winter schools, elders, and local churches. We would also like to develop specific training in Pastoral Supervision, and potentially provide Pastoral Supervision. We would also like to further develop the URC Research Network for a wider audience.

We would like to develop lifelong learning in the following ways:

Tutor in lifelong learning

- An individual to lead on the development of EM2 and EM3 training, and bespoke lay training
- Provision of pastoral supervision
- Indicative: a stipend in line with the Plan for Partnership (including ongoing costs). For five years to imbed shared learning and create sustainable changes.

Pastoral supervision training

- Develop a pastoral supervision training course, including hybrid and online options
- Recruitment, training and supervision for pastoral supervisors
- Indicative: £40,000.

Evidence

Already Northern College is providing significant informal and formal training to the denomination. We see this as an area of growth and potential.

Expected impact

Pastoral supervision is being required by all major denominations and this is a market we can realistically access to support ongoing financial sustainability.

Summary of costs

Year one

- Denominational lead – £40,000 + (Plan for partnership stipend or senior leadership salary for five years)
- IT and digital engagement officer – £50,000 (for five years)
- Lead for online learning – £50,000 (for five years)
- Disability officer – £40,000 (Plan for partnership stipend for five years)
- Tutor in lifelong learning – 40,000 (Plan for Partnership stipend for five years)
- Pastoral supervision training – £40,000
- Development of IT infrastructure – £63,000
- Improve provision of learning facilities and accommodation for people with disabilities – £30,000
- Accessible pastoral support room – £2000.

Total: £355,000

Subsequent years

£220,000 – the figures in blue above are year one only costs other costs continue years two-five.

£250,000 – would allow for inflation and salary/stipend increases.

Conclusion

We would like to thank the URC for providing us with the opportunity to outline the ways in which we are aiming to flourish as we move towards semi-impence from the denomination. We recognise that the funding we are asking for is part of a bigger picture of the URC's involvement in Luther King Centre, as the denomination owns 16% of the building. A full renovation of this building will be part of the development and sustainability of our educational offer and flourishing, and we would like consideration to be made when thinking about funding, specifically with the knowledge that the URC has not paid any money for the upkeep of our building for the last 20 years.

The Revd John Grundy, Mr Paul Barrett, the Revd Dr Adam Scott and the Revd Dr Chris Dowd on behalf of the Board of Governors

Appendix

Statement from Northern College – September 2024

In one form or another, Northern College has served the United Reformed Church, our founding dissenting denominations and ecumenical partners since 1752. Over the past two centuries, the college has reformed and adapted to enable it to best serve the denomination, changing ministries and the wider world as effectively as it can. Northern College is now entering a new, exciting phase of its evolutionary life and we are delighted to share this news with you.

The boards of Northern Baptist College, Northern College (URC), and Luther King House Educational Trust are delighted to announce that we have unanimously agreed to come together as one, united body. This decision is the outcome of a process of discernment that began almost

twelve months ago, and the evolution of a partnership that stretches back over forty years. We will announce our new name in due course.

The decision to take this next step is a prayerful response to our changing context. The denominations that we serve, the church in this country and beyond, the world of higher education, and wider society are all changing at pace. We believe that becoming one college will equip us to cater more effectively to students' needs. It will also help us to secure a more resilient financial basis from which we can respond to new and emerging opportunities.

We will continue to grow as a caring learning community providing excellent theological education, ministerial formation and training for pioneers, chaplains, interns and others. We remain committed to our core values of working for justice, celebrating diversity and striving for inclusion. Rooted in and informed by our radical free church tradition, we will welcome learners from across the Christian Church. Over the next twelve months our immediate focus will be on changing our organisational structures while meeting commitments to our denominational partners. We are working hard to make sure that the changes that lie ahead of us will have a minimal impact on students, colleagues, and other partners. We believe that this new development is rich with possibility as together we seek to serve the purposes of God in our generation, and in generations to come.

Scottish College Flourishing paper



The Scottish College (Congregational and United Reformed)
A Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC051195

Introduction

The Scottish College has been invited to present an outline vision of what 'flourishing' might represent under a new funding arrangement with the United Reformed Church. We understand this as an invitation to present some reasonably grounded and achievable initiatives that would result in an educationally, theologically and financially stable institution that could continue to serve the United Reformed Church. Having been engaged in funding discussions over a long period we recall that the context of the question is set by present signals from the United Reformed Church that a new funding regime would not involve block grant funding on the current model. Rather than designing an ideal educational offering relying on an unrealistic assessment of available resources we therefore confine our presentation to plans extrapolated from the current funding level but do not expect a change in the order of magnitude.

In this scenario we would become an institution with total annual running costs of the order of £200k to £250k. Of this approximately £150k would ensure secure continuation of current provision, with the balance available for developments outlined below. (Current annual costs are in the order of £100k, 75% of which comes from central URC sources.)

Our Scottish context for flourishing

As a provider of Education for Ministry Phase 1 (EM1) we need to be able to complement placement and College self-accredited formation with university-backed learning. We expect our stable educational partnerships with the divinity departments at the ancient Scottish universities (especially Glasgow and Aberdeen) to be maintained and become closer. We are in discussion with Aberdeen University about the possibility of accrediting our ordinands' placement learning and reflection. We also access Durham Common Awards qualifications through the Scottish Episcopal Institute (sometimes with direct input into curriculum). These are established, secure and valuable connections that help us offer something unique to the whole of the United Reformed Church. We are a provider of Education for Ministry Phase 2 (EM2), in association with the other RCLs and (currently) the cohort programme administered from Church House with TD+ Network colleagues. We also advise on (and sometimes directly provide) EM3 opportunities, as well as Scottish Ministers Conferences and gatherings. Mandatory training is also part of our work as we undertake the Training and Development function for the National Synod of Scotland.

We are realistic. We do not (unless our resourcing through 'seed funding' was increased to a degree beyond any current imagining) see any possibility of attracting outside 'customers' in viable numbers. This view does not arise from a lack of confidence in what we do but from the knowledge that our Scottish partners (ie ecumenical partners, other training institutions and the university divinity schools) are struggling with the same types of constraints in finance and numbers of learners. If we were to seek to operate 'on the open market' our partners would also be potentially 'competing' with us from a resource base considerably stronger than we are expecting the United Reformed Church will be able to provide. Our partners in the Congregational

Federation in Scotland are in a weak situation, organisationally and financially. Flourishing depends on resources, and we believe that we have been 'faithful in small things' for the Church.

Our URC context for flourishing

We see our flourishing as inescapably linked to our ability to be useful in service to the United Reformed Church. While we exist in a broad and unusually stimulating ecosystem of ecumenical and academic partners our exclusive focus is, and will remain, working for the United Reformed Church (and, to the degree that we can, for the Congregational Federation in Scotland).

For some Colleges flourishing may involve being resourced by the United Reformed Church to seek 'customers' beyond church, leveraging an inheritance of resources in buildings, connections and finance. We do not begrudge this possibility. For ourselves, the Scottish College is clear that any flourishing *for us* will be within the context of service to the United Reformed Church. For us, given the historic resources (personnel, accommodation, etc) at our disposal and our local landscape, the United Reformed Church at Synod and General Assembly level is 'the only game in town'.

Finance – general principles

In an earlier presentation prepared for the Business Committee we made the point that we do not feel that the current arrangements for funding the Scottish College's work for the church are either broken or unsustainable *as they relate to us*.

Our starting point is that our model of service (especially EM1) cannot function at all with a lower real level of funding than at present. In fact, we have struggled under current funding arrangements and have only broken even through having an unfilled staff post (0.5 FTE out of a remunerated establishment of 1.9 FTE).

This means that the *absolute minimum seed funding* required would need to yield a secure investment income that could replace our block grant plus 25%. That would be maintenance. We believe that we have provided the United Reformed Church with economic, robust and scalable patterns of learning for the whole church, and EM1 in particular. At this time of change we ask the church to recognise our resilience and that we have stretched ourselves within quite limited resourcing. Our risk assessments note significant 'key person risk' whereby the Principal is the College's only full-time member of staff and the only member of academic staff who is not (essentially) a volunteer. The College has just appointed a College Manager (0.5 FTE), whose priority will be to formalise our systems and practices (and administer the URC Learning Hub). This will go some way to addressing vulnerabilities, but we hope that the church will want to support further mitigation in the form of further employed posts and will factor in further costs.

We do not have access to significant financial resources of our own. Neither do we have plant or resources that could be used to generate income from other activities. In an environment where annual block grants are replaced with a capital transfer as an endowment, we suggest that a realistic baseline sum would need to be such as to provide a guaranteed income of not less than £150k. This is before employing any further staff (beyond a Principal, and a College Manager and Finance Officer (both part-time)).

Looking to the future

The Learning Hub – plans in place

The College has agreed in principle with URC Education and Learning to take over administration of the URC Learning Hub. This has been included in the new College Manager role description.

The Scottish College as a centre of digital learning for the whole church

The last few years have seen a radical transformation in learning possibilities, where a move to online learning provision has opened new possibilities for collaboration across the church. We have developed a simple but effective electronic portfolio system for Non-Stipendiary Model 4 ordinands and have led discussions with the denomination about rolling out PebblePad as a comprehensive portfolio learning platform for the whole church. An application for initial licence costs has been made to the Legacy Fund. We seek budgetary support for an appropriate member of staff to undertake this work, with support from the Principal and College Manager.

Our range of partnerships, as well as the in-house expertise that we are continuing to build, make us well-placed to offer this service to the church. We are conscious that embarking on this journey must be supported with adequate initial and ongoing funding. Importantly, this needs to include sufficient headroom for unexpected challenges and to allow us to respond to developmental opportunities yet unforeseen.

The Scottish College as a world church resource

The Scottish College and its predecessors have a distinguished history of world church engagement. In a different age we trained Eric Liddell, of Chariots of Fire fame, for missionary service. Prior to the union of 2020 that brought the current URC into being, the Congregational Union of Scotland was an especially active member body of the Council for World Mission, and that memory continues in the Synod. Our Scottish church life is enriched by contact with the wider body.

In the period before covid we were exploring a proposal to institute a programme whereby we would host a theological educator from an overseas context on a rolling basis, probably in partnership with CWM. The pandemic threw that proposal into abeyance but, given denominational support we would wish to explore that possibility again. In outline, our proposal was to create a scholarship (probably in association with CWM and/or Dr Williams Trust) whereby an aspiring theological educator from overseas might pursue postgraduate studies with Edinburgh or Glasgow universities while also serving as a part-time tutor with the Scottish College. In this way a person would gain experience in theological education and church development to complement their university research. It would also make engaged and reflective voices from world church contexts available to students and church members in a sustainable way over periods of four or five years at a time. For this College it would so help continuity and teamwork and foster innovation. If such a proposal, which we believe could be a pivotal initiative in moving us from the survival mode of recent years towards the flourishing we are invited to dream of, were to meet with church support we would revise and revisit it. Although time is short, such a 2025 Theological Educator Fellowship Programme could be an appropriate marking of the denomination's quarter century since our last union.

There are various configurations of possible funding to include some or all of tuition fees, accommodation, stipend and expenses. CWM involvement would require URC (and/or Congregational Federation) support and sponsorship.

Appropriate Facilities for (a) Residential Learning and (b) Situated Learning

The College's recent experience reveals the limits as well as the opportunities of online learning. For congregational learning and lay leadership development we believe that there are not enough opportunities for face-to-face in person development. In EM1 we have learned that much important learning happens informally in fellowship as communities of enquiry and practice are formed when we gather residentially. However, the demographic of those training means that traditional seminary-type facilities or even staffed residential centres may not meet the needs of our current and foreseeable learning cohorts in sustainable ways.

The Scottish College benefits from residential facilities that others provide, both venues local to us and our partner RCLs. We argue strongly that guaranteed and flexible access to appropriate accommodation must be a part of educational planning for the future.

For ourselves, we hope that currently available accommodation will continue to be accessible. If this were not to be the case, we suggest that the College be encouraged to co-operate in order to resource fit-for-purpose learning accommodation. In these circumstances we would like to explore the concept of a small network of residential facilities (at the scale of a small youth hostel, say ten beds) being established in appropriate locations across the contexts of Great Britain. It will be important to scale correctly and not to over specify, which would lead to unsustainable costs. The Scottish College continues to be encouraged and impressed by the resilience of many lay leaders, elders, ordinands and serving ministers as they exercise ministry in difficult situations and prepare for service in an often-distressed church. We are grateful to those who provide placement learning opportunities. Across the Synods and nations of the Church, all kinds of experiments in church life and leadership patterns are underway.

As part of our vision for flourishing – perhaps in association with the Church Life Review process – we would like to celebrate and better disseminate practices that are imaginative and effective. To do this we would like to develop a programme of recognition and support so that our ordinands and other learners have opportunity to engage with best practice, especially on placement. Being exposed to excellence and innovation is important in formation and we would like to explore with colleagues at other RCLs and the church ways of establishing a network of ‘training pastorates’ (or other learning contexts) that could serve in a manner analogous to ‘teaching hospitals’ in medical education.

Concluding remarks

The Scottish College as a contemporary and necessary institution

The Scottish College’s predecessor institution began even before the emergence of Scottish congregationalism as an indigenous movement of reform. It has seen many changes over more than two centuries. It has been a substantial residential college and, both before and since, a modest but effective church-based enterprise that draws ministers, ministerial trainees and church members into a close fellowship of learning. We submit that our institution has found itself in the right form and at the right scale for the times and contexts it has had to address.

To us a key question in changing times like these is ‘if the Scottish College did not exist would we seek to create it (or something like it)?’ We do not believe that we are a legacy institution whose existence should cause the United Reformed Church concern or difficulty. Embedded in Scottish networks of scholarship and training, with our close university and ecumenical partners, we are able to make unique and valuable resources available to the whole church. Our presence as part of the ‘United Reformed Church family’ adds value, we hope, to the experience of the denomination as a Church in multiple nations and contexts.

The present proposals

The elements of vision recorded above are, as will be obvious, at different stages of refinement and would require varying levels of resourcing in terms of finance and personnel. We hope that each of them is scalable so that beyond a certain threshold of funding we could move forward and bring something of further value to the Church.

Most importantly, we hope that the church will recognise the need for certainty and stability going forward. There has been a cost in terms of uncertainty and constrained funding over the last six years now.

As responsibility for provision of additional aspects of education and learning moves to the Colleges, we will in many cases be employing additional staff to undertake this new work. We will need to remunerate adequately and carry resources to ensure that we can meet all our obligations, both current and new.

We are confident that our service to the church has been the best that we could provide with recent levels of resourcing and our priority will be to attenuate our various risks in order to operate more securely. That may not sound much like flourishing but, for us, it will certainly feel like it. From that base we hope to build and expand in the areas we have indicated and in other ways. Importantly, we plan and hope that this work will be done in partnership with colleagues at the other RCLs.

Financial requirements

The Scottish College prefers the current system of block grant funding, with consequent variable costs charged through fees and charges to the United Reformed Church for work done. In our case the ending of this system would require a substantial capital injection just to survive (including a substantial capital contingency currently unnecessary).

Based on this we have costed the capital elements of the proposals we have made as follows:

Continue to offer EM1/2/3 for ministers of Word and Sacrament

investment in assets property or non-property to produce indexed 3.8% return
£2.5m

Host the Learning Hub, and become the 'lead institution' for digital learning provision

investment in IT
£0.1m

Host a World Church educator in conjunction with others

depends on scope of project
would expect most fundholding to be elsewhere URC/CWM
£variable

Develop 'training pastorates'

invest in IT in the pastorates
£0.1m

Explore, with others, right-sized residential learning accommodation

purchase of premises (worked example available)
£1.65m

24 November 2024

Westminster College Flourishing papers

A Vision for a 'Flourishing' Westminster College – A place for Christian Learning, Renewal and Hospitality in service to the United Reformed Church

In response to a request from the Education and Learning Committee the Board of Governors of Westminster College offer this paper as a vision for a 'Flourishing' Westminster College in service to the United Reformed Church. It builds upon their already agreed document 'Westminster to 2030 Strategic Plan.'

In a time marked by many challenges Westminster has developed a compelling vision of how the College can continue to serve Christ, the United Reformed Church and the wider ecumenical church into the future. And that is it seeks to be an ecumenical learning community of academic excellence that is research active, research-led, spiritually engaged, progressive, contextual and inclusive, offering a form of theological education that is rooted deeply in the Reformed tradition and the highest standards of biblical scholarship. It will continue to be a contextually church engaged provider of academic pathways as a pivotal part of the Cambridge Theological Federation, the largest and broadest ecumenical centre for theological education in Europe.

Building on what we already do well, we believe that Westminster can be a place where the Bible and our traditions can be explored and inspiration found there to motivate Christian mission relevant to our twenty first century context.

We believe also that Westminster can be a place where people can come to ask questions, to pray, to find rest and relaxation to equip them for witness and service in the United Reformed Church.

We believe that Westminster can be a place where vocation can be explored in community that in scope is intergenerational and international. In short, Westminster with the unique resource of its beautiful site in the heart of Cambridge can be a place of Christian learning, renewal and hospitality.

Our vision. We envision a Church: Renewed in its witness to Christ. Alive to the power of the gospel. Committed to reconciliation, justice and peace, and we commit ourselves to training lay and ordained members of the URC in fulfilment of that vision.

Our mission. Is the equipping, inspiring and nurturing of URC ministers and members and Christians globally through our Reformed and Nonconformist traditions.

There are four values informing our vision.

Collaboration – working with partners who share our vision and mission, most especially our fellow RCL partners in their service to the URC, but also drawing upon the long-established partnerships available via our participation in the Cambridge Theological Federation – one of the oldest, largest and most comprehensive partnerships in ecumenical theological education and formation in the world. Westminster sits at the heart of this unique grouping of institutions, including its various university partners, and we believe this offers unparalleled depths of riches in terms of ministerial and lay education, providing a deep attraction to the independent students we plan to recruit.

Equity, diversion and inclusion – treating all human beings created in God’s image as siblings in Christ. Westminster seeks to be an affirming place that supports, encourages and mentors all people regardless of sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity or disability.

Discernment – Approaching education and the use of our resources responsibly, wisely and theologically.

Social and eco-justice – practicing sustainable employment and caring for creation- including through the way we plan for the future heating and power requirements of our building.

Key strategic aims

Christian learning – as a theological college and resource centre for learning, Westminster retains a vital role in training ordained and lay ministries within the URC. This is fundamental to our ethos and vision and we value our covenantal relationship with the denomination greatly. Rooted in our vision to educate and equip individuals for spiritual leadership, the College seeks to produce individuals – ministers, lay leaders and members – who are energised, enthused and prepared for service in the church well able to guide their communities with faith, wisdom, confidence and resilience. As such we will continue to enhance our programmes of theological education to serve the whole people of God by building upon the qualities of our staff team to provide scholarly research rooted in the Bible and the Reformed tradition and facilitating critical dialogue with wider society. We seek to do theology that, though academically rigorous, is for the building up of the Church and not just a participation in the academy. That means that in addition to our formal awards we will seek to provide flexible for credit awards and non-credit short courses on topics of interest to the theological and spiritually curious lay person.

We believe that there is an emerging gap for a centre of excellence in Reformed theology in the UK and that Westminster is well placed to fill it. Not least because we have a sustained physical and electronic library specialising, although by no means exclusively, in historic British Presbyterianism and Congregationalism, (considerably expanded by our new partnership with the Congregational Memorial Hall Trust), that in tandem with the libraries of the CTF, the University and Divinity Faculty, enables focussed periods of research by visiting scholars – especially those from the Global South. Westminster is thus well-placed to be a host for visiting scholars and students from Presbyterian and Congregational affiliated institutions, especially those beyond North American and the Commonwealth.

We believe such a ‘centre of excellence’ in confessional theology rooted in the Reformed tradition, where staff undertake serious academic research that feeds and nourishes up to date teaching and preparation of people in service to the church, has an attraction throughout the UK and beyond these shores. Thus, a flourishing Westminster College would seek to:

- **increase our student numbers**, ideally this would be through an uptake in URC vocations, but also by adding to their numbers by the recruitment of an increasing number of independent students, providing a richer and more diverse learning experience for our URC cohorts. We are already seeing an uptake in our independent student recruitment and hope to build upon this year by year. We plan to recruit six or so independent residential students over the next five years, giving us a stable cohort group of thirty students, plus whatever students we receive from the United Reformed Church. We are already progressing towards that target with the consequent uplift in income.
- **develop innovative and tailored programmes to students, synods and churches**, c.f. our emerging congregationally focussed and bespoke ‘mission development programme.’ This bespoke programme is aimed at developing congregational vitality and could assist them

in areas such as 'community empowerment' as congregations seek to be agents of transformation and resilience in their local communities.

- **develop an enhanced 'Education for Ministry' programme** in all phases in the United Reformed Church. (EM1, 2 and 3).
- **focus on the educational needs of the URC** by leveraging the content of our course offerings wherein the key values of our Reformed theological identity will help ensure that our core academic offerings resonate with the URC community at large and the Church's training needs in particular.
- **enhance our on-site, hybrid and local led delivery modes – including taking on responsibility for Stepwise**, the discipleship development programme of the URC.
- **improve our academic profile and scholarly activity as a whole Church research centre** – including our partnership with the proposed 'Cheshunt Centre for Theology and Ministry'.
- **collaborate with partners who share our vision as an ecumenical and inter-religious hub**- including the development of overseas exchange programmes involving fellow academics and students. Here our range of ecumenical networks – CWM and WARC affiliations, suggest that we might be a place that encourages early career Christian academics, especially woman academics and people of a Global Majority Heritage.
- **strengthen the ties with our university partners.**
- **facilitate discussions, colloquia and workshops on topics relevant to the life of the churches in Britain and around the world.**

Christian renewal – using our beautiful site in the heart of Cambridge to create a place of rest, reflection, retreat and renewal to nourish body, mind and spirit. Here the themes of spirituality, well-being and wholeness will be to the fore as we offer opportunities to explore our campus with its beautiful chapel, art studio and library as places of calm and stillness. Here students, visitors and guests can explore and develop their spirituality and interior lives in natural and fruitful conjunction with the diverse traditions which share our campus site. We plan to:

- **foster the College's identity and culture as a place of prayer and worship** with participants contributing to its spiritual life.
- **re-energise our membership of the Association for Promoting Retreats.**
- **develop and promote the College as a destination for personal and group retreats.**
- **consciously expand and create opportunities for church members to explore their spirituality.**
- **develop fresh opportunities outside the academic syllabus for personal growth, spiritual development, wholeness and well-being.**
- **build on our existing and emerging work of training mentors, coaches and supervisors.**
- **offer an enhanced sabbatical programme** enabling ministers and others to reflect on the changing needs of the Church and their ministry. This would offer a sustained space for reflective Christian thinking- including ministry development conversations for those who seek

a space to reflect in a structured way on their ministry in context and where their call might be for this moment in time, through facilitated conversations with staff members.

- **establish an on-campus vocational community** for individuals to explore how God might be calling them to lives of service and meaning.
- **work with stakeholders across the URC and ecumenical partners** to deliver learning experiences that address the missional challenges of the twenty-first century through the development of responses to what is a 'spiritual' crisis and not just an apologetic, structural or intellectual one.

Christian hospitality – Westminster seeks to show a warmth of welcome, a sense of belonging and the provision of excellence through being an inviting attractive venue for celebrations, breaks and memorable occasions. Our current turnover for events, B & B and hospitality business stand at circa two million pounds per annum and there is room to increase this to support our primary work. We will seek to do this through:

- **providing a place of Christian welcome and hospitality** for the Church, other organisations and the general public.
- **showcasing the spiritual and mission opportunities our Cambridge location offers.** (2000 plus members of the public walked through our building in a recent 'Bridging the Gap' day – offering great opportunities for engagement as we told our story and what we are about and what we do today).
- **expanding our current conference, events and hospitality provision** in ways commensurate with our academic provision and in service to the URC.
- **enhancing the tranquillity, peace and natural beauty of the grounds and premises.**
- **nurturing a shared, relaxed community**, facilitating respectful conversation and enabling the exchange of ideas.
- **extending Christian hospitality and welcome to the wider public** making the campus as open as possible, perhaps through the provision of a Campus café open to the public.
- **engaging, promoting and facilitating Christian business conferences and events**, so that our hospitality business aligns with our core values and mission.
- **encouraging the public to enter Westminster College with an awareness of the College's roles, resources and theological provision – and its setting in the wider Church.**
- **serving the Church and commercial hospitality needs.**

There is no doubt that this exercise is being undertaken in what is a challenging time for higher education in general, and theological education in particular, that is beyond question. Whatever the future of theology as a subject might be in the university system over the coming years – and the prospects are not good overall – it is especially true that 'confessional theology,' or church-oriented theology is being increasingly banished from university departments for a number of reasons, not least financial ones. The question then faces the church, how will the educational and training needs of the church be met going forward? How will future theological educators be trained so that they in turn might train the various ministries, lay leaders and engaged lay people that the church requires for the flourishing of its future life? For unless the church is prepared to resource this type of theological training, then it simply won't exist. However, in this transitional time in the world of higher education, we also believe there is a niche that can be filled by certain

professionally focussed colleges, developing themselves as centres of theological excellence, providing bespoke forms of theological education in service to their partner churches and the wider world church.

Not every institution is best placed to do it, but we believe that Westminster – through the riches of its unique location, the beauty of its buildings and setting – and the commercial opportunities they afford- in the multiplicity of its strategic partnerships, its storied history, the depth of library resource available to it, and the commitment, skill and energy of its staff body, is well placed to pursue these goals successfully. As such we believe there is a ‘flourishing future’ for Westminster College to be had. It will require investment, not least capital investment into its buildings and site – upon which so much of the opportunity depends – but from which so much more of value can be produced. The Westminster campus site- and it is now a campus site – is a unique site offering a set of distinct and varied opportunities for the United Reformed Church to exploit in the theological development and enabling of its ministries, lay leaders and members for years to come. Remembering that ‘education is that which remains when that which has been merely learnt is forgotten.’

The Governors commend our vision of a ‘flourishing’ Westminster College to you for your consideration.

*Dr Peter McEnhill,
Principal, Westminster College*

Appendix to Westminster’s Flourishing Vision document

As requested by the E&L committee representative at a recent meeting we submit this appendix highlighting specifically what Westminster’s vision document already indicates it will offer by way of lay learning Firstly, our commitment to lay learning has been shown in our appointment since 2017 of a dedicated Church Resource Development staff member who has a specific brief with respect to congregational development and life-long learning. This work seeks to be deliberately innovative and developmental and collaborates with Synods and congregations looking to develop bespoke training programmes. One recent aspect of this work is our ‘Congregational Missional Development Programme’ which seeks to build capacity at a group rather than individual level in local congregations. Via this post we also collaborate with Westminster campus partners such as The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion to offer courses and day events on topics such as ‘Creation Care’, ‘Life, Death and Dying’ and other contemporary topics for lay and ordained ministry.

We have agreed to take on responsibility for the URCs flagship lay discipleship development programme ‘Stepwise’ and look forward to evaluating its progress and developing it in years to come. **(Resource allocation 0.5 funding for Stepwise lead post for a potential five years).** We agree with the suggestion of a denominational lead post with responsibility for strategic partnership with the URC and liaising and dealing with the denomination at every level. **(Resource allocation 0.5. of a post situated at a Principal Officer level.)**

Our strategic plan seeks to utilise the beauty and tranquillity of Westminster’s unique site and chapel by offering personal and group retreats for lay people where they can explore and develop their sense of spirituality, faith development and growth in discipleship. **(Resource allocation – sessional input as required, funded by course fees.)**

Working in collaboration with our partner body, the Cheshunt Trust, we co-sponsor public access lectures by leading theologians and ministry practitioners on theological and ecclesial topics particularly relevant to lay people and congregational ministry. We also host focused webinars and extended dialogues at Westminster with theologians and ministry practitioners that equip lay ministers and others to effectively engage with recent developments, current issues, and looming

challenges in the church and society. One such recent event being a session led by the leading contemporary Christian thinker for a new Church age – Brian McLaren. We have plans in the future to further develop asynchronous modes of learning for lay people.

In partnership with our partners in the Cambridge Theological Federation we plan to launch a Common Awards part-time PGDip and MA in Contemporary Christian Leadership and Worship and Liturgical Studies, both of which tracks will be highly relevant to elders, lay preachers, and worship leaders, as well as others engaged in lay ministry. (**Resource allocation – existing staff group and CTF partner staff**).

Lay people can of course also audit all modules in our Common Awards curriculum for a nominal fee, including modules in Biblical Studies, Christian Tradition, Ministry and Mission, and Theological Reflection and Reflective Practice.

And our long-standing and ongoing work with lay members of the Church continues unabated. Westminster staff have engaged in a diverse range of activities including: the leading of an annual ecumenical workshop on a book or theme in the Bible; leading Bible studies for the Christian Women's Fellowship, an annual conference attended by a number of URC women. Westminster has long hosted an annual lay preachers' conference. The staff go out to local churches to lead Bible study workshops; They have led Bible study mornings for lay preachers in different Synods. They continue to be invited by Synods to lead Elders training events. Westminster also hosts the 20s-40s event which has had a discipleship focus. The staff regularly accept invitations to preach and lead worship in local congregations.

In short, Westminster leverages the expertise required to provide E1, E2 and E3 forms of learning to the maximum extent and extracts full value from the church's funding package. We are also aware that our fine buildings and grounds provide an attractive and ready resource for the URC to use for meetings, events and conferences. We subsidise this type of activity through our extensive commercial trade which brings in around two million pounds in revenue.

Funding

Despite this type of commercial activity there is no doubt that the proposal to move from a block grant form of funding for academic costs – which, currently and for a number of years now, has been set at £380,000 – to a purchaser provider model wherein the URC purchases educational resources from Westminster at an agreed price – and this transition to take place over a relatively short timescale presents Westminster with a significant challenge in managing that change. We believe that we have outlined in our vision plan that there is a market wherein Westminster can continue to service the needs of the URC, but within a larger and more varied independent student body, all supported by ongoing commercial activities which sweat the assets as it were. But the transition period is one that will have to be negotiated carefully and responsibly.

We are grateful for the generous offer of 'seed- corn' transitional funding from the 'New College Fund', (or MTF). We acknowledge that this is a gift of grace on the part of the URC.

However, to replicate a sum that would generate anything approximating to the previous block grant allocation of £380,000 on a realistic assumed return rate of 3% would require a figure of around **£12,600,000** – and the block grant does not cover all the fixed academic costs of Westminster with 25% or so of those already being met by the College.

We understand also that the New College Fund will be the eventual source of capital costs relating to buildings and Westminster has professionally estimated building repair and maintenance costs, to be conducted over a ten year period, approximating to **£3.7** million at today's prices. The combination of such sums would of course exhaust the fund on Westminster's needs alone.

We propose therefore that we request a sum of **£8.5** million pounds from the New College Fund to be made available to Westminster. This comprising of **£6** million pounds towards the replacing of the previous block grant – at less than half the sum required – with Westminster seeking to supplement the rest through increased activity, capital fundraising and other grant requests, plus a sum of **£2.5** million pounds towards building costs. Westminster to fund the remainder from grant requests to external bodies.

Submitted in the name of Nigel Uden, Chair of the Board of Governors and Peter McEnhill, Principal of Westminster College.

4 November 2024