

# Paper A3

## Resource Centres for Learning EM1 Review

### Business Committee

#### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	The Revd Dr John P Bradbury, General Secretary john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
<b>Action required</b>	Decision
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Resolution 2</b>  <b>The General Assembly:</b>  <b>A. determines that the Luther King Theological College become the primary Resource Centre for Learning for the United Reformed Church, and provider of Education for Ministry Phase One (EM1).</b>  <b>B. determines that the Scottish College becomes the complementary Resource Centre for Learning for the United Reformed Church, and provider of Education for Ministry Phase One.</b>  <b>C. invites Luther King Theological College and the Scottish College to seek the closest possible collaboration in the delivery of Education for Ministry phase one and in other areas of work.</b>  <b>D. determines to cease using Westminster College, Cambridge, for Education for Ministry One.</b>  <b>E. instructs the Business Committee, in collaboration with the Ministries Committee, Resources Committee and Faith in Action Committee, to agree with Luther King Theological College and the Scottish College new Memoranda of Understanding and Service Level Agreements to effect the outcomes sought in A-D, and to ensure the appropriate financial agreements are in place to enable their successful delivery.</b>  <b>F. instructs the Resources Committee to work with the three existing RCLs to provide appropriate financial support through a transitional period through to the full implementation of A-D.</b>  <b>G. instructs the Business Committee and Resources Committee to work with Westminster College</b>

	<p><b>Governors as they discern the future for the College and to enable the General Assembly to support this through appropriate governance and transitional financial arrangements when appropriately developed proposals have been made.</b></p> <p><b>Resolution 3</b></p> <p><b>General Assembly receives the observations of the Working Group and instructs the Ministries Committee to review these recommendations and return to the General Assembly or Assembly Executive with any appropriate proposals.</b></p>

**Summary of content**

<p><b>Subject and aim(s)</b></p>	<p>To bring recommendations with regard to the future provision of initial ministerial formation (EM1).</p>
<p><b>Main points</b></p>	<p><b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b></p> <p>This review responds to the United Reformed Church’s need to address declining student numbers, over-capacity in training provision, and financial sustainability in Education for Ministry Phase 1 (EM1) as determined by General Assembly 2025.</p> <p><b>Key criteria</b> The review assessed Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs) against core criteria (summarised as):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellence in theological and ministerial formation</li> <li>• Integration of academic learning with practice, mission and personal formation</li> <li>• Capacity to support the whole Church’s learning, leadership and discipleship</li> <li>• Accessibility and flexibility of delivery</li> <li>• Financial sustainability and scalability</li> <li>• Ability to operate as a strategic partner to the Church</li> </ul> <p><b>Strategic conclusions</b> All three RCLs demonstrate high-quality provision. However, declining vocations (around 5–8 new entrants annually) make it unsustainable to maintain three institutions. The Church must therefore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concentrate resources to ensure long-term viability</li> <li>• Move to a model of sustained partnership with one primary and one complementary institution.</li> <li>• Enable the partner institutions to flourish, not merely survive</li> </ul> <p><b>Main recommendations</b></p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Luther King Theological College to become the primary Resource Centre for Learning and main provider of EM1, offering integrated formation across multiple ministries in close partnership with the United Reformed Church.</li> <li>2. The Scottish College continue a complementary provider, enabling distinct pathways for students whose educational, formational or practical circumstances are well served by its model</li> <li>3. To invite Luther King Theological College and the Scottish College to work in close partnership.</li> <li>4. Cease use of Westminster College, Cambridge, for EM1, primarily due to the number of pathways which would need to be developed which already exist and are tried and tested elsewhere, and reflecting the panel's assessment of its financial profile.</li> </ol> <p><b>Implementation</b> New partnership agreements will be established, with transitional financial support provided. The outcome seeks to ensure sustainable, high-quality ministerial formation and a coherent, integrated approach to learning across the Church.</p>
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Assembly Executive February 2025 Paper AD1 General Assembly July 2025 Paper ADH2
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	<p>There was a full consultative process regarding the criteria for the review, with all RCLs contributing, prior to General Assembly July 2025.</p> <p>There has been consultation with all RCLs through paper submissions, visits, and follow-up correspondence through the last year.</p> <p>There has been consultative conversation with ecumenical counterparts from the Methodist Church and the Church of England.</p>

### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	See appendix to the report.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	Any recommendation in line with Assembly's decision to reduce the number of RCLs offering EM1 would have knock-on ecumenical considerations. If these recommendations are adopted by Assembly, depending on the future shape of Westminster College's life, this will impact upon the life of the Cambridge Theological Federation.

### Glossary of Key Acronyms used within the Report

AALP:	Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher – recognised lay preaching ministry
CA (Common Awards):	National theological education framework validated by Durham

	University
CRCW:	Church Related Community Worker
CTF:	Cambridge Theological Federation – ecumenical partnership of theological institutions
EM1:	Education for Ministry Phase 1
ESB:	English Standards Board (Community work accreditation)
LKTC:	Luther King Theological College
LMP:	Living Ministry Programme – placement-based training component
CLP:	Church Leadership Programme MoU: Memorandum of
Understanding MWS:	Minister of Word and Sacraments NSM: Non-Stipendiary Ministry
RCL:	Resource Centre for Learning – theological training provider
SLA:	Service Level Agreement – defines services and expectations in partnerships
SM:	Stipendiary Ministry

## Introduction

General Assembly in July 2025 passed several resolutions concerned with reducing the over-capacity within the provision for ministerial training and formation for Education for Ministry phase one for Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers.

In the light of those resolutions, the task group continued its work in implementing the process set out (membership The Revd Dr John Bradbury (General Secretary), The Revd Nicola Furley Smith (Deputy General Secretary, Ministries), The Revd. Dr Michael Hopkins (Convenor of the Resources Committee and Moderator of Wessex Synod), Pippa Hodgson (former convenor of the Education and Learning Committee), Victoria James (Chief Operating Officer), The Revd Jenny Mills (Deputy General Secretary, Faith in Action and former Secretary for Education and Learning), The Revd Dr. Michael Jagessar (former Moderator of the General Assembly, theologian and theological educator), The Revd Dr Andrea Russell (external consultant, Warden of Gladstone's Library) and Mr Alan Yates (Treasurer and previous convenor of Education and Learning).

## Criteria for decision making adopted by the General Assembly

The criteria agreed by General Assembly were refined to reflect the additional points helpfully raised in debate. They were finalised as:

### **Theological and ministerial formation for Ministries of Word and Sacrament and Church Related Community Work**

Education must provide a strong foundation in biblical studies, theology, church history, ethics, pastoral care, and reflective ministry practice.

### **Mission-focused and integrated learning**

Education and Learning for the whole people of God should equip the whole church for mission, and integrate theological study with practical ministry skills, effective placement work, and skills in reflective practice.

### **Ecumenical and reformed identity**

Engagement with other denominations is essential while maintaining a distinctive Reformed ethos in theology and practice.

### **Discipleship and leadership development**

Learning opportunities must support lifelong discipleship, leadership training for Elders, provision must be able to resource structured programs like Stepwise and the Church Leadership Programme.

### **Accessibility and contextual relevance**

Education should be accessible, inclusive, adaptable, and delivered in ways that meet the diverse needs of URC members across different nations and ministry settings.

### **Financial sustainability**

Any future model must significantly reduce the £800,000 RCL block grant budget while ensuring both operational and long-term financial viability, including capital investment needs.

### **Efficient use of Church resources**

Training provision should align with Synod-funded learning initiatives, ensuring that overall church spending on education (currently over £1.7M) is used effectively and strategically.

### **Scalability and future-proofing**

Education and Learning provision must be flexible, allowing for expansion or contraction in response to changing church needs and ministerial demands and the ability to respond to external changes in context, for example changes in validation arrangements.

### **The contribution of RCLs to the development of future academics and theological educators within the life of the United Reformed Church.**

The Assembly recognised the need to continue to provide the church with leadership that had had the opportunity to engage at depth, and in research level study.

### **The ways in which RCL curricula and practice support the denomination's aspiration to be a post-colonial, anti-racist Church engaging seriously with the legacies of transatlantic slavery.**

This is about the formational context, as well as the curriculum itself, and the published resources engaged with during study.

## **The process of the review**

The Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs) were invited to submit written responses to evidence how their offerings enable the criteria to be met, along with end of year and management accounts, and any business plans.

There then followed a series of visits from the core team of visitors (John Bradbury, Michael Hopkins, Michael Jagessar and Andrea Russell) to each institution. Unfortunately, at the last moment it was not possible for Andrea to visit Luther King Theological College (LKTC), so she arranged a separate visit at a slightly later date. We thank LKTC for making that possible.

The initial timetable agreed by the General Assembly presumed that there would be one round of visits, then a final report would be prepared in draft form for the RCLs to comment on, before final proposals would be brought to Assembly Executive. However, at the end of the first visit, both those who had visited, and the wider working group were not satisfied that we were in a position to make a firm recommendation. It was very clear that we had seen excellence in each institution.

We were also left with questions, and in varying ways some concerns we felt that needed further addressing. The working group therefore took the decision that a further round of visits would be appropriate.

A draft report, summarising the findings of the original visits, and naming the areas where there were continuing concerns about each institution. This was circulated to the RCLs, who all responded both in writing, and then through engagement with a second visit (this time from John Bradbury, Michael Jagessar and Andrea Russell). These visits were concluded early in the New Year.

Having finalised the interim report prior to the second round of visits, the working group also determined that the financial information that had been requested gave detailed information about the past financial situation of each institution, but did not give us information about what the future financial situation would look like, particularly in the light of different potential outcomes of this process.

It was therefore decided that Michael Hopkins and Alan Yates would undertake a further piece of work, supported by the Chief Finance Officer, John Samson, to attempt to model the financial impact on each institution of differing outcomes from this process.

All the RCLs have participated in this process with great grace, patience and generosity of spirit. It is difficult to feel that one is being examined, particularly when the implications for individuals and organisations are so significant. We extend huge thanks to all the staff and governors of all the college for their engagement in the process. All the teaching staff we have engaged with bring passion and commitment to the task of theological education.

In all the RCLs we have found excellent practice and been left excited by the life of all the institutions we have engaged with. It has been a genuinely deeply difficult process for those engaged from the working group, because in an ideal world we are clear that we would wish to be able to support each of these three excellent institutions with the student numbers, and finances, needed for flourishing. Having grappled extensively with whether there is any way that can be possible, we conclude it is not and that the direction of travel the General Assembly has determined is the correct one.

## The issue of student numbers

One of the key drivers of this review is the reality of student numbers. Here, the reality is stark. It is worth setting out the numbers for the last few years. Also included for reference in the final column is the total number of students 20 years ago, in 2006, the year General Assembly last revised the number of colleges and courses we used to train ministers.

For reference, in 2006 the URC Yearbook records us having 78,872 members in 1655 congregations. In this year's Yearbook (2026) we have 39,576 members in 1149 congregations (and that is not a like for like comparison, as we now also count all LEP members).

Students in Training *					
2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2006

STIPENDIARY						
Northern College (RCL) CRCW	3	2	2	1	0	6
Northern College (RCL) MWS	9	8	6	5	3	
Scottish College (RCL)	2	0	1	2	2	
Westminster College (RCL)	10	10	7	5	2	
Subtotal	24	20	16	13	7	51
NON-STIPENDIARY						
Northern College (RCL) CRCW				1	1	
Northern College (RCL)	2	2	3	4	2	
Scottish College (RCL)	1	2	1	2	2	
Westminster College (RCL)	1	3	3	4	2	
Subtotal	4	7	7	11	7	14
NON-STIPENDIARY Local						
Northern College (RCL)		2	2	1	1	
Scottish College (RCL)	4	2	2	2	1	
Westminster College (RCL)	3	2	2	4	2	
Subtotal	7	6	6	7	4	
Total New Entry Students**	13	7	11	5	?	
GRAND TOTAL	35	33	29	31	18	78

\* Numbers are all actual as at March each year, and projected actuals based on known starters and leavers for March 2027.

\*\* The total number of new starters across all forms of ministry.

Thus far, the indications are that there are seven candidates we would expect to come through from Synods to Assessment Conference in 2027 – meaning that at most there would be seven entrants in 2027 (across all forms of ministry), perhaps more realistically five.

It is interesting to note that our membership has declined by about 50% in 20 years. The number of congregations has declined by around 30%. The number of candidates for all forms of ministry has declined by 64%.

That the church has sustained such levels of numerical decline in the last 20 years, whilst continuing to sustain the same number of RCLs indicates why it has become pressing that further review and change is necessary.

The working group conclude that a realistic potential number of new students each year across all forms of ministry to presume for the purposes of planning is an average of 8. This would likely be higher some years and lower others. Based on the current trajectory, that is as realistic as we can be, and it may, projected forward, soon become an optimistic number.

This fact, taken alone, suggests that radical thinking is needed about how we take seriously as a church challenging people to consider whether they have a vocation, and also to review the shape and modes of preparation for ministry such that it might be possible to begin to see an overall increase in the number of vocations. We note, however, that if we managed to maintain an average of eight for the next decade, that would have halted the decline in the number of vocations – which alone would be in some ways a huge positive.

A paper from the Ministries Committee coming to this year's General Assembly posits that we are potentially at a concerning 'tipping point' and sets out the number of new stipendiary ministers that would be required each year to maintain ministerial numbers at their current levels.

These figures are considerably above eight per year on average. Whilst we are fortunate many years to receive ministers from other churches through certificates of eligibility, we also do need to be alert to a more optimistic view, which might see an increase in vocations. What this does, is underlie the vital need for scalability of provision. We need provision that can shrink and expand, possibly quite significantly in either direction.

In the course of our work, we became aware that in the academic year 25-26, there were only sufficient candidates for one assessment conference. From this, there will be only five students beginning training in September 2026, only 1 of which is for stipendiary ministry on a four-year programme. This reality focused our minds.

### **The wider ecumenical and higher education context of theological education**

Throughout this review, we have been aware that both the Methodist Church, the Church of England, and the Church of Scotland, have been in the process of reviewing their ministerial training and formation programmes. The Methodist Church is still in that process and will bring recommendations to Conference in 2027. The Church of England is preparing a report with recommendations for Synod later in 2026.

The Church of Scotland adopted proposals to its General Assembly in June 2026 to centre its training for stipendiary ministry in the Divinity Faculty of Glasgow University as lead provider. Whilst there have been informal consultation between those engaged in the review processes in all these traditions, none of the denominations undertaking such reviews have given governance consent for them to be undertaken ecumenically. Informal consultation has had to be careful, not least because the direction of travel of such processes is potentially commercially sensitive information for Theological Colleges and training institutions affected. Ecumenical consultation has been real, but by necessity, somewhat limited in scope. Also, during this review, Spurgeon's College, the Baptist College in London suddenly and unexpectedly closed after becoming insolvent. This too, was a stark reminder of the fragility of the theological education sector.

### **'Being a good ancestor...'**

Michael Jagessar has held before us an idea that we have found helpful. What does it mean to consider ourselves a 'good ancestor'? Meaning, when people look back in generations to come, will they believe that we took decisions, and stewarded resources in ways which have led to future flourishing?

We found this a helpful lens through which to consider this task, but also an uncomfortable one. All of those involved would love to see the possibility of bequeathing three, flourishing, creative and vibrant centres for theological learning to the future. As we can see from the student numbers above, just in terms of student numbers it is hard to see us, as the URC, sustaining the number of students to enable one college to flourish – though we recognise that all of our RCLs work in partnership with others, which enables sustainability in different ways.

However, there is a very serious danger that were we to carry on supporting 3 colleges as a denomination, we would not bequeath three flourishing institutions to the future, but three struggling ones at best, and three that have become unviable and closed at worst. We cannot but sadly conclude that General Assembly was right in taking the decision in July 2025 to cease using at least one. This enables a concentration of resources, and students, such that the student experience is enriched, and institutional viability is sustained.

Summary assessment of the three Resource Centres for Learning against the adopted criteria

Criteria	Luther King Theological College	Scottish College	Westminster College
<p><b>Theological and ministerial formation for Ministries of Word and Sacrament and Church Related Community Work</b></p> <p>Education must provide a strong foundation in biblical studies, theology, church history, ethics, pastoral care, and reflective ministry practice.</p>	<p>An excellent integrated, contextual and practical formation for MWS and CRCWs. Rooted in the Common Awards, with assessments designed to integrate placement and classroom learning. Placements always include an ecumenical placement, often a sector ministry placement, and a long 2 year placement through the final years of the programme. The range of disciplines are taught by staff with the relevant expertise. Students receive ongoing tutorial support. The range of theological disciplines are taught by specialist staff drawn from across the college teaching body. Existing CRCW program delivered using the Common Awards, and to English Standard Boards accredited standards using the integrated contextual and practice based pedagogical approach.</p>	<p>The use of the Scottish faculties gives access to world-leading academic theological faculties as well as the ability for students to engage with the Common Awards programme through the Scottish Episcopal Institute. The college program gives students placements, ministerial skills and reflective practice, accompanied by strong tutorial support. The small numbers mean that formation is highly individualised around the needs of particular students, and no two programmes will be the same. The college programme is in a constant state of evolution, guided by the individual needs of the students at any one time making highly tailored programmes possible. A CRCW programme could be developed, either mapped against Common Awards through the Scottish Episcopal Institute, or in partnership with Community Education programmes in Scottish faculties.</p>	<p>Excellent range of awards available (Common Awards, Cambridge BTH, Cambridge Tripos, Cambridge post-graduate awards, Anglia Ruskin post-graduate awards) alongside a diverse placement programme (3 different placements a year followed by LMP in final year) with college enrichment programme and strong tutorial and academic support. A huge range of subject specialist teachers teaching awards through the CTF. A CRCW programme could be developed, mapped onto the Common Awards. Existing staff experience and expertise in community and youth work, and wider expertise in the CTF in this area. ESB accreditation would be possible through careful mapping on CA.</p>

<p><b>Mission-focused and integrated learning</b> Education and Learning for the whole people of God should equip the whole church for mission, and integrate theological study with practical ministry skills, effective placement work, and skills in reflective practice.</p>	<p>Use of award teaching for AALPreachers alongside MWS &amp; CRCW candidates gives integration between ministries. The programme itself is the primary driver of the integration – through assessment that requires students to integrate classroom and practice-based learning. The nature of the contextual integration is at the leading edge of its kind. The 3 main placement contexts that students engage with throughout a standard programme gives a range of experience of different mission contexts.</p>	<p>Integration of award learning and placement learning happens primarily through the college residential programme and through tutorial support. The student is the centre of the integrative process, supported by staff. The role that the college plays as TDO for the Synod gives another layer of integration – but joint EM1/Synod learning sessions have reduced post-covid difficulties a result, in the main, of a relative increase in student numbers..</p>	<p>The integration of award and placement learning happens through the college programme and the tutorial process. More recent development of CA assessment that requires integration of classroom teaching and placement work. The student is at the centre of the integrative process, supported by tutors. The final year LMP for full-time students gives a year of near full-time practice alongside reflective practice programme.</p>
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<p><b>Ecumenical and reformed identity</b> Engagement with other denominations is essential while maintaining a distinctive Reformed ethos in theology and practice.</p>	<p>LKTC has a very strong, clear, identity as a dissenting non-conformist place of learning which concentrates on radical and contextual theologies and being an inclusive learning community. It also ensures that the magisterial reformation is represented in the curriculum. The staff team is diverse and reflects a wide range of church traditions. The student body is also diverse, with URC and Baptist ministerial candidates, and independent students from a range of traditions. Uniquely, no one tradition is dominant, allowing students to develop a constructive understanding of their tradition rather than one defined primarily in opposition to an 'other'.</p>	<p>The context of the theological faculties of Scotland give a broad ecumenical space as students engage with award learning there, with staff and students from a range of theological and church traditions, with the majority tradition of the nation being the Reformed tradition in its Church of Scotland guise. The Synod of Scotland, emerging from the Scottish Congregational tradition gives a unique context of a highly minority church, in the context of an overwhelmingly majority church in a related Reformed tradition. This leads the identity of the URC in Scotland to be one which instinctively only understands itself as functioning well in partnership arrangements. Students on the CA with the Episcopal Institute develop collegueship and are taught by staff from the broad Anglican tradition (which expresses itself very differently in Scotland than England).</p>	<p>Westminster identifies itself as standing in the broad Reformed theological tradition, including its dissenting and main-stream European reformation identities. The context of the CTF gives a broad and deep ecumenical context. Students are taught by staff from the Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and Lutheran traditions. There is theological breadth along radical-conservative axis. Students engage in worship with others from those traditions in the wide variety of those traditions. Students on mid-week programmes engage particularly closely with Anglican ordinands (from liberal catholic and evangelical traditions) and in bock weeks with students from a wide range of traditions. There is also an interfaith dimension to the CTF through the Woolf Institute, on the college site.</p>
<p><b>Discipleship and leadership development</b></p>	<p>EM1 students are formed through community and worship life in</p>	<p>Students are formed through the residential college programme,</p>	<p>EM1 students feel very formed through the worshipping and</p>

<p>Learning opportunities must support lifelong discipleship, leadership training for Elders, provision must be able to resource structured programs like Stepwise and the Church Leadership Programme.</p>	<p>their time in college, as well as through tutorial relationships, and by the communities they engage with on placements. The college currently offers the AALPreachers programme, and the Church Leadership Programme. Staff make themselves available to the wider church, and the college hosts many visitors from the wider church. The responsiveness of the staff to requests to develop new strands of work is noted positively by those responsible for the Education and Learning work of the Assembly.</p>	<p>and through tutorial relationships, as well as through placements. The College also holds the TDO brief for the Synod, offering the range of development opportunities for members and congregations of the Synod.</p>	<p>community life of the college, and also the wider CTF – which is clearly a foundational experience for many. Personal discipleship is fostered through tutorial relationships. Staff engage with a wide variety of wider URC contexts, and a range of diverse people pass through the college shaping its environment – including sabbatical visitors, greatly valued by students.</p>
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<p><b>Accessibility and contextual relevance</b>          Education should be accessible, inclusive, adaptable, and delivered in ways that meet the diverse needs of URC members across different nations and ministry settings.</p>	<p>Excellent provision for students with learning needs, with a developing specialism around neurodiversity. The building development programme will make more of the building accessible (though installation of lifts). Weekend and mid-week programmes give a diversity of accessibility for students with good use of on-line learning possibilities. The culture and ethos of the college make it 'feel' accessible to those from non-traditional educational backgrounds.</p>	<p>The college programme is highly tailored around the needs of individual students. The timing of delivery is worked out once the needs of individual students are known. Each student will be on a highly individualised programme according to their prior learning and needs. The small student numbers allow for individualised learning support to be offered where needed. Where students have accessibility needs these would inform the choice of venues for residential. It would be possible for the college to develop partnership with theological education providers elsewhere in the UK, allowing students to engage in an academic award in a department or faculty outside of Scotland, engaging in the college formation programme alongside.</p>	<p>The wide range of award pathways possible to students mean a high degree of flexibility to meet a wide range of needs. The learning support available through the Federation and the universities mean there is excellent support for students with particular learning needs. The college building is accessible and navigable. The breadth of theological perspective found in the teaching allows students to inhabit and develop their personal theological convictions in dialogue with the widest possible range of views. The LMP year allows for placement experience anywhere in the UK. Block week and weekend teaching offers two distinct ways to access teaching. Through the CTF, it is likely that weekend delivery could be developed if required.</p>
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<p><b>Financial sustainability</b> Any future model must significantly reduce the £800,000 RCL block grant budget while ensuring both operational and long-term financial viability, including capital investment needs.</p>	<p>The college is in a good financial position. Considerable investment is needed in the buildings, and plans are at an advanced stage of development. There are sufficient funds to undertake this work, without further fundraising if necessary. The merger of the three entities is allowing for considerable cost savings; the hospitality aspect of the business plan is being maximised. Within the context of higher education, and particularly theological education, the model seems secure. It would move from secure to flourishing with continued URC involvement.</p>	<p>The financial model is very economical. The use of the Scottish faculties and the Episcopal Institute for the delivery of awards, means a small staff team. This leads to an overreliance on the Principal, which is a potential single-point of failure (which the college is aware of, and somewhat mitigated in the appointment of a college manager). The wider sustainability of the enterprise would be supported by an additional full-time member of staff, which would come with associated financial costs, but add to the security of the model.</p>	<p>The financial modelling reflects the view of the college and visitors that the college could operate at a break-even point through its academic and hospitality work. However, this position does not fully cover the ongoing upkeep and development of the building, which is expected to require periodic fundraising or capital support. This funding might be from a range of sources, including foundations outside the URC (potentially Laing). The existing loan from the URC is accounted for on the balance sheet and full repayment is assumed over 15 years in the model. The nature of the building means that it represents a significant cost base, although the scale and timing of investment may vary depending on strategic choices and available funding. There are no urgent major capital works. Work is ongoing to reduce costs and maximise income, both in terms of developing the academic work of the college and independent students, and from the hospitality side of college life.</p>
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<p><b>Efficient use of Church resources</b>          Training provision should align with Synod-funded learning initiatives, ensuring that overall church spending on education (currently over £1.7M) is used effectively and strategically.</p>	<p>See financial report.</p>		
<p><b>Scalability and future-proofing</b> Education and Learning provision must be flexible, allowing for expansion or contraction in response to changing church needs and ministerial demands and the ability to respond to external changes in context, for example changes in validation arrangements.</p>	<p>The college seems to have financial security – and in that sense future-proof. There is an extensive plan for the regeneration of the site, which needs this urgently. The successful completion of this will be central to the ongoing viability of the college. The extent to which it thrives in its new formation will be affected by the outcome of this process. To some extent future proofing depends on viable cohorts, and this will depend on the number of candidates from the URC and who choose to train for the Baptists – as well as the independent student numbers. There is clear ability to scale up if necessary. The union of the colleges has created a far more viable entity into the longer term, with a total staff structure to support expansion if required, and economies of</p>	<p>The Scottish College works so well in the way that it does precisely because it is small. If the student numbers because too large, the model would have to evolve to enable this. We became confident during the process that such evolution would be possible. The college needs to continue to develop ways in which it is not totally reliant on the one full-time academic member of staff, the Principal. We note the strength and abilities of the tutorial team, who are all excellent. The college is quite reliant on appropriate people to draw on for these roles. Reducing the reliance on the Principal could happen in a number of ways: though an additional member of staff; and/or, potentially through a close working relationship, including the</p>	<p>A great strength of Westminster is the Cambridge Theological Federation. The range of staff expertise and availability to deliver awards gives a strong indication that provision is secure in the longer term. However, the ordinand elements of the programmes are now delivered overwhelmingly for the CofE and the URC. To develop programmes or pathways (for example a weekend pathway) is both likely possible because of the Federation, but cannot be guaranteed by Westminster alone. The Federation tries, wherever possible, to respond positively to requests from member institutions to develop new ways of working. The financial comparison is</p>

	scale in operational matters to be gained.	delivery of teaching, with a partner institution.	dependent on assumptions regarding capital expenditure and funding – but the overall position is obviously considerably strengthened if the college continues to be a primary provider of EM1 for the URC.
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<b>Ability to contribute to the evolving learning needs of the denomination as set out in paper ADH1</b>	The college is currently the primary deliverer of learning leading to Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher recognition, and also delivers the Church Leadership Programme. Some of this happens in student groups jointly with EM1 students on the weekend pathway. The college makes available modules from within its programme for audit or credit, for continuous learning for ministers and others within the life of the church. The college offers programmes aimed at continual development of Lay Preachers. Staff from the college make themselves available for education and development work delivered through Synods. Staff are actively engaged in research and publication, enriching the ecology of theology within the academy and the church.	The Scottish College, as a key partner of the Synod of Scotland, also acts as the Training and Development vehicle for the Synod, and therefore offers a range of learning possibilities to ministers, Elders and lay leaders within the life of the Synod. The Principal also makes himself available when possible to the wider church through being invited to participate in learning events elsewhere. The college hosts the URC 'Learning Hub', the denominational on-line learning resource.	The college staff make themselves available to the wider church through Synod run and organised events, as well as running events at the college, for example to deliver continuing education and learning for Lay Preachers and Elders. The college has indicated a willingness to become the primary developer of Stepwise (the denominational discipleship development resource) and would partner with the URC to meet other needs if invited to. The staff are actively engaged in research and publication. Through the Federation, modules are available for audit or credit for continuing learning for ministers and others.
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<p><b>The contribution of RCLs to the development of future academics and theological educators within the life of the United Reformed Church.</b></p>	<p>There are MA programmes and a PhD program available to students. These possibilities reflect the backgrounds of the staff team, so reflect the contextual, practice-based approach of the whole institution. The staff team noted that they do from time-to-time spot people who could benefit from engaging with academic work at research level, but that the denomination lacks the pathways to make it straight forward to know how that could meaningfully be accessed – and potentially future-theological-educators are lost because of this.</p>	<p>Through the Scottish Faculties students have the possibility of studying at Masters and PhD level in the whole range of academic disciplines as part of their formation for ministry.</p>	<p>Through the University of Cambridge, Anglia Ruskin University and through Common Awards there would be research degree possibilities for students. Supervision could come from the wide range of Federation staff, or through the academic staff of the Faculty of Divinity of the University of Cambridge. The college has from time to time had a student engage in PhD work through other institutions, as part of formation for ministry.</p>
<p><b>The ways in which RCL curricula and practice support the denomination’s aspiration to be a post-colonial, anti-racist Church engaging seriously with the legacies of transatlantic slavery.</b></p>	<p>LKTC is seen as a leader in the field of decolonising the curriculum by Durham University Common Awards. There is the active drawing in, through the possibilities of IT, engagement from academics and church practitioners from around the globe in teaching. LKC is acutely aware of the lack of diversity of its own staff team and would love to be able to address this. The concrete steps they take are to draw in voices into teaching from beyond the existing staff team,</p>	<p>This is built in to how the college constructs the college programme, and the way its content is shaped. The current staff and tutorial team are aware of their own lack of diversity but the faculties with which it cooperates are much more so. Glasgow was the first university in the world to complete a historic audit of slavery, Edinburgh followed suit and now SEI and Aberdeen are undertaking the same process. An internal</p>	<p>The CTF, particularly through the evolution of its CA programme, has been actively involved in processes of decolonising the curriculum. There is an attempt to draw voices from beyond the core Federation staff teaching team into many modules to ensure voices on all theological topics are heard from global majority traditions. The staff team are aware of their own lack of diversity, and have acted to</p>

	<p>and through the development of the curriculum and learning resources from a global perspective.</p>	<p>review of the curriculum at Glasgow found Theology to have done an outstanding job in this regard. Glasgow also co-teaches with Stellenbosch University and has formal collaborations with the UWI and we work in partnership with Codrington College.</p>	<p>respond to this by the recruitment of adjunct staff with a range of backgrounds and specialisms. These staff engage in a variety of ways, from the teaching of full modules, to occasional sessions in the enrichment programme.</p>
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## Diversity of pedagogical approach

We also note that across the three RCLs there are two different broad approaches to integration within EM1 formation. One is student centred, the second enables the student to develop into an integrated practitioner primarily through the integrated nature of the programme itself. We believe both have a valuable role to play in formation, and that there would be a loss to the church if we only were able to offer one of these approaches.

It also must be noted that the approaches are not entirely mutually exclusive, but nonetheless we have come to believe they are real. By integration, we understand the process by which student ministers come to inhabit ministry as reflective practitioners, who effectively bring together their theological learning, their learning through experience, their growing understanding of themselves as human beings called to life-long ordained ministry, and their ability to synthesise these various elements as they grow into ministry.

Westminster College and the Scottish College broadly approach integration within the programme in a student-centred way. By this, we mean that the student themselves is the locus of the integrative process. Students will gain knowledge and experience through an academic award, the college denominational programme, placement experience and tutorial support and reflection. These are distinct, but related, elements to a student pathway. With tutorial support, in both colleges, students themselves are the centre of the integrative process, integrating the various learning experiences that they are exposed to. This is not to say that the awards students engage with, to a lesser or greater extent depending on the award, will not also contain learning and assessment which deliberately encourages integration.

At LKTC, the programme itself drives the integration experience for the student. The design of the award, the integration of placement work within the academic programme and its assessment, is the primary vehicle through which students, come to know and understand themselves as integrated, self-reflective ministerial practitioners. This does not mean that the individual journey of each student, particularly through tutorial support, is not fully encouraged and students are supported to explore and own their own development, learning and self-knowledge.

We do not believe that one approach is superior to another, but they are different, and potentially different sorts of student thrive in the different contexts. Any determination about which RCL or RCLs we ought to engage with in the future, needs to bear in mind these different approaches.

A reduced number of RCLs might mean that we need to challenge those RCLs delivering EM1 to think with care about how it might be possible for elements of each of these approaches to be accessible to students who would benefit from them.

## Prioritising the criteria

The General Assembly in offering the criteria for this review, did not prioritise them. We recognise that to some extent they are all important and it is hard to do so. However, we have concluded, through the course of our work, that some do carry a weight that perhaps attaches greater significance, and we have come to understand the significance of some of the criteria in slightly new ways. We offer the following observations which have guided our conclusions.

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## Integrated learning for the whole life of the church

'Integration' is a key quality that the URC has sought in its education and learning for many years. It can be understood broadly in two ways. Firstly, integration as reflected above, in terms of how formation is the integration of different forms of personal and formal learning. Secondly, integration is the way in which different ministries and forms of service within the life of the church integrate with one another during formation for service. Whilst this review is primarily about EM1 and formation for ministry of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Work, this vital aspect of Education and Learning cannot be conceived of simply on its own.

We believe that the outcome of this review needs to lead to a situation where the RCLs we partner with offer the full range of education, training, formation and discipleship development for the full range of ordained, commissioned and formally recognised ministries, and discipleship development for the whole church more broadly. This was the initial vision behind the colleges becoming 'Resource Centres for Learning', but the policies and organisation of the URC have never fully enabled the RCLs to play this part. Moving on from this review, we need an outcome which allows those RCLs we partner with to be the hub in the wheel of denominational Education and Learning, and to be the core resource from which the whole church can draw.

We would wish that those preparing for different forms of ministry, who are expected to work as teams within the context of pastorates, should wherever possible also prepare for those ministries alongside one another. So, whilst EM1 forms the core part of the outcome of this review, we have come to see it cannot and must not be separated from the criteria about the learning needs of the church as a whole. This has been doubly underlined by what we have heard from the RCLs themselves, who have helped us understand that the delivery of EM1 is what gives them the resources of people and material that in turn allows for the effective delivery of education and learning in service of the wider church.

It is key that the provider or providers we partner with for EM1, are also able to be, and trusted to be, the core partners in the resourcing of Education and Learning for all our recognised ministries, and also discipleship development.

## Financial flourishing

We cannot fail to take seriously the financial situation of the Church, and the need for spending on Education and Learning, and particularly EM1, to be proportionate. However, we have come to the firm conclusion that this exercise must not simply be about reducing costs, although it must make that possible.

It must also, as a primary aim, lead to a level of financial support for the institutions we partner with in the future not just to survive, but to thrive and flourish. Spreading our resources amongst three RCLs is simply not a viable way to ensure that the Education and Learning the church needs is delivered in the context of colleges that are flourishing.

Therefore, the institutions we partner with as a result of this review must, with the level of URC financial support that can be offered, be able to demonstrate that they will be able to flourish with that level of support and the United Reformed Church must be willing to commit, insofar as it is at all possible, to enabling that flourishing into the long term (recognising they all also have funding from other sources supporting their work to a lesser or greater extent).

## Excellence in EM1 Formation for Ministry

It almost goes without saying that the key determinant in this process must be that the Church ends up with partners who offer excellence in EM1 formation for ministry. On its own, however, this criterion does not answer the question for us, because all three of our RCLs do offer such excellence.

In the light of this, and in the light of the two key criteria we have articulated above, we believe that what we are seeking is *excellence in the delivery of education, learning and formation for the Ministries of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Work in a context which resources formation for the wide range of the church's accredited ministries and discipleship development. This needs to be delivered in institution(s) that can flourish through the resources the United Reformed Church can offer in close, collaborative, partnership. This will need to, over time, evolve with the needs of the Church, to offer new ways of providing education and learning as needs arise.*

## New partnerships

We are aware that the more recent attempts to arrive at a financial model for funding RCLs was an attempt to make a limited amount of money stretch across three institutions and be sustainable from the point of view of the Assembly budget. That pushed in the direction of a purchaser-provider relationship. However, both the educational needs of the church, and the financial context of the colleges needs to push us in a different direction. This is the direction of a Partnership, where the primary College partners, in close collaboration with the Ministries and Faith and Action Committees, can evolve constantly in relationship to the evolving needs of the United Reformed Church. None of the existing RCLs have been able to function fully in this way to date, partly because of the internal structures and working processes of the Assembly, and partly because of the complexities inherent in working with three institutions.

It has become clear to us that the outcome of this review needs to leave the United Reformed Church with a clear primary partner as its Resource Centre for Learning. This is for the sake of ensuring the longevity and flourishing of our ability to deliver integrated education and learning across the whole range of our ordained, commissioned and accredited ministries and to resource denomination wide discipleship development.

At the same time, we believe that the ability to continue to offer formational experiences rooted in both the key pedagogical approaches outlined above make it beneficial to have a complementary partner. Our hope would be that both RCL partners over time come to work in the closest possible collaboration.

We would envisage one coordinating body, which was rooted in the governance of the two RCLs, and within the Ministries Committee, that acts as the body with oversight of the partnership arrangement, and allows the church and the partner institutions, as one, to evolve together the provision that the church will need in its future. The hope would be that, in time, this partnership would become so deep rooted, that through effective collaboration and resource sharing any future need for a further reduction in the number of RCLs will become unnecessary.

The distinction between the 'primary' and 'complementary' provider is intended to describe differences of scale, resourcing and likely student numbers, rather than differences of institutional quality, academic depth, ecclesial status or educational seriousness. The Review Group recognises that the two colleges embody distinct but complementary pedagogical

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approaches, each of which offers significant gifts and which working in close collaboration will create a rich educational partnership for the United Reformed Church.

We need a partnership of RCLs who genuinely will be able to, in partnership with the Assembly, Synods and local churches, resource the learning and development of the whole people of God for discipleship and ministry. This was the clear direction of travel discerned by the Education and Learning Consultation in 2025. It called for the denominational development of Education and Learning materials, enabled by the RCLs, facilitating local delivery which supports congregations, individual church members, and those in accredited ministries in their discipleship development and education and learning.

### Recommendations

All of which come with the unanimous support of the working group.

#### RECOMMENDATION ONE

The General Assembly determines that the Luther King Theological College become the primary Resource Centre for Learning for the United Reformed Church, and the primary provider of Education for Ministry phase one (EM1).

After long deliberation, in which all possible outcomes have been considered in depth, it is the recommendation of the working group that the Luther King Theological College (LKTC) become the primary partner for the United Reformed Church in meeting the education and learning needs of the Church, and the primary provider of Education for Ministry phase One.

On the basis of the prioritisation of the criteria made above, we believe that the Luther King Theological College is in the strongest position to become the primary Resource Centre for Learning for the United Reformed Church. The college already offers EM1 for Ministers of Word and Sacrament as well as Church Related Community Workers.

LKTC also already offers a well-established weekend pathway. Whilst the other RCLs are both in a position to develop a CRCW programme should they be asked to, at LKTC this already exists.

There is also already excellent and well received training for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, and the Church Leadership Programme. All the RCLs contributed to the initial gestation of these programmes, though the specific material was largely developed by LKTC staff. The reality is that these programmes are currently delivered by LKTC and thriving.

Because of the existence of the weekend EM1 pathway, this is already allowing Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and those engaging with the Church Leadership Programme to be engaging together in learning. LKTC therefore already begins to provide a context where education is integrated not only in terms of the rounded formation of individuals, but also training people for different forms of ministry in ways which enable them to engage with and alongside one another in the formation process. We believe this is a strong basis upon which to develop this form of integrated learning further.

LKTC is financially stable. It already has strong independent student numbers, and being in partnership with the Baptist Union, a stream of students for ministry from one of our ecumenical partners. The College is reasonably well endowed in the context of British Theological Education, and even after the redevelopment will sit on a sustainable level of financial reserves. This will mean it will have newly renovated buildings that are easy to maintain, as well as a healthy reserves level to provide additional income and financial stability.

It is our hope that this existing stable basis will become the basis for flourishing with the financial sustainability that the college becoming the primary educational partner for the United Reformed Church will bring.

LKTC has also proved to be an exceptionally responsive partner in the last few years, working with the Ministries and (former) Education and Learning Committee in picking up and developing the Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher formation and the Church Leadership Programme. The college has also supported in other areas, such as rewriting the Safer Sacred Spaces Boundary training.

Both in the process of consultation leading to this report, and in the lived reality of the last few years, the College has demonstrated a willingness to genuinely partner with the United Reformed Church in ways we believe can lead to exciting future developments for both College and Church.

The integrated nature of the pedagogical approach to the curriculum is also excellent. We believe that the formation offered by LKTC by a programme which is itself conceived, developed and structure around practice-based, contextual educational experience will meet the needs of most candidates for Ministry within the United Reformed Church. The college is highly accessible, increasingly so in terms of the building, and also in terms of educational background and support for students with particular learning needs.

### RECOMMENDATION TWO

The General Assembly determines to continue to partner with the Scottish College as a complementary provider of Education for Ministry One, and in the provision of wider educational resources.

We conclude that the financial pressures, and pressures of student numbers, mean that there should be a clear sense that the URC works with one primary provider. However, we believe that there are gifts and graces in the model that the Scottish College works with that brings benefits to the life of the United Reformed Church, and offers an important additional resource and educational approach, all on the basis of excellent value for money.

The Scottish College model allows a student to be matriculated for an award at another university (normally in Scotland, but not necessarily so), and to engage in a formation programme rooted in that award, placements, tutorial support and the college programme. We have noted that it operates with a model of integration somewhat different from that encountered at LKTC, which requires the student themselves to be at the heart of the integrative process, accompanied in this through the tutorial relationship. We believe that there will be students who, for either practical reasons concerning access, or for educational reasons, will benefit from engaging with a theological award at a university or theological college other than LKTC, and that the Scottish programme gives a valuable way for this to be possible. We believe there is a benefit to retaining this possibility, and that its loss would be noticeable.

### RECOMMENDATION THREE

The General Assembly invites Luther King Theological College and the Scottish College to seek the closest possible collaboration in the delivery of Education for Ministry phase one and in other areas of work and together in partnership with the Ministries Committee.

We would want to encourage the Scottish College and LKTC to seek the closest possible forms of collaboration. Rather than spell out exactly what that might look like in pre-determined

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resolutions of the General Assembly, we believe this would be best left to evolve through continued development of the partnership between the two colleges.

We could imagine, for example, that students enrolled in both RCLs might benefit from parts of the curriculum being delivered jointly across the two RCLs, particularly in the URC identity specific aspects of the programme. We could also imagine the skills of Scottish College staff proving valuable input as the wider provision of education and learning is developed through a partnership between LKTC as primary provider, Scottish College as complementary provider and the United Reformed Church.

We recognise that this recommendation is not one that we can or ought to impose, but is something that we invite the Scottish College and Luther King Theological College to seek to develop together, hopefully for the benefit of both colleges and the wider United Reformed Church.

We are aware of the serious danger that a further review and reduction of RCL capacity may, on the present trajectory, become necessary in future years. We believe that the closest possible co-operation between both LKTC and SC would mean that we have a resource which through close co-operation will offer, jointly, a scalability that will make this unnecessary.

### RECOMMENDATION FOUR

General Assembly determines to cease using Westminster College, Cambridge, for Education for Ministry One.

It is with deep sadness that we make this recommendation. The educational provision that Westminster offers is excellent and the resources of the Cambridge Theological Federation and the context of Cambridge itself are a rich blessing. There is a superb staff team, and it is clear following a very difficult period in the life of the college in the last few years, in recent times the college has begun a process of transformation.

We are quite confident that educationally, Westminster College could become a sole provider of EM1 and develop in ways which would allow it to meet the wider educational needs of the URC. However, to move towards Westminster being the primary partner for the United Reformed Church in Education and Learning would require it to develop a tranche of new offerings.

At the moment there is no weekend pathway for training, and also no CRCW pathway. Whilst the college has a long history of work with Lay Preachers, it does not currently offer the Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher training, similarly it does not offer the Church Leadership Programme. We understand that the lack of offer of these courses at Westminster is not the result of an unwillingness to respond to the Church's needs.

Whilst there is no reason to think that the college would be unwilling or unable to deliver all of this well if we asked it to the reality is that it is not delivering these key elements at the moment, albeit, we understand, for reasons beyond Westminster's control. Were the college to develop these to the extent to which integrated learning would be possible between those preparing for different forms of accredited learning might depend on the introduction of an EM1 weekend delivery. For a variety of reasons of history, some more recent, some much older (like the decision taken to base CRCW training at Northern College in Manchester) these offerings exist solely at LKTC, where they are delivered with excellent quality.

It is difficult to envisage the college becoming the primary provider based on the financial criteria above, because there is uncertainty as to whether the college would achieve long term

financial flourishing under the assumptions applied by the working group. It should be noted that these assumptions do not reflect Westminster College's submitted financial position but have been applied by the working group to enable reasonable comparison across RCLs.

The financial modelling suggests that if all the resource available for EM1 was directed to the college, and assuming continual development of independent student numbers and the hospitality activity, the college could operate at or around break-even on an underlying operating basis. In addition, the buildings are expected to require ongoing capital investment with the scale and timing of expenditure dependent on strategic priorities and availability of funding.

The college currently holds a relatively modest level of reserves. It is noted that the underlying operating position is broadly sustainable, with financial pressures arising primarily from capital investment requirements and associated funding.

Westminster College has indicated that it is confident that the wider URC, in the event that it were the sole provider of EM1, would enable this financial provision. The working group has taken a more cautious view and considers there to be uncertainty in this regard. It is noted that there are a range of existing financial commitments across the URC, including those supported by Synods and central funds. The working group considers there to be uncertainty as to the extent that the wider URC can or would be able to support the ongoing running of the college in terms of capital investment into the buildings that may be necessary to support long term financial flourishing.

We consider that there would be a degree of financial uncertainty under this scenario particularly if assumptions about the growth in income are not realised. These conclusions are, therefore, sensitive to assumptions regarding capital investment and funding availability, rather than reflecting the underlying operating performance of the College.

The concern of the working group is with the modest level of reserves and the inevitable need of the building for capital investment over time and the risks which might arise for the URC if the anticipated fundraising strategies did not deliver the results hoped.

If Westminster were the primary provider of EM1 for the URC, this may end up posing a risk either to the URC to the continuity of educational provision over the medium to longer term, or a financial risk to the URC in accepting it may potentially need to meet those capital costs to ensure the ongoing secure delivery of our educational provision.

We recognise, deeply, the loss that ceasing to use Westminster would represent to the life of the United Reformed Church. We also recognise the many questions that this leaves for the governing body of the college to grapple with about the future of the college. We also recognise that the General Assembly has elected the majority of these same governors as Westminster College's trustees.

Therefore, the General Assembly recognises its responsibility to work with the governors to together work out what the future for the college might look like if it is no longer a provider of EM1 for the URC. If the General Assembly agrees this recommendation, the governors, URC and URC Trust will need to engage in a lengthy process of untangling legal, financial and governance relationships (see Recommendation Seven).

Whilst we would not want to predetermine any outcome to that process, we do need to acknowledge, for the sake of transparency, that given the criteria we have explored above, and

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the desire for integration across learning and formation for all the accredited forms of ministry of the church and wider discipleship development, that we would envisage these areas of activity residing primary with LKTC, complemented by the Scottish College.

There are various possible avenues for the governors to explore. The college may believe it can continue offering theological education and formation for ministry based on offerings to independent students, graduate and international students and find a pathway to long term financial sustainability. An alternative avenue may be to explore whether it could be possible to stretch still further the net revenue generated from the hospitality part of the business and develop a research focused model in the wider academic context of Cambridge on the basis of its library holdings. This could potentially offer the URC and the wider church something of a theological ‘think tank’ and research base for Reformed Theology.

It is also recognised, depending on the outcome of further work, some options may prove less viable than others, including the potential for more fundamental restructuring of the College’s activities and use of its estate given the restrictive covenant on the land. The URCT, the General Assembly and the College Governors will need to work closely together to securely enable a transition to a new model and that ideally allows for an evolution of the college’s charitable purposes and the restrictive covenant on the land, and does not undermine them.

It is beyond the remit of this review to seek resolutions of the General Assembly around these issues, but our hope would be that the URC and the URC Trust would work constructively with the governing body as they determine the future direction, and to support a viable transition to a sustainable future model where possible.

We cannot, however, on the basis of the financial information available and the assumptions applied, commit the central budget of the URC to long term financial support of the College at current levels, given the higher degree of financial uncertainty identified.

### Transition to the future

#### RECOMMENDATION FIVE

General Assembly instructs the Business Committee, in collaboration with the Ministries Committee, Resources Committee and Faith in Action Committee, to agree with Luther King Theological College and the Scottish College new Memoranda of Understanding and Service Level Agreements to effect the outcomes sought in Resolutions 1-4, and to ensure the appropriate financial agreements are in place to enable their successful delivery.

#### RECOMMENDATION SIX

General Assembly instructs the Resources Committee to work with the three existing RCLs to provide appropriate financial support through a transitional period through to the full implementation of Resolutions 1-4.

#### RECOMMENDATION SEVEN

General Assembly instructs the Business Committee and Resources Committee to work with Westminster College Governors as they discern the future for the College and to enable the General Assembly to support this through appropriate governance and transitional financial arrangements when appropriately developed proposals have been made.

## Further observations

### RECOMMENDATION EIGHT

General Assembly receives the observations of the Working Group and instructs the Ministries Committee to review these recommendations and return to the General Assembly or Assembly Executive with any appropriate proposals.

In the course of the visits to the RCLs, and the extensive engagement with staff and governors, we make some further observations that we believe that General Assembly needs to hear and potentially act upon. Not to do so, would not do justice to the quality of time and engagement that colleagues in the RCLs have given to us during this process. We do not report in detail, and these matters will need further work which is likely to be best undertaken by the Ministries Committee.

1. The clear need to be much more intentional about forming potential future theological educators and a deeply theologically informed ministry. RCLs have expressed some frustration that there is something of an 'anti-academic' mood at times within the URC.

There are no obvious routes to funding or extended training for ordinands who might benefit from undertaking higher study, and might be able to serve the denomination in myriad ways were they able to. Opportunities for ministers already serving to undertake higher research degrees are also limited. We suggest that the Ministries Committee, the Ministries and Learning Forum, with the RCLs, give urgent attention to how we might encourage theological study at research level in EM1 and beyond for ministers, as well as for others.

2. Across all the RCLs, there have been instances where decisions of the Assessment Board have given rise to questions within the colleges. In this light, the Ministries Committee may wish to review the criteria employed, together with the shared understanding and formation of those serving on the Board.

We also observe that staff within the RCLs bring considerable experience in discerning the qualities that enable a student to flourish in ministerial formation. It may therefore be timely to consider whether they might have a more substantial and structured role within the decision-making processes relating to candidates for training.

3. We have explored CRCW training with all the RCLs, LKTC who already offer this, and with the Scottish College and Westminster College as we've explored how they might potentially offer a CRCW programme. From all these conversations it appears that it is now unhelpful to require English Standards Board accreditation for CRCWs.

This once made sense, but the landscape of community work education has shifted markedly in the last couple of decades, and this now places an unreasonable and unnecessary burden on training providers. We suggest this be reviewed with a view to lifting this requirement.

4. We note the tiny numbers coming forward for CRCW ministry. The commitment of the URC to community engagement is clearly high, and this was reflected in all the RCLs and the way they form ministers (not just CRCWs).

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The opportunity and financial costs of maintaining a separate CRCW training pathway are considerable. We believe that it would be appropriate to initiate a review into the future of the CRCW programme, and its training pathways, to ensure that the ordained, commissioned and accredited ministries of the URC are all sustainable.

5. All of the RCLs have expressed to us that there would be scope for a review of the training requirements for ministry. A standard pathway being 4 years, regardless of the age of a candidate, is not necessarily helpful. There is also concern at the lack of a basic standard for NSM local – a strong preference being made that this should be a certificate pathway to give coherence to the programme.

We would also question the parity of expectation between NSM and SM Word and Sacrament routes. 800 hours of practical placement for NSM ministry, being the same as for SM, potentially makes training almost impossible for those in full-time employment. We sense from many of our conversations, that a review and rationalisation of training pathways for our ministries would now be timely.

## RCL Financial Sustainability Review May 2026

### Introduction

This report addresses the Financial Sustainability criterion agreed as part of the General Assembly 2025 resolutions concerned with over-capacity in the RCLs. The Convenor of Resources Committee and the Treasurer were tasked to complete this task in time to provide input into the RCL report being prepared for General Assembly 2026.

This report is contained under the following headings:

1. Executive summary: which provides the key findings;
2. Context and objective: describes the aim of the analysis;
3. Approach: explains how the review was planned and undertaken;
4. Luther King Theological College (LKTC): provides the sustainability analysis for LKTC;
5. Scottish College (SC): provides the sustainability analysis for SC;
6. Westminster College (WMC): provides the sustainability analysis for WMC;
7. Analysis: gives the comparison between the three colleges; and
8. Conclusion: identifies the key financial issues affecting the possible RCL resourcing decisions.

### Executive Summary

- Continuing to use three RCLs for EM1 is not financially sustainable either for the RCLs or for the URC
- The Scottish College is the only RCL that is 'unconditionally' financially sustainable in the long term without a substantial grant from the URC. This is driven by three features:
  - SC does not own any residential/hospitality facilities.
  - A substantial element of the theological education is provided by other partner institutions.
  - A significant volume of formational teaching and tutorial support is received as a gift from experienced and able ministers and academics.
- Additionally, using the SC as our sole provider of EM1 is by far the cheapest option to operate.
- In all scenarios, LKTC requires a smaller grant to break even than WMC, subject to the Capex assumptions.
- A key variable affecting WMC is the funding required for the possible capital expenditure (Capex) estimated by an independent property consultancy at £3 million over ten years. If the £300k pa capital spend is not included in the WMC scenarios (i.e. no significant refurbishment/development of their facilities) then:
  - The grants needed for WMC become significantly smaller than for LKTC; however
  - the comparison with LKTC will not be equitable as LKTC will be spending £7m on their planned (and funded) upgrade and WMC will only need to be doing modest work until new funding is in place, recognising that a significant upgrade was completed in 2014.
- These results need to be understood in light of the assumptions stated in the main body of the report.

## Context and objective

This exercise establishes, in broad but realistic terms, the level of financial support required for each Resource Centre for Learning to operate sustainably if it continues as one of three, two, or the sole, RCL.

It also assesses, at a high level, the financial implications for each institution if the URC were to withdraw.

This is not a forensic accounting exercise, but a strategic stress-test which models data from existing accounts, management information, business plans, and informed institutional discussion, together with a set of prudent assumptions.

## Approach

### Overview

The acid test for financial sustainability is cash flow. Can enough cash be generated to fund the operations and the required capital works? The analysis focuses on two linked, but distinct, financial flows: Operational Income & Expenses (Opex) and Capital Expenses (Capex).

The flows are connected because surpluses from Opex feed into reserves and can be used to fund Capex. Conversely, Opex deficits reduce reserves, limit the scope for Capex, and reduce investment income. In a financially healthy organisation this relationship creates a virtuous circle; in a financially insecure organisation it becomes a vicious circle.

Although data has been modelled for 2023 and 2024 for comparison purposes, the main modelling is done for 2030 to 2032. This assumes that steady state, following the implementation of GA26 decisions, has been reached.

We have not modelled the transition period, for which bespoke arrangements will be needed whatever decisions are made. This timescale also enables us to assume that the planned major capital works for LKTC will be completed and operational.

### Scenarios

For each RCL four basic scenarios will be prepared, where realistic income and capital required for financial stability over the years 2030 to 2032 will be defined:

- A - Where the URC continues to use the three RCLs as today;
- B - Where the URC uses the RCL as its only EM1 provider;
- C - Where the URC uses the RCL and one other as their EM1 providers (excluding using only LKTC and WMC); and
- D - Where the URC does not use the RCL for EM1.

### Student numbers

Predicted student numbers is one of the fundamental parameters used in the model. The Deputy General Secretary, Ministries has reviewed the number of students needed to replace those retiring.

The estimate for 2030 and 2031 is eight and four respectively. Given recent numbers (ie for 2026 there is a single student for stipendiary ministry!) these numbers look a little optimistic.

Recognising that providing an accurate forecast for student numbers in the 2030's is not possible, this analysis will use a single, flat forecast of eight students pa for the assessment period. CRCW students are included in these numbers.

The following table gives the estimated student numbers, by scenario, for each of the RCLs using recent SM/NSM proportions (approximately 50/50). SM students are assumed to be full-time (F/T). NSM students are assumed to be part-time (P/T).

SCENARIO	NUMBER OF URC STUDENTS					
	LKTC		SC		WMC	
	F/T	P/T	F/T	P/T	F/T	P/T
A – As is	2	1	1	1	2	1
B – Joint provider	3	2	2	1	3	2
C – Sole provider	4	4	4	4	4	4
D – Not used as a provider	0	0	0	0	0	0

## Interpreting the results

The data for each RCL model will assess the RCL's income from the URC for each student placed, using an estimated total cost per student, including:

- Course fees,
- Tuition costs<sup>1</sup>
- Accommodation costs
- Typical expenses

Note that at present the block grants for LKTC and WMC include course fees and tuition costs. Accommodation costs and most of the other student expenses are funded separately by the URC.

The key outputs from each model will be:

1. The value of the URC grant required for the RCL to break even; and
2. the total costs to the URC.

Please note:

1. The accuracy of these numbers is very dependent on the core assumptions, particularly student numbers and Capex. Consequently, the absolute accuracy of the numbers cannot be guaranteed. However, more credence can be given to the comparisons between the RCLs.
2. Although there is a 'grant' number shown in each of the D scenarios (the RCL not used as a provider) this does not imply a grant will be given, this is simply the sum needed to make the RCL break even.

The assumptions common to all RCLs are:

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<sup>1</sup> Per capita course fees and tuition costs have been estimated using previous analysis. These estimates do not represent RCL pricing, they are simply used to calculate the size of the grant needed to sustain the RCL irrespective of the number of students. The costs used for this analysis are £14k pa for F/T students and £7k pa for P/T students.

1. A F/T EM1 course is assumed to be F/T in college for three years, and then P/T in college and P/T in a pastorate for the final year.<sup>2</sup>
2. A P/T EM1 course is assumed to be half-time over four years. I.e. 0.5 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) student.<sup>2</sup>
3. The RCL costs/grants shown below do not include allowable student expenses, which are about £2320 per student pa *on average* (2025 figures). These have been added into the Total Cost to the URC results.
4. All costs in the charts are in £thousands.

## LUTHER KING THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE (LKTC)

### Assumptions

1. The 2032 forecasts have been used as they better represent steady state.
2. As the major refurbishment will only recently have been completed it is assumed that no significant Capex is required in the analysis period.
3. With capital growth the £7m capital spend only reduces the reserves by about £3m.
4. There is a predicted cohort of 35 non-URC funded students using LKTC in 2032.
5. Independent of the scenario, it is assumed that LKTC will continue to run the Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and the Church Leadership Programme courses – note that decisions concerning these courses will be taken following the GA decisions.

### Results summary

SCENARIO	No URC STUDENTS FTE	PER CAPITA COSTS	GRANT	OTHER URC COSTS (AALP + CLP)	COST PER FTE	ACCOMMODATION COSTS	STUDENT EXPENSES	TOTAL COST TO URC
A – As is	10	126	287	45	41.3	16.6	23.2	497
B – Joint provider	16	203	240	45	27.7	16.6	37.1	541
C – Sole provider	24	308	145	45	18.9	16.6	55.7	570
D – Not used as a provider	0	0	313	45	N/A	0	0	474

### Implications

- Although LKTC has healthy reserves, predicted to be about £4.5m after the redevelopment, the organisation will not have an Opex surplus without a grant from the URC.
- If LKTC is used as a joint or sole provider of EM1 it is likely that their reserves would enable them to survive for at least two decades.
- The grant needed reduces as more students are put through LKTC, reducing to zero should the URC provides about 12 FTE students pa [not seen as likely].
- These results are contingent upon LKTC attracting 12 or more FTE non-URC students each year.

<sup>2</sup> These assumptions do not change the total URC financial award; they simply change the balance between the per capita payments (for services rendered) and the grant (to eliminate deficit).

- If the URC were to not use LKTC as an EM1 provider their reserves would probably be sufficient to fund them for a decade during which time a revised strategy could be implemented.

## SCOTTISH COLLEGE

### Assumptions

1. No capital acquisition of facilities will be made.
2. Independent of the scenario, it is assumed that the SC will continue to administer Stepwise - note that decisions concerning these arrangements will be taken following the GA decisions.

### Results Summary

SCENARIO	No URC STUDENTS, FTE	PER CAPITA COSTS	GRANT	OTHER URC COSTS (Learning Hub)	COST PER FTE	ACCOMMODATION COSTS	STUDENT EXPENSES	TOTAL COST TO URC
A – As is	6	77	50	12.5	20.2	11.0	23.2	173
B – Joint provider	10	126	77	12.5	20.3	18.3	37.1	271
C – Sole provider	24	308	48	12.5	14.8	44.0	55.7	469
D – Not used as a provider	0	0	61	12.5	N/A		0	73

### Implications

- Although the SC would require some form of limited grant, unless there were 14 or more FTE students pa, the grant sums are low in comparison to the other RCLs.
- Staff numbers in SC would need to be increased should significantly more students use the college (the additional costs are taken account of in the analysis).
- Should the SC not be used for EM1 it is likely that the National Synod of Scotland would still require some financial assistance to support their lay training function. Although this might not be funded from the M&M budget it would be funded from the URC ‘family’ in some form. Consequently, any ‘saving’ by not using SC for EM1 would be minimal. Also, extra costs could be incurred for EM1 students who live in Scotland and would not then be able to take advantage of free university education.

## WESTMINSTER COLLEGE

### Assumptions

1. The average annual cost of capital works for WMC is £300k at today’s prices. This is consistent with a recently made professional assessment by Bidwells and has been included in the costs. The Governors wish to emphasise that capital works will only be undertaken if grants or Opex surpluses allow, and that not all works identified are a priority, even over the ten-year horizon of the report. Note that a conservative assumption has been made that no allowance has been made for possible grants supporting their capital works.
2. There is a predicted cohort of 20 non-URC funded students using the WMC in 2030+.

3. Independent of the scenario, it is assumed that WMC will continue to provide archive services to the URC, for which appropriate costs can be agreed.
4. £80k pa is added to account for repaying the loan to the URC.

### Results Summary

SCENARIO	No URC STUDENTS FTE	PER CAPITA COSTS	GRANTS	OTHER URC COSTS (eg Archiving)	COST PER FTE	ACCOMMODATION COSTS	STUDENT EXPENSES	TOTAL COST TO URC
A – As is	10	126	466	70.5	59.2	88.6	23.2	774
B – Joint provider	16	203	370	70.5	35.8	107.4	37.1	788
C – Sole provider	24	308	256	70.5	23.5	116.8	55.7	807
D – Not used as a provider	0	0	656	70.5	N/A	0	0	727

### Implications

- It is noted that Westminster’s operating position (excluding Capex) is broadly similar to LKTC, with financial outcomes materially influenced by assumptions regarding capital expenditure and associated funding.
- One of the key issues for WMC is the capital needed to maintain their facilities. The WMC submission suggests that the funding may be provided by Synods, the URC Trust and external supporters in equal measures. Over the ten-year plan this would amount to £1m each. This assumption has not been adopted in this report.
- WMC have small net reserves and would have limited capacity to fund significant deficits over an extended period.
- These results are contingent upon WMC attracting about 10 (FTE) or more non-URC students each year. Plans are in place for recruitment of these independent students.
- If the assumed £300k pa Capex is not included in the analysis, the results (excluding reserves) are broadly comparable to LKTC.
- If the URC were to not use WMC as an EM1 provider, it is likely that some level of funding would be required to enable a revised strategy to be implemented.

### Analysis

The table below shows the grants required by each RCL to break even under the four different scenarios.

SCENARIO	LKTC	SC	WMC
A – As is	287	50	466
B – Joint provider	240	77	370
C – Sole provider	145	48	256
D – Not used as a provider	313	61	656

The table below shows the estimated total cost to the URC for using the RCLs as per the scenarios:

SCENARIO	URC TOTAL COST
A – As is	1444
B – Joint provider – LKTC & SC	812
B – Joint provider – WMC & SC	1059
C – Sole provider - LKTC	570
C – Sole provider - SC	469
C – Sole provider - WMC	807

Please note:

1. The total costs include costs for additional services, such as Archiving and Lay Preaching courses. This analysis assumes that these services will remain with the RCL presently hosting them.
2. None of the costs include possible grants to RCLs no longer used for EM1.
3. Decisions concerning the placement of these contracts will be taken as part of the process for implementing the GA decision regarding which RCLs are to be used for EM1 in the future.

## Conclusion

- ‘As is’ is not financially sustainable either for RCLs or for the URC. Although the absolute accuracy of the numbers cannot be guaranteed, the total cost for as-is is highly consistent with today’s actual costs.
- The analysis indicates that a reduction in the number of supported RCLs will be prudent.
- One of the biggest uncertainties surrounding this analysis is around student numbers, both URC and independents.
- The Scottish College is the only RCL that is more-or-less financially sustainable in the long term, without a six-figure grant from the URC, and is far less geared to changes in student numbers. This is driven by three features:
  - SC does not own any residential/hospitality facilities.
  - A substantial element of the theological education is provided by other partner institutions.
  - A significant volume of formational teaching and tutorial support is received as a gift from experienced and able ministers and academics
- Additionally, using the SC as our sole provider of EM1 is by far the lowest cost option to operate.
- In all scenarios, LKTC requires a smaller grant to break even than WMC, subject to the Capex assumptions.
- While LKTC still require a grant in all scenarios (i.e. it is not sustainable indefinitely) its reserves suggest that it could survive (but not thrive) at least for a decade without URC support.
- A key variable affecting WMC is the funding required for the possible capital expenditure (Capex) estimated by independent property consultancy at £3 million over ten years. If the £300k pa capital spend is not included in the WMC scenarios (ie no significant refurbishment/development of their facilities) then:
  - The grants needed for WMC become significantly smaller than for LKTC; however
  - the comparison with LKTC will not be equitable as LKTC will be spending £7m on their planned (and funded) upgrade and WMC will only need to be doing modest work until new funding is in place, recognising that a significant upgrade was completed in 2014.
- These results need to be understood in light of the assumptions stated in the main body of the report.