



The Fruitful Field:  
The Response from Cliff College



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### Introduction

The Fruitful Field consultation document sets out a wide range of visionary ideas for the future development and use of the Connexional learning resources of the Methodist Church. This report indicates Cliff College's response to the consultation document. The appendix attached to this submission provides supporting evidence for the arguments presented under each of the three main headings below.

#### Abstract

Cliff College recognises the many significant challenges facing the Methodist Church, supports the Fruitful Field initiative and considers that there are sound financial and missiological reasons for developing a more co-ordinated approach to learning, formation, training, theological education, scholarship, research and development.

Cliff College considers that the College's long tradition of equipping a wide range of people, lay and ordained, for discipleship, mission and evangelism is a gift which it can offer more fully to the Methodist Connexion as the College's current pathways are adapted and developed and a more strategic approach to the Connexional deployment of people is introduced.

Cliff College considers that its business model of ecumenical working in a marketplace context would be very difficult, if not impossible, to transfer to a single hub on another site. The College considers that such a move would very significantly reduce what the College can offer to the Methodist Connexion and indeed to the work of the Kingdom of God and consequently not serve Methodism well as it looks to the future.

The College therefore offers alternative proposals to fulfil the aims and objectives of the Fruitful Field.

The vision of developing a Fruitful Field from a wilderness as described in the "Liverpool Minutes" of 1820 offers an exciting challenge. The resultant Report is a creative, imaginative and prophetic call to a Methodist future that is rooted in its past, realistic in the present and hopeful for the future. The College supports this vision, recognising that the Fruitful Field consultation invites the church to have courage to grasp this *kairos* moment.

Cliff College agrees that our current Methodist balance of training the People of God, whereby a disproportion of finance is spent on ministerial formation and relatively little on local preachers, worship leaders, lay pastors, children and youth workers etc, is neither helpful towards equipping a discipleship movement shaped for mission nor a realistic way to proceed into the future.

The College agrees that a radical solution is called for, recognising fully that previous attempts to address this issue have not, with the benefit of hindsight, been successful.

The College recognises that many difficult decisions have been made by local and national Methodism in recent years. Such decisions continue to be necessary and the College sees no case to argue that theological colleges in general, or as individual institutions, should be exempt. Many Methodists have agreed to close their local chapel or other work to aid the wider mission of Methodism and the Kingdom of God. Such courageous and self sacrificial actions are Christ-like, and it is within that context that the theological colleges exist.

As a college related to the Methodist Church, Cliff College recognises that the Methodist Church and the movement of the people called Methodists are more important than any one individual expression. While Cliff College has a large ecumenical basis, student body and staffing, it is still a Methodist college, rooted firmly in that tradition and seeking to facilitate the extension of that tradition and the wider Kingdom.

Overall, the College agrees with the vision and aims of the Fruitful Field report. While the detail on how to carry out the vision is absent from this response, the College recognises the wisdom in seeking broad agreement with the vision.

We consider that the College has much to contribute to the development of the vision of the Fruitful Field and this response will reflect on how this can be achieved under the headings of pathways, people and places as used in the consultation document. What follows is a description of the ways in which the College considers the vision of Fruitful Field can be realised, with particular emphasis on how the charisms, ethos and particular expertise of Cliff College might enable that to happen.

### Pathways

Overall, the College agrees with this understanding. The Fruitful Field consultation document notes that “Cliff College offers a range of learning opportunities, from Summer School and short courses to residential undergraduate programmes and post-graduate awards” (page 35). This brief summary of the many different pathways and modes of teaching and learning at Cliff College indicates that the College has significant experience of developing opportunities for training and theological education suitable for individuals from a wide range of backgrounds and contexts.

Approximately 20% of our 283 university registered students study full time, either on our BA in Theology course or on the full-time options offered on our MA or research programmes. These full-time postgraduate students include students from overseas such as those on the SALT programme. The significant majority of our students, however, follow a dispersed pattern of learning with electronic, Skype or telephone tutorial support available to those whose attendance at the College is focused in intensive modular study weeks.

In recent years this wide range of courses has been supplemented by an increasing range of non-validated modular courses such as a course in Christian Mentoring or

the popular Summer School which is expected to gather 60 people for three different streams in June 2012. These non-validated modules have been important in offering very affordable training to the whole people of God irrespective of previous academic attainment and have also provided an entry point to those preparing for more formal academic study. The Cliff College academic staff have, in addition to regularly participating in national conferences, always been active in offering training in local churches and circuits around the Connexion. The focus of the training offered in these various contexts has been that of mission and of equipping the whole people of God in a wide range of areas of service and ministry.

Cliff College's expertise in identifying needs and developing appropriate training pathways has led it to be successful in a marketplace economy where students are recruited rather than sent to an institution with funding packages. This awareness of the importance of providing practical and effective training which equips people for mission and service will be important to the Methodist Church as it seeks to develop itself and its mission.

**Cliff College has a strong record in providing "high quality flexible pathways" which are "delivered in a number of different communities and contexts" and which have always sought to "meet the needs of a discipleship movement shaped for mission". This means that the College has significant and unique expertise particularly in the areas of mission training, lay training and post ordination training to enable the Connexion to achieve the "pathways" vision of the Fruitful Field document. We support this and look forward to being part of how this is implemented.**

### People

Cliff College supports the vision of the development of a "single connexional network of skilled and knowledgeable staff" which includes both regional staff and those based in a central hub (be that single-site or multi-site). The location of the College which is geographically in the Sheffield District and yet linked with the Midlands Training Forum has enabled us to see some of the duplication and lack of coordination produced by the current model. It is clear that local ownership and delivery of training and theological education are important, but if scarce resources are to be well used, this local delivery must involve some form of Connexional strategic planning and support.

Cliff College is well placed to offer a base for such strategic planning and support with our experience of offering support to over 230 dispersed university students on a regular basis and through a pattern of intensive modular training offered to those who gather at the College week by week throughout the year. This pattern of education which is followed by all of our part-time undergraduates on our Children and Youth Ministry courses (86 students) and by those on our part-time MA programme (120 students) could easily be adapted to provide training and support for the network of dispersed staff and volunteers. The current Cliff College faculty members have gained significant experience in developing and successfully introducing new programmes (both validated and non-validated) with the well-

attended Summer School introduced in 2011 being just one example of this. This expertise would be very valuable to the Connexion in supporting a network of staff and volunteers who were nationally dispersed but centrally resourced and equipped.

**Cliff College's significant experience in supporting large numbers of people in their dispersed contexts through individual contact and gathered modular training of a high academic standard in ways which resource and equip people for mission means that the College is well placed to enable the Connexion to achieve the "people" vision of the Fruitful Field document. We support this and look forward to being part of how this is implemented.**

### Places

Cliff College is geographically centrally located on a campus which offers a prime location for teaching and learning. The modular pathway followed by the majority of our students offers time and cost effective opportunities for reflection and for study. Our current group of over 280 university students travel to Cliff not only from all over Britain and Ireland but also from Europe and further afield. The campus is well placed for road and rail links and overseas students access the College via various international airports, in particular from Manchester and East Midlands airports which are both one hour travel from the College.

The current improvements on the main building whereby 34 high quality en-suite rooms and 3 self contained flats have been provided for our full-time students have demonstrated the level of practical provision to which the College aspires and which is possible with the development of the current buildings. The plans to transform the dormitory style accommodation in the Broadbelt/Eagles complex into 21 twin bedded en-suite rooms and the planning permission for a new 20 roomed ensuite facility are further examples of the College's strategic development plans. There is a rolling programme for the upgrading of all the remaining facilities on the campus, funded from our own resources.

As a site owned by the Methodist Church, Cliff College offers a physical resource that has strong potential for the development of the Fruitful Field vision. It has room for further development and building in the central area of the campus. The catering and other facilities are already being developed to offer an increasingly high level of service. The SRC's Scrutiny group has recognised that the College has been well managed and governed in recent years with a balanced budget and with appropriate levels of capital investment. The current activities of the College at its present site meet all the criteria set out in the Fruitful Field consultation document in that it has enabled work which is Connexional, open, broad and excellent. It is a site to which thousands of people travel each year – including the increasing numbers who meet for the annual Festival event (over 2000 people attended Festival in 2011). The current Cliff College site would provide an excellent base for one site of a multi-site hub or as the location for a single-site hub.

**The use of Cliff College's current site with its wide range of facilities and its geographically central location would enable the Connexion to achieve the "places" vision of the Fruitful Field document. This could be as the location of the single-site hub, which may well be the most cost effective way to implement the vision of Fruitful Field, or as one site of a multi-site hub. However we have significant misgivings concerning the effectiveness of seeking to move the work of Cliff College to another site. The reasons for this view are set out below.**

Could Cliff College move to be part of a single-site hub located elsewhere?

Clearly, at one level, such a move would be possible. While no site is perfect, the College recognises the potential advantages of a new site with purpose built accommodation, lecture rooms, library and IT facilities, staff offices and housing, chapel, dining and coffee rooms and recreational facilities that meets the accreditation standards of a leading university, is centrally located and adjacent to road, rail and air links etc. and that is financially underwritten by the Methodist Church. However, the College perceives significant difficulties in achieving and financing such a new complex.

The College considers that there are a number of aspects to consider in relation to how successfully the work and ministry of Cliff College could be moved to such a new single-site hub as envisioned in the consultation document. There are significant reasons to conclude that in seeking to move the work and ministry of Cliff College to a new site much which is of value to the Methodist Church and the Kingdom would be lost.

- 1) Cliff College offers a clear focus in training in mission and evangelism. The consultation document speaks of a hub which would be "representative of the diversity of the Church" (page 53). In a multi-site hub which had shared governance and which demonstrated a co-ordination in the provision of programmes it would be possible to offer this range of diversity to the Methodist Church. However we consider attempting to move the work and ministry of Cliff College to a new single-site hub, together with the work and ministry of other institutions, would risk losing that diversity. In such a context it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the charisms and teaching emphases of Cliff College – which are recognised as being important by the Connexion at this time – to be maintained. Clearly the same argument could be made against locating a single-site hub at Cliff College. However the College considers that, if a multi-site hub is not seen as the way forward, then locating the hub on the current Cliff site would involve a lower risk in terms of potential loss to the Connexion of what Cliff can offer.
- 2) There is much that would be lost in attempting to move Cliff College to another site as part of a single-site hub. Clearly such a move would mean leaving behind a beautiful and effective site which has been a place where God has equipped people for mission for over a century. Thousands of people have, on this site, come to faith and been called and equipped for a wide

range of Christian ministries, both lay and ordained. The current site is prayerfully and financially supported by a wide range of friends and former students and the magazine “Cliff Today” is sent, twice a year, to 5000 addresses. Thousands of people travel to the site for the annual Festival as a significant way of being encouraged and resourced for discipleship in their local churches. This prayerful and active support is associated with the site as well as the College and we consider that this would not be transferable to another site.

- 3) The College also considers that its Methodist students are challenged and developed by training in the mixed context of our ecumenical provision as they learn about mission and evangelism alongside those from other traditional denominations or from various church streams and Christian organisations. This creative mix of students enriches the training of our Methodist students educationally and, of course, underwrites the College’s financial viability for our Methodist students. It is our understanding that many of those who come to Cliff College from beyond Methodism would not want to study at what was perceived as a Methodist focussed single-site hub at a different location. This would reduce the educational value to our students and increase the financial cost per Methodist student to the Connexion. In a new single-site hub in a new location, the College considers that in reality it would become a small school of mission with Methodist students being fully financed by the Connexion, perhaps looking something like the Selly Oak Centre for Mission Studies model.
- 4) The current members of the Cliff College staff are committed to the College and to its aims and mission. Clearly a move to another site some distance from Cliff College would mean that most if not all of the current professionally qualified and experienced support staff would be unable or unwilling to transfer to the new location. Current indications suggest that this may be the case for a significant number of the present faculty.
- 5) Currently Methodism has a small number of ‘thin places’. For example, many find Epworth with its Wesleyan heritage to be a place where God meets with them in ways that do not always happen in their day to day experience. Indeed a current Cliff College BA Th student came to faith through entering the Epworth Old Rectory, and has been wonderfully nurtured through the ministry of the Methodist people associated with that ‘thin place’. For many people Cliff College is also a ‘thin place’ and Methodists who study part-time or full-time, who join in Festival or who from the locality join in our regular worship, testify to such experiences. It is possible to seek to develop such a ministry in a new hub in a new site, but there is no guarantee of success. To leave such a ‘thin place’ risks moving from a fruitful field to a more uncertain future.
- 6) This then leaves the question of what of the work, ministry, charisms and teaching emphases of Cliff College could actually be moved intact to a new location. Perhaps the name and, if the site was sold, the capital assets – but maybe little else could actually be transferred. The Connexion may decide

that this is the way forward - but Cliff College considers that the risks are significant to the work of the Connexion and to the work of the Kingdom. Cliff College is currently acknowledged as being very successful in its work and ministry and moving what is successful to an unknown future would not seem an appropriate course of action.

- 7) Given that Cliff College recruits its students rather than having students sent, it should be noted that Cliff College will need a four year minimum protected period in order for almost all students to complete their studies. Students were recruited in September 2011 on programmes varying from 1 to 6 years in duration. A significant number of students embarked on 3 year BA Theology and 4 year BA Mission and Ministry programmes. We continue to recruit students for the next academic year, beginning September 2012. The costs of continuing to honour the educational contract entered into between the College, these students and in many cases Student Finance England, may be considerable. While this is a short-term issue that should not influence the wider vision, significant costs are anticipated, given the expected collapse in student recruitment if the College is to be moved and merged into a new hub, and the resultant loss of student fee income. While the College would take the necessary measures to reduce costs where possible, over the protected period a necessary financial subsidy of between £1 -£2 million is anticipated.
- 8) Having considered the issue objectively and in depth, the conclusion of the Cliff College Committee and of the Cliff College Faculty is that attempting to move the College would in reality end its work and witness.

### Conclusion

There is much in the vision presented by the report which the College would wish to support and to which the College could contribute significant expertise. However, for the reasons stated above, the College does not believe that it will be possible to move the work of the College to another site in a way which protects and develops that work. Such an attempted move would, we believe, be detrimental to the work of the Methodist Church and to the work of God's Kingdom.

This response engages with the vision of the consultation document in a positive and creative way. The College agrees with the vision in general, and offers these comments as a way of commending the overall vision, and of showing how the part of Methodism that is Cliff College can best serve the Methodist Church. It attempts to do that in a concise format by responding in a similar general and visionary way. The attached detailed appendix provides more evidence for the arguments presented in this report.

**Cliff College considers that it has much to offer to the Methodist Church at this key moment in the Church's history. The College prays that its expertise and ethos will be well used in the new vision for the glory of God.**

## Appendix

This Appendix sets out the factual information related to our response and the underlying reasoning behind it.

### Pathways

Following is a quantified account of the pathways we offer that directly correspond with those set out in the Fruitful Field vision. All the pathways that Cliff College offers are supportive of the vision and none is extraneous to it.

Training for Mission. Our total focus is and has always been on training for mission and evangelism that engages with contemporary culture and society. This directly links to the missional concept of Fruitful Field, to “meet the needs of a discipleship movement shaped for mission” (p.9), that places “a disproportionate emphasis on apt evangelism” (p.i), that makes people “more confident in making new disciples of Jesus Christ” (p.49), that helps fulfil the aim that “pastoral charge is also necessarily missional charge” (p.50), that can “enhance our evangelism” (p.50), and that can engage with contemporary culture including Fresh Expressions (p.50).

The whole people of God. The Fruitful Field vision states the requirement to “meet the needs ... of the ministries of the whole people of God” (p.9). We do this by combining open access with degrees from an internationally important university. We specialise in large-scale lay training with over a century’s experience. Many of our undergraduate students have gone on to take up ordained ministries as well as lay, and many have received their call to ministry whilst studying at Cliff. We also train those who are already in ordained ministries. This is mainly done through our postgraduate school, but our undergraduate vocational courses, for example in children’s and youth work, are also taken up by some in ordained ministry who wish to specialise in these areas. The 2009 report of the SRC’s Scrutiny Group says “Cliff College does not provide for those who have been selected for ministerial training in the Methodist Church. It is however a rich source for those who move in that direction and of training, development and advanced study for those who are Methodist ministers. We feel that it may be valuable for the Church as a whole to be provided with statistical information about how much the College contributes to Methodism in this way.” (SRC 09/63).

A significant number of our students on part-time undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are full-time church and Christian NGO employees. In addition to the training of employed lay workers, the college actively seeks to resource the whole people of God at local and volunteer level. As well as the non validated week long programmes and Summer School, many Methodists have taken validated courses, especially in children’s and youth work to theologically resource their volunteer ministries. While neither presbyters nor deacons, these lay workers and volunteers are enabled to train to a high professional standard, and in an increasing number of circuits, lay employees hold theological qualifications to a higher standard than presbyters. Within the whole people of God this is as it should be, and Cliff College is pleased that this is an important part of what the College delivers.

Courses. All our courses meet the Pathways vision and none is outside its scope. They are as follows, with student numbers for 2011-12 given as well as 2010-11 indicated for comparison:

- BA in Theology (50 students 2011-12; 47 students 2010-11). The core BA degree focuses on mission and evangelism as well as other theological modules, and includes the practical learning and experience that come from mission placements, where students are attached throughout their studies to a relevant Christian or secular organisation.
- Part-time vocational qualifications up to BA level in Children’s Mission and Ministry, Youth Mission and Ministry, Third Age Mission and Ministry (86 students 2011-12; 74 students 2010-11). These vocational streams are strongly supportive of the repeated Fruitful Field emphasis on ministry and mission among children, youth and older people.

<b>Denomination 2011-12</b>	<b>BA Th</b>	<b>Dip in CMM</b>	<b>Dip in YMM</b>	<b>BA MM</b>
Methodist	21	4	1	8
Anglican	9	10	7	7
Baptist	3	5	7	3
Community/Christian Fellowship	8	6	5	5
Salvation Army	2	6	0	5
Independent Free church	6	1	0	3
Other	1	2	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>31</b>
Age range	18-51	19-38	19-39	24-60

- Postgraduate MA streams include mission and evangelism, leadership and renewal, emerging church, Celtic mission, Wesleyan theology, children and youth work, religious pluralism, the world of work and Christian mentoring (120 students 2011-12; 111 students 2010-11). Of the 2011-12 figures 40 are ordained. There are currently 48 Methodists being educated on our PGT programme among a further 72 from nine other denominational streams.

<b>Denomination 2011-12</b>	<b>PGT</b>	<b>ordained</b>	<b>lay</b>
Methodist	48	23	25
Anglican	28	5	23
Salvation Army	8	7	1
Baptist	4	1	3
Independent	19	2	17
Pentecostal	6	0	6
Presbyterian	2	0	2
Assemblies of God	2	1	1
Roman Catholic	2	1	1
Congregational	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>80</b>

- Postgraduate research, working towards MPhil or PhD, including 6 on our new PhD in Missiology (27 students 2011-12; 18 students 2010-11). The Fruitful Field vision places great emphasis on scholarship, research and development, and our postgraduate research strength enables us fully to support this aim. Our relationship with the University of Manchester, part of the Russell Group of research focused universities, both supports this focus of research and to some extent also requires such a focus. Of PhD graduates in the last two years, three have been appointed to academic positions in UK, USA and Korea, and one has become an Anglican Bishop in Ghana.

Research students 2011-12	Total	ordained	lay
Methodist	18	13	5
Anglican	1	1	0
Baptist	2	0	2
Salvation Army	1	1	0
Pentecostal	2	2	0
Nazarene	1	0	1
Assemblies of God	1	1	0
Lutheran	1	0	1
Total	27	18	9

University student enrolment	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
BA Th	45	55	56	53	47	50
BA MM	49	47	90	86	74	86
PGT	83	100	102	106	111	120
Research	16	19	21	24	18	27
Total	193	221	269	269	250	283

- Ecumenical study, it is clear from the figures above that Cliff College currently educates 100 Methodists and 183 others (in a total of 283 students) on university validated courses. This is our largest ever total. In educating 100 Methodists on university courses, the College is supported by a Methodist Church grant of £99,000 in 2011-12, which offers very good value to British Methodism. We consider that our strong ecumenical base and financial income from a large student body enables us to deliver high level university education to a significant number of Methodists in a vibrantly ecumenical setting with the major financial subsidy coming from the non-Methodist students.
- Short courses (non-university-accredited) have been introduced recently. Most are one week long, with some covering two weeks. They include Summer School (June 2011, 32 attending), Training the Trainers (2011-12, 14 attending), Christian Mentoring (2010-11, 20 attending, 2011-12, 32 attending), Christian Leadership (2011-12, 6 attending), Christian Life and Mission (2011-12, 10 attending). In the past 12 months 94 people have studied in non-validated courses of at least 1 week duration, 10 people from these courses have since enrolled in university programmes at Cliff College. Since 2010-11 we have

provided part of the EDEV training for the Nottingham and Derby, and Lincoln and Grimsby Methodist districts.

Denomination	Cert in Christian Mentoring 2010	Cert in Christian Mentoring 2011	Cert in Christian Life and Mission 2011	Cert in Christian Leadership 2011	Training the Trainer 2011
Methodist	9	9	1	1	2
Anglican	4	6	8	1	6
Baptist	2	5	0	3	4
Community/Christian Fellowship	3	6	1	0	2
Salvation Army	2	3	0	1	0
Independent Free church	0	2	0	0	0
Other	0	1 Church of Scotland	0	0	0
Total	20	32	10	6	14
Age Range	22 – 60	24 – 66	18 – 28	25 – 58	21 – 49

- Informal training has been carried out by our Principal and tutors at around 25 events and conferences at local church, Circuit, District, national and international level during the past year. We have recently been approached by a large circuit to develop a circuit based training programme to be delivered by a mixture of Cliff staff and local tutors, who will be trained, resourced and supported by the College. This pattern of dispersed training is one example of how the Fruitful Field vision is being achieved.
- Supporting the World Church has always been a priority for Cliff College. We have made the required heavy investment necessary to meet new government regulations on accepting non-EU students for study in the UK. We currently have several students on Tier 4 visas, including 1 MA student in 2010-11 and 2 MA students in 2011-12 on the SALT programme. Our International Training Centre also works in-country, with a current programme in Nigeria that is training national Ministers in mission (currently 151 ordained students, a total of 510 students over the 6 year duration of this programme), and recent similar courses in Sierra Leone where we trained presbyters, local preachers and women's workers.

#### Academic excellence and the University of Manchester

All our academic courses are validated by the University of Manchester. This is a very strong relationship that has become stronger year on year. In 2008 Drs Meadows and Skuce were invited to give a presentation to wider university staff on aspects of the new MA in Mission (Emerging Church) programme. In the last two years the Cliff College Academic Dean has been invited to attend internal University of Manchester committees when any Cliff College paperwork is being considered.

While unusual for a validated partner to have this privilege, this is as a consequence of the unconditional revalidation process about which the 2009 SRC Scrutiny Group report said “This is an exceptional outcome and provides academic affirmation of the views of the scrutiny group.”

A second outcome of the unconditional revalidation is the professional doctorate in Missiology (PhD Miss). In 2006-8 initial conversations with the university had not been fruitful. After the revalidation process the university requested Cliff College to reopen these discussions, and the outcome was the successful launch of the PhD in Missiology in September 2011. The university encouraged one student to transfer from its own Doctorate in Practical Theology to our PhD Miss.

Having such an internationally recognised university link has been very positive in postgraduate student recruitment, and vital for most doctoral students. It is important, although less so, for the College’s undergraduate studies. It additionally has assisted in Faculty recruitment, and in recent years new Faculty members have come with university teaching experience and from positions in institutions such as Garrett Evangelical Seminary, Chicago; Trinity Theological Seminary, Singapore and University College Dublin.

The University of Manchester is actively considering an application for validation from a large UK denominational theological college. This is a very positive sign for Cliff College as it demonstrates the university’s commitment to validated relationships in the confessional sector.

Size and scale. At approaching 300, the number of students at Cliff College is large enough to support a wide range of courses. Mission and evangelism in contemporary culture is a constantly evolving field that requires continual investment in research and course development. Based on the evidence of figures cited and new courses being developed we have confidence that, given the appropriate environment, student numbers can continue to grow.

Ecumenical engagement. About 60% of our students are from other denominations, giving us a rich ecumenical student mix that benefits all students through their encounters with those from different denominations and contexts. This is fully in line with the vision for ecumenical engagement that is repeatedly outlined in the Fruitful Field consultation document. This form of ecumenism is very wide in its scope including Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Pentecostal and monocultural, in addition to most mainstream Protestant denominations. It is fluid, dynamic and suited to a postmodern environment as it is ever changing and not reliant on formalised relationships or models of ecumenism that only engage with a small number of partners.

Emphasis on community and the Holy Spirit. The “gathered community of the learning hub” (p.50) is an important feature of the Fruitful Field concept. Cliff College has always been a community as well as a learning centre: when students in a small focus group were asked what in their view was the best part of being a Cliff College student, the reply was “the community”. This community includes not only residential students, but the collegiate community of part-time students who are together on their study weeks several times annually, and the dispersed community of those who attend short courses, visit the annual Festival and continue to network and enjoy fellowship as alumni.

The vision of the Liverpool Minutes states “the great thing to be desired is an abundant effusion of the Holy Spirit on ourselves and our families, our societies and our congregations”. Cliff College has given and continues to give an appropriate, contextualised emphasis to the empowering character of the Holy Spirit.

Finance and governance. We can appreciate the serious financial challenges that are meeting the Methodist Church in its training activities, and that this is in common with other denominations who are currently reviewing similar situations, including the Anglican and Baptist communities.

We consider that we can best respond to this challenge through the business model that Cliff has always held to – not always without difficulty – of largely funding our own activities mainly through student fees and supporter donations/legacies. We have never received a stream of funded students.

The balance historically was more dependent on donations but, more recently, the scale and size of our training has given us the possibility to be financially viable through achieving critical mass and economies of scale. As a result, student fees and charges make up about 70% of our annual income of about £1.3m, the remainder being about 20% from donations and conferencing, and 10% from a year-by-year Connexional grant.

We consequently account for less than 2% of the £6.2 million annual Connexional training spend and from September 2013 we are currently due to receive no Connexional grant.

The 2009 Scrutiny Group review acknowledged: “There are now no concerns about the arrangements for governance ... The financial affairs of the College are stable although that stability remains reliant for the moment upon an ongoing contribution from connexional funds ... the Methodist Church has every reason to believe that the College is now on secure ground in relation to governance, management and financial control”.

Our vision and future strategy was discussed by the Cliff College Committee in May 2011 and is as follows. It should be noted that this focused on a short- to medium-term vision, as we felt it inappropriate to try to forecast a longer-term vision before knowing the content of the impending Fruitful Field proposals.

- To ensure that Cliff College builds on its historic charisms in mission and evangelism in order to equip the whole church effectively for contemporary mission through a wide range of high quality validated courses and an increasing variety of other training opportunities.
- To increase the level of collaborative working with the Methodist Church in order to provide tailored programmes of training, study and research and to respond to initiatives from the Methodist Church, while at the same time seeking to serve the mission training needs of the wider church through increased contact with other denominations, streams and agencies.
- To significantly revise our BA Th course so that student choice is increased and individual subjects are more clearly linked to key themes in order to maintain a high level of employability of our students into the future.
- To build on the reshaping of our part-time undergraduate courses in Mission and Ministry so that, in addition to the Youth and Children’s courses and the Third-age course, other courses can be added within a flexible framework.

- To add to our range of open access courses such as the Bible Summer School courses “Encounters with the Word”, “Encounters with the World” and “Greek in a Week”.
- To ensure our research level programmes meet the needs of the church today and in the future.
- To develop the quality of our practical provision for students and conference guests.
- To explore actively the provision of distance learning courses which utilise web-based materials.

## **People**

Academic staff. We have seven faculty posts (6 full-time equivalent posts) in addition to the Principal, with international experience at a high level in the USA, Singapore, Kenya, Cameroon, Sri Lanka, New Zealand, Palestine, India and Ireland as well as the United Kingdom. All faculty work is carried out to University of Manchester standards. Our faculty currently includes 6 Methodists (including the Principal), 1 Church of England and 1 Baptist; 6 ordained and 2 lay; 7 male and 1 female; 5 English, 1 USA, 1 Indian, 1 Irish.

Five of our faculty have been appointed as Honorary Research Fellows at the University of Manchester and all our permanent faculty are members of the Higher Education Academy. Four of the faculty regularly publish in peer reviewed journals and in the last 2 years Drs Meadows, Emery-Wright and Skuce have delivered academic papers at international conferences in USA, Norway and Korea.

Three of our current Faculty are External Examiners at a number of British colleges. Dr Meadows is a regular PhD External Examiner for a number of British and USA universities. Dr Skuce has been appointed External Examiner at Queen’s University Belfast for 2012-13 onwards and is an appointed International Reviewer of the Institutional Review of Irish Universities panel. Cliff College is pleased that our faculty are recognised in the wider Bible college sector, and also in the wider university sector. This is also important to the University of Manchester and is an example of the strong and dynamic relationship between the College and the University. It is one of the challenges in accreditation by a world leading university, and the College is pleased to be achieving the necessary standards.

Alumni. In addition to Methodist Presbyters and Deacons, our alumni are found as District evangelism/mission enablers and youth leaders, District training officers and university professors, local preachers and bishops, children’s workers and church stewards, District Chairs and Connexional officers, and in about 15 different denominational streams.

## **Places**

Revd. Canon Prof. Martyn Percy, Principal of Ripon College Cuddesdon and immediate past Chairman of the Cliff College Committee, puts succinctly the core issue: “Cliff’s biggest contribution to Methodism and the wider church is to be yeast

in the dough and salt in the earth. So if there was a way of keeping the Cliff identity and ethos as a viable, distinct feature of any new entity, I would think that this was worth exploring.”

The sole aim of the following comments on ‘Places’ is to help discover the optimum model in which the attributes that Cliff College offers to the Fruitful Field vision, and which have been described above, can be taken forward intact, or indeed enhanced.

#### A single Connexional hub on a new site?

Members of the Cliff College Committee, from their distinctive perspectives (including human resources, academic, management, finance, estates, pastoral, strategic and ecumenical), concluded that the following issues would pose particular risks to the ability of the College to continue the contribution detailed above under ‘Pathways’ and ‘People’. Some of these are already argued in the body of our submission and so are not elaborated here in detail.

- Culture Centralisation always means loss of culture for the previously separate entities, but we have sought in this submission to concern ourselves only with the substantive issues that would, in our view, seriously harm our ability to continue to make a full contribution to the Fruitful Field vision of the kind set out above.
- The structure and governance model chosen for a single-site hub would influence to some extent the degree to which the distinctive attributes of Cliff College and others could be carried through (or not). If there remained distinct entities or operating divisions within the site (e.g. one for ministerial training, another supporting regional and local training, a third for training in mission and evangelism, each retaining its identity and ‘branding’) while recognising and respecting the current diversity of missiological and theological emphases among these and within the connexion, then there may be a reduced loss of Cliff’s and others’ contributions to the vision. However, recent history shows that the consolidation of institutions often results in the particular individual identities being lost. If individual identities are not retained, then what would be produced would be a place of the “lowest common denominator” where all individual strengths and insights would be forfeited.
- Focus on contemporary mission and evangelism. Experience in other fields shows that, the wider the overall scope of a merged organisation, the less the distinctive contributions of individual component units can stand out. As this focus on contemporary mission and evangelism is Cliff’s most distinctive attribute, then the risk of losing a potentially important contribution is very high.
- Lay training experience. In a single Connexional hub on a new site this risks receiving a diluted and subsidiary role to areas such as ordination training.
- Academic excellence. From our experience with University accreditation, we consider that moving to a single-site hub, where our activity was merged with all other Methodist training activities would very likely lose our accreditation from the University of Manchester. What we know of our postgraduate and doctorate student profiles, both lay and ordained, also leads us to consider that we would no longer be their first choice. Our accreditation would be especially at risk should student numbers decrease significantly. This would place our course range, size and scale at very high risk.

- Student numbers are at significant risk should a decision be made to move Cliff College to a new single-site hub as we foresee a dramatic drop in student recruitment, starting immediately, so falling below the critical mass that we need both academically and financially. It has been suggested that the Connexion's timescales would guarantee prospective students' ability to finish their studies at Cliff College. However, in our view, students would still hesitate to apply and many would choose to go elsewhere, because of the overall uncertainty, the risk of disruption due to a major relocation mid-course, the risk of their tutors leaving, and – possibly above all – the fact that there are a number of other Bible Colleges and similar institutions at which they could study, even if not fully comparable with Cliff College as it is today. Overall, the most expected scenario is that the mix of students who are currently attracted to Cliff because of our mission focus would not be attracted to a hub with a less clear focus and a strong "Methodist" label. We are already detecting this from prospective student enquirers who express hesitation over enrolment in view of the current Fruitful Field proposals.
- Our rich ecumenical mix, with 60% non-Methodist students, would most likely evaporate. Students (including Methodist students) choose us, not because we are Methodist, but because of our courses, our focus on mission studies, our biblical and evangelical theology, and ethos – what people have termed the Cliff College 'brand'. The more strongly we become identified as part of a broader Methodist institution and the more dispersed the focus of that institution, the less likely it is that non-Methodists in particular will choose us. The Salvation Army and some non-denominational organisations, including Scripture Union, Youth for Christ, Urban Saints, Church Pastoral Aid Society and Methodist Homes for the Aged are in formal partnership with the College, a relationship which involves them directing their staff to us to study. Two of these organisations have already indicated that this relationship would no longer be appropriate if Cliff College was in another location and more closely identified as a Methodist training centre. A Baptist colleague has commented, giving Spurgeon's College as an example, that colleges which specialise in ordination training find it difficult to attract significant numbers of lay students and that colleges with a firm denominational identity (it is difficult for a college called "Spurgeon's" to avoid this!) find it hard to attract students from other denominations. The Baptist Union has recently asked for prayer for Spurgeon's "for financial provision after three years of large deficits".
- Our skills base would be substantially depleted by the loss of staff, certainly starting from summer 2012 and possibly before. Indications are that this would include key academic staff. It would also include qualified and experienced senior support staff: we are fortunate to have two qualified accountants on staff and others highly experienced in areas such as estates, building development, marketing and conferencing. We do not want to lose any of this pool of expertise, but there is no doubt that we would.
- Financial viability Regrettably, we consider that our financial viability could not in any way carry through intact into a new single-site hub. The foreseen significant drop in student numbers would pose the greatest risk, as this is our greatest source of income. The second largest source of income, our 5,000 strong supporter base offering prayer, donations and legacies is invaluable, but would

inevitably fall away. We are already hearing from supporters who are withholding their donations and/or intend to change their wills should the changes go ahead as proposed. Merging a financially viable body with others that are not, may more likely lead to financial problems for the new body rather than financial stability. As a result, Cliff's functions could cost the Connexion significantly more than at present and there may simply not be the funds, or indeed the priority, to continue to support them. We are especially vulnerable to uncertainty and competition. If the Fruitful Field vision for a single new-build hub goes forward, our financial position, while currently sound, is not robust enough to survive either uncertainty or the competition that already exists and would step into the gap very quickly.

Short-term costs to move the College to a new one-site hub are anticipated to include the following, based on expected reduction of student enrolment:

Year 1 potential reduction of £300,000 income from student fees

Year 2 potential reduction of £600,000 income from student fees

Year 3 potential reduction of £900,000 income from student fees

Year 4 potential reduction of £900,000 income from student fees

- Competition. If the Fruitful Field proposals change the identity or nature of the work of Cliff College, then there is the possibility that one or more other Bible Colleges will develop additional programmes in the same areas of mission and evangelism training as we do, and so will attract students who would otherwise come to Cliff College. This underlines the difficulty of recruiting such students to a new single-site hub where the focus of the hub would be more diverse. Recent competitive developments include the Anglican St Mellitus College and St Paul's Theological Centre based at Holy Trinity Brompton, both only four years old. Their university accredited offering for non-ordination training talks about 'lay leadership in your local church'; 'passionate about mission, evangelism and/or Christian ministry'; 'courses for independent students, those who simply want to strengthen their faith, discover more about the Bible and enable them to serve in the church as lay leaders' – all important Cliff College charisms.
- The 'thin place'. By definition, this would not transfer to a new 'place', although in God's grace a new site may in due course become a 'thin place'.
- Festival The current College Festival enables approximately 2000 people to come on site for an all age conference/celebration. In recent years this event has grown in numbers attending, witnessed a number of people come to Christian faith and an increasing number of Methodist churches bringing groups of people to the event. Unless the new single-site hub has facilities to allow 200+ bed spaces, camping for 500+ and car parking for a larger group, the Festival will not continue and its impact on Methodism and beyond will be lost.
- Further losses to Methodism Further losses will include the demise of the Cliff College mission teams and their positive impact to local congregations. Without strong student numbers such a programme will become unsustainable. In addition the current placements programme, where Cliff College undergraduate students work with a number of congregations to help them fulfil their programmes, will become unsustainable in its present form.

Are there alternative ways to achieve the vision?

- Locating the single-site hub on the current Cliff College site
  - Locating a single hub on an existing Methodist-owned site, whether or not currently used as a college, could well be the most cost-effective approach for Methodism, as an alternative to the concept that what Methodism needs in its present context is a new suite of buildings. A less demanding investment in an existing site may well prove more financially sound, better safeguard Methodist resources, and help mitigate the substantial risk.  
The Cliff College site has unique attributes among the sites currently available, which could enable the Fruitful Field vision to be practically located in a cost effective way for the Connexion. It is a large site, configured to University of Manchester requirements, with substantial student, campus and conference accommodation. There has been over £1 million invested recently (Cliff Hall, en-suite student accommodation etc), has planning permission for further expansion and indications from the planning authorities of where any additional expansion could take place.
  - This could be good for other institutions which would have a ready-made site to which to transfer with an existing infrastructure, and so reduce disruption. Also, a wider constituency would have access to this particular ‘thin place’, which is certainly not the property of Cliff College but is in the gift of the Holy Spirit – it was a ‘thin place’ before a Methodist college arrived on-site, when it was for some time a missionary training college.
  - Much of what Cliff can bring to the vision would be less adversely affected than moving to a remote hub, for example the mission and lay training focus, academic excellence and skills base. Other attributes could still suffer significantly, such as student numbers, ecumenical mix and financial viability. However, overall it would seem that more of what Cliff can offer to the Fruitful Field vision could be carried through intact in this way rather than in moving to a remote hub.
  - The current site is central to all major conurbations outside the south-east, accessible for visitors by car (half an hour from the M1), train (three railway stations within half an hour, all with bus connections to the College, 2 hours from London) and air (one hour from Manchester and East Midlands airports). The location is popular with students and – important for staff and manse costs – with well-priced housing within an easily commutable area. However, it is recognised that a single-site hub, wherever it was in the country, would not be so convenient for people at a large distance from it and, in the case of the current scenario, this would apply to those who are south and east of, say, the Bristol-London M4/M25 corridor. In such a case, the argument would tend towards a two- or multiple-site hub solution.
  - The use of the current site would ensure that the premises would not undersell in the current and foreseeable economic climate. There are stringent local and National Park planning restrictions that would make it difficult to sell for a change of use, while selling for a similar use as at present, such as a conference centre, is unlikely to happen in the

foreseeable future due to the current challenges in the commercial conferencing market.

- A dual or multiple-site hub with Cliff remaining at its present site as one site
  - This would enable the Connexion to focus on where the critical financial problem is (the 98% of the £6.2m spend).
  - Retaining Cliff at its current site, while developing one (or more) other sites as part of the hub would present a much more manageable challenge for Methodism, in terms of a considerably smaller new-build site, less cost, shorter timescales for implementation, less overall disruption and – vitally – a much reduced risk.
  - It could much better retain Cliff’s attributes so they are not lost to the Connexion and wider church, while avoiding any sense of polarisation or competition, as we have never regarded ourselves as in competition with other Methodist institutions.
  - It could enable Cliff to continue as a financial going concern with a minimal call on Connexional funds.
  - It would fit with typical governance and management models. These suggest top-level governance by a single board, with subsidiary specialism-level boards for individual entities, and common back office systems and services across both/all sites (for example as in Airbus Industrie and other organisations).
  - There would be room at the present Cliff College site for some additional units such as central systems and services, units responsible for devolved training at least in the central and northern half of the country, possibly also for activities such as UTU, SOCMS, diaconal or Local Preacher training, redeployment of evangelism staff from the Connexion (with likely reduction of posts enabled) etc. This would make for a less large-scale and expensive development for other site/s.
  
- A third way?
  - An independent future for Cliff College  
It has been suggested that, if the outcome of the consultation was the recommendation to move to a new single-site hub, Cliff College might ask to continue to administer the freehold of its current site and continue as an independent entity. This is not among the possibilities that the Cliff College Committee wish to make in this submission, not least because we would not then be able to make the contribution to the Fruitful Field vision which we would wish, and are equipped, to make. That said, it is a possible future.
  - Continuation of present arrangements  
An alternative suggestion is that Cliff College should be ‘left out of the equation’, as this would reduce significantly the size and cost of any new single-site hub, Cliff is not a major call on Methodist funds, and this would allow the Connexion to focus on where the financial and other organisational problems lie. Cliff’s programmes could then continue to make a strong contribution to the Fruitful Field vision. Again, this is not among the possibilities that the Committee added to its submission. That said, it is also a possible future.

### **The business case**

Finally, members of the Cliff College Committee, when making their individual written comments from different perspectives, raised substantial issues of concern regarding the importance of undergirding the Fruitful Field vision with a full business case. We underline the need to have a costed and practical proposal to present to Conference, given that there is no possibility of going back once places have been sold and institutions unwound.

### **Summary conclusions**

#### **Pathways**

Cliff College has a strong record in providing “high quality flexible pathways” which are “delivered in a number of different communities and contexts” and which have always sought to “meet the needs of a discipleship movement shaped for mission”. This means that the College has significant and unique expertise particularly in the areas of mission training, lay training and post ordination training to enable the Connexion to achieve the “pathways” vision of the Fruitful Field document. We support this and look forward to being part of how this is implemented.

#### **People**

Cliff College’s significant experience in supporting large numbers of people in their dispersed contexts through individual contact and gathered modular training of a high academic standard in ways which resource and equip people for mission means that the College is well placed to enable the Connexion to achieve the “people” vision of the Fruitful Field document. We support this and look forward to being part of how this is implemented.

#### **Places**

The use of Cliff College’s current site with its wide range of facilities and its geographically central location would enable the Connexion to achieve the “places” vision of the Fruitful Field document. This could be as the location of the single-site hub, which may well be the most cost effective way to implement the vision of Fruitful Field, or as one site of a multi-site hub. However we have significant misgivings concerning the effectiveness of seeking to move the work of Cliff College to another site.

Cliff College considers that it has much to offer to the Methodist Church at this key moment in the Church’s history. The College prays that its expertise and ethos will be well used in the new vision for the glory of God.