



Free  
Churches  
Group

# *HOPE IN HIGHER EDUCATION*

The Free Churches and Higher Education: a report and  
recommendations from the Free Churches Group Higher  
Education Working Group

# **The Free Churches Group Higher Education Working Group**

## **Report on the Free Churches and Higher Education**

### **Executive Summary**

**Higher Education is a massively significant part of contemporary society**, with an enormous cultural, social and economic impact on individuals and societies. Universities, the main focus for higher education, are formative for many of their students, not only in terms of intellectual development but also shaping values and world-views. Universities thus impact in a very direct way on nearly half the total young adult population, plus many older people; such is the reach of universities in Britain today. They have an impact on wider society too as they help disseminate views, values and ideas. The research they do will affect life for individuals and societies for generations. What is happening in higher education is, therefore, properly of vital concern to Christians concerned for the good of societies and individuals. For Free Church people, there are particular insights to be drawn from our principles and experience which can help resource engagement with universities for the good of staff, students, church and society. This report highlights such areas and recommends ways in which the FCG might engage with higher education for the good of all.

**The report is produced by a working group set up by the Free Church Education Committee and the Free Churches Group** to help the Committee and Group determine how they might most helpfully engage with higher education.

**The structure of the report** reflects the work asked for. It begins with the aims, objectives and membership of the working group. It then moves (in sections four to seven) to a discussion of

- Free Church principles,
- The higher education context,
- The place of religion in higher education,
- Student experience, including Christian provision on campus.

These things are brought together in a section (numbered eight) which suggests **areas of work with which the FCG and FCEC may wish to consider engaging**. Highlighted are issues around

- The proper role of universities;
- The impact of present changes in higher education on the sector generally and on Free Church theological colleges and courses;
- The way religion is handled in higher education;
- Possible ways for the Free Churches Group, its Education Committee and members to engage with issues in higher education and in caring for, supporting and evangelising students.

In section nine, **four key recommendations are made for future work**. They are:

- **That the FCG (i) develops a statement expressing a positive vision for HE and (ii) in the light of that and contemporary higher education realities engages with specific HE policy areas.**
- **That the FCG engages with questions about the place of religion in universities in a way informed by FC principles and contemporary realities.**
- **That the FCG works with its member bodies to develop a strategic approach to chaplaincy and student work.**
- **That the FCG surveys its members to determine what issues their theological colleges face in the present HE context and what action the FCG might helpfully take to support the colleges.**

**We recognise these are substantial recommendations with clear resource implications. We commend the report to the Free Churches. It indicates ways in which the FCG can contribute to the good of higher education, and further the FCG's own strategic goals to do with both education and witnessing to the place of faith in the public realm. We believe the report will bear witness to that and, as a working group, express a willingness to be consulted about on-going work.**

### **Section One. Aims and hoped for outcomes of the project**

1. The Higher Education Working Group was set up by the Free Church Education Committee (FCEC) on behalf of the Free Churches Group (FCG) 'to discern the most effective use of resources and the best way of equipping Free Church people to engage with Higher Education.'<sup>1</sup>
  
2. The FCEC set out some aims for the project which were subsequently amended in discussion within the FCG to read:
  - (a) To undertake a scoping exercise to discern the most effective areas of engagement for the Free Churches Group within Higher Education.
  - (b) To explore existing projects and initiatives in which the Free Churches are involved and identify good practice.
  - (c) To reflect theologically on the issues involved for the Free Churches regarding Higher Education.
  - (d) To build up the Higher Education presence on the Free Church Education Committee.
  - (e) Possibly, following discussion amongst the Directors of the Free Churches Group, to build capacity amongst the Free Churches to support Higher Education.
  
3. Three hoped for outcomes of the project were set out by the FCEC as follows:
  - (a) To produce a report which identifies theological issues, practical involvement, policy considerations and proposals for the future engagement of the Free Churches with Higher Education.
  - (b) To start to build a network of expertise in Higher Education
  - (c) To recruit additional members to FCEC.
  
4. This report is that referred to in paragraph 3, point (a). At the request of the then General Secretary, and with the agreement of the FCG Directors, it was delivered to the Free Churches Group Directors at the end of April 2015, to be considered at their May meeting.

### **Section Two. Members of the Working Group**

5. The members of the working group were:
  - Dr Andrew Bradstock, Director of the Centre for Theology and Religion in Public Life (TRiPL) at the University of Winchester. Former Secretary for Church and Society with the United Reformed Church. He has held academic positions in higher education in the UK and New Zealand.
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<sup>1</sup> FCEC paper *Higher Education Project*, undated.

- Professor Les Ebdon, Director of Fair Access to Higher Education, formerly Vice-Chancellor of the University of Bedfordshire; Convenor of the Baptist Union Educational Chaplaincy Working Group.
- Professor Graham Handscomb, Visiting Professor of University College London, Institute of Education; Professor & Dean of The College of Teachers; URC Member of the Free Church Education Committee.
- Revd Dr Stephen Heap, Baptist minister; former university chaplain and Church of England National Higher Education Adviser; Visiting Professor at the University of Winchester. (Chair)
- Revd Cassandra Howes, Methodist Minister, Co-ordinating Chaplain, University of Bedfordshire, Bedford campus, University Centre Milton Keynes and Oxford House in Aylesbury. Formerly held chaplaincy roles at Aston, Birmingham City and Sheffield Hallam Universities and the University of the West of England.
- Revd Professor Neil Messer, Head of the Department of Theology, Religion and Philosophy, University of Winchester and (from July 2015) Convenor of the URC Education and Learning Committee.
- Dr Peter Rae, Dean of Nazarene Theological College, Manchester. Reviewer for the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and Chair of the 'QAA Faith-Based Colleges Group'.
- Hilary Topp, National Coordinator, Student Christian Movement
- Dr Emmanuel O. Tukasi, Director of Ministerial Studies, Christ Apostolic Church, United Kingdom.

6. Three meetings were held at the FCG offices, between November 2014 and April 2015. Between meetings, work was done via email. The FCG officer responsible for servicing the working group was Sarah Lane Cawte, the Education Officer. The working group is grateful to her and also to Sabina Williams in the FCG office for their support.

### **Section Three. The Background and Remit for this Work.**

7. The FCG and its antecedent bodies, like many FCG members, have a long and distinguished involvement in education. Much of the work of the FCG in education is currently done through the Free Church Education Committee (FCEC). Recently, the work of that committee has primarily, although not exclusively, been to do with schools, as can be seen in its June 2010 *A Free Church Voice on Education*.<sup>2</sup> Its paper outlining the HE project says 'The committee is concerned that Higher Education is not given the attention it deserves in the work of the Free Churches.'<sup>3</sup>

8. This concern is expressed at a time of change in higher education (HE). Within the working group we gave thought to what is currently happening in the sector as that will clearly influence how the FCG and the FCEC might set priorities for engaging with it. Similarly, we considered the changing religious situation in Britain, in particular how religion tends to be treated on campus and how religion is perceived and received by the young adult generation which forms a significant part of the university

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.freechurches.org.uk/group/group.aspx?id=229944> (accessed 4.3.15).

<sup>3</sup> FCEC paper, *Higher Education Project*, undated.

population. Key points from our thinking are outlined below. No claim is made for comprehensiveness; a 'scoping' document is what was asked for and a comprehensive one would not have been possible in the time available. We hope we have indicated significant areas for the FCG and FCEC to consider as decisions are made about future work.

9. The working group was asked to look at HE issues specifically from Free Church (FC) perspectives and sought to do that throughout. Part of that was deciding what might be relevant FC principles and approaches. The ones identified are set out below. These are drawn mainly from recent FCG documents, though other FC literature and parts of FC history are also cited. Again, there is no claim for comprehensiveness but it is hoped some key points are identified which indicate the FC tradition can speak into the contemporary debates. Indeed, the working group is of the view that there are important contributions the FCs can make to contemporary HE. These are set out in section eight: **Issues for the FCG, including the FCEC, and the member bodies.**

#### **Section Four. Free Church Principles**

10. Three recent FCG documents were made available to the group: *A Free Church Voice on Education* (produced by the FCEC in June 2010), the Free Church Education Committee Strategic Plan 2014, and the 2014 Work Plan for the FCG Secretariat. A number of words and phrases appear in those documents which are expressive of FC principles relevant to education.

11. The following are drawn from the Executive Summary of *A Free Church Voice on Education* (p.3):

- (a) 'The Free Churches are ... united by ... a concern for the education of the whole person.'
- (b) 'The Free Churches' voice ... will speak the language of the Kingdom of God; it will speak of justice, integrity, equality, truth, freedom and peace for all. The source of these values is the Bible, in which the churches are rooted and grounded.'
- (c) 'A Free Church voice must resist secularism and encourage the use of Christian language in education, particularly the vocabulary of hope.'
- (d) 'The Free Churches speak from an inclusive perspective ... In the belief that every individual is important to God, a Free Church Voice, silenced in the past by discrimination and inequality, must speak for those who are disadvantaged because of difference.'
- (e) 'A Free Church voice recognises the importance of young people's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development... Education needs to be broader than that which is measurable; it should enable individuals to live life in all its fullness.'
- (f) 'The FCEC is committed to upholding respect for religious faith, of whatever creed, and the right of an individual to hold that faith, whilst recognising its own rootedness in the Kingdom of God.'

12. The following are drawn from the FCEC Strategic Plan 2014:

- (a) The values statement in the plan says FC values are 'rooted in the Bible and bear witness to nonconformist convictions:  
Equality and justice: challenging disadvantage.  
Inclusiveness: promotion of the good of all.  
Freedom of conscience and belief: putting forward Christian perspectives and respecting those whose convictions are different.  
Openness: ready to learn from others and to embrace new ideas.'
- (b) Also relevant is one of the objectives in the plan: 'To promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of young people and of society through education.'

13. The 2014 Work Plan for the FCG Secretariat says little about FC principles, but some points relevant to this work are as follows:

- (a) One of the Secretariat's strategic goals as set out in the Work Plan is 'To contribute to the well-being and flourishing of communities ... by engaging in holistic mission and whole-life discipleship to transform our churches and communities.'
- (b) Another is 'To draw on our rich heritage of campaigning for religious freedom for the non-conforming churches (and other religious minorities) in England to address the challenges posed by religious freedom, equality and human rights.'
- (c) Under the latter Strategic Goal is another goal: 'Co-ordinating responses to Government consultations on education, particularly those involving issues of equal access, widening participation and justice.'

14. From that, it may be judged the FCG has particular concerns about education being holistic (including spiritual, moral, social and spiritual development), that it be marked by justice (especially for the marginalised), truth, freedom, equality, inclusiveness and openness, and that it be about society as well as individuals. There is a desire to 'resist secularism', respect religious faith 'of whatever creed', and use Christian vocabulary, including that of hope. There is also one reference to 'whole-life discipleship', which may be relevant to thinking about relating to Christian students and staff on campus.

15. The working group allowed such concerns to guide its work and also drew on group members' knowledge of particular parts of the FC tradition.

16. One part of FC tradition particularly highlighted in our conversation was a commitment to toleration, freedom and respect. This arose in history not out of a lack of conviction but from experiences of courageous witness leading to persecution and minority status stretching back to the emergence of independent congregations in the aftermath of the Reformation. It was the pioneer Baptist, Thomas Helwys (1575 – 1616), who wrote the first full plea for religious liberty in England and

Wales in *A Short Declaration on The Mystery of Iniquity*, 1612. This was a plea for toleration and for the King not to be the judge between God and individuals, 'Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews or whatsoever.'<sup>14</sup> In the theology and experience of early dissenters such as Helwys lie the roots of FC commitments to the separation of church and state, advocacy of religious liberty and respect of those liberties for those with whom we debate and disagree. These are vital matters on campus today and this is an area we will be suggesting is a priority for FCG involvement in HE.

17. We also sought to ascertain whether there is any writing about contemporary universities from within the FCs. We believe there is very little, but are aware of the following:

- (a) Stan Brown, *Higher Education Chaplaincy and the Changing Role of Religion in the Public Square – a Contextual Theology for University Chaplaincy* (DMin thesis, King's College, London, undated and unpublished). As the title suggests, this is mainly about chaplaincy, but it also contains useful material on the treatment of religion on campus.
- (b) Paul Fiddes, *The place of Christian Theological Reflection in the Modern University with some modest suggestions for the role of chaplains*. Lecture given to the Churches Higher Education Liaison Group Chaplains' Conference 5<sup>th</sup> September 2005. Fiddes outlines the involvement of FC people in the creation of University College, London, and puts a case for the inclusion of the study of theology in universities, including for chaplaincy as a focus for theological endeavour.
- (c) Paul Fiddes, *The place of Christian Theology in the Modern University*, Baptist Quarterly, 42:2:1 (2007), pp. 71-88, Baptist Historical Society. A version of the above lecture, but without the comments on chaplaincy.
- (d) Stephen Heap, *What are Universities Good For?* (Cambridge, Grove, 2012). This is a theological reflection on the purpose of universities mindful of the present HE context. Whilst the author is a Baptist minister, it is not particularly written from a FC perspective, and the title page describes him as National Higher Education Adviser, Church of England.
- (e) Steve Holmes, *Awesome Hospitality, or How to run a Baptist University if Liberty of Conscience, Doctrinal Standards, and Academic Freedom are all bad ideas*. Unpublished, undated paper, which makes a case for academic freedom based on Baptist principles.
- (f) 2012 Education Commission Report to the Methodist Conference.  
[http://www.methodistconference.org.uk/media/118008/24%20education\\_commissionreport.pdf](http://www.methodistconference.org.uk/media/118008/24%20education_commissionreport.pdf) (accessed 9.2.15). Whilst most of this is about schools, there are sections on Methodist involvement in chaplaincy and as a provider of HE.

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas Helwys, *A Short Declaration on the Mystery of Iniquity*, 1612. A copy of the original, presented to King James in 1612, is in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Cited in, for example, Andrew Bradstock and Christopher Rowland (eds), *Radical Christian Writings* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2002, p.108).

- (g) The Free Church Federal Council, *Report of a Working Party on Free Church Chaplaincies in Higher (and Further) Education*, October 1990. This report considers FC HE chaplaincy and proper arrangements for it until the day the ecumenical councils 'give oversight to the work of chaplaincy in Higher Education in a fully ecumenical and centrally funded manner' (p.3). The report reviews the provision of FC chaplaincy, the reasons for chaplaincy ('The primary function of the Chaplaincy is to proclaim that the life, work, responsibilities and values of the institution and all within it are part of the concern of God in Christ, and therefore, a concern of His Church'(p.8)). It advocates the FCs working together to provide chaplaincy to the whole university, not just FC people, after due consultation with the HE institution and other denominations, clear contractual and other arrangements, and that the FCs examine priorities in ministry 'that the whole field of education and the new generation of staff and students may be challenged by the Christian understanding of education and enlightened by the Spiritual insights of the Gospel.' (p.18).
- (h) *A Strategy for Free Church Higher Education Chaplaincy in London*. Report of the Group Established at the 1999 Annual Meeting of the Free Church Covenant in Further and Higher Education in London. This sets out a vision and rationale for the FCs working together in London to expand FC HE chaplaincy provision, and what the role of chaplaincy might consist in; it advocates a similar model of ministry to the whole institution and all within it as the FCEC report.

18. We are also mindful that there is an history of FC involvement in post-school education, some of which has contributed to the present HE sector. For example, the Congregationalist minister John Hunter Rutherford created a 'ladder' of educational opportunity in Newcastle, founding schools and a technical college to enable advancement for the poor in that city. The technical college is one of the institutions from which Northumbria University grew. Similarly, in Manchester the Unitarian George William Wood and the Quaker John Dalton were leaders in the founding of the Mechanics Institute, one of the institutions from which the University of Manchester arose. Another antecedent institution of the same university was Owens College, founded by the Congregationalist John Owens. Wood, Dalton and those who worked with them were clear they were founding an Institute to help the workers learn the foundations of science. Owens was less clear about the purpose of his college, but he did say it was for education, for males and that it was to be non-sectarian.

19. Dissenters also responded to their exclusion from the then two universities in England; Oxford and Cambridge. Conditions of entry to those universities included subscription to the Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England and being male. In order that they might access HE, FC people established theological colleges, which offered education in arts and theology for ministers, and 'dissenting academies' which, to quote Paul Fiddes, 'offered a general education to a wider group at a somewhat lower level.'<sup>5</sup> Dr Williams's Library has developed Dissenting Academies Online as a source of information about the Academies. It can be accessed at <http://www.english.qmul.ac.uk/drwilliams/portal.html> (accessed 12.2.15). Some of the institutions

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Fiddes, *The Place of Christian Theology in the Modern University*, Baptist Quarterly, , 42:2:1 (2007, pp. 71-88, pp.71-72).



dissenters founded in those days have become part of present day universities; for example, Spring Hill College, a Congregationalist theological college, grew to become Mansfield College, part of the University of Oxford. Harris Manchester College, also part of the University of Oxford, began life as a dissenting academy; the Warrington Academy. How many such there are, and how far their heritage affects their present may be worthy of more research.

20. Exclusion from the existing universities also led dissenters to be part of a group which established a new university in London. University College London (UCL) was opened in 1826 by a group of utilitarian free-thinkers, nonconformists, Jews and some Anglicans. Entry was not dependent on religious belief or gender. Prominent nonconformists involved included Francis Cox, a Baptist minister who was Secretary to the Committee which set up the college and then Clerk and Librarian of the College, and the Baptist MP and financier Benjamin Shaw, who helped underwrite the purchase of the site.<sup>6</sup> They were clearly resistant to groups being excluded from HE on the basis of gender or faith, and were committed to inclusion.

21. Another contribution FC people made to what is now HE was through the development of teacher training, in which nonconformists took a lead. The Quaker Joseph Lancaster was founding a training school for teachers in London in 1805.<sup>7</sup> Some of those teacher training schools and colleges have a continuing life as part of present-day universities (e.g. the Methodist Westminster and Southlands Colleges, now part of Oxford Brookes and Roehampton universities, respectively).

22. Within those institutions created with FC involvement, which opened their doors to the poor and women, and did not impose religious tests, can be seen an outworking of FC principles. The working group could do but little work in this area; more could be done on the history of FC involvement in HE as part of developing and clarifying a FC understanding of HE.

23. We also noted FC people have made significant contributions to academic life. Christopher Brooke in his history of the University of Cambridge from 1870 to 1990 has a section on the academic contribution of FC people to that university during that period. He notes in particular T.R.Glover, who was a Baptist, a classicist and an ancient historian; Alex Wood, who was a Presbyterian and a physicist; and Bernard Manning who was a church historian and a Congregationalist who, Brooke says, 'also drank deeply from the Methodist tradition.'<sup>8</sup> A list of FC people who have made a significant contribution to the academic study of theology would include C.H. Dodd and H.H. Farmer, who held the Norris-Hulse Chair in Cambridge from 1935 to 1949 and 1949 to 1960 respectively, Morna Hooker and Graham Stanton who held the Lady Margaret's Chair in Cambridge from 1976 to 1998 and 1998 to 2003 respectively, Colin Gunton who was Professor of Christian Doctrine at King's College, London from 1984 to 2003, and Frances Young who held the Edward Cadbury Chair at Birmingham from 1986 to 2005. The latter Chair is a reminder of the support the Cadburys, who were Quakers, gave to theology at Birmingham. Dodd also held the Rylands Chair in Manchester, endowed by

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<sup>6</sup> Fiddes, 2007, p.72.

<sup>7</sup> Martial Rose, *A History of King Alfred's College, Winchester, 1840 to 1980* (London and Chichester, Phillmore, 1981, p.2).

<sup>8</sup> Christopher N.L.Brooke, *A History of the University of Cambridge Volume IV 1870-1990* (Cambridge, CUP, 1993, Chapter 13, p.388).

Congregationalist Mrs Enriqueta Rylands, from 1930-35, a chair held by other FC scholars, including F.F. Bruce from 1959 to 1978.

## Section Five. The Higher Education Context

24. As suggested in paragraph eight, HE is currently undergoing great change. Some of that is set out here, in particular in the English context, though with some reference to the UK-wide situation. HE is a devolved responsibility, with different policy regimes within the different nations in these islands. The working group recognises that concentrating on England and the UK is a shortcoming as the FCG has members in Wales. However, the working group was told that no responses to the request to nominate members for the group were received from FCG members whose primary focus is Wales and the working group did not have competence to discuss Welsh HE policy. The FCG may wish to liaise with its members in Wales to determine what of the present report is useful to them, and what extra work is needed to enable the FCG to work effectively in HE on behalf of and with its Welsh members.

25. Overall, the HE sector is growing, vibrant and has a massive impact on individuals and communities throughout the UK. Saying precisely how many institutions of higher education there are is difficult due to questions of definition. There are currently 133 institutions whose executive head is a member of Universities UK (UUK), but not all institutions, or their heads, are members of what is still the major 'umbrella' body.<sup>9</sup> Mark Humphriss, University Secretary at the University of Bath, gave a figure of 163 HE institutions in a talk to the Churches Higher Education Liaison Group new chaplains training course in November 2013. Looking at numbers of students, according to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), in 2012-13 across the UK there were 2,340,275 students in HE. 1,803,840 were undergraduates, of whom 1,385,675 were full time.<sup>10</sup> That is a participation rate of just under 50% of 17 to 30 year olds in HE.<sup>11</sup> In the same year there were 382,515 staff working in HE.<sup>12</sup> According to UUK, universities contributed £73 billion to the UK economy in 2011-12 (2.8% of GDP) and generated £10.7 billion of export earnings.<sup>13</sup> That partly comes from research, for which universities are a key focus, and which is essential to long term prosperity, health and well-being.

26. The direction of travel for HE in England was set out in the report of the Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance chaired by Lord Browne and the subsequent White Paper, *Students at the Heart of the System*. The report of the Browne review was published in October 2010 as *Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education*. The White Paper was published in June 2011.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/aboutus/members/Pages/default.aspx> (accessed 23.3.15).

<sup>10</sup> HESA web page <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/>. (accessed 23.3.15).

<sup>11</sup> Mark Humphriss gave a figure of 49% of 17 to 30 year olds in HE in his presentation to new chaplains, referred to earlier in this paragraph.

<sup>12</sup> HESA web page <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/>. (accessed 23.3.15).

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Documents/2014/HigherEducationInFactsAndFigures2014.pdf> (accessed 23.3.15).

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/31999/10-1208-securing-sustainable-higher-education-browne-report.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/31999/10-1208-securing-sustainable-higher-education-browne-report.pdf) and [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/31384/11-944-higher-education-students-at-heart-of-system.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/31384/11-944-higher-education-students-at-heart-of-system.pdf). (accessed 12.2.15).

27. Browne and the White Paper express a view of HE as having two primary purposes; serving the economy and advancing social mobility. They also both state a commitment to introducing more competition into the HE system and express the belief that competition will lead to improvement. One way of introducing more competition which they advocate is through changing the primary system of funding from a block grant from government to the university to one in which universities are mainly funded through increased fees payable by individual students. Those fees do not need to be paid 'up front' but via a loan made available to students by central government, to be used to purchase the course each student perceives to be best for them. Under such a system, universities will be forced to compete for students to gain revenue and, in competing, will improve. Grants were also proposed to help students with living expenses, again funded through central government.

28. The White Paper also saw competition and choice for students being fostered as a variety of ways of participating in HE were developed, including through HE delivered in Further Education colleges, and the entry of 'alternative providers'. The latter have included both 'not for profit' and 'for profit' providers, some of which are seeking, or have obtained, taught degree awarding powers. At present, they are less regulated than public universities, including in matters of widening participation, for example. They are growing rapidly. According to a report of 24 Feb 2015 from the Public Accounts Committee, *Financial Support for Students at Alternative Providers*, in 2010/11 there were 7,000 students at alternative providers in receipt of support from the public purse via the Student Loans Company. By 2013/14 this had risen to 53,000 at 140 providers.<sup>15</sup> HE in further education is also growing; there were 186,455 students studying HE in FE colleges in 2012 – 13.<sup>16</sup>

29. Whilst the Browne report advocated most subject provision in most providers being funded through fees paid by students, it also proposed some 'priority' subject areas should continue to get direct central government support. They are typically subjects which are more expensive to teach and, to quote Browne, 'deliver significant social returns such as to provide skills and knowledge currently in shortage or predicted to be in the future.' Browne says: 'Typically, the courses which may fall into this category are courses in science and technology subjects, clinical medicine, nursing and other healthcare degrees, as well as strategically important language courses.'<sup>17</sup>

30. In line with the commitment to social mobility, proposals were made to strengthen the Office for Fair Access (OFFA). In putting the case for that, the 2011 White Paper noted significant progress in expanding the participation of people from lower socio-economic groups in HE, with an increase of about 30% in numbers from such backgrounds in the five years preceding the White Paper (6,600 more students).<sup>18</sup> It also said more was needed, because 'currently fewer than one in five young people from the most disadvantaged areas enter higher education compared to more than one in two

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-accounts-committee/news/report-financial-support-for-students-at-alternative-higher-education-providers/> (accessed 28.4.15).

<sup>16</sup> UUK, *Patterns and Trends in Higher Education 2014*, <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Documents/2014/PatternsAndTrendsInUKHigherEducation2014.pdf> (accessed 23.4.15) p.5.

<sup>17</sup> *Securing a Sustainable Future*, p.47.

<sup>18</sup> *Students at the Heart of the System*, p.54.

from the most advantaged areas.<sup>19</sup> Also, ‘the participation rate of disadvantaged young people at institutions requiring higher entry tariffs has remained almost flat over recent years at under three per cent.’<sup>20</sup> In response, the White Paper proposed OFFA be given more resources and that universities commit to an evidence based approach to furthering widening participation, including to high tariff institutions, with universities’ commitments being expressed in Access Agreements which universities charging fees of over £6,000 p.a. are required to submit to OFFA and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) for approval.

31. OFFA and HEFCE subsequently developed a *National Strategy for Access and Student Success*, published in April 2014. It can be read at <http://www.offa.org.uk/publications/national-strategy-for-access-and-student-success/> (accessed 25.3.15).

32. The proposals in Browne and the White Paper were broadly followed and now shape the HE system in England. Fees of a maximum of £9,000 p.a. were introduced in the 2012-13 academic year, with graduates being liable to begin repaying their loan, with interest, when they earn more than £21,000 p.a.

33. There were fears the new system might deter people from attending university. In practice, the numbers applying and enrolling have increased, and the numbers applying and enrolling from lower socio-economic groups have likewise increased, though people from higher socio-economic groups are still more likely to attend university than those from lower ones. The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), which deals with applications for full-time places, reported in December 2014 that the highest number of full-time students ever had been admitted to courses in UK universities and colleges in autumn 2014; a total of 512,400, which was up 3.4% on 2013. 447,500 were from the UK. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds were 10% more likely to enter HE in 2014 than in 2013.<sup>21</sup> UCAS also says that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds were 40% more likely to enter high tariff institutions in 2014 than five years previously, though that still means ‘only three percent of disadvantaged 18 year olds enter (high tariff institutions) compared to 21 per cent from the most advantaged backgrounds.’<sup>22</sup> Also, in terms of participation across the sector, those from higher socio-economic groups are still about two and a half times more likely to enter HE than those from disadvantaged groups.<sup>23</sup>

34. There are continuing variations in participation rates in different regions and between women and men. Regional participation rates of 18 year olds range from 26.7% in the South West to 34.8% in London.<sup>24</sup> In 2014, 18 year old women were a third more likely to enter HE than men; indeed, fewer

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<sup>19</sup> *Students at the Heart of the System*, p.55.

<sup>20</sup> *Students at the Heart of the System*, p.55.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/record-number-students-placed-uk-universities-and-colleges> (accessed 25.3.15).

<sup>22</sup> UCAS *End of Cycle Report 2014*, Foreword, pages not numbered. <http://ucascomstg.prod.acquia-sites.com/sites/default/files/2014-end-of-cycle-report-dec-14.pdf> (accessed 25.3.15).

<sup>23</sup> UCAS *End of Cycle Report*, p.iii.

<sup>24</sup> UCAS *End of Cycle Report*, p.ii.

18 year old men apply for HE than the number of young women who enter.<sup>25</sup> This disparity is most pronounced in more disadvantaged areas.<sup>26</sup>

35. Despite the government making more support for part-time students available, the numbers of such students have dropped dramatically in recent years. This should be considered alongside the increase in full-time students. UUK reports that the number of part-time undergraduate students dropped by 28% between 2003-04 and 2012-13, and by 23.3% between 2010-11 and 2012-13. The figures for part-time postgraduates were a decline of 6.7% and 13.9% respectively.<sup>27</sup>

36. There were also fears that an emphasis on serving the economy might draw students towards courses with a clear economic benefit, to the detriment of enrolment on courses providing a less obvious route into well-paid employment. There is some evidence this is happening in arts and humanities courses, with some universities cutting courses in those areas.

37. What is happening to theology and religious studies (TRS) both illustrates the general trend and may be of particular interest to the FCG.<sup>28</sup> According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency, the total number of TRS students across the UK and across all modes and levels of study fell by around 15% between 2011/12 and 2012/13 (the first year of the new system) with a loss of more than 2,000 students. The fall was particularly marked in part-time undergraduate study. Enrolments on TRS part-time courses fell by 30% between 2011-12 and 2012-13. Looking at full-time undergraduate TRS figures across the UK, according to UCAS, in 2011 there were 5,616 applications and 1,306 acceptances. In 2012, there were 4,888 applications and 1,086 acceptances. The figures for 2013 are 4,568 and 1,047.<sup>29</sup> Within that overall picture, in TRS as in other areas, it may be that some departments will gain strength as others close. That may lead to centres of excellence. It may also mean some find it difficult to access courses if they need to remain at home whilst studying.

38. There are other policy factors which are impacting on the sector at present, including changes to visas for international students, the removal of the right of international undergraduate students to bring family into the UK and the removal of many post-study work opportunities for international students. Whilst the overall number of international students has continued to grow, there has been a significant decline of applicants from India and Pakistan. Current figures indicate in 2012–13, there were 125,270 HE students from other EU countries and 299,950 non–EU in the UK. 62% of those came from Asia, principally China and India, 11% from Africa, and 9% from each of North America and the Middle East.<sup>30</sup> Whilst continued growth is welcome, there are many in the sector who argue it could be greater if the changes in visas and the restrictions on work were reversed. They are being imposed

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<sup>25</sup> UCAS *End of Cycle Report*, Foreword, pages not numbered.

<sup>26</sup> UCAS *End of Cycle Report*, p.iii.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Documents/2014/HigherEducationInFactsAndFigures2014.pdf> (accessed 25.3.15). p.8.

<sup>28</sup> There may also be particular pressures on TRS, a matter the FCG may wish to explore.

<sup>29</sup> Figures kindly obtained by HE consultant and Cathedrals Group General Secretary Sue Boorman on a pro bono basis ([sueboorman@virginmedia.com](mailto:sueboorman@virginmedia.com)). The distinction between applications and applicants should be noted. Each applicant is likely to make a number of applications; on average just under 5.

<sup>30</sup> UUK, *Patterns and Trends in Higher Education 2014.*, pp.9-13. <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Documents/2014/PatternsAndTrendsInUKHigherEducation2014.pdf> (accessed 23.4.15).

at a time when there is a strong internationalisation agenda in HE which recognises that graduates will need to live as global citizens, compete in a global market, and live appropriately in an increasingly interdependent and inter-connected world which faces challenges, such as the environmental one, which can only be tackled globally. It is also the case that international students bring revenue to Britain and may continue to be friends and allies of Britain well into the future, including as they possibly move into positions of considerable influence.

39. Initial Teacher Training (ITT) or Initial Teacher Education (ITE) may be of interest to the FCG and FCEC. It is presently undergoing considerable change, which is impacting on universities. The 2014 UUK report 'The Impact of ITT Reforms on English HEIs' contains a useful summary of the changes.<sup>31</sup> About eighty English universities have traditionally been engaged in training teachers, either at undergraduate or postgraduate level. Some of those universities were founded by the churches, initially as teacher training institutions. The Church's work in schools and ITE has been recognised over the years in the concept of 'denominational balance', with teacher training places to universities being allocated to reflect state and denominational schools provision.

40. In 2011-2012 there were five main routes into teaching: university led undergraduate training leading to a BA, BSc or BEd; university led postgraduate training leading to a Post Graduate Certificate of Education; School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT); Employment based Initial Teacher Training (EBITT); and Teach First. The then Secretary of State announced in 2012 that he wanted half of ITT places to be allocated directly to schools by 2015 under a scheme called 'Schools Direct'. This has largely been achieved. In 2011-12, 80% of the 35,744 training places were allocated to universities; in 2015-16, 49% of places are allocated to Schools Direct and SCITTs. While this may have strengthened school-university partnerships in many places, there has been a major decrease in primary level teacher training places at universities and a destabilising of some secondary provision. There are warnings of incipient teacher shortages and concerns about the future sustainability of ITT in the one in five universities involved in ITT where over ten per cent of the student population is studying to be a teacher. Many of the latter are church foundation universities.

41. One debate which has emerged following the changes is how far HE is a private and how far a public good. The shift to funding via an individual student may lead to an emphasis on the former; the individual pays for their course and looks for a 'good' from that, often, perhaps, in the form of a financial return on their financial investment. There is also a long tradition that universities are for the public good. That can be seen in, for example, the report of the 1997 National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, which spoke of one of the main purposes of universities being 'to play a major role in shaping a democratic, civilised, inclusive society'.<sup>32</sup> Such themes are notably missing from both the Browne report and the White Paper.

42. Whilst the working group's remit was to focus on the wider higher education sector rather than theological colleges, the latter are part of the sector and the overall HE policy framework impacts on them. They will also be of proper concern to the FCG in themselves. We believe there are approximately 20 to 25 colleges or national courses associated with FCG members in England and

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Documents/2014/ImpactOfITTReformsOnEnglishHEIs.pdf> (accessed 26.4.15).

<sup>32</sup> *The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, Higher Education in the Learning Society, Summary Report, July 1997* (Norwich, HMSO, 1997, p.13).

Wales; the FCG may wish to check the exact number. Such colleges and courses not only undertake their founding purpose of ministerial preparation, including for chaplaincy, but also educate those going into youth work, teaching, social care, and a range of professions; and they are active centres for postgraduate teaching and research. In this they serve a global constituency, being a particularly rich resource for theological institutional development in the majority world.

43. Various aspects of the present policy changes have impacted on such institutions. For example, the changes in student visas for international postgraduate students mean many are not allowed to work during study (including teaching, which otherwise would be both a source of money and part of professional development), or to bring their families to the UK with them. The changed funding situation also means some universities are withdrawing from validating courses in theological colleges because increased regulatory demands on collaborative provision mean the cost of supporting validation increases, particularly (as is often the case in theological education) where student numbers are modest.

44. As universities have pulled back from validating courses, the colleges have responded in various ways. Some have grouped together to work with a single supportive validating university such as Durham, Chester or Manchester. There has also been consideration of more separatist alternatives: in particular seeking taught-degree-awarding powers for themselves, or establishing a 'federated university' for theological institutions, on the model of the Melbourne 'University of Divinity'.<sup>33</sup> Some would embrace this as removing a perceived secularist threat represented by validating universities. Such a move could also reverse the pattern of engagement of recent decades, and presage a return to an insular view of theological education.<sup>34</sup>

## **Section Six. The Religious Context**

45. This section considers the place of religion on campus. Two broad topics have surfaced in our discussions as likely to be important for the FCG, FCEC and FCs as they consider involvement in HE, given the FC principles and concerns outlined above. One is the treatment of religion on campus. The other is what place Christian faith has amongst students. The report looks first at the treatment of religion on campus.

46. Most universities are likely to describe themselves as secular, even if they were founded by the church or individual Christians. A few do seek to live as church foundation universities within the publicly funded HE sector. Amongst them, one, the University of Roehampton, has a Methodist foundation as one of its constituent colleges. The other such universities are Anglican or Roman Catholic. There are also church foundation theological colleges, referred to in the previous section.

47. Exactly what is meant by 'secular' is not always clear, and those using it may not always be aware that it can carry various meanings. Within the current literature, there are a variety of views.

48. Charles Taylor in his *A Secular Age* points out that a secular society is a phenomenon of one part of the world and one recent part of history. The former point is particularly relevant as in many

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.divinity.edu.au/> (accessed 22.3.15)

<sup>34</sup> See also paragraph 96.

universities different parts of the world meet. Taylor outlines three understandings of the secular, all worth reflecting on by FC people wishing to engage in HE. The first is the separation of religion and public life, with religion becoming a private matter. The second is a decline of religious belief and practice. The third, which he concentrates on, is belief in God, once normative, becoming 'one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace.'<sup>35</sup>

49. One effect of such changes is that societies are no longer held together by any shared acknowledgment of 'the transcendent', argues Taylor. Society as a whole no longer accepts 'final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing'.<sup>36</sup>

50. In considering what it is to be secular, Rowan Williams makes a useful distinction between 'programmatic secularism', characterised by 'the almost value-free atmosphere of public neutrality and the public invisibility of specific commitments', and 'procedural secularism', which allows for 'a crowded and argumentative public square' such that religious convictions are granted a public, though not privileged, hearing.<sup>37</sup> The Baptist Nigel Wright makes a similar distinction when he writes of 'hard' and 'soft' secularism. He says '*hard secularism* is essentially an atheistic worldview and ... *soft secularism*... is a political strategy designed to hold together religiously and ideologically diverse societies.'<sup>38</sup> Wright is cautiously welcoming of the latter,

51. Arguably the first secular university in England was University College London; it did not require religious faith for entry and was open to people of all faiths. The comments in paragraph 20 about the foundation of UCL, show that those who began it were not seeking to create a religion-free or religiously neutral space, but a place for people of all religions and none; a religiously plural university.<sup>39</sup> Free Church people were involved in creating UCL, and the understanding of the place of religion in the college is well in line with the Helwys vision also quoted above.<sup>40</sup> Arguably, then, a FC understanding would lead to a welcoming of religious plurality; of soft or procedural secularism.

52. In the days of Helwys, and in those when UCL was created, that understanding of the place of religion was worked out within an overall context in which Christianity carried authority and could be appealed to in the arguments about what sort of secular space should be created. That is no longer the case, which may mean other world views, rather than Christian thinking, may shape current secularism.

53. Recent research has noted religion has not died out, as early exponents of secularisation theory suggested it would, but, rather, religion remains a significant force, including in the public

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<sup>35</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England,. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007, p.3).

<sup>36</sup> Taylor, 2007, pp. 16-18, p.18.

<sup>37</sup> Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square* (London, Bloomsbury, 2012, p. 27).

<sup>38</sup> Nigel Wright, *Free Church, Free State* (Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 2005, p. 277).

<sup>39</sup> It is perhaps noteworthy, and salutary, that they did not manage to create a university where various and different theologies were taught, as was the original intention. According to Fiddes, this was because the Anglicans involved insisted that Anglican theology must predominate. The Dissenters responded by agreeing with the free thinkers that theology should not be taught within the new university. Fiddes 2007, p.73.

<sup>40</sup> Paragraph 16.



realm. Some, such as Elaine Graham, even talk of the present age being ‘post-secular.’<sup>41</sup> In saying that, Graham is not suggesting that there has been, or is about to be, a religious revival; ‘Levels of formal institutional affiliation and membership in mainstream Christian and Jewish denominations continue to diminish across the Western world.’<sup>42</sup> Rather, the belief of ‘conventional secularization theories’ that ‘as societies modernize, so they become less ‘religious’’ no longer copes with the complexities of the situation.<sup>43</sup> Graham argues this is in part because of ‘a new visibility of religion in politics and public affairs’.<sup>44</sup> Religion is a player in local, national and global events, as, for example, a provider of services, a source of social capital, and a carrier of identity.<sup>45</sup> In Britain, she continues, ‘religion and belief’ are treated as ‘protected characteristics’ by the 2010 Equality Act, which has led to Christians and others seeking the protection of the law in expressing their faith. This has resulted in some high-profile cases in which the ‘protected characteristic’ of religion and belief has conflicted with other ‘protected characteristics’, especially sexuality.

54. Linda Woodhead has written out of the findings of a research programme on ‘Religion and Society’ which she directed. This began in 2007 with £12 million of funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council. It looked at the changing place of religion in Britain since the Second World War. Woodhead argues that in the immediate post-war era in Britain religion ‘was chiefly shaped by its relation to the state’, that it then ‘seemed to many people to have gone away in the 1960s–1990s’ but in fact ‘analysis shows the religious field was in fact transforming outside the control of state and church and in relation to new opportunities of market and media.’<sup>46</sup> She argues religion tends to adopt the dominant mode of organisation of the time; the state post-war and the market in the late twentieth and early twenty first century.

55. As religion emerged as a market, it did so with a variety of expressions, with women and ethnic minorities becoming significant players, and with religion ‘out of control of state and church’.<sup>47</sup> One response, says Woodhead, was ‘urgent attempts by state and law in the twenty-first century to ‘regulate’ religion and bring it under control.’<sup>48</sup>

56. The key question then becomes how religion is handled, or, if Woodhead is right, controlled, in the public realm, particularly, for this report, in universities. Stan Brown, a former university chaplain and currently Church and Community Development Officer (Chaplaincy) for the Methodist Church in Britain wrote a doctoral thesis which reviewed how religion is treated in various reports and policy statements issued by government departments and sector wide advisory bodies. He argues the

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<sup>41</sup> For example, Elaine Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place. Public Theology in a Post-Secular Age* (London, SCM, 2013). ‘Post-secular’ is a term also adopted by, among others, Jürgen Habermas, who perhaps embodies the shift within European intellectual thought towards a greater awareness of the presence of religion in the contemporary ‘public square’; cf. Jürgen Habermas et al, *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age* (Cambridge, Polity, 2010).

<sup>42</sup> Graham, 2013, p.xv. It may be appropriate to ask who is deciding what is mainstream there.

<sup>43</sup> Graham, 2013, pp.xiii – xiv.

<sup>44</sup> Graham, 2013, p.xiv.

<sup>45</sup> Graham, 2013, pp.xiv-xv.

<sup>46</sup> Linda Woodhead, Introduction, in Linda Woodhead and Rebecca Catto (eds), *Religion and Change in Modern Britain* (London and New York, Routledge, 2012, pp.1 – 33, p.1.

<sup>47</sup> Woodhead, 2012, p.1.

<sup>48</sup> Woodhead, 2012, p.1.

debate about the place of religion in HE in the current context has been shaped to a large degree by such documents.<sup>49</sup> Brown identifies three agendas which appear to be behind them:<sup>50</sup>

- (a) widespread concern about radicalisation and violent extremism, which has led to an agenda of securitizing religious issues in universities;
- (b) equality legislation, which now identifies religion and belief as ‘protected characteristics’ creating specific duties for universities toward faith groups;
- (c) a greater emphasis within universities on the quality of the student experience and on students as ‘consumers’, which has led to a concern to ‘manage’ religion within the sector.

57. The latter may also lead to universities acting as providers of religious services to their consumers or, as students are increasingly called, ‘partners’.

58. The working group gave thought to how such things ‘play out’ in universities. Here are some points made:

- (a) Universities tend to look to chaplaincy to help with handling religion. In particular, they expect chaplains to:
  - Help with preventing violent extremism being fostered in the name of religion on campus.
  - Contribute to ‘student satisfaction’, which will be measured through a focus on ‘performance’ and ‘outcomes’. This may include pastoral care for students and staff, community building on campus and creating links between the university and the wider community.
  - Manage religious diversity, including the university’s statutory obligations in this regard.
  - Act as purveyors of ritual on university occasions (such as degree ceremonies) or, for example, to mark a student death.
- (b) Universities may tend to focus not so much on the positive contribution of religious beliefs and ideas to the search for truth and wisdom, including what they might contribute to debates about the meaning and value of HE, but more on a concern to deal with the *effects* of religion, or seeing religion as a problem. Some may hold to a post-Enlightenment rationalism which doubts that religion can do anything but harm to the pursuit of truth. Such things are not always the case. The situation does vary depending on the type of university

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<sup>49</sup> Stan Brown, *Higher Education Chaplaincy and the Changing Role of Religion in the Public Square: a contextual theology for university chaplaincy*, DMin thesis, King’s College, London, undated. The documents Brown alludes to include the 2010 report of the Caldicott Enquiry <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/caldicott-enquiry> (accessed 30.3.15), the UUK’s 2005 report *Promoting Good Campus Relations: Dealing with Hate Crimes and Intolerance* <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Pages/PromotingGoodCampusRelations.aspx#.VRlKXmd0xjo> (accessed 30.3.15) and, from the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) in 2007, *Promoting Good Campus Relations – an Institutional Imperative*, which is no longer on the ECU web page in that form, but a later version, called *Promoting good relations on campus: a guide for higher and further education*, published in March 2013 is at <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/promoting-good-relations/> (accessed 30.3.15).

<sup>50</sup> Brown, undated, p.16.

in a diverse sector, and other factors. Some at least of the Cathedrals Group of Church Foundation Universities, for example, do take a more positive approach to religion as a source of enrichment.<sup>51</sup> How religion is treated may also depend on the views of individuals within the institution and the mix of courses; courses concerned with the caring professions, literature, art, drama, and courses requiring ethical input, including ethical issues around research, may find religion a creative conversation partner. This is work chaplains are often involved in.

- (c) Where different equality strands or what the 2010 Equality Act calls ‘protected characteristics’ clash, other strands may take precedence over religious freedoms (or ‘privileges’ as they are seen by some): so a Muslim group organising a public meeting may not be allowed to divide the audience on the basis of gender, a conservative Christian group may not be able to insist that women have no leadership roles within it. These are now considered equality issues, not religious ones.<sup>52</sup> How often which equality strand takes precedence is one thing the FCG may wish to research.
- (d) Religions may be tempted to buy into ‘identity politics’ and the ‘rights’ agenda when, for example, campaigning for ‘prayer space’.<sup>53</sup> Adherents of the religions may also find this agenda does not always work in their favour, for example when the rights of individuals to publish material which religious believers find offensive are upheld, while certain practices religious groups would hope to practise are forbidden because they ‘offend’ the equality policy of the university. The president of the National Federation of Atheist, Secular and Humanist Student Societies has argued a university’s duty is to its students, not to its students’ beliefs.<sup>54</sup>
- (e) The university may provide services for religious believers as they do for other parts of their constituency. This may be a genuine welcoming of religious belief as part of the life of the individual (an individualistic approach, notice), but may lead to religious belief being seen as a ‘need’ to be dealt with for recruiting, marketing and retention purposes. It may also be one of the factors leading to chaplains becoming part of Student Support Services departments.
- (f) In sum, whilst religion may be treated in different ways in different universities, there is a trend towards universities defining religion on the university’s own terms. That may mean religions or faiths not being encouraged to articulate publicly their ‘truth claims’, or engage in the public life of the university on their own terms; rather the university is concerned

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<sup>51</sup> The Cathedrals Group web page says: ‘The Cathedrals Group is an association of sixteen universities and university colleges with Church foundations. It is the only grouping in the UK higher education landscape based on ethical principles informed by faith-based values. Members share a common faith heritage and a strong commitment to values such as social justice, respect for the individual and promoting the public good through our work with communities and charities.’ <http://cathedralsgroup.org.uk/> (accessed 30.3.15).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Radha Bhatt, *University Challenge: secular neutrality or religious privilege?*, [www.opendemocracy.net/5050/radha-bhatt/university-challenge-secular-neutrality-or-religious-privilege](http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/radha-bhatt/university-challenge-secular-neutrality-or-religious-privilege) (accessed 29 December 2014).

<sup>53</sup> Sophie Gilliat-Ray, *Religion in Higher Education – The Politics of the Multi-Faith Campus* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000, p.122). Cited in Brown, undated, p. 28.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Bhatt, *University Challenge*.

mainly with how religion impacts as a phenomenon on the institution and how the religious 'needs' of students and staff can be met. As Brown puts it, religion becomes essentially 'a series of institutional issues to be managed', which is not always the case but does indicate a direction of travel.<sup>55</sup>

59. Over recent years there has been a process to help universities understand and engage with religion in a more 'religiously literate' way. It arose from a piece of work commissioned by the Church of England Board of Education, the results of which were published as *Faiths in Higher Education Chaplaincy*.<sup>56</sup> That work identified a need for greater religious literacy amongst leaders in HE and led to the creation of the Religious Literacy leadership in Higher Education programme, part-funded by HEFCE. Details of the programme can be found on its web page.<sup>57</sup>

60. A difficult issue is what place there is for religious ways of knowing and religious belief in the curriculum and policy making (around student faith groups for example). If there is a God such as the God revealed in Jesus, then it is unlikely that anyone will see themselves or the world as they are, or begin to understand self or world, except in relation to that God. That means the curriculum, for example, needs to draw on religious as well as secular wisdom if HE is to be about such understanding. In practise, the premise is not accepted by all and religious traditions and wisdom may or may not be drawn on in the lecture theatre and seminar room or in policy making.

61. A second area of likely interest for the FCG, FCEC and the FCs in connection with religion on campus is to do with students and Christian faith. Universities are now required to collect information on the religious beliefs of their students, usually done as part of the registration and enrolment process. This is part of ensuring universities do adequately provide for their religious students. One university's figures for the 2014-15 academic year indicate 52.7% of new students identified as having no religion, 37.3% as Christian, 3.2% declined to give information, 2.5% said they were Muslim. The other faiths and spiritualities listed amounted to less than 5% of the new student body. Figures were asked for from other universities for comparison but were not forthcoming. One suggested that most students are not completing what is a voluntary question.

62. For comparison, the figures for 20 to 24 year olds in the last census showed 37.5% said they had no religion, 45.1% described themselves as Christian, 6.9% gave no information and 6.2% said they were Muslim. Obviously there is not a direct correlation there with new students, some of whom will be outside that age bracket.

63. As part of the Religion and Society project referred to in paragraph 54, research was carried out between 2009 and 2012 on *Christianity and the University Experience*, 'aimed at discovering what distinguishes university students who identify as Christian and how their experience of university affirms or undermines their Christian faith.'<sup>58</sup> The findings are based on research across thirteen

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<sup>55</sup> Brown, undated, p.68.

<sup>56</sup> Jeremy M S Clines, *Faiths in Higher Education Chaplaincy* (London, Church of England Board of Education, 2008).

<sup>57</sup> <http://religiousliteracyhe.org/> (accessed 2.4.15).

<sup>58</sup> Matthew Guest, Kristin Aune, Sonya Sharma, Rob Warner (eds), *Christianity and the University Experience* (London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p.3).

English universities of different sorts, in particular a survey to which 4,500 students responded, and more in-depth work with a smaller number of students who identified themselves as Christians in five of the universities. It may be worth noting that is a fairly small cohort, and it was 'self-selecting', so it may be that those who responded had more interest in Christianity than the average student. Having said that, this is the most major recent piece of work in this field, from which it is impossible to do more than mention a few key points here, and it does contain material worth studying. Members of the FCG may wish to read the book, therefore.

64. One key finding 'is that Christian students ... comprise a sizeable and diverse population of individuals .... unified neither by doctrinal assent nor by moral conviction.'<sup>59</sup> Another is that 'university for Christian students is not primarily a context characterised by a cognitive undermining of faith. It is, rather, a context that presents challenges, but also opportunities, and these foster a sense of empowerment rather than disillusionment among many Christian students.'<sup>60</sup> Against that overall background, the authors explore the experience of Christian students, including setting that experience in the context of different types of university.<sup>61</sup>

65. Whilst determining the overall number of Christians at universities was not the main focus of the work, the authors do offer some figures.<sup>62</sup> This is based on whether students self-identify as Christian, with the figures weighted to allow for various factors. On this basis, it is suggested '51.4% of undergraduates studying at England's universities self-identify as Christian' and 34% say they do not belong to a 'religion or spiritual tradition'.<sup>63</sup> These are rather different figures from those identified in paragraph 61.

66. One thing explored in the research is what happens to church attendance by students self-identifying as Christian when they are at university. The researchers look at church attendance pre and at university under various categories of churches. Of the categories used, the two which might most closely align with the membership of the FCG are 'Historic Protestant' and 'Evangelical Pentecostal'. The researchers give a 'weighted' table which indicates 14.1% of students identifying as Christian are in the 'Historic Protestant' tradition and 10.9% in the 'Evangelical Pentecostal'.<sup>64</sup> Looking at what happens to students from those traditions at university, the researchers comment: 'It is the Historic Protestant denominations that are least successful at retaining their attendees in proportional terms, with only 30.5% of students who attended one of these churches (pre-university) also attending during term-time' and 'Over 40% of those attending Historic Protestant churches before university choose not to attend any church (of any denomination) after they have arrived'.<sup>65</sup> Amongst Evangelical/Pentecostal churches, '69.3% of students attending such churches before university also (attend) the same sort of church when they get there, with only 13.9% dropping out of church altogether.'<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Guest et al, 2013, p.3.

<sup>60</sup> Guest et al, 2013, p.8.

<sup>61</sup> Guest et al, 2013, chapter 3, pp.53-82.

<sup>62</sup> Guest et al, 2013, Appendix, pp.211-217

<sup>63</sup> Guest et al, 2013, pp.213 -214

<sup>64</sup> Guest et al, 2013, p.91.

<sup>65</sup> Guest et al, 2013, p.92.

<sup>66</sup> Guest et al, p.92.

67. Although there is not space to develop the theme here, it is worth noting there has been much work done on evangelism and mission amongst students, both by groups such as Fusion, SCM and UCCF who work with students, and by those who have reflected on how to do mission in the cultural and generational contexts of the majority student population. The work of Sara Savage, Sylvia Collins-Mayo and Bob Mayo is important in the latter category.<sup>67</sup>

### **Section Seven. Student Experience and Christian Provision on Campus**

68. This section is included at this point rather than earlier not because student experience is low down our list of priorities but because it seemed important to outline the context in which students experience HE before turning to specific student experience issues. The points here are made mindful of FC principles and approaches and also of what the FCG, FCEC and FCs might be able to respond to. We are aware there is a history of FC involvement in working with students, through chaplaincy and denominational student societies for example.<sup>68</sup> There are three broad areas of what we are calling student experience which the FCG and its members might be interested in; the nature of education; pastoral care; evangelism. We invite the FCG and its members to consider where such work fits into their own strategies and plans nationally, and how they listen to the 'student voice'.

69. Thinking about the nature of education, the present higher education context has already been outlined, in Section Five. Suggestions about what the FCG might wish to do mindful of current trends in HE are made in Sections Eight and Nine. No more than a brief comment is made here about the nature of education as part of the student experience, therefore.

70. The FC values and understandings of education articulated in Section Four express a big, holistic, and much-needed understanding of HE. If such a FC view is presented to students and potential students it may help them appreciate and fully engage with what HE can be and therefore engage more effectively in the educational process as students. So, for instance, the FC voice can contribute to an understanding of openness, critical thinking, and being ready to learn with and from others and to embrace new ideas, which are essential parts of HE. The FC emphasis on equality and justice, inclusiveness, freedom of conscience and belief can help students enter into the academic ethos and the conception of a liberal education. This understanding and outlook can therefore help students make the sometimes considerable leap from wherever they have been previously to HE, and can support them in making the most of a life-changing and enhancing experience.

71. Many, perhaps most or even all, students will experience personal, social and emotional needs whilst going through HE. The transition from schooling or gap year, or indeed from work or a period of unemployment, to university life, can be both daunting and disorienting. Despite living in a social media age, young people can find this transition emotionally and socially challenging. Freshers programmes are designed to help mitigate feelings of, for instance, homesickness, but ironically can add to the pressure of young people feeling that they SHOULD be having a good time and enjoying

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<sup>67</sup> For example, Sara Savage, Sylvia Collins-Mayo, Bob Mayo with Graham Cray, *Making Sense of Generation Y* (London, Church House Publishing, 2006).

<sup>68</sup> We have not had chance to research all that has been done. It may be an illuminating history.

themselves like (supposedly) everyone else! Instead they can feel increasingly isolated, 'different' and forlorn.

72. International students may be coping with particular pressures as they seek to adapt to a different culture and climate, as well as engaging with a language which may not be their mother tongue and, possibly, a different way of doing education.

73. Once established and settled into higher education, there are other pressures on students to balance social and academic demands on their time and outlook, conform to social and sexual expectations, and to discover different aspects of themselves in new contexts. Making, developing and managing relationships in what can be felt as a cauldron of inter-personal experiences can be particularly demanding.

74. Often these kinds of needs may be met through student services provision but it can be helpful to have the support and friendly shoulder of others who are not perceived as part of the university establishment, like a chaplain or the local church.<sup>69</sup> All students are likely to experience some of these tensions to a certain degree, working through them as they settle into university life, with just general support and advice if required. However for some, experiences and feelings can become acute and critical and crisis counselling may be needed. Working appropriately with other professionals the HE chaplain has much to contribute to helping in these situations.

75. One current area of concern is about mental health issues amongst students and staff. Research suggests such issues are increasing amongst students. 'If we look at the data, we see that the proportion of disabled students who declared a mental health condition increased from 5.9 per cent in 2007-08, to 11.1 per cent in 2012-13. That is a rise from 0.4 per cent to 1.1 per cent of the entire student population' reports Dr Ruth Caleb, Chair of the Mental Wellbeing in Higher Education Group and Head of Counselling at Brunel University.<sup>70</sup> According to the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), which works on issues of equality and diversity on behalf of the HE sector, 'In UK higher education around 1 in 125 students (0.8%) and around 1 in 500 staff (0.2%) have disclosed a 'mental health condition' to their university. However, figures from the Department for Health indicate that a far higher number of adults in the UK population as a whole experience 'mental health illness.' That difference may suggest mental health issues are under-reported.'<sup>71</sup> There are examples from various universities of chaplains working closely with mental health professionals tackling these issues.

76. Whilst we believe all students are children of God and to be cared for, we also recognise Christian students may have particular experiences during university years which the FCG and its members may wish to respond to.

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<sup>69</sup> How far the chaplain is, or is not, perceived to be part of the establishment may depend on a variety of factors such as how much he or she is a part of Student Services and whether or not he or she is a university staff member.

<sup>70</sup> Ruth Caleb, *Anxiety and depression – universities must respond to demand*, The Telegraph, 13.2.15. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/universityeducation/student-life/11409362/Anxiety-and-depression-universities-must-respond-to-demand.html> (accessed 23.4.15).

<sup>71</sup> Equality Challenge Unit, *Understanding adjustments: supporting staff and students who are experiencing mental health difficulties*. <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/understanding-adjustments-mental-health/> (accessed 17.4.15).

77. Moving to university can prove to be a critical time in the spiritual journey and church life of students who have been part of local church communities. There is a danger that if they are moving away from home they will feel cast adrift from Christian life and the sense of being part of a Christian community. This is a time of considerable risk when many young people 'fall away' from church involvement and from the Christian way of life.<sup>72</sup> Some may find challenges in courses or the attitude of others, some may find faith is strengthened. *Christianity and the University Experience* refers to a 2010 National Union of Students (NUS) survey which found that '62% of students who belonged to a religion said that their university was a place where they could freely practise their faith.'<sup>73</sup> That suggests most students are comfortable as people of faith at university but a significant proportion are not.<sup>74</sup>

78. Attitudes towards sexual activity and alcohol may create particular challenges for some Christian students. The latter is highlighted in *Christianity and the University Experience*.<sup>75</sup> According to that research, the focus on alcohol is 'one of the most cited factors in the alienation of religious students from student social life.'<sup>76</sup> For some who find the drinking and clubbing culture 'morally inconsistent with their religious values' this may be a major problem.<sup>77</sup> Having said that, the research also found that just over a third of Christian students said they had no problem with the drinking culture.<sup>78</sup> There is some indication that chaplaincies, Christian Unions and Methodist Societies organise alcohol-free events, and local churches can also play a role in this. Such provision is also being promoted by some Students' Unions and universities, often with Muslim students in mind.

79. Against that background, it is worth considering what sources of support are available for Christian students. Student Christian groups, of which there are a number, are one source of support. Some such groups meet within chaplaincies, some keep their distance from the chaplain, some are recognised by the Students' Union (which is necessary in some universities before groups can meet on campus), some are affiliated to national organisations or local churches, some work particularly with international students. They are often of a broadly, or narrowly, evangelical nature.

80. The largest grouping of student societies is the Christian Unions. Most, though not all, are affiliated to the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship (UCCF). According to UCCF, 'There are approximately 200 Christian Unions in Great Britain affiliated with UCCF.'<sup>79</sup> The next largest is the Student Christian Movement, with 23 student groups affiliated. There are also a number of smaller groupings. For example, we know of eight Navigator Groups, six Agape Groups, and two Just Love

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<sup>72</sup> See paragraph 63 for figures on numbers of students from FCG type backgrounds dropping out of and continuing in church attendance.

<sup>73</sup> Guest et al, 2013, p.121.

<sup>74</sup> The ECU report *Religion and belief in Higher Education: the experience of staff and students* (London, ECU, 2011) is a useful resource in thinking more about issues students and staff experience.

<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/religion-and-belief-staff-and-students-in-he/> (accessed 2.4.15). The National Union of Students has also done work to help sabbatical officers in universities develop programmes and strategies for people of faith.

<sup>75</sup> Guest et al, 2013, e.g. p.119. There is also a section on alcohol in ECU, 2011, p.47.

<sup>76</sup> Guest et al, 2013, p.122.

<sup>77</sup> Guest et al, 2013, p.119.

<sup>78</sup> Guest et al, 2013, p.122.

<sup>79</sup> Email correspondence with UCCF. Information supplied 9.3.15.



groups. There are also other groups, often with Pentecostal or Evangelical links, sometimes to local churches, sometimes part of a national network. There are no precise figures indicating how many such groups there are, but, as an example, in 12 universities in the West Midlands there are 12 Pentecostal groups, mainly concentrated at four universities (i.e. there are several groups at a few universities).

81. Whilst once there were denominational societies of the historic FCs in many universities, sometimes supported by staff at central offices, such societies have declined significantly and the staff posts have gone. We know of 7 Methodist Societies in England, Scotland and Wales, one of which is a joint Methodist and Anglican Society. As far as we know, there are no other FC denominational societies; research would be needed to check that.

82. Chaplains will offer support to Christian, and all, students and staff, but the time they have available and their roles vary enormously. Most will be part of, or linked to, a Student Service or similar department within the university. Most will be expected to serve all students and staff irrespective of faith commitments, to work in a collaborative way with chaplaincy colleagues of all faiths and with staff colleagues across the university, and within the university's equality and diversity policies. Such agendas are willingly embraced by some. Others sit less easily to them. Whilst chaplains will witness to their own faith simply by being on campus and whilst many will find appropriate ways of witnessing to Christ amongst students and staff, there is a debate about whether chaplains should evangelise or proselytise. There are clearly proper questions to be considered about the relationship between working in a multi-faith environment in a secular institution and evangelism, not only for chaplains but for any Christian who wishes to engage with HE.

83. A survey of the 24 FCG members about their HE chaplaincy provision elicited nine responses. Of those who replied, most indicated they do not have any university chaplains. Three said they do. Of these, two (URC and The Methodist Church in Britain) have chaplains in the general HE sector and one (Church of the Nazarene) has a chaplain in its own theological college. One FCG member said it did not have any university chaplains and commented 'having asked around it seems that there is a lack of awareness of the vacancies and opportunities, alongside a reticence within the institutions to think of all the Free Church denominations as providing suitable chaplains (other than Baptist, Methodist, URC).' That is noted here as possibly a matter for further exploration.

84. The URC central office is aware of 22 URC university chaplains. Three are full-time, two part-time and the rest volunteers. There may be other URC chaplains appointed under local arrangements which do not include informing the central office. The Methodist Church reports it has involvement in the provision of 99 university chaplains. Some are Methodist, some Free Church and some Ecumenical chaplains. The majority of the 99 are local circuit ministers and their involvement is part-time. The working group is aware of at least one other FCG member, the Baptist Union of Great Britain, having university chaplains; we believe over 50 who are part-time and three in full-time ecumenical posts.

85. Across FCG members responding to the questionnaire, this is a total of 122 university chaplains being known about nationally, most of them part-time, one of them in the denomination's own theological college. It rises to about 175 with the Baptist Union of Great Britain figures added. How much coverage that amounts to depends largely on how much time those who are part-time

allocate to chaplaincy. Only the Methodist Church and the URC amongst those responding report making money available nationally for university chaplaincy. Only one FCG member responding (The Methodist Church in Britain) indicated it has a policy to do with higher education chaplaincy or higher education more generally. We are aware that the Baptist Union of Great Britain does provide clear guidance to local churches on the appointment of chaplains and that it has an Educational Chaplaincy Working Group with a particular emphasis on HE.

86. The survey sought information on student workers. It seems clear that the Methodist Church in Britain and the URC do have student workers as well as chaplains, but information about them is not kept centrally. More research would be needed to establish numbers, roles etc. Similar research could be done to establish how many chaplaincy assistants the FCs employ or otherwise support.

87. It is clear from the above that most FC chaplains are part-time. Most are likely to be very part-time, with a main role in a local church. Anecdotally, it seems there may have been a shift from chaplaincy to student workers, but it was beyond the scope of this work to research that.

88. There are a small number of part- or full-time chaplaincy posts supported by two or more FCs and specifically designated Free Church Chaplaincy posts, as well as some posts which are occupied by a member of a FC who is appointed and funded by his or her own denomination but may work on behalf of other FCs. We think there are about ten posts specifically designated as Free Church in England, but that needs checking. There are also a few ecumenical posts; we believe about eight in England, of which three are currently held by FC people. There is also one other university where a FC person is, in effect, the co-ordinating chaplain. Since the 1990s some lead or co-ordinating chaplaincy posts have been open to people of all faiths and, in a very few cases, all faiths and none. We know of five posts currently in one of those categories. None are held by Free Church people. Another university which developed that model has now reverted to a more traditional one.

89. In sum, whilst some FCG members are putting some resource into higher education chaplaincy, this is not a ministry the FCG member bodies as a whole are resourcing in a significant way.<sup>80</sup>

90. Looking at the figures for today, it is salutary to read the document *A Strategy For Free Church Higher Education Chaplaincy in London*, written in 2000. That envisaged developing and expanding the FC contribution to HE chaplaincy across London, with the FCs negotiating with other denominations and the universities, seeking 'comprehensive chaplaincy coverage'.<sup>81</sup> When that was written, there were 3 full-time FC chaplains in London and a number of part-timers with designated time for chaplaincy. Now there is one full-time and a reduced number of part-timers, with only one funded under the covenant. The reality is a long way from the dream of fifteen years ago, indicative of reduced funding and withdrawal.

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<sup>80</sup> Whilst this report was being written, the Christian think tank Theos produced a report looking at how chaplaincy ministry is generally expanding and arguing it is an effective way of relating to people who are not likely to go to church. Ben Ryan, *A Very Modern Ministry: Chaplaincy in the UK* (London, Theos, 2015), available on Theos web page at <http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/files/files/Modern%20Ministry%20combined.pdf> (accessed 1.4.15).

<sup>81</sup> *A Strategy for Free Church Higher Education Chaplaincy in London*, 2000, p.15.

91. It is relevant to note that most paid university chaplaincy posts, including those paid in part by the university, are open only to Anglican priests. Some institutions by bye-law or statute only have Anglican chaplains. This is a source of frustration not only to FC people but to Muslims and others. This may be something the FCG wishes to address. In doing so, it must be noted many of these posts are joint-funded, so if they became available to FC people, there would presumably be a cost to the church, or the mosque if a Muslim appointment was made, for example. It is probably also wise to consider what response any particular university might make if questions are raised about its current practice.

92. Whilst chaplaincies and student groups are important in supporting students, the local church can also have an important role in terms of mission outreach, forging ways of welcoming Christian students in homes and church, and supporting student groups on campus. This is considered further in the next section.

#### **Section Eight. Issues for the FCG, Including the FCEC, and the Member Bodies**

93. Mindful of the issues outlined thus far, the working group has identified a number of areas which might be of interest to the FCG, FCEC and the FCs in their work in HE. They are referenced here to specific points in the FCG and FCEC documents already referred to, to ensure they relate to the priorities of the FCG.

94. One area of work the FCG might engage in is to do with **HE policy**. We note a number of relevant commitments in the FC documents. They refer to the Bible as something in which the FCs are 'rooted and grounded', and to such things as the education of the whole person; the Kingdom of God which has to do with justice, integrity, equality, truth, freedom and peace for all; speaking for the disadvantaged; spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of individuals and society through education which enables life to be lived in its fullness; learning from the other; co-ordinating responses to Government consultations on education. Particular parts of FC tradition, principles and experience have been referred to in the report.

95. In order to engage with government, and to speak the concerns of the FCG and FCEC into higher education policy, **an helpful first step would be for the FCG and FCEC to develop a positive vision for HE which sets out the marks of a good HE system from a FC perspective**. This would be rooted in FC experience, ecclesiology and theology, as well as showing awareness of the traditions and contemporary views of what it is to be a university, and the issues universities currently face. It would not be afraid to speak clearly from a Christian perspective. It would presumably contain references to holistic education, education which is about the good of society as well as individuals (so a public as well as a private good), education made widely available, education which is imbued with values such as integrity and concern for the truth, which seeks justice and peace, which is about creating new knowledge and its proper use, and which is also about advancing economic wealth. Such a vision statement would be a useful tool to guide thinking and action. It may be helpful to compare it with statements produced within other Christian and, indeed, other religious, traditions, to ascertain if

there are areas of commonality and distinctiveness. Any of the former might mean useful co-operation is possible.<sup>82</sup>

96. Whether or not such a statement is produced, it seems likely on the basis of the FC documents and in the present policy context, **the FCG may wish to give attention to a number of HE policy areas. They might include** the economic role of universities, their role in research and application of that research (including ethical issues around that), how effectively British universities deal with globalisation (including international student issues), the success or otherwise of attempts at widening participation and any threats to progress made, the effects of the emphasis on education serving the economy on such things as moral, spiritual and social development, how far the present system is about society as well as the individual and what is happening to particular subject areas such as theology and religious studies. The FCG may wish to think about the present debt-based funding system, with loans which attract interest, how they fit with the Biblical witness, whether they disadvantage those who for religious reasons are averse to debt and the payment of interest, and what might be done about that. Research on the effects on individuals of a system which means people have large debts at a young age as a matter of course, thus 'normalising' debt, may be valuable.

97. The FCG may also wish to engage with **questions around theology and religious studies**, both in the general HE sector and in FC theological colleges. In a society which desperately needs an increase, rather than a decrease, in religious literacy, the decline in participation in TRS courses must be a concern, including to people who, because of their own faith commitments, believe religion is an important matter and that people of various religions should be heard in the public realm. That may apply more to religious studies than theology. The decline in the academic study of the latter may be of particular concern to FC people because the academic study of theology in universities helps to generate the research and critical study on which church-based theological education depends. Whilst vital work is done in the church-based colleges, contributing much to the overall ecology of the discipline, it is unrealistic to suppose all that is needed could be done solely or largely by theological colleges, unless the FCs wished to increase massively the resources they put into their colleges, and radically rethink what they ask the colleges to do. Ultimately, to put it bluntly, if theology disappeared from the universities, in time FC ministers would be more poorly educated than they are now, and the FCs would have poorer resources for 'thinking their faith'. Also, the FC principles we quote include resistance to secularism; this means FC people should want to see theology thriving in the universities for the universities' sake, because the presence of research and teaching in an academic discipline concerned with reasoning within a tradition of faith is an important challenge to narrow, secularist conceptions of what counts as reason.

98. The FCG may also wish to engage with issues arising for the **theological colleges** of its members, which may be to do with what is happening to TRS, but also with the consequences of HE and other policies more generally, including on international students and on regulating 'alternative providers' (regulations often aimed at for-profit bodies), which impose extra costs on theological colleges, which have a destabilising effect and have led to closures.

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<sup>82</sup> There has previously been an ecumenical group working on HE policy issues meeting at Church House, Westminster. Currently, it has not met for over a year.

99. It would seem there are significant HE policy areas the FCG might appropriately engage with. Arguably, to do so would not only be a living out of FC principles but would be a contribution to creating the sort of HE system needed in the present context, where questions of justice, equality and dealing with the outsider are pressing, and society needs graduates who are morally and socially aware to deal with the complex issues society faces. It is likely that in doing such work the FCG will find allies not only in other Christian groups but in the work of others engaged with the sector and many in universities themselves.<sup>83</sup>

100. Such work may be done through an FCEC strengthened by the addition of people with an expertise in HE. The working group does have suggestions of people who may be able to contribute, but who is approached may depend on what issues are identified to be worked on. If any plans to engage with such work are developed, consideration will also need to be given to any staffing and other resource implications.

101. In considering **the place of religion on campus**, some of the points already referred to from the FCG and FCEC documents will be relevant. Others may be also. For example, there are references to resisting secularism and encouraging the use of Christian language, particularly the language of hope; being inclusive; respect for religious faith of whatever creed and the right of an individual to hold that faith; freedom of conscience and belief; readiness to learn from others and embrace new ideas; addressing the challenges posed by religious freedom, equality and human rights.

102. **The work we have done, and our experience in HE, leads us to question some things said in the FC documents.** For example, *A Free Church Voice on Education* speaks of ‘resisting secularism’ but there are some ways of being secular we have welcomed; those ‘soft’ or ‘procedural’ secularisms that are about creating ‘faith rich’ spaces.<sup>84</sup> In doing so, we believe we are being true to FC principles and traditions. What is not always easy to determine in practice is whether there are limits to which ‘faiths’ are to be welcomed. We note the FCEC document *A Free Church Voice on Education* speaks of having ‘respect for religious faith of any creed’. We would ask whether the FCG and FCEC have considered whether there are any creeds or faiths they might regard as not worthy of respect. More generally, present equality legislation draws the boundaries of what constitutes a ‘religion or belief’ fairly widely; does the FCG?

103. Arising from the above, which raises serious and pertinent questions about the nature of society and the place of religion, including Christianity, within it, and mindful of the FCG’s ‘strap line’

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<sup>83</sup> Others working on issues about the shape of the sector include, for example, Ronald Barnett, *Being a University* (London and New York, Routledge, 2011) and (ed) *The Future University* (Abingdon and New York, Routledge, 2012); Stefan Collini, *What Are Universities For?* (London, Penguin, 2012); Jon Nixon, *Towards the Virtuous University* (New York, Routledge, 2008) and *Higher Education and the Public Good* (London and New York, Continuum, 2011); David Watson, *The Question of Conscience. Higher Education and Personal Responsibility* (London, Institute of Education Bedford Way Papers, 2014). From a theological perspective, albeit not FC, contributors include Gavin D’Costa, *Theology in the Public Square. Church, Academy and Nation* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2005); David Ford in various lectures and also in *Christian Wisdom* (Cambridge, CUP, 2007); Mike Higton, *A Theology of Higher Education* (Oxford, OUP, 2012) and Rowan Williams in various articles and lectures, including a lecture *What is a University?* delivered in Wuhan, China, in 2006 <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1468/china-universities-have-essential-role-in-public-life> (accessed 1.4.15).

<sup>84</sup> See paragraph 50.

and other involvements in the public realm, we suggest **it would be a major contribution if the FCG developed a clear FC theological understanding of the place of religion in society**; a theology of the secular, perhaps. Such work could make an important contribution to important issues society faces about the proper place of religion in the public realm, about which there seems to be a good deal of confusion and, at times, a perceived marginalising of faith groups, including in the face of those who might wish religion to have no role in the public square.

104. Having raised some questions, we are also clear from the documents that the FCG wishes to campaign for religious liberty and freedom of conscience and sees Christianity as being a source of positive and hopeful language in education. **The FCG may wish to consider how far contemporary universities are places where Christianity is seen as having a positive contribution to make.** In doing so, it needs to recognise that the sector is diverse, including some specifically church foundation universities. The general policy framework we have outlined indicating how religion is treated on campus might suggest religion, including Christianity, is seen more as something to be managed, even a problem, than a source of hope with a positive contribution to make. If the FCG is minded to agree this is the situation and wishes to further the work suggested in its documents, then it may wish to engage in the theological work suggested in paragraph 103 and also to decide where it wants to focus its efforts in tackling questions of how religion is handled on campus.

105. One possibility would be to examine this through the prism of equalities legislation. There do seem to be cases when religious freedoms may be trumped by others; the question of whether there can be gender segregated seating for Muslim events, or whether a religious group can refuse to have a leader who is female may be cases in point. Whilst it is not within the scope of this report to examine this area in detail, the importance the FCG attaches to religious freedom for all faiths may suggest this is an area it will wish to examine further.

106. Equally, the FCG may wish to examine whether students and staff from its member bodies, and from other faiths, feel free to express their religious convictions on campus. It may wish to give thought to whether any limits to freedom of expression, perhaps arising from love of neighbour, are, in FC terms, proper, and how far not. What the law says will be an important matter. Present debates about the responsibilities of universities in connection with 'extremism' need to be kept in mind in thinking about this also. Questions of whether people feel free to express convictions at odds with the general liberal consensus, and how far FC principles suggest they should be free so to do, about sexuality or gender equality for example, are difficult but pertinent. Questions of academic freedom may be relevant also; though the law draws that in but limited terms the tradition of free speech and questioning is an important part of being a university.

107. **If the FCG is serious about freedom, equality and human rights, universities certainly provide a place within which questions about such areas are focussed. An FC perspective on them would need careful work but could also be a valuable resource.**

108. We need to issue a 'health warning' about this area. We have written the above about the place of religion on campus as a working group without a member with expertise in the law. Our comments are to the FCG Directors. We suggest the FCG takes legal advice in any work it does in this area.

109. The report considers **the experience of Christian and other students**. There is little in the FCG and FCEC documents to guide us in thinking about this area, but it is, in our view, an important area of possible practical engagement for the FCG and its member bodies. Understandings of what education is are expressed in the FC documents and it has already been noted that introducing students and potential students to such understandings might help them gain more from their university experience.<sup>85</sup> The FCG constitution says one of the objectives of the FCG is 'to express the essential unity in Christ of the Evangelical Free Churches of England and Wales.'<sup>86</sup> Presumably the member bodies own some sense of being 'evangelical' therefore. There is also a reference in the FCEC report *A Free Church Voice on Education* to every individual being important to God. That may lead to a sense that pastoral care for students and staff is important. Part of being evangelistic may also be supporting Christian students and helping them remain within Christian faith. With those things in mind, we make the following comments about possible engagement with students.

110. **Local churches can provide a sense of continuity between a student's previous home church involvement and their practice and growth as a Christian in their new HE environment.** In this context, local churches and their members, including older people, can act as 'surrogate families, providing students with comparable relationships to those they have at home, acting as a stabilizing structure during a time of transition.'<sup>87</sup>

111. **Local churches may also have an important role in supporting student groups,** perhaps supporting the student leadership and providing continuity as student leadership tends to change frequently, offering food and places to meet, maybe giving input to teaching programmes, and generally offering wider perspectives.

112. **Local churches may wish to consider how they can support or engage in evangelistic activities amongst students,** perhaps with students as they move around the town or city, or on campus. If the latter, whereas it seems quite appropriate that Christian views be presented alongside others, religion can be a sensitive matter on campus, as indicated in Section Six. Part of seeking a fruitful evangelistic engagement is likely to include developing an awareness of such sensitivities, the equal opportunities framework of the university, and the arrangements around chaplaincy and other Christian groups on campus. As in any mission field, a good missionary will develop an understanding of that field before proceeding too far with mission. Negotiation with others already involved will also be important.

113. As noted in paragraph 72, **international students** may have particular needs. There is a long tradition of churches and individual Christians providing support for international students, perhaps through funding chaplains to work with international students, or through specifically Christian Organisations such as Friends International, or other organisations without a specific church base such as HOST UK, in which British people offer to host international students in their homes.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> See paragraph 70.

<sup>86</sup> Quoted in the FCG 2013-2014 Work Plan.

<sup>87</sup> Guest et al, 2013, p.115.

<sup>88</sup> <http://friendsinternational.uk/> and <http://www.hostuk.org/> (accessed 1.4.15).

114. The above suggests there are roles for churches in supporting students, in particular with helping them see what education might be, in offering pastoral support, supporting student groups, providing chaplains and doing evangelism. FCs can also help people about to embark on HE with preparation that will enable them cope with and make the best of the experience, including living as a Christian at university.

115. Whilst this section has majored on students, **staff should not be forgotten**. FCs may be able to support staff including, for example, those who do wish to hold to a vision of HE more akin to the vision outlined in FC documents than that present in current policy documents. Churches which can develop foci of conversation about such things may play an important role. There is also, of course, the general role of supporting people at work.

116. We are aware that **local churches and individual Christians may need guidance and support** in such things as preparing people within their congregations who are going to university, how to support a student group, how to work in a chaplaincy, how to do evangelism amongst students. We suggest there may be a role for the FCG in developing such resources. This could be done in partnership with chaplains and organisations such as Fusion, SCM and UCCF.<sup>89</sup>

117. **We note the low level of involvement of most of the FCG members in chaplaincy. We suggest the FCG and its members consider why this is the case and whether it should change.** Any such consideration should take into account the mission principles outlined in the FC documents, the figures given about student involvement in FCs, the overall religious and HE context and current models of and possibilities within chaplaincy, including how, or whether, chaplaincy can support religious freedom, FC supported views of education, pastoral care and evangelism. Similar exercises could be carried out in connection with student workers and chaplaincy assistants, and decisions be made about which types of workers might best fulfil the aims and objectives of the FCs in engaging with HE overall.

118. Whilst the working group was set up following a nomination process and FCG members were asked to nominate members to the group, we recognise that within the group were people from but a small selection of the total FCG membership. We hope that our report might lead to others expressing interest in this work. **It may be that the conversation could be extended into other parts of the FCG constituency via online debate, focus groups etc.**

119. **The FCG may wish to liaise with other faith and HE sector groups in taking forward its work.**

## **Section Nine. Recommendations**

120. These recommendations should be read and 'filled out' in the light of the comments in the last section in particular.

121. **Recommendation One. Higher Education Policy shapes the HE sector, and the lives of those who study and work in other ways within it. We recommend that the FCG (i) develops a statement**

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<sup>89</sup> See paragraph 80.



**expressing a positive vision for HE and (ii) in the light of that and contemporary HE realities engages with specific HE policy areas.**

122. **A positive vision for HE.** As demonstrated in the report, the HE sector is massively significant, influencing the lives of millions. The FCG and FCEC documents set out the principles upon which an FC understanding of HE can be based. In the light of those principles, the realities of the present situation, and with an awareness of philosophies of education, we recommend that the FCG develop a positive, theologically informed, contextually credible statement expressing a positive vision for HE. Such a statement will form a firm foundation for the FCG's work in HE. The already existing FCG and FCEC documents, plus this report and other resources referred to in it will form a starting point for this work.

123. **Engaging with specific HE policies.** In the light of the statement, the FCG should identify key policy areas it wishes to engage with. They may include an holistic view of education, HE as a public as well as a private good, Theology and Religious Studies, the present debt-based funding system, widening participation and international students. In the light of its statement, the FCG should set priorities and identify resources and strategies for taking forward specific pieces of work, either alone or with others, including, as this is one of the FCG's stated aims, entering into dialogue with government, speaking with a public voice. Noting a comment on the hopeful nature of Christian language in A Free Church Voice in Education, we urge that any material produced provides resource for positive steps forward, such as supporting widening participation initiatives and offering opportunities for holistic education, as well as offering a critique.

124. The FCG will presumably do at least some of this work, and that suggested in the other recommendations, through the FCEC. It may wish to call upon members of the working group and others identified by the working group who can support the FCG's work in HE.

125. **Recommendation Two. We recommend that the FCG engages with questions about the place of religion in universities in a way informed by FC principles and contemporary realities.**

126. We are mindful that questions about the place of religion in the public realm are significant in the overall strategy of the FCG and in the history of the FCs. In the light of that, and in the light of issues mentioned which do arise on campus, we recommend the FCG gives serious thought to what FC principles suggest should be the place of religion in the university. Whilst it would be outside our remit to suggest anything concerning other parts of the FCG's work, it would seem sensible to consider whether similar issues arise in the FCG's work in prisons and health care, for example. Serious work on the place of religion in these and other areas would require the iteration of a FC theology of the place of religion in the public realm. We recommend work be done on that, bearing in mind FC history and principles, work currently being done to understand the place of religion in society and the lived experience of those working with these issues in a variety of contexts. Out of such work action points should be developed and resources identified to take forward specific pieces of work.

127. We cannot stress enough how important we think this area is. Society does face difficult questions about the place of religion. The FC traditions of freedom, including for expression of faith, can offer a vital resource for tackling those questions, including addressing specific issues such as

whether there is an 'hierarchy of equalities'. It is also important to address issues around the place of faith in the core educational work of universities. Are the insights of faith, and the questioning which arises from it, an accepted part of the academic endeavour? Such work will be aimed at supporting universities as vibrant, questioning communities where a mixture of voices can be heard.

**128. Recommendation Three. We recommend that the FCG works with its member bodies to develop a strategic approach to chaplaincy and student work.**

129. FC traditions of holistic education, concern for the creation of particular sorts of societies, pastoral care and evangelism are likely to be important in taking this recommendation forward. Helping local churches develop skills to engage with students, and universities more generally, may be an important part of this work. It can be done in conjunction with others, including chaplains and national organisations such as UCCF and SCM, and those working more particularly with international students. It may include work both with existing students and with those about to go to university. In doing it, the FCG may wish to bear in mind the research quoted in the report indicating what happens to church attendance amongst FC students and the opportunities for care and evangelism amongst the student population. This recommendation is not only about work with students, however. It is also about providing chaplaincy which can support both students and staff and also engage with issues within the university which are important to FC people, such as the way religion is treated by the institution.

**130. Recommendation Four. We recommend that the FCG surveys its members to determine what issues their theological colleges face in the present HE context and what action the FCG might helpfully take to support the colleges.**

131. As indicated in the report, theological colleges are facing particular challenges in the present HE policy environment. We are suggesting the FCG does more work to clarify the issues and then, in liaison with the colleges, takes appropriate action to support the colleges as they continue to engage with the systems and structures of UK higher education, including through encouraging regulatory bodies, awarding bodies, government and other relevant parties to consider the particular needs and contributions of theological colleges, which can otherwise fall victim to the unintended consequences of changes in government policy.

132. We recognise these are substantial recommendations, with clear resource implications. We believe they are appropriate for a group expressing the commitments the FCG does and in the present HE context. They will require working out within the total strategy of the FCG and do, we believe, indicate ways in which that strategy can be taken forward in the world of HE. If the FCG engages with the recommendations, it and its members could make a significant contribution not only to Christian work in universities but to universities and theological colleges in themselves and to an issue clearly high on the FCG's agenda; what is the proper place of religion in the public realm? Members of the working group are happy to be consulted about on-going work.

29<sup>th</sup> April 2015.