

CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION **A discussion paper for *Christian Education* by John Keast.**

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper

1. This paper sets out to articulate *Christian Education's* perspectives on education in Britain today. Its purpose is to provide a starting point for discussion for its own trustees, staff and others with whom it works, better to understand what *Christian Education* is and is about, and a Christian view of education itself. It is also to be hoped that the paper will stimulate similar discussion about the nature of Christian education and Christian perspectives on educational developments among other groups of people working in education or supporting those who do so work.
2. There is a long history of study and publications in this area, and there are many different (and sometimes dissonant) views of Christian Education. It is also true to say that perspectives of this kind continually develop as times change. Education is not static so perspectives on it shift as new views unfold. What is more long-lasting is the lens through which the Christian perspective is focussed.
3. This paper, therefore, is of its time. It is a result of discussions held at various *Christian Education* trustees' meetings, comments from members of staff and a seminar conducted by Rev Dr Jeff Astley in September 2007. It is not intended in any sense to be a conclusion or the final word, but itself a contribution to an ongoing commentary on what seems to be a constantly changing area of human life.

Who is *Christian Education*?

4. *Christian Education* is a charitable trust that was formed by the amalgamation of the Christian Education Movement (CEM) and the National Christian Education Council (NCEC) in 2001. The particularity of Christian Education is signposted in the two words of its title. Through "Christian" it has access to a dynamic and positive theology. In "Education" it has access to a dynamic and positive philosophy and process. The juxtaposition of the two provides the opportunity to generate a particular perception of the dignity of the human person and the meaningfulness of human development.
5. The Formal Objects of the charity name the purpose as providing opportunities for learning about the Christian faith and its implications, with an emphasis on young people and their helpers: this emphasis is clearly not exclusive. The current Mission Statement refers to "developing and promoting opportunities and resources for life-long learning in religion and faith". The Aims refer to professional research, advice, consultancy, training, publications and programmes to support, resource and encourage religious education (sic) and spiritual development in schools, Churches and families. Its statement of Values claims that education is a lifelong process in which persons and their experiences are paramount; that the exploration of religion, religions and religious awareness is integral to all stages of the education process; that nurture, the growth and development of personal and shared faith, is central to the life of the Churches; that plurality within and beyond the Christian tradition is beneficial; that it is able to work professionally with all in education. It sees its work as to build understanding and respect for a range of religious perspectives and approaches to living; to comprehend the variety within and between faith traditions; to be open to controversy and risk; to respect difference; to oppose prejudice and discrimination; to seek the divine in human experience; to articulate a coherent philosophy of life. One of its stated Objectives is that *Christian Education* "enables people to explore and articulate their own beliefs and values through reflection, creative engagement and worship".

6. *Christian Education* recognises its privileged status, educationally, ecumenically and multi-culturally, as a provider of resources for religious learning, for use in schools, churches and beyond. It sees the need to develop its range of provision, to support learning throughout the lifespan of its actual and potential customers, building on the areas of strength it enjoys in its provision for religious education in schools. It recognises that there is a huge potential market in the Churches, in all their diversity, in faith traditions other than Christianity and in society at large, where many profess to believe without belonging.

WHAT IS MEANT BY CHRISTIAN EDUCATION?

7. *Christian Education* sees “education” both as formal, institutionalised processes in schools, colleges, workplaces and faith communities and as informal processes of nurture and formation in homes and communities through the media and critical reflection on lived experience (‘the university of life’). Young people need to be equipped with the information, skills and values which will help them cope with the experiences, opportunities and complexities of becoming and being adults. For *Christian Education*, adulthood is more a developmental concept than a static demarcation, the recognition of individuality, autonomy and yet connectedness with others and the environment. Its presence, or absence, can be noted at any age. Non-formal education in churches contributes greatly to Christian education, with the experience and quality of worship playing an especially formative role for children and young people. Church education programmes and other children’s and youth work also contribute to the growth of Christian discipleship.
8. *Christian Education*’s understanding of “Christian” is that the following of Jesus Christ is good news for humanity. It is the unique dignity of humans to be able to relate personally with God, a relationship which can transcend all forms of human frailty, even ageing and death. *Christian Education* therefore sits within the main stream of Christian thinking about God and humanity, seeking to serve the widest range of Christian tradition in the UK and beyond. It tries to promote and learn from an open and inclusive approach to human knowledge and understanding.
9. In its broadest sense therefore “Christian education” signifies the development of human potential, through time and into eternity. The actualisation of this potential is what *Christian Education* understands as learning, both the transactional or transmissional learning of the ‘child’ and the transformative learning of the ‘adult’, together with the conditioning effect on each of the context of time and place. Learning of this sort leaves the learner open to change in some way, becoming something other than previously. This is a Christian philosophy of education, articulating what education in its deepest and most powerful sense is really about.
10. Christian education is education put into the ultimate context of the creation of human beings in the image of God, intended for relationship with Him and to be stewards of the creation. Education is bringing out of human nature the possibility of total human fulfilment to the glory of God and the good of all. In this sense all education is fundamentally religious for it is grounded in the nature of humanity and its purpose. It is truly learning what is to be discovered about the self, others, the world and life. In so far as Christians believe that all these originate in and are sustained by a real, loving meaningful power, revealed in the person, teaching, life and new life of Jesus of Nazareth, and seen in the activity and indwelling of His Spirit today, all learning is religious. Science, technology, humanities, languages, arts and crafts - all manifests aspects of this Creative power. Christian Education understands religious learning to be developmental, ideally progressing from the mode of the dependent child to the mode of the independent adult, from the accumulation of fragmented information to the acquisition of an all-embracing life-view. It is work which is constantly in progress and never definitively finalised.
11. More specifically, Christian education can also be understood as education into Christianity, as science education might be seen as education in the sciences. Such a description would

include the formation, nurture and upbringing intended to lead a young person confessing the Christian faith. Such a process would include teaching and learning about that faith, and understanding something of its relationship to the rest of life. Christian education of this kind might connect in varying ways with traditions of catechesis, evangelisation or conversion. This understanding of Christian education is important for Christian families and communities as well as individuals, and would take place within the broader philosophy of Christian education described above. It might also be said that this kind of Christian education may provide the motivation for a Christian approach to education generally. One who confesses the Christian faith would want to understand the whole of life as significant for that faith.

12. Yet again Christian education can be understood as education about Christianity. As far as this is one of the elements referred to above within education into Christianity such a view could be seen as a narrower description of Christian education. However, it is not confined to that, for education about Christianity is important for non-Christians too in helping them to understand what Christianity is, how it has arisen and developed historically, and what its impact is on the world, communities and individuals.
13. It can be seen then, that Christian education is a multi-layered and complex term, where its different meanings and emphases overlap with each other. However, they are all grounded in a basic Christian theology, which interprets human life and endeavour within the reality of God. In this sense, all Christian education is potentially transformative of human life for it involves some kind of encounter with God either directly or indirectly through His creation. Similar claims might be made by other religions for education.

Christian Involvement in Education in the Past

14. Christianity has a long and distinguished history of involvement with education both in this country and elsewhere. Christianity itself has inherited a Jewish emphasis on learning seen in synagogues and scripture, with emphases on concepts of wisdom and truth. Much of this inheritance can be summed up in the importance to Christians of the Logos, not just word or even rationality, but the very revelation of the mind and understanding of God, the fount of all knowledge and truth, in the person of Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh.
15. Christian churches and groups have established many institutions of learning – monasteries, colleges and schools over many hundreds of years, including the basis of the modern provision of education in Britain. In the 19th century the Churches established many schools and colleges which helped to stimulate the state provision of universal free education for all children. In 1944 a 'dual system' of government and voluntary (largely church) provision was agreed which still vitalises education today. The Christian churches have contributed, and still do, to the training and formation of teachers, through colleges and support for teacher education. The Churches have had and continue to have influence on policy and understanding of educational change and development. Not least, many thousands of Christians are dedicated to further education through being teachers and educationalists themselves. In this, they also are learners, as through the educative process, they continue to grow in their understanding of humanity, the world, life and God. From this rich and diverse involvement the shoots of what is now *Christian Education* sprang, with the development of the National Christian Education Council, the Student Christian Movement and the Christian Education Movement. Though historically based, *Christian Education* does not feel constrained by its history but wishes to continue a distinctive form of Christian service to education in the 21st century, and speak with a distinctive yet harmonious voice.

Modern Religious Plurality

16. In the multi-religious Britain of today, the Christian voice in education needs to be in dialogue with voices from other religious traditions that also have important and valuable

contributions to make to the development of education. For example, the long existence of the Jewish community in Britain, with its emphasis on the importance of education, and their many thriving Jewish schools illustrates something of this enriching dialogue of voices speaking together with Christians. The establishment of more and a greater variety of faith schools of different kinds in coming years means that the investment in education by all faiths is increasingly significant. The contribution of a Christian voice in education should continued to be made (and the nature of Christian education itself articulated) as part of an inter-faith dialogue that celebrates diversity, and a commitment to the spiritual health and well-being of all children, young people and adults. Christian Education supports organisations that work for better understanding between and within faiths.

17. There is much to agree upon in such dialogue. Examples include
- the vital place of spiritual and moral development in all education;
 - the importance of educating children within the faith traditions of their families and communities, albeit with due regard to the rights of children themselves, their teachers;
 - the importance of freedom of religion and belief.
18. There may also be points of difference that a dialogue identifies, and ways would need to be found of living with such differences. Where it is possible to make common cause, the religious traditions of Britain need to work together to ensure that all children get the best educational start in life and all adults have access to lifelong learning.

THE NEED FOR CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES TODAY

19. Education appears today to be in a constant state of change. Whilst this may indicate energy and determination to improve, it could also indicate a degree of lack of direction and stability. In this situation, Christian perspectives may offer means of identifying priorities and developments for education policy makers in the following areas:
- The nature and purpose of education
 - Early Years Education
 - School structures and choice
 - Curriculum and ethos
 - Collective worship
 - Religious Education
 - Achievement and accountability in schools
 - Qualifications
 - Further Education
 - Higher education
 - Life Long Learning

Nature And Purpose Of Education

20. Education is the purposeful equipping of children with the knowledge, understanding, skills and characteristics they need to flourish as full human beings. Such an enterprise requires an understanding not only of the processes involved to achieve this, but of what human nature is, the kind of beings humans are and their purpose, and the nature of the world and its purpose. Education is therefore about not only what children and young people know, understand and can do, but with what they are and become, particularly in relation to each other in a diverse and plural society.
21. Education is a moral enterprise, because it places great worth on the value of the world, the value of truth and wisdom, the value of the individual and therefore the value of the other. It is about the fulfilment of the whole person and community. From a Christian perspective this means reflecting the nature of people as made in the image of God and having potential for life in him. The nature of education therefore should reflect the unique

wholeness of the human person and the human community, and develop all children's talents and gifts for their own sake because they contribute to human flourishing.

22. Equally important, however, is that education should also serve the economic interests of individuals, families and the community. People have to eat, and to eat people must work. The stewardship of creation requires that human beings are as knowledgeable, skilled and economically active as is consistent with the sustainability of the earth and its purpose in God's sight. High quality vocational education and training is therefore a vital part of education provision to meet the country's economic needs of a global economy.
23. It is also important from a Christian perspective that the right to education of each individual is met, and that all children have an equality of opportunity to enjoy the benefits of good education and develop their potential, particularly where there are special needs, since every child is of equal value in the sight of God. This means also that the education offered to children should reflect their diverse backgrounds since the diversity of the human family is also God-given.
24. Education is not the same as schooling, but continues throughout life. It is important that opportunities for learning and development exist beyond compulsory schooling, whether through further and higher education, continuing or life-long education, through college or work-place, community or distance. *Christian education* is committed to learning for and throughout life.

Issues to be addressed:

- What is the purpose of education from a Christian perspective?
- How equitable are the educational opportunities for all children, young people and adults?

Early Years Education

25. The primary responsibility for upbringing, nurture and formation of children lies with parents, supported ideally by other members of the family. Children learn first and most powerfully by copying and interacting with those nearest to them. The local community, in various forms including the faith community, also plays an important role, since parents and their children are parts of local networks, relationships and activities that influence the identity, culture and development of children. Another major influence is the media that surround children, their families and their communities. Assumptions, norms, expectations, and ambitions are all highly susceptible to advertising, fashion and peer (and other) pressure. The time and context of their lives influence how children develop; national and international events, economic advantage and disadvantage, the accidents and incidents of time and place – all impinge on how children learn, and on how they become who and what they are.
26. In this complexity of influences that have unpredictable and varying effects on children and young people, formal education plays an increasingly important role, particularly in the early years. There is much research which suggests that a good quality of education between the ages of 3 and 7 helps to prevent many problems and much underachievement in later years. A balance therefore has to be struck between the education and nurture provided by the love and security of home and family and the advantages gained by children attending various forms of early years' education which can help their individual development and socialisation.
27. From a Christian perspective this balance is underpinned by the nature of human beings as individuals created by God for community. There is a saying: "It takes a village to bring up a child." There should, ideally, be no inconsistency between the education from home and the education from early years' settings such as playgroups and nurseries. In practice, the ideal

is rarely found. Parents are required by economic pressures to work leaving them to find child care that can be too long for the good of family and child. Many homes do not offer the same standard of socialisation and stimulation as child care and educational settings. The 'curriculum' on offer in some settings may be too formal or restrictive. Tough issues emerge in ensuring the best balance and how it is to be paid for.

Issues to be addressed:

- What is the right balance between family and formal provision of child care from a Christian perspective? Is there one?
- How equitable are the economics of the proper nurture of young children?

Schools: Structures And Choice

28. In Britain there has always been a mixed provision of schooling. Independent schools, often church foundations, have co-existed with schools established by churches and other charities. In the 19th century state provision began (now dominant but itself composed of voluntary and community schools) to provide universal and largely free access to schooling. A Christian perspective on education believes it right that a mixed provision exists, for both a wholly independent and wholly state provision have great disadvantages for parental choice, equality and quality. The difficult questions come when trying to work out what is the right balance. Independent schools are perceived to provide an elite education for those with sufficient money to buy their children advantages over others. State schools are often regarded as inferior or failing. Successive governments have tried various means to make state provision more differentiated, for example, by ability (grammar and secondary moderns) and by specialisation (technology, humanities etc). State provision is somewhat controversially differentiated also by publicly-funded faith schools.

29. Trust schools will be additional to existing types of schools: independent, academies, foundation, aided, community. These are provided by a wide range of bodies through private, faith or charitable provision. Based on the premise that "a growing number indicate they want to choose trust status"¹ the government has legislated to promote more choice for parents and more autonomy for schools through trust status. "Academies offer a clear and viable way out for failing schools". This is clearly a main plank of government policy to drive up standards and deal with choice, based on the view that "schools which perform best drive up standards within the school by drawing energy and expertise from outside." The emergence of trust schools and the rapid development of academies frustrate those who believe in a state neighbourhood community school, but please those who believe that only choice will meet the wishes of parents and provide the high outcomes so crucial to pupil's success and society's good. A Christian perspective on education requires that if differentiated provision of institutional learning provides the most effective way of raising and maintaining standards for all children, enables all parents to have access to the kind of education they believe best for their children, and provides equality of opportunity for those, then such provision is welcome. However, a Christian perspective on education would also want to ask always for equitable funding from the state to ensure that differentiated provision is not a form of inequality that privileges some families over others.

Issues to be addressed:

- How well does provision of choice and power for parents sit with the needs of equality and of the community from a Christian perspective?
- How does a Christian perspective distinguish between quality, equality and inequality?

School Curriculum And Ethos

¹ This and the quotes in the following paragraphs are from various speeches by Secretaries of State for Education in 2006-7.

30. The Christian starting points of the transcendent, truth, loving relationships and the created order mean that education should promote the widest forms of development of children and young people. It should offer a broad and balanced curriculum that enables the diverse potential of all to be realised. Science, technology, humanities, languages, arts and crafts, all of which manifest aspects of God's creative power, are routes to wisdom, and all children need, as far as their individual capacities allow, access to these forms of knowledge and power. This has been described as a liberal education, and is often placed against a more utilitarian notion of the curriculum, that of preparing children for work. *Christian Education* does not accept this polarisation. Increasing employers require educationally-rounded people, with social skills and competences, adaptability and general knowledge, well-motivated and fulfilled, able to relate to others of different cultures and faiths, positively-minded regarding their place in time and space, and therefore economically useful. A broad and balanced, education, based on the whole person encompasses the vocational and liberal.
31. The purpose of the maintained school curriculum at present is set out in legislation. It is to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural of pupils and society; and prepare them for adult life. Recently, the curriculum for Key stages 3 and 4 in England has been reviewed by the QCA, and primary curriculum is about to be reviewed. Some look in vain for an adequate reflection of the legal purposes of the curriculum in these developments, and are concerned that the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of young people are not properly provided. Work needs to be done to scrutinise the new curricula to see how well it meets the Christian perspective on the curriculum, and offer a constructive critique accordingly.
32. Given that there can be agreement on the aims and purposes of the school curriculum, decisions have to be made on its content, and on how progress is assessed. Who should make these in a plural democracy, and how they reflect the variety of interests, both the individual's and society's are key questions, as is the priority that should be given to employers (national and local), the community, the school and parents, and to children's own wishes. Related to this is the importance given to particular subjects, cross curricular priorities such as community cohesion and diversity, and the experiences and opportunities that are so important for life in general but which do not fit neatly into a particular subject context. Work on what some call 'the personal development curriculum' is relevant here.
33. The curriculum is fundamental to the purpose and experience of a school – it is what is taught and learned. Conventionally, the curriculum is divided into the 'hidden' and the explicit. The curriculum, however, is not confined to the formal provision of subjects and courses. The 'hidden curriculum' is very powerful despite the fact that it is not specified, assessed or examined because it derives from the ethos, relationships and examples found within the school. It is in these areas - ethos, relationships, activities (including routines such as lining up, assemblies and games), links with family and community – that the real values of a school are set out and practised. If the hidden curriculum goes wrong, the school's partnership with family and community goes wrong, and standards fall. Yet it is precisely these areas for which teachers are least trained and schools are least accountable. It is also precisely to these areas that the curricula for personal development and community cohesion, in handling what are at times both sensitive and controversial issues, especially citizenship, personal social health and religious education are the most relevant. Much work within Christian communities, including *Christian Education*, is designed to influence, inspire and resource the curriculum and especially religious education and collective worship in schools.

Issues to be addressed:

- From a Christian perspective, what are the purposes, nature, contents and skills of the curriculum, and how can the Churches bring their insights to bear?

- What is meant by school ethos? Why is it important, how it is established and maintained? What is *Christian Education's* contribution to a positive provision of ethos in schools?

Collective Worship

34. Issues of school ethos have rarely been so important, connected as they are with the values of school and society, with questions of parental choice, and with issues of school effectiveness. One of the most significant contributors to and measure of school ethos is collective worship. That pupils in England and Wales should take part in a daily act of this kind (unless withdrawn by their parents, or, since 2007 if over 16 by themselves) has been legally compulsory since 1944. This requirement is much more honoured in the breach than the observance in most secondary schools, though still generally complied with in most primary schools. Many schools find both the legal requirement and current government guidance hard to accept, and there is believed to be widespread disregard for the Scottish requirements on religious observance, even though recently revised.
35. The Churches Joint Education Policy Committee (CJEPC) has been lobbying the government to provide more support through better guidance, resources and training, within the current legal provision for collective worship, which the government is still considering. A Christian perspective on education requires that that collective worship remains an important element in the education of children and young people. It is committed to supporting effective educationally-sound provision of collective worship.

Issues to be addressed:

- What Christian perspectives operate regarding collective worship in religiously plural schools today?
- What is *Christian Education's* view of current and desirable provision of collective worship in schools?

Religious Education

A Christian perspective on education requires that the curriculum of all schools includes the effective provision of religious education for all pupils. *Christian Education* wholly supports the position agreed by the Christian churches and other major faith communities evidenced in the publication of the non-statutory *National Framework for Religious Education* in 2004, and reinforced through the agreement contained in the publication *Faith in the System* in 2007. It also fully endorses the call for a national strategy on religious education and the work being pursued by the Religious Education Council for England and Wales (REC) in England.

Issues to be addressed:

- What, from a Christian perspective, should be the role, nature and structure of religious education in increasingly religiously plural community schools and in 'faith' schools? How do these roles relate to Christian education in churches?
- How can the churches best support religious education in schools?

Achievement and Accountability

36. It is important that any critique of education is mindful of any improvements and gains in standards that have taken place in education over past years. The 1997 Labour government made education one of its top priorities for spending and legislation ("Education, education, education"). Money committed to education has "nearly doubled" since 1997. There are 132,000 more support staff, and 32,000 more teachers, if government figures are to be accepted. The Secretary of State announced in 2006 that "100,000 more 11 year olds are reaching level 4 now than in 1997." Of course, global competition is a key factor in encouraging such investment and quest for higher standards.

Again, government figures tell us that “India and China produce 4 million graduates a year.” Ensuring that British graduates are equal to this challenge is important not only for individuals but for the economy, prosperity and ultimately the welfare of citizens in this country. A Christian perspective on education would not only endorse but welcome this commitment to education.

37. However, there is by government’s own admission still concern over standards. The drive to raise standards in schools continues, and in post 16 provision in 2006, Britain was “37th out of 40 for 17 year olds in training”. There is serious under or non-achievement by minorities: “1 in 10 free school meal children leave with no qualification; ... looked after children 5 times less likely to get five good GCSEs ... African-Caribbean children four times as likely to leave with no qualifications ...” If such questions lead to a focus on accountability for failure then they begin to get tough. Government says “... 1,300 failing schools are turned around, but there is a need to get tougher on failing schools, which must be tackled not tolerated.” The drive for reform therefore continues, and according the previous Secretary of State “progressive government is about constant reform and continuous renewal”. This means that education will continue to court political controversy.
38. Another controversial area is the way in which schools are perceived to be accountable for the standards children achieve. The whole apparatus of performance tables and their impact on parental perceptions and choice of schools puts tremendous pressure on teachers, and on those who support and manage them. Naturally, higher standards and the attempts to achieve them are desirable, but controversy remains on how real claimed rises in achievement are, how accurate and effective such forms of accountability are, and over the cost at which any improvements in achievement are gained – socially, personally and spiritually. Christian perspectives deriving from theological themes of incarnation, personhood and holistic spirituality are relevant in working out how we know what good standards of education are and how they are best achieved.
39. The government may justifiably point to other developments regarding education and young people generally to offset any criticism that it is only interested in measurable outcomes. The “Every Child Matters” and “Youth matters” initiatives have started to transform how education administration and policy are conducted locally. “Respect for all” and other developments regarding community cohesion, inclusion and the valuing of diversity have prompted much work, which is designed to ensure that the personal and social development of children, who experience various barriers in education achievement, are promoted.
40. Christian insights here should include the relevance of themes such as the pursuit of truth in community, personhood, forgiveness, redemption and renewal, and how they might be applied to the drive to increase standards and accountability.

Issues for discussion

- What, from a Christian perspective, is meant by achievement in the education system today? Is achievement in tests, examinations and qualifications really what matters most? To what extent has achievement really improved children? Who has been failed? How? Why? Who has failed: How, and why? Why does under-achievement continue to exist in spite of the effort being made? How can it be effectively addressed?
- What should *Christian Education* be saying about systems of assessment, the use of data and forms of accountability?

Qualifications

41. There have been many changes in the nature and structure of qualifications since 1988 when GCSEs replaced O Levels and CSEs. Perhaps this is unsurprising given the pace of curriculum and structural changes in education since then. Many more young people are

gaining good qualifications than previously, including those necessary for university entrance. The numbers of pupils who achieve qualifications in religious studies, and the standards gained, have increased enormously in recent years. Such advances are to be welcomed by a Christian perspective on education if they provide evidence of the fulfilment of human potential.

42. However, there are concerns about grade inflation, restrictive curricula, teaching to the test, 'dumbing down', and fitness for purpose in both the development and acquisition of qualifications over this period. Yet more changes to A Levels are being implemented and changes in GCSE are in the offing, related to the redevelopment of curriculum and qualifications 14-19. Specialist (vocational) and other diplomas are being introduced, and the school leaving age being raised, ie the up to which young people should be at school or college, in workplace training or apprenticeships.

Issues for discussion:

- Do current developments in qualifications in 14-19 education and training represent the best way forward, from a Christian perspective?
- How might *Christian Education* contribute most effectively to ensuring that they do?

Further Education

43. The Churches have been working hard to strengthen the spiritual dimension of FE colleges and provision for 16-19 age group especially. Relevant here are the many recent publications from the Church of England and Methodist Church's FE officer, the formation of the National Council for Faiths and Beliefs in Further Education (fbfe), the Dare to Engage work of Christian Education and other developments concerning the current Further Education Bill going through Parliament.

Issues to be addressed:

- Is there a Christian perspective on Further Education? If so, what is it?
- What can *Christian Education* offer to this developing scene?

Higher Education

44. The Christian Faith has been a formative influence in establishing higher education - an experience to develop curiosity, to delight in truth, to learn wisdom, to seek justice, and to respect and celebrate diversity and difference, and should be widely available to all who can benefit. Such education should seek to serve the needs of the world as well as to pursue personal advancement, so a university is concerned with the development of the skills necessary for the maintenance of a just and decent society. Christian Education believes that a university should be a community, all of whose members are valued and affirmed. The community of the university and the relationships it fosters should be a kind of model of how broader society might be. The goals of a university are wisdom, truth, knowledge, skills and responsibility - the abiding values of service, selflessness, love and justice which arise from Christian and other faith. A university should also produce an ongoing critique of society and culture, constantly questioning the received wisdom and challenging complacency. Academic freedom and independence of control by wealth or power are essential, but universities are responsible to God and to society for what they do.

Issues to be addressed

- Is there a Christian perspective on higher education today? If so, what is it?
- What does Christian education have to say regarding the questions of top up fees, access to higher education by students from relatively underprivileged backgrounds, the role of universities in relation to service to the poorer countries of the world, the welcome given and rationale of recruiting many overseas students, chaplaincy and inter-faith dialogue?

Life Long Learning

45. A Christian perspective on education understands each person's dignity to be founded in their unique manifestation of the loving Godhead, received as gift and celebrated best by life lived in Godly fashion. Learning from one's own giftedness and the appreciation of that of others, the adult person is able to operate in loving service of self, neighbour and God, for Christians with Jesus Christ as exemplar. *Christian Education* understands lifelong learning to be the processes whereby personal potential is actualised and relationships, with fellow humans and the whole universe, increasingly offer insight into the nature of the loving and infinite God and the impact this has upon the conduct of human affairs. This sort of learning, which some call 'discipleship', is holistic in its scope and collaborative in its acquisition. It rules out nothing of what people of any time, place or tradition have deemed appropriate to learn: what is distinctive is that it is set in a vital theological context. All human life is there, the seasons, the crises and developmental stages, the skills and understandings to make sense of the experiences, responsibilities and opportunities of adult life – not excluding death. *Christian Education* recognises and affirms the formative influence on religious learners of the prayer and worship opportunities they experience, most notably in the cultural environment of their own particular faith tradition.
46. *Christian Education* recognises that adult learners need to learn about and from religion, through engagement with the complexities of life experience and critical reflection upon it, not just from their own viewpoint, but also from the viewpoint of the God who made it all possible. The view of the one illumines the appreciation of the view of the other, the other of the one. Christian Education is active in exploring how best to help resource important learning of this sort.

Issues to be addressed:

- How can Christian Education best engage with government and other attempts to promote life-long learning?
- What can Christian Education contribute to the provision of life-long learning?

John Keast, June 2008