

LST – A Brief History

London School of Theology is called under God to be a world class institution with a worldwide reach in order to serve the Church of Jesus. We do this by *educating* individuals, *equipping* churches and *engaging* in leading research.

We *educate* individuals in theology to the highest standards. We also care deeply about the people our students become. Our theological education involves spiritual formation that is rooted in worship, the Scriptures and Christian community.

We *equip* local churches in multiple ways. Events such as evening public lectures, Summer Schools, Theology Within Reach and partnerships in mission, including offering students for placements, are key to this work.

We *engage* in leading scholarly research. Our faculty and some of our research students are engaged in international research at the highest levels, enriching and serving the Church.

As we approach our 75th year of operation we find ourselves reflecting on our rich heritage with much gratitude for God's goodness to us.

LST (formerly London Bible College, LBC) was formed in the middle of World War Two by a group of ministers, missionaries and business people. This group came together with a vision for an interdenominational, evangelical college that would counter the rising tide of liberal scholarship in Western universities and prepare Christians to interact with the post-war world.

Based in central London, the College initially offered correspondence courses and evening classes. By 1944 over 300 students were enrolled. Two years later the number had risen to 1,400 and LBC evening classes were being taught all over the UK. In Autumn 1946 the first full-time students started their studies. The new college was located at 19 Marylebone Road, a site purchased by Sir John Laing for development and given to LBC rent-free for a period of three to five years, pending the erection of a new building.¹

The College grew rapidly and the premises were quickly outgrown. In 1956 work began on the new building. This work was made possible, again, by the expertise and generosity of Sir John Laing. Not only did he sell the site to the college for £15,000 less than cost (around £375,000 at today's prices), in addition he and his wife donated the first £30,000 to the building fund. Also, his company built the new premises at cost to themselves with John Laing himself reimbursing the company for the profit that they had lost.²

Further growth of the college required a move in 1970 to an even larger site in Northwood to its current campus, previously occupied by London College of Divinity. The move was largely made possible by its possession of the first-class building in Marylebone Road. The main building on the current campus is named after Sir John Laing in recognition of his contribution to the formation and growth of the College.

In 2004, LBC became London School of Theology. This name change did not represent a change of focus, but rather, it expressed a renewed commitment to serve Christians from around the world for whom the term Bible College did not clearly convey our commitment to academic rigour alongside our core commitment to Scripture.

¹Roy Coad, *Laing: The Biography of Sir John W Laing, C.B.E.*, 191.

² Roy Coad, *Laing: The Biography of Sir John W Laing, C.B.E.*, 191.

From 2010–2016 the School underwent a difficult period. The Principal appointed in 2008 became ill during the first year of his appointment and was unable to continue in his role, leaving in 2010. The School had difficulty in appointing a successor. A succession of acting Principals appointed from existing faculty lacked the mandate or the authority to do much more than act as caretakers.

The economic climate during this period was very challenging due to the worldwide recession on a scale not seen in a generation. At roughly the same time the regulatory and compliance frameworks within Higher Education (HE) were becoming more complex and the costs of compliance rose exponentially, particularly for alternative providers such as LST.

The combination of the recession in an HE environment of increasing costs and complexity created a perfect storm which required navigation by skilled and stable leadership. The succession of short term and acting Principals from 2008-2012 was not adequate for this task.

An alternative leadership structure was put in place. A Chief Operating Officer was appointed who eventually became Executive Director (ED). There was to be no Principal but a Senior Leadership Team (SLT) that included the ED, Vice Principal Academic, Vice Principal Pastoral, and Academic Secretary, as well as some co-opted members. Crucially, the ED was not an academic, so for the first time in the School's history its senior leader was not a member of faculty. This was a significant shift and created an internal clash of cultures. Alongside this, the School's finances worsened.

The necessary focus on the financial challenges meant that many faculty members felt that the SLT was more concerned with managing the business than with the academic mission of the School which led to further clashes. Morale within the School was low. At its lowest point 26 employees left the School in a single calendar year.

The Board of Trustees acknowledged that the shared leadership structure was not working. In 2015 the role of Academic Dean was created to strengthen the School's leadership and in 2016 Trustees decided to revert to the previous model of leadership by appointing a Principal who would be a member of faculty. This they successfully did in late 2016 following an international search. Under the new Principal's leadership the SLT was reshaped to become the Executive Team and fresh leadership appointed to it, including two new posts, the Director of Finance and Administration, and the Academic Secretary & Director of Academic Support.

The fruits of this new leadership are becoming obvious. Morale has markedly improved. A new strategic vision is near completion. Student recruitment has increased. Notably, in 2017 the School reported its first operating surplus in a decade.

Today LST has 513 students registered on its degree programmes as well as around 185 Personal Development students taking short courses. Students are able to study at a wide range of levels from Saturday classes based within local churches through to doctoral research.

Students study on one of 11 undergraduate and postgraduate programmes including Theology, Biblical Interpretation, Theology and Counselling, Music and Worship, Theological Education, and Integrative Theology. Core to all that we do is a commitment to see students equipped to serve the Church of Jesus worldwide.

In order to expand our reach, two years ago we launched our online delivery of the BA in Theology that allows students all over the world to study through LST without needing to move to London.

Looking to the future we are exploring the possibility of implementing a Theology and Ministry stream specifically for those students who are clear that God has called them to church leadership.

The School is led by its Principal, Revd Dr Calvin T Samuel who is accountable to the Board of Trustees. Dr Samuel is supported by an Executive Team consisting of Professor Graham Twelftree (Academic Dean), Mrs Kate Douglas (Academic Secretary and Director of Academic Support) and Mr Jonathan Mead (Director of Finance and Administration).