

**General Assembly of Unitarian
And Free Christian Churches**

Approved Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting

Friday 12 & Saturday 13 July 2013

Essex Hall, London

Present: Rev Martin Whitell (Convenor), Joan Cook, Louise Rogers, James Barry (until item 22), Rev John Clifford, Alison Thursfield, Robert Ince

In Attendance: Derek McAuley (Chief Officer), Mary-Jean Hennis (Minute-taker)

In Attendance Saturday Session:

Andy Phillips (Item 22. – 2020 Congregational Development Report)
Sue Talbot, Vanessa Rothwell and the Rev John Harley (Item 23. -
Presentation by Youth Panel)

Friday

Session 1

Opening Devotions: Louise read from Robert Greenleaf – The servant leader is the servant first.

1. **Apologies:** Jacky Woodman
2. **Minutes of the meeting held on 17 May 2013 - (Document EC47/13)**
With an amendment to page 7, item 12.6 where the word “Motions” was altered to “Resolutions”, the Minutes were signed as a true record of the meeting held on 17 May 2013.
3. **Matters arising for noting or to include in Agenda for later Discussion:**
 - Page 9 A.O.B. – The Chief Officer has not had a chance to speak with Paul Parker from the Quakers with regard to the Quaker Bank proposal, but he had managed to acquire some information from The Friend web-site.
 - Page 2 – item 4.1 – bullet point 6 – Uni-doodles – James has spoken with Kate Taylor with regard to copyright issues. She had not been aware of these and had reviewed the publication and decided not to withdraw it. Should a problem arise it will be pointed out that the project is an educational one, but she will

look at editing the current version. Kate was grateful to James for pointing this out.

- Page 5 – item 10 – Partnership with UUA Congregations – The Convenor was pleased to report that the proposal had been approved by the Board of the UU Partnership Council. A member of the Board will be visiting Britain in August and hopefully discussions can take place.
- Page 5 – item 8.2 – Investment Panel Meeting – The Treasurer reported on the meeting which took place in Manchester on 25 June. Several companies as well as Newtons presented to the meeting. Subject to further clarification it was decided to recommend that charities retain the services of Newtons for the foreseeable future.
- Page 8 – item 13 – bullet point 1 – EC Business arrangements – The Convenor is still in discussion with Louise and James with regard to the signing of the EC Code of Conduct.
- Page 3 – item 5 - noted that the suggested change to the 2020 web-site had not yet been made and agreed that Rev Andy Pakula be contacted. **Action: Convenor**

4. Reports of Strategy Groups – (Document EC48/13)

a) LLSG – noted with the following:

Louise had contacted Margaret Robinson (LLSG Chair) and has arranged to discuss strategy planning and growth and offer her services as a mentor. She asked for a report rather than notes of meetings.

It was noted by the Chief Officer that the LLSG had responded positively to a request from the EC to develop their 5 year plan, but that much in the “Five Year Dreams” was in essence a list of what they are currently working on. There have been some changes of personnel within the Strategy and Action Group and membership needed to be clarified.

A letter was received seeking the approval of the EC to bring the Strategy Group and the two Action groups together into one larger body. The EC remained convinced that whilst they would be receptive to changes in areas of work covered that there needed to be a separation between the strategic work and actual implementation of specific programmes particularly given the number of activities for which they were responsible. The need for strategic planning demonstrated this as it appeared from the minutes of the meeting that the LLSG was focused on detail of delivery. The Chief Officer was asked to respond. **Action: Chief Officer**

Page 3 – item 11 – future ministry (fm) Scottish pilot –, the LLSG had been unable to obtain an update. Joan reported that there was activity planned in Scotland. LLSG would be asked to pursue with

the SUA as the project needed to be completed and any lessons learnt. If any funds remained the donor would be asked to lift the restrictions on their use

It was noted that reference was made to the need for a Worship Committee equivalent in the structure (item 9.)

b) VSG – noted with the following:

It has been noted that the VSG needed to provide information on its work for the General Assembly web-site. **Action: Chief Officer**

There appeared to be some confusion as to responsibilities for progressing the strapline and Alison agreed to speak to Angela Maher and the Chief Officer would liaise with the VSG with regard to the formal launch. **Action: Alison Thursfield and Chief Officer**

c) Ministry – noted with the following:

EC accepted the recommendations of the Interview Panel but full information was not yet available on compliance. **Action: Chief Officer to follow up**

The significant progress made on DBS clearance of ministers by the Director of Ministry was welcomed.

5. Ministry

a) Categories of ministry - (Document EC49/13) - noted with the following:

A lengthy discussion was held with regard to the categories of Ministry paper and proposals from the MSG. In relation to Rec 1. Louise asked that “frequent” replace “regular”. There was a view expressed that the lay pastor/associate minister category should in fact be phased out, however, it was also emphasised that the category provided flexible opportunities for some individuals unable to commit to two years full time training. It was **agreed** to accept the recommendation of the MSG and to publish their suggested “key message” after a few minor adjustments had been made with further consultation required on the proposal and identification of competencies. **Action: Chief Officer**

b) Request from Interview Panel - (Document EC50/13) – noted with the following:

Correspondence was received from Rev Sarah Tinker, Chair of the Interview Panel, seeking an indication of the approach to take to applications in light of funding issues. It was **agreed** that the policy implemented by the EC should be that the Interview Panel should continue to select on the quality of the application rather than of the availability of funds, however, that in 2014/15 an ideal number should be between 3 and 5 candidates. This policy will be reviewed on a regular basis. It should also be made clear that there cannot

be any guarantees of ministries being available after training given congregational autonomy, local financial constraints and the size of the denomination. **Chief Officer to respond to request.**

c) Feedback from UCM meeting 8 July –

Correspondence from Jeffrey Teagle on behalf of UCM was noted following the tripartite meeting held on 8 July 2013 between the Ministry Strategy Group, Executive Committee and Unitarian College Manchester representatives. A formal request for financial support for 2013/14 would be presented at the next Executive Committee. A further meeting had been confirmed for 9 September 2013 to consider the medium and longer term issues.

d) Ministry – A Wider Perspective – (Document EC51/13)

Louise talked through her paper on various forms of ministry. John Clifford highlighted that ministry had been grounded in congregations and provided important learning on how issues of funding and accountability were to be addressed. In relation to specific areas the following was agreed:

- Music Ministry – **Louise to talk to Margaret Robinson** of LLSG
- Community Ministry – **Louise to email Stephen Lingwood** of MSG
- Digital Ministry - a wider discussion needs to be held and **Louise should engage with the NUF and Iain Brown** (fm in Scotland). The talk of Terasa Cooley at the Annual Meetings may have some insights and **Chief Officer to obtain.**

Session 2

6. Finance:

a) Management Accounts– 30 June 2013 – (Document EC52/13) noted – with the following:

Income is under pressure however expenditure was in line with budget and there were no major concerns for 2012/13 financial year. Reliance on legacies was a risk for the budget. Andrew Mason and the Annual Meeting Panel were thanked for their accurate budgeting of the 2013 Annual Meeting.

b) Financial Development – (Document EC53/13) – noted with the following:

Budget processes were outlined for 2013/14 with an initial assessment of pressures outlined. There will continue to be major pressures next year. It was reported that an exercise on the Quota for 2013/14 had revealed an alarming drop in quota numbers.

It was recognised that the financial implications of the decline in quota membership and the cessation of Bowland Trust funding in due course needed to be understood and addressed in a timely

manner. Ensuring the full benefit of Bowland Trust support was also a priority.

The Treasurer proposed that the EC form a funding development group which will focus on live-giving and the terms of reference were agreed:

- To develop a financial development strategy for increasing income for the General Assembly, including issues relating to congregational quota
- To provide an overview of all funding demands and requirements and to ensure a co-ordinated approach eg Sustentation Fund, 2020 Congregational Development Programme
- To encourage increased “live giving” towards the General Assembly with an aim of maximising Bowland Trust matching

The group will comprise of the Treasurer, Chief Officer, Louise Rogers and two other members, to be identified by the appointed members.

The title to be used by the Acting Treasurer was raised and research would be carried out on the constitutional requirements and Annual Meeting Resolution: **Chief Officer**

c) Millennium Fund Grant - Ullet Road Church – (Document EC54/13) - noted with the following:

Report received as requested. There did not appear to be any general lessons to be learnt on wedding fair events and in future any similar request would be judged on its own merits.

7. Service Plan – (Document EC55/13) - noted with the following:

The Chief Officer and Louise Rogers were thanked for their work on the draft Service Plan. It was acknowledged that there remained gaps and a need for greater clarity on the ongoing work of the General Assembly and on new developments. A discussion was held on the content of the report. There was a need for the Strategy Groups to be involved in future planning and for the final document to be published for the wider movement. The need for input from the Youth Programme and Welsh Department was highlighted. Amendments were suggested to the structure diagram. It was again reiterated that the term “panel” was now redundant and needed to be replaced by “action group”. The Service Plan would be finalised as part of the budget considerations at the next EC meeting.

8 Risk Management

a) Risk Management procedure - (Document EC56/13)

Robert Ince introduced a Risk Management procedure which described the processes undertaken by the EC. The use of P.E.A.R.

(people, environment, assets and reputation) was confirmed. The procedure was approved.

b) Risk Register - (Document EC57/13) – noted with the following:

The Chief Officer and Robert had undertaken a review of the risk register. The focus was on things that we cannot control with issues to be addressed by management action as reflected in Service Plan. Key matters identified were:

- It has been agreed to audit whether all our Charities are conforming to the Safeguarding Policy.
- Bullying has been identified as a Risk and this will need to be assessed before being put on the Register. **Action: Chief Officer and Robert.**
- Item 2 on the Register (Inability to maintain GA income) will be split into 2 items a) Investment and b) live-giving and re-assessed.
- Item 3 – Ministers Pension Fund – deficit being addressed, however, ministers cannot be obliged to join.
- Item 5 – “Help is at Hand” document is to be up-dated by the LLSG. It was suggested copyright and entertainment licences should be included.
- There is a Business Continuity Plan in place should a serious event prevent access to Essex Hall however this needed to be reviewed and tested. We can expect this to reduce when new IT arrangements in place.
- Can the General Assembly actually impact on overall congregational membership numbers?
- Louise recommended that The Nightingale Centre be put on the Risk Register given the personal implications for EC members as trustees.

It was noted the risk register and issues log would be updated.

Action: Chief Officer

Session 3

9. Proposal for National Attendance Survey – (Document EC58/13)

The Convenor introduced a proposal that the General Assembly conducted an attendance and membership survey in November 2013. Following discussion he was asked to make a few changes to the document. James emphasised that the target of 20% growth in numbers needed to continue to be based on quota numbers to remain valid. It was felt that the survey would more accurately reflect the health of the movement. The capacity for electronic returns was proposed. The proposal was approved.

10. Update on the Upgrade of GA's IT Infrastructure – (Document EC59/13) – noted with the following:

Two major steps forward were reported with decisions taken on the Contact Management (CRM) system and finance system. The CRM will be CiviCRM and Aqilla for the finance system. In relation to the schedule of activities the Chief Officer confirmed that the project was “on track” as planned. There has been no decision made on the web-site yet as we would work closely the appointed contractors. The decision-making process had been externally tested. The budget was received with support required from restricted funds reducing the demand on current budgets over the five year period.

11. Progress regarding Resolutions – (Document EC60/13) – noted with the following:

- Item 1 – Assisted Dying - the 2nd reading of the Bill has been delayed from October 13 to June 2014. Robert will be speaking to an Interfaith Group of religious leaders. The Discussion Pack is now being widely referred to by other faith groups.
- Progress on Resolution needed to be included in the Annual Report and the EC presentation to the Annual Meeting
- An edited form of Appendix N should be submitted to the Inquirer and placed in Uni-news. **Action: Chief Officer**
- An updated report was requested for the November EC meeting. **Action: Chief Officer**
- It was suggested that districts and congregations could be asked if they were pursuing any of the Resolutions

Session 4

12. Nightingale Centre

a) Annual Report and Accounts for the year ending 30 September 2012

The Annual Report and Accounts for the year ending 30 September 2012 was approved. The need for a revaluation of the land and buildings was raised and agreed.

b) Minutes of Nightingale Management Committee – (Document EC61/13)

Robert Ince reported that the Centre was now getting professional advice and a report on their tax position as requested by the EC.

c) EC Responsibilities

Mary-Jean left the meeting at this point.

Louise emphasised the need for clarity in what was a delegated function to the management committee and ensuring that this complied with the law and Charity Commission guidance. The Chief Officer indicated that any changes should be reflected in the terms of reference for the management committee. It was also suggested that at least one EC meeting explicitly as trustees should be held each year at the Nightingale Centre (perhaps November?).

The proposal in 8.3 of the minutes was agreed and Management Committee to be informed of the EC's responsibilities in this area with the terms of reference to be updated. **Action: Chief Officer**

Mary-Jean re-joined the meeting

13. General Assembly office space requirements –

(Document EC63/13) - noted with the following:

The Chief Officer presented proposals for changes to space in Essex Hall used by the General Assembly which had been prepared at the request of the Essex Hall Trust and consulted about with staff. The EC supported the recommendation. It was also suggested that the fitting of air-conditioners be examined along with some sort of sound buffering for the Lindsey Room. **Action: the Chief Officer to convey views to Essex Hall Trust**

14. Experts – (Document EC63/13) – noted with the following:

Louise presented some initial thinking on developing lists of volunteer "experts" in a number of areas and was asked to follow up with the LLSG Chair Margaret Robinson

15. Provision of Information – (EC Document EC64/13) – noted with the following:

Louise suggested that more information could be made available in electronic format to congregations who wished to receive it in this form. It was noted that the new IT CRM system would enable this to be achieved.

16. Chief Officer's Report – (Document EC65/13) – noted with the following:

The Chief Officer reported on the proposed timetable for the passage of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill which should achieve Royal Assent by 18 July 2013. The issues of fees for registering was raised and it was noted that the Chief Officer had already raised this issue and would be involved in discussions on a range of implementation issues with civil servants. Progress with similar legislation in Scotland was reported.

The Convenor congratulated the Chief Officer on his achievement of keeping the Unitarian Movement at the forefront of the campaign for Same Sex Marriage and also for the way in which he has developed this area of work as Chief Officer. He also congratulated Derek on his long-listing for a National Diversity Award and was hopeful that he would be short-listed to the final three for the Award of Positive Role Model in the category of Race, Religion and Faith.

It was noted that additional capacity had been secured with an individual on work placement at Essex Hall for two months helping the Chief Officer with various projects.

An update was received on the activities of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists with the next Council meeting in New York scheduled for January 2014 to be followed by a Ministers Conference. In relation to the International Association of Religious Freedom the Chief Officer confirmed that he was actively supporting the Global Congress to be held in Birmingham in August 2014. He was also speaking at an IARF Peace Commission conference in Horsham in August 2013. It was also highlighted that the August 2014 event would be preceded by a conference of the International Association of Liberal Religious Women also in Birmingham.

In relation to work on "Improving Services" it was highlighted that the major IT project and changes to Essex Hall space usage were major projects which would bring benefits. More generally the four areas of work identified in the Strategic Objectives for the EC to lead were changes to governance structures and review of staffing (completed), "live giving" (initial work undertaken with Funding Development Group now established) and supporting volunteers (included in LLSG training but more work required).

17. Other Reports – (Document EC66/13) - noted**18. A.O.B.**

- It was noted that the Quakers had produced a short video to support their Annual Report – could we perhaps do the same?
- James reported that he will be attending the next four Western Union meetings and was helping with their new group in Glastonbury. He was advised that the policy was that as an EC link person he was expected to attend one meeting a year in person, with contact to be maintained primarily by email, and that any other work should be as a volunteer.

19. Key Messages – as distributed**20. Confidential items – none to report****21. Non-responsive check out**

Closing Devotions: Joan led an exercise on reflection on how the outcome of the EC meetings affects each EC member.

Saturday

Session 5

Following a short delay in start time the Convenor indicated that he was disappointed that James was absent and that he had not received any apology for absence.

Opening Devotions: Robert Ince borrowed from Rev David Shaw – Oriental carpet – in that Unitarian meetings are similar to a Persian carpet with the weft & weave.

22. 2020 Congregational Development Report

Andy Phillips from the 2020 Congregational Development Programme gave a comprehensive presentation on the application and evaluation process that will be used when determining whether a congregation will receive funds from the programme.

A detailed diagram was circulated of the evaluation process.

There were questions raised including the following:

- Governance - at which stage does the EC become involved as the final decision would ultimately lie with them?
- Finance: Has the £100K been received or is it mainly pledges and if so, how do we manage the risks? Andy assured the EC that by the time the first bid is ready to be accepted the funds will be available and that even then the bid may not need the full £100K in which case there will be funds available to start the next bid rolling.
- Are there any plans to have the paperwork etc to be translated in Welsh? It was suggested that someone from the 2020 Congregational Development Leadership make contact with Dr Carwyn Tywyn, the Welsh Secretary.
- Louise considered that the method of evaluating proposals was overly complicated.

The Convenor thanked Andy for his very detailed presentation.

Session 6

23. Presentation by Youth Panel

A brief discussion took place before the presentation from the Youth Panel. EC agreed that they would put the suggestion of forming a Youth Strategy Group to the Panel. The Convenor opened the session by putting that suggestion forward to the group, not for an immediate decision but for them to take away and discuss.

The intention of the presentation from the Rev John Harley, Sue Talbot and Vanessa Rothwell of the Youth Programme was to update the EC on where they are at the moment, what they are doing and where they would like to be – there are choices to be made and they considered that they need the guidance and support of the EC.

Successes were an increase in outreach work – road shows, new youth Sunday initiatives - financial management; changing the structure and composition of the Youth Panel and event staffing (contingency planning and training in first aid, safeguarding etc.)

Their current issues are;

- Changes in legislation (Safeguarding)
- Geographical spread and reduction in numbers of possible attendees.
- Changing expectations from children, young people and their families.
- Continual use of denominational buildings that are evolving.
- Developing a team of enough quality/trained youth volunteers.
- Increasing costs of running these events/infrastructure.

In relation to finances changes that have already been made:

- A financial review on the agenda for each Youth Panel meeting.
- Profit and loss accounts for each weekend, in an accessible format.
- Adjusted the structure of some events to make them more financially viable.
- 2011 – 2012 broke even and in 2012 – 2013 an accurate budget has been set.
- They have looked at additional ways of supporting the programme i.e: look for Grant funding, but there are problems going down that route and youth leaders being involved in regular fund raising given other commitments.

Some ideas that they have had to make themselves more sustainable were:

- Bring in external grant funding – but that will take time and is not sustainable
- Charge more – but that would mean a potential loss of children and less inclusion.
- Reduce number of events – but that would mean a potential loss of attendance/engagement.
- Reduce staffing – but then there is a risk to quality of service and safety.
- Alternative staffing (eg. Day leaders) – but that would mean that overnight supervision would be put at risk.
- Alternative venues – but that would mean severing cherished links with Hucklow and loss of quality.

The cold hard financial fact at the moment is that the Youth Programme is not sustainable and they have now reached a crossroads in their decision making and need input from the EC.

The Convenor thanked the Youth Panel for their presentation.

A discussion took place with the following:

- Robert stated that the Nightingale Centre would not increase their rates disproportionately, but Sue said that it was not just the financial implication but also lack of dormitory space due to the up-grade. He also suggested promoting more effectively a dedicated Youth Fund as this would be live-giving and also legible for doubling by the Bowland Trust.
- Louise suggested that the Panel should be “bold” and more actively promote Youth Sunday and ask for donations of a set amount.
- Joan inquired about starting up programmes for children in the North and also suggested using Scout accommodation for their events, holding one day and local events which would help strengthen bonds with their districts.
- The Chief Officer said that the congregational survey (see above) should help identify children and that the new data-base system at Essex Hall will be able to help with administration work. The Chief Officer also asked how far the model being used by the Youth Panel was in line with current young work practice?
- John Harley said that he has made some strong links with the Quaker Youth Movement recently and will be researching this further. He also thought that starting a new Youth Fund could be successful although it would be a big challenge for publicity. The Youth Panel has recently recruited a volunteer, Emma Nichols, to help with marketing and publicity. There are plans in place to visit Transylvania and Prague, John Clifford suggested the Netherlands as well which the Chief Officer would raise when he spoke to the Director of the NPB. John thanked the EC for their input

The Convenor raised the questions from James Barry (**Document EC66/13**):

Responsibility for Youth at GA in the Evenings

There was a shared view by both the Youth Panel and the EC as well as the Annual Meetings Panel that the responsibility for young people/ children belonged solely to the parents from dinner time and that this is made very clear both vocally and in all paperwork pertaining to the Annual Meetings. The General Assembly could not offer contained youth work in the evenings given the public nature of the venue.

It was noted that the Foy Society were reviewing their safeguarding arrangements following the publication of the General

Assembly Policy given the involvement of young people in Gazette.

Image Library

There is no longer a shared password for the image library. Each individual who wishes to utilize the library has their own password. There is a duty of care on youth leaders to ensure that any photos of weekends sent to Essex Hall are in line with policy.

Crisis Management

The Youth Panel are in complete agreement with the EC about a clear line of accountability and communication in the event of an incident and that they should not attempt to undertake responsibilities that more properly lie with other agencies. There is clarity with the measures to be taken, which had been used with recent safeguarding incidents.

Youth Database

A discussion with Martin Sarbicki had already taken place and John Harley had set out exactly what he and the Youth Panel will require.

The Youth Panel and the EC felt that the presentation and the discussion had been very positive and fruitful and that the idea of a Strategy Group for the Youth Panel would be a very positive way forward.

24. Non-responsive check-out

Closing Devotions: John read from Olive Schreiner – "I hear a sound of feet"

