

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

**Approved Minutes of Executive Committee (EC)
Friday 15th & Saturday 16th May 2015
Essex Hall, London**

Present: Robert Ince (Convenor), Marion Baker, James Barry, Joan Cook,
Peter Hanley (Honorary Treasurer), Gwynn Pritchard, Jacky Woodman

In attendance: Rev John Clifford (General Assembly (GA) President), Derek
McAuley (Chief Officer), Mary-Jean Hennis (Minute taker).

Friday

Session 1

*Opening Devotions: Joan read from the book "Carnival of Lamps " written by
the Rev Cliff Reed – A liberal manifesto*

1. Apologies and Welcome to new EC members

The Convenor welcomed the two new EC members – Marion Baker and
Gwynn Pritchard and also the GA President, the Rev John Clifford.

2. Appointment of EC Convenor

Robert Ince stood down and handed the chair to the GA President for the
duration of the election of a new Convenor. Robert Ince was re-
nominated, and was re-elected unanimously for a further period of one year.

**3. Minutes of the meetings held on 13th February 2015 (DOC EC32/15)
- Part one**

The Convenor indicated that he would like to see if minutes could be
approved by email and then circulated, however, this required that
amendments should be notified as soon as possible after the draft had been
circulated to EC members

James Barry indicated that he did not believe that the minute relating to his
verbal report on VSG (Item 4 (c)) was a true and accurate record. Other
members considered that the draft did reflect what was said. There was a
lengthy discussion and it was pointed out that the minutes were a summary
and had to carefully address issues relating to individuals. This had been

reflected in the comments when the draft had been distributed after the meeting.

It was agreed that James prepare an amendment to the draft minutes for discussion later in the meeting (see below Item 16.)

It was agreed that when draft minutes are circulated to EC that if members wish any changes to be made that these are submitted as written amendments and that a deadline is given.

A further amendment on page 2 - Session I –item 4 – b) Ministry Strategy Group - paragraph 4 – approved

“Marion Baker reported on her attendance at her first committee meeting at Unitarian College Manchester (UCM) on the 12 February 2015, where the main topic was the College Review which had been commissioned to look at the implications for training at UCM in light of the Competency document. The importance of curriculum development was recognised.”

4. Matters arising for noting or to include in Agenda for later discussion:

page 2 - Session I –item 4 – b) Ministry Strategy Group – paragraph 2 - *Peter asked that in future could the Ministry Strategy Group use full names instead of initials – **Action** - Joan to liaise with Rev Linda Phillips – Joan reported that the MSG have agreed that full names will be used at the start of the meeting and thereafter initials would be used.*

page 2 - Session I –item 4 – c) Ministry Strategy Group - paragraph 4 – *The importance of curriculum development was recognised. **Action** – Jacky to liaise with Rev Daniel Costley with regard to the curriculum – Jacky has not yet contacted the Rev Daniel Costley.*

5. EC Action List (DOC EC33/15) – Noted with the following:

EC meeting 14/15 November 2014

pg 3 item 7 - *Talk to Jen Hazel re consultation arrangements – there was concern about the progress on the work that had been requested.*

EC meeting 23/24 January 2015

pg 7 item 14 – *2020 mechanisms for financial control – Chief Officer and Martin Sarbicki had met with Rev Andy Pakula and agreed on a way forward and Rev Pakula would consult with East Midlands District officers.*

Pg 9 item 26 – *Pay Robin Hood Tax – Still to be paid*

EC meeting 13/14 February 2015

Pg 2. Item 3. – Safeguarding at the Annual Meetings. Arrangements had been made to appoint a safeguarding co-ordinator. James was thanked for his suggestion.

Pg 2 item 4 – b) Ministry Strategy Group – paragraph 3 -
The EC has requested that the Ministry Strategy Group ensure that the Guidelines with respect to part-time Ministers are clearly expressed. – Action – Joan to take request back to the Ministry Strategy Group. – Joan reported that the MSG view was that part-time ministry is treated on a case by case basis as each one is different to each other. It was agreed that this should be reflected in the Guidelines for Partnership between Congregations and Ministers. It was confirmed that these were the responsibility of the MSG.

pg 3 item 5 – *Post- Bowland financial planning* – terms of reference are a latter item (see below Item 12.)

6. Co-option of EC members (DOC EC34/15)

The Chief Officer reported that two applications had been received. A third individual had asked that his reason for not applying be drawn to the attention of the EC. **Action: The Chief Officer was asked to acknowledge this communication.**

Following discussion of the attributes of the candidates against the requirements that had been circulated it was agreed to co-opt Philip Colfox and Rev Lynne Readett. **Action: the Chief Officer to inform them and confirm acceptance before wider circulation in EC Key Messages.**

Mary-Jean left the meeting at this point and returned at the start of the Ministry Strategy Group discussion.

7. Reports from Strategy Groups

a) Local Leadership Strategy Group (DOC EC35/15) - Noted with the following:

A brief note was received from Louise Rogers on the contribution of the LLSG to the Annual Meetings and details of a planning meeting to be held on 23 May 2015. Concern was expressed at the pace of progress by the group. Arrangements for safeguarding responsibilities were discussed and it was noted that the role of LLSG was to co-ordinate training not to deal with specific allegations which were dealt with by staff. James highlighted the implications of the Care Act 2015 which had come up at his volunteer training but this was not seen as relevant to the GA.

b) Ministry Strategy Group (DOC EC36/15) - Noted with the following:

Joan reported that the Ministry Strategy Group had had a healthy response to their advertisement for a Consultant, had identified three possible candidates and then held interviews with them. A decision has been made to award the contract with stage 1 to be completed by mid-July 2015 within the budget set of £1,250. It was noted that the two colleges were supportive of the above process. MSG were to be congratulated on the progress.

c) Visibility Strategy Group - Verbal Report

James reported that at the Annual Meetings two individuals had expressed interest in joining the VSG. VSG would follow-up and then bring any recommendation back to the EC for approval. Joan noted that there had also been an expression of interest from someone in Aberdeen. It was suggested that it may be better to wait until the Vision Statement work has been finalised before any decisions are made.

James noted that he had wrongly assumed that the proceeds from the sale of posters would be added to the VSG budget which they would then have reinvested in new posters. It had been explained to him that this was dealt with as income for the GA in line with accounting rules and from which the Strategy Groups all receive their funds. Sales income was in fact less than expenditure on printing.

Joan raised the question of a report by VSG on income from the sale of badges produced using the badge making machine purchased by the GA.

d) Youth Strategy Group – no report received

There was general concern that the detailed plan requested had not been produced although a report was made to the Annual Meetings. The Chief Officer noted that he had tried to follow this up and that the EC link would have to be replaced following the departure of Rev Martin Whitell..

It was felt that the Vision discussion would require a review of the basis of a Strategy Group structure as a means of implementation and therefore that any investment of time and energy in getting them functioning now is of questionable value.

Those involved in activities for children and young people were commended for all the work that they were currently doing.

e) 2020 Leadership Team – no report received

The Chief Officer reported that the proposed training course had had to be postponed due to ill health. It was noted that the building issue affecting Derby

will continue until the summer. It is hoped that the “soft” launch will take place in September 2015.

Before Session 2 commenced the Convenor reported on the donations so far reached for the Red Cross Appeal for the Nepal disaster reaching £6,500 and that the EC and the Chief Officer had been congratulated on the speed at which they responded. £41,000 had been raised to date by the Unitarian Clara Barton Fund.

Session 2

8. Managing Volunteers (DOC EC37/15) - Noted with the following:

James presented a report on a “Managing Volunteers” training course he had attended highlighting:

- Although an unknown training company was used, they were incredibly good and could be very useful to use in the Movement,
- There was a lot of time and energy required to manage volunteers.
- Volunteers could be from within the Movement or placements from, for example, colleges
- He went through the do’s and don’ts of volunteering.
- Colleges will pay for travelling expenses for students.
- Used many examples of how volunteers can be looked after.
- Volunteers need to be shown that they are valued eg the use of hand written notes and cards of thanks from senior management

The EC had had a previous discussion with regard to volunteers and it was clear that there needed to be clearly defined roles for all volunteers with the proper care put in place.

After a lengthy discussion was held it was agreed that this required a cultural shift in the way volunteers operate and are managed and that the way forward was to put a well defined structure in place drawing upon some of the ideas from DOC EC37/15.

The Convenor thanked James for his work on this issue and noted that the EC now has a comprehensive document to work with and to add to that material previously gathered.

9. Vision Follow-up

A lengthy discussion took place on the follow-up of the Vision Document.

- The document was very well received at the Annual Meetings and reflects well on the EC as a body.
- Many Districts, congregations and churches are discussing it; however it does not seem that they are yet engaging on a national level as there has been very little feedback.

- Locally there seems little understanding of how to move forward with a planning process.
- The GA President was highlighting the need for Districts and Congregations to respond with feedback to the document in his Presidential visits. He had attended the SUA Vision day which was well structured to encourage participation and the flip charts used will be transcribed and sent to Essex Hall in some detail. It had been well received at the Evesham Asparagus luncheon.
- Welsh Districts appear not to have engaged as yet but Gwynn is attending a meeting in Cardiff and will be taking the document with him for discussion.
- The Chief Officer reported that in the newsletters that he receives from the congregations the comments are all positive, however there were few online responses and he highlighted the need to encourage replies.
- The Convenor has had a conversation with one of the Ministers with regard to promoting comments on Facebook. It was agreed that further articles should be put in the Inquirer (the Convenor), The Unitarian (the Chief Officer), raised in uni-news and in Key Messages and promoted by the EC links to their Districts.
- There is also a question on how to engage those Unitarians not online.
- It is imperative that the message is sent out about the importance of the response/comments being received within a set time frame as this document is going to inform the EC decision making for the next 5 year plan.
- It was noted that the document is being used by congregations to help their development, rather than simply being seen as the basis for a national plan and sending comments to the EC.
- It was noted that all Ministers are in receipt of a copy of the document.

It was agreed that a "Progress Day" on how we can move forward will be arranged with the suggestion that this will take place in September in Bristol with a plan confirmed at that day for presentation at the 2016 Annual Meeting – time, date and venue still to be agreed. **Action: Chief Officer to arrange**

A discussion then took place around the Strategy Groups and the problems they have had in performing at a strategic level. It was agreed that the Movement was expecting the EC to come up with a Strategic Plan for the next five years. It was argued that as a small denomination we may have aspirations, but we should focus on what we are capable of doing. Social Action/Justice does not appear in the current arrangements and this needs to be re-looked at. There had also been an insufficient focus at the EC on the strategic level with a tendency to get involved in detail. The fewer volunteers at national level raised succession issues.

Thinking on a Business Plan needed to be prepared for the July EC meeting for final approval with budgets at the September EC meeting. Some initial work was undertaken (see below Item 23.).

Session 3

10. Management Accounts – 31 March 2015 (DOC EC38/15) – Noted with the following:

The Chief Officer noted that it had been challenging to produce these accounts as the finance system is still in a state of transition. There are no concerns with regard to income and the budget is on target with the big variable being the Annual Meeting. The hotel invoice has been received and looks to be as expected and will be reflected in the figures at the July EC meeting.

There have been two donations of £5,000 each received from Kingswood Trustees (which are not liable for Bowland Trust matching). One is an unrestricted donation to the GA and the other is restricted to Unitarian College Manchester.

The Chief Officer notified the EC of the start date of the new Finance Manager – 27 May 2015.

James reiterated his sadness that the poster money is not returned to the VSG.

11. Millennium Fund Applications:

James declared an interest in two applications – Brighton and York. The Chief Officer presented a schedule of funds available and the effects of possible decisions on the future size of the Fund. A commitment had been given to support Dukinfield and an application was anticipated from the Ministerial Fellowship to fund a retreat for those thinking of entering Ministry.

a) Bridgwater (DOC EC39/15) - this was deferred back to Bridgwater on a procedural issue. **Action: Chief Officer to liaise with Bridgwater.**

b) Brighton (DOC EC40/15) - James left the meeting for this item. The congregation was awarded £650 plus vat for a further survey. It was noted that before sending in a bid for funding, congregations should take note of the criteria set out in the Millennium Fund application information. It should be highlighted that funds are not awarded retrospectively.

c) Simple Gifts (DOC EC41/15) - discussion took place on the two elements of the application. The First, "The Road Ahead" was supported with an award of £5540.

d) York (DOC42/15) – Awarded £2,000. The Chief Officer to liaise with Peter with regard to the acoustic element.

12. Financial Review Group (DOC EC43/15) - the proposed Terms of Reference were accepted as follows:

1. Purpose

The purpose of the Financial Review Group is to:

1a understand the current pattern of activities and the financial implications for income and expenditure underpinning the work of the General Assembly.

1b in particular, explore the implications of the ending of financial support for the General Assembly from the Bowland Trust in September 2015

1c consider the changing landscape for charities, particularly religious organisations which may impact upon finances of the General Assembly

1d to prepare proposals for the financial sustainability of the General Assembly.

2. Membership

Robert Ince, Convenor
Peter Hanley, Honorary Treasurer
Derek McAuley, Chief officer

Support may be obtained from other volunteers and members of staff.

3. Timescale

The Group has been asked to report to the Executive Committee in November 2015.

4. Resources

Expenses will be available from existing budget allocations.

5. Accountability

The Group is accountable to the Executive Committee.

6. Reporting

The Group will report to the Executive Committee regularly on progress.

13. GA Constitutional arrangements and EC Terms of Office

It was confirmed that CIO status remained the way forward for changes to governance. There was therefore a need to re-form the Constitutional Review Group with specific instructions on reviewing this and other pressing issues by

the November EC meeting to prepare for the 2016 and 2017 Annual Meetings. The EC will need to propose a Motion supporting a change in the status to a CIO.

Four people have been identified as possible members for the CRG and the Chief Officer was asked to approach them and if they are agreeable, to return to the July EC meeting with Terms of Reference. **Action: Chief Officer**

Establishing a CIO will need a new constitution and this involves expense for legal advice which will be included in next year's budget.

Immediate issues included for report to the November EC:

- Terms of office of EC members
- Re-co-option
- How long could a former EC member have to wait until could seek re-election?

The question was raised about the EC quorum; the Chief Officer indicated that it was 6 members.

Session 4

14. Annual Meetings

a) Resolutions (DOC EC44/15) - Noted with the following:

The Chief Officer had been in touch with the Unitarian Music Society about the Resolution on fees for musicians and it was agreed that they be asked to prepare recommendations to present to the EC in September 2015.

The Resolution on Dr Hadwen's Trust had featured in several press articles in East Anglia.

b) Climate Change 2015 Resolution Follow-up

There had been little progress on any information pack for congregations. The FOY Society has indicated it would be willing to help with, but not lead, and the Chief Officer had a Unitarian contact within a major environmental charity who had offered to assist. There is a need to have a balanced view on any information pack put together.

It was suggested that the Building Advisory Group could work on making church buildings more "green", this issue is already being tackled by a member in the group.

The Chief Officer suggested that the EC convene a working group to discuss eco-congregations; this group would then have the expertise to put together an information pack. He would follow this up. **Action: Chief Officer**

c) Study Motions Feedback

The Chief Officer reported that there had been a useful debate at the workshop with general support for the ideas put forward.

d) General Feedback

All members reported on their experience:

- The general consensus is that the feedback has been very positive, excellent venue and very good spirit.
- The two services were a bit long.
- Travelling was easier with the venue being easily accessed by both rail and road.
- The Chief Officer's top ten tips at the Newcomer's Reception were greatly appreciated.
- The suggestion was made to colour code the map in the handbook.
- The suggestion was made for the photographer to consult with the former GA photographer if he was agreeable.
- It was felt that it was a buzzing, working conference with very positive feedback from Welsh participants.
- The EC report was well received and thanked for their honesty.
- There should be a plenary agenda item to acknowledge recently deceased Lay persons. It was agreed that this would be logged as information was received at Essex Hall during the year.
- The negatives were: lack of outside space, poor worship atmosphere in halls, price of drinks, concern was raised about where the group photograph was taken, Hotel signs could be better, the situation of the tea/coffee vis a vis the Exhibition.
- As there was no press coverage at this year's GA, we need to look at a volunteer press officer
- The Newcomers Reception could be made more welcoming, Jacky indicated her willingness to lead with this.
- EC thanked Andrew Mason and Essex Hall staff for all the hard work put into delivering a successful GA.

15. Safeguarding Audit Report (DOC EC45/15) – Noted with the following:

- Concern was expressed about the large number of congregations that had not responded.
- The legal responsibility of this issue should again be highlighted to the Movement quoting the Charity Commission requirements.

- The GA President will promote the importance of this issue on his travels through out the year.
- It was agreed that the Chief Officer will liaise with the GA's insurer on the implications of an incident and how this might be disseminated more widely. There is a danger that congregations do not understand the full implication should an incident happen. It was agreed that the EC will send out more information in this regard to congregations.
Action: Chief Officer
- It was agreed that a 10 minute slot highlighting this issue take place at the 2016 GA. **Action: Chief Officer**

Mary-Jean left the meeting at this point

**16. Minutes of the meetings held on 13th February 2015 (DOC EC32/15)
- Part Two**

James Barry proposed the following amendment to replace the first paragraph of draft minute 4 (c):

“James mentioned that VSG were likely to be very disappointed when they heard that the EC had all but rejected the VSG proposal for a series of new less wordy leaflets and that the EC wanted the existing leaflets updated – an approach VSG had rejected. VSG would try and find a volunteer to do this work, but as the artwork was at Essex Hall, James felt they were in a better position to make the change they had already identified. This would be a more straight forward than VSG, the EC and Essex Hall being involved in the re-wording as some leaflets were required for the summer. There was then a wider discussion on the terms of reference of volunteers and our working practices.”

Following discussion he agreed to remove the final sentence of the amendment and that the amendment would replace the first sentence of the paragraph not all of it.

It was confirmed that it was the responsibility of the meeting to agree a minute of the consideration of the issue rather than accept that there were two different views of what took place.

It was agreed by four votes to two to record that the draft minutes had been changed.

The amendment was approved with three votes for, two against and one abstention

The minutes were accepted as a record of the EC meeting held on 13 February 2015 by three votes for, two against and two abstentions.

17. Non-responsive check-out

Closing Devotions: Robert read from Peter Hawkins "The Wise Fool's Guide to Leadership"

Saturday

Opening Devotions: Gwynn had two short readings, the first was a piece written by Diane Bianchi which he read first in the Welsh language and translated into English – "As we meet once more" and then from "Oh Spirit of life and love".

Session 5

18. EC links and other responsibilities/ways of working:

The purpose of the EC Links to Districts was explained to the new EC members; they were primarily a conduit for information from the EC to the Districts and vice versa. It was noted that there were a number of people at the Annual Meetings who did not know about the EC link.. The Chief Officer was asked to produce an article in his "A view from Essex Hall" column in "The Unitarian" on this topic. **Action: Chief Officer**

It was agreed that the Districts would be allocated as below as links were needed now and be revisited at the July EC meeting

Name of Link person:	District:
Robert Ince	Sheffield/Yorkshire
Joan Cook	Scotland/Northern
James Barry	LDPA/East Union
Phillip Colfox	Western Union/Southern
Lynne Readett	Manchester/Merseyside
Gwynn Pritchard	South and South West Wales
Marion Baker	East Cheshire/ East Midlands
Jacky Woodman	North and East Lancashire / Midlands

The links to Strategy Groups will stay as they are at the moment

Name of Link person:	Strategy Group:
James Barry	Visibility Strategy Group
Joan Cook	Ministry Strategy Group
Marion Baker	Local Leadership SG
Phillip Colfox or Lynne Readett	Youth Strategy Group
Marion Baker (acting till September meeting with Management Committee)	Nightingale Centre
Phillip Colfox	2020 Leadership Group
Peter Hanley	Stipend Review Commission
Peter Hanley, Joan Cook	Sustentation Fund

Joan Cook	EC Safeguarding
Marion Baker	UCM Committee

The Chief Officer is in consultation with members of the Sustentation Fund, with Joan indicating that she would like to stand down from the Fund.

19. Chief Officer's Report (DOC EC46/15) - Noted with the following:

The Chief Officer highlighted auto-enrolment and reported that the GA commencement date was 1 November 2016.

20. President's Report (DOC EC47/15) - Noted with the following:

- Has co-ordinated with the Chief Officer with regard to events that he cannot attend including the funeral of the Kate Taylor
- Had managed to engage the services of past President, Joyce Ashworth to represent the office of the President and offer the condolences of the GA at the funeral of the Ruth Cann.
- Sent the Chief Officer and James information on Google for which James thanked him
- Has had unfortunately to decline an invitation from the NSCPI due to other commitments.
- Marion thanked the President for the photographs in his report.

A conversation took place with regard to copyright and an incident at Glasgow – the President had put a link to relevant information on the UK Unitarian Facebook page.

21. Nightingale Centre Minutes (DOC EC48/15) - Noted with the following:

- The Nightingale Centre has received the letter with regard to auto enrolment and the Centre manager has all the background information needed.
- The living wage is paid at the Centre, with the Centre about to register as a living wage employer committed to annual upgrades.
- About to complete the Charity Return – there are various new questions on coverage of GA policies. **Action: Mike Tracey , Andrew Mason and the Chief Officer to liaise.**
- It was agreed that the delayed meeting between the EC and the Nightingale Centre Management will take place on Friday 18 September 2015 at 2pm at the Centre during the EC meeting. **Marion to liaise with the Centre management.** The agenda will include the relationship between the EC as Trustees and the Management Committee.
- The EC agreed in principle that the Centre may invest an amount of £50,000 when the time is right.
- The Centre is in consultation with the Bowland Trust.

22. AOB

The Convenor raised the subject of the profiles of the EC which appear on the GA website and suggested that they should include a photograph and a short (50 words) bio of each member.

23. Arrangements for President and Vice-President 2016 – 17

The Chief Officer will be writing to the Districts and congregations for nominations for the positions of GA President and Vice-President 2016-17 with a deadline of the end of October 2015, with nominations to be considered at the November EC meeting.

The same recruitment problems are expected with a view that people are not prepared to serve two years, therefore the role of the Vice-President may de facto disappear. It would be emphasised that taking worship is not a requirement of the role.

24. Vision Follow-up

Peter presented the outcome of initial thinking based on the discussion the previous day and work overnight. This showed the linkages and dependencies between the various activities and would help frame the planning processes. Further work was, of course, required. It was agreed that Peter would circulate to EC. **Action: Peter Hanley**

Session 6

11.00 – 12.00

Mary-Jean was not present at this session

25. Arrangements for future meetings in 2015

Discussion took place on creating the time to properly address the follow-up to the Vision Document. It would not be possible to meet outside the programmed meetings. Risk would also be a key issue on the agenda and Peter had agreed to take over "lead" role from Robert. It was agreed to devote the Saturday to the Vision work with other matters to be dealt with on the Friday, and to extend the finish time for the meeting from 12.00noon to 2.00pm.

25. Key Messages

Topics agreed.

26. Confidential Items

a) Staff Remuneration

Chief Officer left the meeting

Staff were awarded a salary increase of 1.75% from 1 July 2015.

27. Non-responsive check out

Closing Devotions: Marion Baker

