

General Assembly of Unitarian
& Free Christian Churches

Approved Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting
Friday 17th November 2017

Essex Hall, London

Present: Marion Baker (Convenor), Philip Colfox, Peter Hanley (Honorary Treasurer), Matthew Smith, Sheena McKinnon, Lynne Readett and Rob Whiteman

In Attendance: Derek McAuley (Chief Officer), and Mary-Jean Hennis (Minute taker). Simon Bland (MCSO) at 12 noon and Rev Andy Pakula and Aleks Zglinska at 2.00pm

Session 1

Opening Devotions: Peter invited the EC to listen to the sound of a bell ringing and to go with the simplicity of one tiny initiating action creating so much radiating energy. He then read two short pieces from Alexis de Toqueville and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

1. Apologies

Rev Charles VanDenBroeder (President) and Christina Smith

2. Minutes of the meetings held on 25th & 26th September 2017 (DOC EC106/17) the Minutes of the meeting held on the 25th and 26th September 2017 were signed as a true record.

3. Matters arising for noting or to include in Agenda for later discussion:
Pg 3 – item 6 (b) Organisational Effectiveness - *The Risk Register should be used to prioritise actions to address areas of weakness.* – It was agreed that how this might be done would be explored at a future EC meeting.

Pg 6 item 15 – Budget 2017 -2018 *It was suggested that the matter of legacies should be raised by the Hon Treasurer at the 2018 Annual Meeting –*
Action: Hon Treasurer. – EC to consider this issue at the January EC meeting.

Pg 8 item 24 – ICUU Nominations - The nominations submitted by the EC have been accepted by the Nomination Committee of the ICUU which included Rev Celia Midgely as a member of the Nominations Committee and the Chief Officer Vice-President.

4. EC Action List (DOC EC107/17) - updated

5. Next Steps – TED Report (DOC EC108/17) – noted with the following:
Lynne reported on the position at Unitarian College Manchester and that a special meeting of governors proposed for 29 November 2017 had been

cancelled to enable interested parties to make comments after receiving a detailed statement. They will have a three month period to digest this information before the committee move forward with a firm proposal.

The impact of the UCM decision on the Interview Panel and options for the 2018 student intake was discussed. Support was offered to the Panel in their decisions relating to the new pilot and places at HMCO. **Action – Chief Officer to convey this to the Interview Panel – with a lengthier discussion to be had at the January EC meeting.**

- MSG Notes 20/9/2017 (**DOC EC109/17**) - **noted with the following:**
It was agreed to ensure MSG was given advance notice of EC decisions on Ministry matters before announcements to the wider Movement.

6. Next Steps – Organisation Effectiveness (DOC EC110/17) – noted with the following:

A paper was presented by Philip Colfox. It was noted that there is a link between the papers submitted by Philip and the Chief Officer's paper on Communication Strategy which drew upon the "Vision: Next Steps" and remained the priorities for the EC. Greater clarity on the role of the General Assembly as an institution was suggested

It was agreed that further work was required to take these ideas forward and that two members agreed to consider and bring a paper to the January 2018 EC – **Action Peter & Philip.**

7. Next Steps – Communication Strategy (DOC EC111/17) - noted with the following:

A strategy paper was presented by the Chief Officer. It was noted that other like minded organisations could be competitors and also collaborators at the same time. Matthew suggested that strength would come from greater coherence which would require internal dialogue involving the different strands with the Movement and also discussion of how this affected our interface with society, Questions were raised of how do we measure our own success which was difficult with communications activity at a national level.

Discussion took place on the staff capacity required to deliver the strategy which required high level skills as well as operational delivery. The resignation of the IT/Communications Officer would allow a focus on web content and social media and engagement with volunteer resources as IT support was now out-sourced. The Chief Officer had produced a copy of a draft job description it was agreed that he proceed to recruit – **Action – Chief Officer to recruit to a post of Communications Officer.**

The need for high level advice and support was highlighted; particularly in light of some of the proposals in the Identity Project. It was clear that there was not support for a full-scale top-down marketing initiative as had been suggested rather support needed to be built from the bottom-up. It was agreed that a proposal be prepared for the next meeting. **–Action – Chief Officer**

There was a lengthy discussion on the “Next Steps” process and what flexibly existed on implementation. The Chief Officer and Convenor explained that after the Next Step Vision was presented at the 2017 Annual Meetings and accepted, it gave the EC the authority to move forward in a certain direction but with freedom to adjust to respond to changing needs and conditions.

Action – Chief Officer to bring Next Steps Progress Report to January EC meeting

- VSG and other Groups (DOC EC112/17) - noted

8. Penal Affairs Panel (DOC EC113/17) – response was noted

EC agreed to the proposals put to them by the Penal Affairs Panel; social responsibility survey, expand publications, annual presentation, moving to four meetings and changing name to “Penal and Social Affairs Panel” **Action – Chief Officer to inform the Penal Affairs Panel of the EC decision.**

Session 2

9. Nominations for President/ Vice-President (DOC EC114/17)

It was agreed that Joan Cook be nominated as President for 2018/19 and The Rev Celia Cartwright as Vice-President 2018/19 followed by President 2019/20 **Action – Chief Officer to inform them and proposers.**

10. Nominations for Honorary Membership of the General Assembly (DOC EC115/17 and DOC EC116/17):

It was agreed that The Rev Dr Ann Peart and Alan Ruston be nominated. **Action Chief Officer to inform them and proposers.**

11. Co-option of EC Member (DOC EC117/17):

It was agreed to co-opt Hilda Dumpleton as a member of the EC until April 2019 - **Action Chief Officer to contact Hilda.**

12. Update from Ministry and Congregational Support Officer (MCSO) – Simon Bland joined the meeting

Simon gave a update on his first year in the position. He has received a warm and accepting welcome within the Movement and noted the following:

- Recognises that the post can be a force for change affecting both ministry and congregational support.
- The TED project had been taking up much of his time and once completed he could focus more on congregational support.
- Untapped well of activity and need within the congregations.
- Home working has worked well as his location to the A1 has been very beneficial.
- Only a minority of congregations can support a full-time minister; some were growing, others were unfortunately “constrained by comfort”.
- That peer pressure is always going to “trump” advice from Essex Hall.

- Has dealt with a number of sensitive and confidential matters which were stressful.
- Hopes that this first year has endorsed the decision to create the position.

Areas still to explore:

- TED – General Assembly Roll and different models of ministry
- “Excepted” Status likely to end in 2021 therefore greater clarity on governance will be required. Congregations will however need to be informed of the need to change with a positive message.
- CIO offers opportunities for change.
- Lay Leadership needs to be considered.

Simon updated members on the successful Ministry Inquiry Day. TED appeared to appeal to potential students however there is a challenging timescale ahead he would be attending an Apprenticeship Trailblazer meeting to assess the feedback from the Institute of Apprenticeship on its suitability to be a faith based apprenticeship. **Simon agreed to liaise with Peter on the apprenticeship scheme.**

Asked by the Hon Treasurer if he had three wishes, what would they be:

1. Ensure that resources are in a place where they can be used.
2. Ensure that we are more visible.
3. More time, to get a sense of a programme of activity.

The Chief Officer thanked Simon for his update and made the EC aware of the stressful nature of the staff roles, such as the MCSO and that support mechanisms should be included in annual reviews. **Action – Chief Officer to add this item to the Risk Register.**

Session 3

13. Next Steps – Growth & 2020 – Andy Pakula and Aleks Zglinska joined the meeting.

The Convenor welcomed Andy and Aleks to the meeting. Andy used the metaphor of the NHS to highlight the problems he saw that face the EC in promoting growth in the Movement. He likened the EC to an NHS commissioning body in that they have the funds to address ill-health but needed clinical expertise on how it is spent.

He presented a paper on “Growth of the GAUFCC and Congregations” outlining the congregational and systematic challenges to growth and how the centre could take specific actions. The EC needed to access expert support.

The Convenor thanked Andy and Aleks for attending the meeting.

Growth Paper (DOC EC118/17) - noted with the following:

A paper was received from Matthew and Peter as requested at the previous meeting. This complemented the paper from 2020 but with a particular focus on how to change culture. This would include training, consultancy and Input.

There was a clear view that one off interventions will not work and there needs to be systemic change. As well as transferring financial assets to the Growth programme, knowledge assets needed to be transferred as well. It was suggested that there needed to be a coalition of change in the Movement.

Simon referred to the 4 Ps for growth:

- Purpose - unless there is a vision for growth it will not engage people. This is the “pivot point” which leads to a commitment to change
- People – there needed to be a conscious decision for change
- Pounds – resources and energy
- Perception.- changing mind-sets

It was noted that congregations that are growing have made a conscious decision to grow,

Action – Matthew, Peter and Aleks to liaise and bring a paper o the January EC meeting. Simon to take completed paper to the Assessment Group as it would be helpful in exploring roles.

Matthew and Peter thanked the EC for a constructive discussion, concentrating on what is being done and on best practice.

14. Annual Meetings – 3 day meeting (DOC EC119/17) - noted with the following:

The proposed Motion, including for Constitutional change, which had been considered by the Steering Group and Annual Meetings Panel, was approved.

Notes 21/ 9 /2017 (DOC EC120/17)- Noted with the following:

- The GA President had asked for support with chairing the Business Sessions and Dot Hewardine has offered to assist
- There has been progress on the opening ceremony which would be undertaken by young adults presenting the experience of moving from Juniors through the national youth programme to BUYAN.
- Social evening – David Kent will be presenting “David & Ruby’s little big show”.
- A video has been produced to promote the 2018 GA which will be circulated in late November.

15. Management Accounts to 30 September 2017 (DOC EC121/17) – noted with the following:

It was agreed £87,000 would be drawn down from the Bowland Trust for 2016/17, which was less than budgeted.

A legacy of £35,000 has been received in 2017/18.

The EC thanked David Joseph, Finance Manager for his work on the accounts.

16. Nightingale Centre notes 26/10/2017 (DOC EC122/17) – noted with the following:

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It was reported that the Management Committee had received a letter from Rev David Shaw inviting two of their members to become Trustees of the Old Chapel, Great Hucklow as the Congregation and Trustees had decided to merge and that services will cease in the Chapel on the 12 December 2017.

It was noted that Sheffield District Association was the Custodial Trustee not the British and Foreign Unitarian Association Incorporated. It was thought that it would be anomalous for a committee of one set of Trustees to appoint two Trustees of another separate Trustee body and suggested observer status would be more appropriate. **Action – Chief Officer to produce a letter of explanation for the Convenor to send to the Rev Shaw.**

17. Sustentation Fund notes 10/10/2017 (DOC EC12317) – noted with the following:

The Resolution to transfer the assets of the Sustentation Fund to the General Assembly was noted. The reference to independent examination (Pg 1 item 5) was noted. **Chief Officer to liaise with the retiring Treasurer with regard to an inspection of the closing accounts.**

A process for awarding grants in 2018 would be brought to the January EC meeting. **Action: Chief Officer.**

The Trustees past and present of the Sustentation Fund were thanked for their service.

18. Grant Form (DOC EC124/17) – noted with the following:

EC approved the principles of a new Grant Form and agreed to turn the paper into an organisational template for use when congregations or other bodies are asked to apply for grants. **Action – Andrew to be approached to help with the template.**

Action – Rob to formulate a template for individuals to apply for grants with current forms to be provided by the Chief Officer.

Session 4

19. Presidents Report (DOC EC125/17) - noted

20. Chief Officer Report (DOC EC126/17) - noted with the following:

An updated letter has been received from the Rev Alex Bradley with regard to arrangements for Rev Dr Eniko Ferenzi who will be utilising the Gabor Kereki Fund in 2018 – **Action – Chief Officer to liaise with Rev Bradley with regard to reimbursement of expenses.**

Welsh Districts were interested in holding a Safeguarding training day in 2018.

He was revising the presentation he had given to the Australia and New Zealand Unitarian Universalist Association Biennial Meeting in Adelaide 20-22 October 2017 and would circulate.

21. EC Link Reports (DOC EC127/17) - noted.

22. Youth Report (DOC EC128/17)- noted with the following:

The report from Lorna Barry, Chair of the Youth Panel fed back on the strategy event and explored many key issues. The recognition of the value of day events for districts was welcomed.

EC authorised the Chief Officer to proceed with the recruitment to the position of Youth Co-ordinator.

23. Key Messages

To be distributed separately

24. A.O.B.

Lancashire Collaborative Ministry

CIO Status had been confirmed. The EC agreed to the appointment of Dot Hewardine as Trustee and Chairperson **Action – Chief Officer to inform LCC.**

25. Dates of Future Meetings in 2018:

Jan - 19th - 9.00 am – 5.30 – Essex Hall – London

May – 18th - 9.00 am – 5.30 & 19th – 9.00 am – 12 noon Essex Hall London

July – 20th - 9.00 am – 5.30 – Essex Hall – London

September – 24th - 9.00 am – 5.30 & 25th – 9.00 am – 12 noon – The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow – arriving Sunday evening for dinner on 23rd and informal session

November – 16th - 9.00 am – 5.30 – Essex Hall – London

26. Non responsive check-out

Closing Devotions – Matthew offered a prayer to close the meeting