

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

**Approved Minutes of Executive Committee
Friday 17th & Saturday 18th July 2015**

Present: Robert Ince (Convenor), Marion Baker, James Barry, Philip Colfox, Joan Cook, Peter Hanley (Honorary Treasurer), Gwynn Pritchard, Jacky Woodman plus Lynne Readett (by Skype call 10.00-11.00am on 17 July 2015)

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

Friday

Session 1

Opening Devotions: James read from a series of quotes:

My higher power – Michael Franti

Be gentle with yourself – UCCWC.pbworks.oc

One is wise to cultivate the tree – Henry David Thoreau

Unitarian Universalists have said for centuries ... – Rev Barbara Merritt

We are of different opinions... - Ralph Waldo Emerson

1. Apologies and Welcome of new EC members

Apologies were received from Lynne Readett. Philip was welcomed to his first EC meeting.

2. Minutes of the meetings held on 15th & 16th May 2015 - (DOC EC50/15)

Page 7 item 11 - Millennium Fund applications: b) Brighton was amended to £780. The Minutes were signed as an accurate record of the EC meeting.

3. Matters arising for noting or to include in Agenda for later discussion:
none

4. EC Action List – (DOC EC51/15)- noted with the following:

EC 14/15 November 2014

Pg 3 item 7 – Asset Register progressed – Andrew Mason has this task almost completed.

Pg 6 item 8 Youth Strategy Group – three issues which have not progressed.

EC 13/14 February 2015

Pg 2 item 4 – MSG - Curriculum – Jacky had spoken with Daniel Costley. MSG were concentrating on the competencies, which was an assessment tool, and not the development of a curriculum which all recognised was a major task.

EC 15/16 May 2015

Pg 3 item 5 – (Pg 2 item 4) - MSG – part-time ministry to be reflected in the Guidelines – Joan reported that MSG were amenable to the idea of being as definite about part-time ministry as they were about full-time ministry. The Director of Ministry will follow-up.

Pg 4 item 7 – VSG to follow up and bring any recommendations for membership to EC – James reported that there has been no movement on this item. Joan reported that the Aberdeen volunteer remained interested.

Pg 6 item 9 – Vision follow-up – progress day – Having secured a venue in Bristol on 23 October it was no longer available and the event would be moved to November. – **Action: Chief Officer to pursue new venue and date as a matter of urgency (see later)**

Pg 10 item 14 a) – Fees for musicians – the Unitarian Music Society had agreed to develop recommendations but could not meet the September EC meeting and it was agreed for November EC.

Pg 10 item 14 b) – Climate Change – it was understood that the proposer is not taking any action. There may be another congregation bringing a Climate Change Motion to the 2016 GA. The Steering Group is likely to discuss the procedural motion process at its meeting in January 2016.

Pg 13 item 21 – Nightingale Centre – Charity Commission return – Chief Officer to follow-up.

Pg 14 item 22 – Bios of EC members – received. **Action: to be edited by the Chief Officer.**

5. Reports from Strategy Groups

a) Local Leadership Strategy Group - (DOC EC52/15) - noted with the following:

Marion reported that she had attended the meeting with Louise Rogers and Margaret Robinson which had resulted in the paper. The LLSG is taking note of the Vision Document when planning, but the proposed work needs to be prioritised and tasks allocated. The plan is very ambitious for one year, but things are now moving forward. At the moment there are only two members on the LLSG, although the action groups are populated and are working well.

The need to ensure co-ordination with other groups was stressed. Peter highlighted his concerns about health and safety and risk in congregations.

b) Ministry Strategy Group - (DOC EC53/15) – noted with the following:

Joan reported that 12 people had attended the “Ministry in the Making” event. A paper by Richard Gaines had been received at the subsequent MSG meeting on the “Reception and Welcome of New Ministers” and would be presented to the next EC meeting.

Joan presented the summary of the research findings from stage 1 of the competencies work and a recommendation from the MSG to proceed to stage 2 which required EC to release funding. Following discussion EC approved the move to the second stage and the release of a further £1,500. **Action: Chief Officer to inform MSG of approval of EC and release of funds.**

It was suggested that the second stage report take the form of a presentation by the Consultant to the EC with a member of the MSG in attendance to give MSG’s recommendations.

The Competency document has been accepted very positively. Jacky reported in more detail on the discussions with Daniel Costley with regard to the curriculum and on the need for engagement with the current providers. It was stressed that no decisions had been made.

EC approved the recommendations of the MSG to admit Kate Dean on to the Roll with probationary status on completion of the academic requirements of her training – which will be after September 2015.

EC approved the recommendations of the MSG to admit Phil Waldron on to the Roll with probationary status on completion of the academic requirements of his training – which will be on 22 July 2015 and should be included in uni-news.

EC approved the recommendations of the MSG to admit Jim Corrigan and Helen Mills to the Roll of Ministers with full status.

c) Visibility Strategy Group - a verbal report was given by James –

There was very little to report as the VSG were waiting for clarity from the Vision Document. James noted that a letter written to the 2020 Leadership Group after a meeting held by the VSG on 3 April has still not been responded to which was disappointing. **Action: James was asked to follow-up with 2020 Leadership Group.**

It was noted that James had sent an email update with regard to the use of the badge making machine to the EC, however, had not provided the requested accounts as agreed at the September 2014 EC Meeting. James indicated that he had not the time to do these but that he had sold 240 badges at the annual meetings plus another 150 and he simply charged the cost per

item as agreed by VSG. If this was a requirement he would undertake to bring the badge making machine and equipment back to Essex Hall. It was

suggested that a simple year end summary and declaration of interest would suffice next year along the lines of the verbal summary given above in respect of year to date.

The success of the scheme was welcomed and James was thanked for his volunteer work. It was agreed that there would be no requirement for James to provide accounts of his personal expenditure on the badges as this activity was not included in the GA Accounts.

d) Youth Strategy Group - no report received

e) 2020 Leadership Team - (DOC EC54/15) – noted with the following:

It was noted that steps had been taken to ensure that reports would be received by the EC on a more frequent basis. The positive work at Derby with the support of the East Midlands Unitarians was welcomed.

6. Vision Follow-up paper from Lynne Readett - (DOC EC55/15) – noted with the following (10.00 – 11.00am)

Lynne joined the meeting via Skype and a lengthy discussion was held with regard to responses to the Vision Document. The general consensus from feedback received was that the document has been very useful. However there is some cynicism as to whether anything will happen. There seemed to be engagement at congregational level but not with districts and some congregations were using the Vision document to think about their own development. It was noted that there was much stronger engagement at congregational levels in Wales although ironically it is the congregations that are doing well that are engaging the most. It was felt that the document did not as yet set out a Vision ie a visual statement that all could understand and remember. One view was that there was too much information for small congregations to absorb.

There is a problem getting printed versions to people who have no electronic access, however, Essex Hall had provided hard copies when requested.

It was agreed that EC needed to evolve a process to move forward recognising that it will take time for all the comments to come in and that all the feedback would not be received by the September EC meeting. Regular updates on progress should be produced.

There was a need for a plan with clear targets. Delivery would require engagement with volunteers. A few quick wins would be important in raising confidence and EC should guard against being too directive and therefore be prepared to have a dialogue as to what is possible.

It was agreed that those who attended the Vision Day in 2014 should be updated on progress and asked for views in preparation for the follow-up event. **Action: Chief Officer**

An A5 leaflet was also suggested to encourage those who would not read the full document.

The meeting returned to further discussion on the Vision in Sessions 5 and 6.

Session 2

7. Risk Register – (DOC EC56/15) – noted with the following:

The Chief Officer presented an updated Risk register. Peter Hanley, as new EC risk lead, introduced the concept of risk using a “Lighthouse Model” stating that risk information did not tell you all you needed to know. The items in the risk register were reviewed individually. Item 8 relating to the Nightingale Centre was removed and other items re-scored. **Action: Chief Officer**

It was recognised that safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults remained the highest risk area facing the Unitarian Movement. The response of some congregations to the safeguarding audit had been disappointing and it was agreed that the audit would be repeated in 2016. **Action: Chief Officer**

EC links would be highlighting with their Districts the implications of not following recommended policies. **Action: EC members**

Chief Officer would follow-up David Edwards’ article. **Action: Chief Officer**

The risk assessment revealed that, despite the success in recent years in increasing the number of new ministers, that there were a growing number of unfilled vacancies which combined with current ministers planning to retire meant that the numbers in training were not adequate to fill these posts. The Executive Committee also recognised that the falling congregational membership, as revealed by the quota and the recent survey, was likely to lead to unsustainable congregations and overall greater Denominational weakness. Both scores were increased to reflect the identified risks which are now being used to focus attention on what can be done to address the underlying issues.

Philip circulated a paper on risk and opportunities.

Session 3

8. Volunteering - (DOC EC57/15) – noted with the following:

A response to the consultation from East Midlands District was received along with feedback on the workshop held at the Annual Meetings. It was suggested

that an advert for volunteers be placed in The Inquirer and that the Vision Follow-up event may highlight potential volunteers.

District Associations would be reminded by their EC link member that a response to the letter seeking views on a proposed Nominating/Volunteering group would still be welcomed by the Executive Committee, who would only take the plan forward if there was support. In the meantime the request for suggestions for the posts of GA President and GA Vice President for 2016/2017 required consideration across the Movement. **Action: EC Links.**

9. Constitutional Review Group – (DOC EC58/15)

The following terms of reference and membership were agreed:

Purpose

The purpose of the Constitutional Review group is to:

a. General Assembly Constitution

To review the current General Assembly Constitution (April 2014) and bring forward recommendations for changes to the Executive Committee in November 2015 (who can present such a motion for consideration at the Annual Meetings by 31 December 2015) on the following matters:

1. Definition of “terms of office” of EC members
2. Re-co-option
3. How long should a former EC member wait until seeking re-election
4. Removal of redundant clauses eg transitional arrangements
5. Any other issues identified by the group or the Executive Committee

b Charitable Incorporated Organisation Status

To bring forward a motion having reviewed the issues relating to CIO on a way forward to the Executive Committee in January 2016 (who can present such a motion for consideration at the Annual Meetings by 3 February 2016). Subject to any decision of the Annual Meetings to take forward changes to constitutional arrangements to enable CIO status for consideration at the Annual Meetings in 2017.

Membership

The group shall comprise four members appointed by the Executive Committee with the Chief Officer in attendance. It shall be chaired one of the members (Michael Allured (Golders Green, London) John Bates (New Unity, London), Ann Sinclair (Edinburgh) and Philip White (Kingswood) were appointed).

Person Specification

Members should be sought on the following basis:

- Experience of governance in the Unitarian Movement locally and nationally
- Knowledge of governance, particularly CIO status
- Networking and communications skills

Timescales

The Group shall meet as required. Timetable is set out in purpose.

Resources

A budget for the work of the group and any legal advice required will be agreed by the Executive Committee for the year 2015/2016 and subsequent years as part of the annual budgetary process.

Accountability

The group is accountable to the Executive Committee

Reporting

The group shall report to the Executive Committee regularly on its work

Arrangements

To be determined by the Group.

10. Management Accounts to 30 June 2015 – (DOC EC59/15) – noted with the following:

Several issues were highlighted. The Annual Meetings were currently showing a deficit, however, several transfers are still to be done so a small surplus was anticipated. There is still outstanding quota payment to be received and would be followed-up.

A note of caution with the regard to the Summer School was expressed as only 50 people had signed up and the budget was based on 60. An estimate for CIO costs would not be finalised after the 2016 GA. If more funds are required by the MSG to take forward the ministry training work EC will need to know before the September EC meeting – **Action: Joan to clarify with Daniel Costley.**

11. Millennium Fund Bids

- a) **Bridgwater - (DOC EC60/15)** – awarded £1,000 for installation of sound amplification system
- b) **Ministerial Fellowship – (DOC EC61/15)** – awarded £2,500 for ministerial retreat

Action: The Chief Officer to convey decisions to Bridgwater and the Ministerial Fellowship.

12. Joint Unitarian Investment Panel 29 June 2015 – (DOC EC62/15) – noted with the following:

Peter reported his concerns that as Newton's are managing the funds on an advisory rather than a discretionary basis this placed significant responsibility on the Executive Committee. It was agreed that the implications should be considered by the Financial Review Group.

Session 4

13. Annual Meetings Panel 11 June 2015 – (DOC EC63/15) – noted with the following:

The Chief Officer reported that arrangements were well advanced for 2016. It was agreed that Gwynn Pritchard be appointed as a member of the Annual Meetings Panel, The Chief Officer and Andrew Mason will be visiting two sites for potential venues for the 2017 Annual Meetings in late August.

14. Nightingale Centre Minutes 4 May 2015 – (DOC EC64/15) – noted with the following:

Marion reported that the finances for the end of June were in profit with £20,000 up on budgeted income. Although the Centre had lost a major educational customer, it had not had a major impact on income as other bookings have been more than anticipated. There is a shortfall on staffing numbers, but the staff are all pulling together and are really committed.

The Bowland Trust have asked the Centre for an indication of capital improvements they would make if they released the requested funds that the Trust is holding for them. Extending the dining room was the top priority.

A request was made that for the September EC meeting that the Nightingale Centre finance papers be included with the paperwork sent out with the EC papers. **Action: Marion to ask Colin Partington to ensure that the Chief Officer receives the finance papers with the Minutes.**

15. President's Report – (DOC EC65/15) - noted with the following:

The President reported that his general impression is an increasing awareness of in-built problems such as appointing a secretary or a treasurer. He would highlight the importance of rotation of officers and he has been mentioning both the Vision and Safeguarding Documents during his visits. There is a certain amount of pessimism but more positivity. He will be preparing a letter of helpful observations for the incoming President.

16. Chief Officer's Report – (DOC EC66/15) – noted with the following:

EC formally agreed to support the nomination of the Rev Celia Midgley as a member of the Steering Group to the Annual Meetings. The Rev Dr Ann Peart was thanked for serving.

The Assisted Dying Bill is about to go through the House of Commons and the Assisted Dying consultation paper had been sent by the Chief Officer to Bob Marris MP. There would be further opportunities to promote the view of the

General Assembly. **Action: The Convenor to produce a short note to be sent to MP's in the Autumn.**

17. NSPCI Synod Greetings – (DOC EC67/15) – Noted with the following:

The Formal Greetings were received with thanks. The historic and ongoing relationship with the NSPCI was welcomed and recognised as of mutual benefit and engagement should be encouraged. **Action: The Chief Officer to extend an invitation to attend the 2016 GA and will reply to the letter sent to the GA President.**

18. Arrangements for Future Meetings in 2015/16

January 2016	- 11th & 12th - London
February 2016	- 12th & 13th - London
May 2016	- 13th & 14th - London
July 2016	- 14th & 15th - London

19. Key Messages to be distributed separately.

20. Confidential Items

21. Non-responsive check-out

Closing Devotions: Jacky - Making The Right Mistakes: Error Management And The Evolution Of Errors by Dominic Johnson and Daniel Blumstein

Saturday

Opening Devotions: Robert read from John O'Donoghue – Eternal Echo's – Purity of Heart.

Sessions 5 and 6

22. Vision

The following papers were presented:

- a) Comments Summary – (DOC EC68/15) – noted
- b) Vision Planning Facilitation Session Report from Peter Hanley – noted
- c) Growth Strategy – paper from Philip Colfox - (DOC EC69/15) – noted
- d) Strategy Groups – some initial thoughts – (DOC EC70/15) – noted and consideration postponed until next meeting

A letter from Rev Peter Roberts and views from the Ministry Strategy Group were also circulated.

Considerable discussion took place on next steps. Many questions were raised including; identity (“who are we?”), are we addressing the specific concerns of each congregation, leadership and funding, what is not being addressed (“black holes”) and are we talking enough at grass roots,

The following timeline was agreed:

- For September EC meeting – preparation of background paper on key issues to include, demographics, quota numbers, Ministry shortfall, congregations who have closed and finances, Also positives were needed. **Action: Jacky.**
- November EC meeting to discuss the objectives.
- Vision Day to be held between the November and January EC meetings [Confirmed as 21 November 2015]
- January & February EC meeting to action plan and prepare for Annual Meetings
- Annual Meetings in April – Convenor to present proposals to plenary and to try and ensure focus at EC Q&A.

It was agreed that the objectives for the Vision Follow-up Day would be:

- Making Change Happen
- Volunteers – clearly identify who is there and what they committed to doing
- Energy
- Hearts & minds
- Quick wins
- Rolling plans
- Innovation

We would need sessions on who we are and what we need to do leading to recommendations for action.

This would be a much bigger event than previously thought (100-200 attendees) and therefore a larger venue was required. Younger and newer Unitarians would be encouraged to attend as their input was invaluable. Getting non-Unitarians but sympathetic to our cause was also suggested. It was essential to get District involvement. Provision of bursaries to cover travel costs would be explored.

Showcasing good practice was proposed eg Derby 2020, Ministry in the Making.

It was agreed that the format of the Vison day would be “thematic” with small group work. EC would develop a process to enable volunteers with ideas and recommendations to take them forward in principle without waiting for the next

EC meeting in January 2016. This would recognise potential risks and legal requirements and not be “core” activities.

It should be seen that the EC is committed to “making change happen” and giving permission to others to act and it was agreed that a Motion would be put forward from the EC to the 2016 GA approving the Plan and the principles of EC leadership and supporting wide involvement in its development and implementation..

It was agreed to seek to broadcast the final session live via UKUnitarianTV. It was also agreed that a short promotional film about “Vision For the Future” should be produced by UKUnitarian TV for screening at the 2016 Annual Meetings. It was noted that Gwynn has volunteered to work with UKUnitarianTV in an advisory but not an operational capacity.

Discussion took place on the role of the facilitator, who was seen as essential given the number of attendees and would be independent of the EC, and whether or not more than one would be required.

The importance of creating conversations beforehand was recognised and of getting new people involved. It was suggested that Chapels and Districts be invited to suggest the names of their newest members and this was supported.

The President suggested a theme for the day on developing a sense of personal and group identity. This would be of interest to new potential members and activists.

Others suggested that members of the EC could lead individual break out groups on the day. It was also agreed that the EC should find a mechanism to approve on the day low risk, high reward actions to be taken forward immediately in order to harness enthusiasm, building it up and transferring it into action.

It was suggested by several that perhaps we would meet quietly for a short period to agree these actions and make an announcement before the end of the day. One suggestion repeatedly made was taken on board which is to put take the name of each person making suggestions so that they could be given permission to act whilst their enthusiasm was at its highest.

It was suggested that the images produced on the first Vision Day should be reproduced as posters and displayed at the event. The logo on the front of the Vision document should also be used to brand the event and subsequent work.

Action: It was agreed that the Chief Officer would produce a separate Key Message drawing on the discussion.

23. Non-responsive check out - none

Closing Devotions: Philip – read an excerpt from the film “The Secret” a self help film – “What you think, you become”