

General Assembly of Unitarian  
& Free Christian Churches

Approved Minutes of Executive Committee  
Friday 13 September 2013

Essex Hall, London

**Present:** Rev Martin Whitell (Convenor), Joan Cook, Louise Rogers, James Barry (until 3.30 pm), Rev John Clifford, Alison Thursfield, Robert Ince, Jacky Woodman

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

**Friday**

**Session 1**

*Opening Devotions: Martin read from two pieces –*

- 1) *From the poet –William Stafford – “It could happen any time.....”*
- 2) *A prayer for a meeting – “Echo’s” – Dick Boder*

**1. Apologies:** James Barry (from 3.30pm)

**2. Minutes of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> July 2013 (Document EC69/13)**

With amendments to item 8b) where the title “Treasurer” was altered to read “Robert”, that Louise had not “arranged a meeting” (item 4 a), a sentence on further research on the position of Treasurer (item 6) and that “and agreed” be added to item 12; the Minutes were signed as a true record of the meeting held on the 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> July 2013

**3. Matters arising for noting or to include in Agenda for later**

**Discussion:**

- Pg 2 – (pg 5 – item 10) the Convenor confirmed that arrangements were still progressing with the UU Partnership Council and they intended to send participants to the 2014 Annual Meetings. It was agreed to have an EC sponsored workshop on Partnerships at the Meetings.
- Pg 2 – (pg 3 – item 5) the alteration on 2020 website still had not been made and “Board” was still appearing on the FAQ page. The website also stated that the 2020 Congregational Development Team is the final authority on funding; this is incorrect as the final authority lies with the EC. There is also a question mark over non-Unitarian Ministers being involved. **Action: The Convenor to speak to Andy Pakula.**

- Pg 2 – item 4a – Reports of Strategy Groups –LLSG – Louise had had difficulty in contacting Margaret Robinson but had finally done so.
- Pg 2 – item 4a - Reports of Strategy Groups – LLSG – The Chief Officer has contacted Margaret Robinson regarding the structural changes.
- Pg 4 – item 5d – Ministry – Louise has spoken to Margaret Robinson with regard to Music Ministry but still has to make contact with Stephen Lingwood with regards to Community Ministry and Iain Brown with regard to fm pilot and Digital Ministry.
- Pg 3 – item 4c) - The Chief Officer confirmed that Rev Cody Coyne and Rev Winnie Gordon had successfully completed their academic requirements and it was agreed that they would be added to the Roll with probationary status.
- Pg 5 – item 6b) - the title to be used for the “ Honorary Treasurer” function was discussed and it was agreed that Robert Ince should use the title “Acting Treasurer” whilst performing this function on an interim basis for the EC eg in Minutes. The need to progress permanent arrangements was emphasised. Robert was thanked for the progress made.
- Pg 5 – item 6b) it was noted that an advertisement for volunteers would be included in next uni-news.
- Pg 5 – item 6c – Millennium Fund Grants – Louise raised the issue of monitoring of Grants. The Chief Officer responded that payments reflected written confirmation of spending and that this case was unusual as EC asked for a formal report. He would ensure that all Grants were monitored.
- Pg 5 – item 7 – Service Plan – Louise said that the Service Plan should be a standing arrangement on the Agenda until monitoring arrangements were in place which was agreed.
- Pg 6 – item 9 – Proposal for National Attendance Survey –The Convenor had followed up on the proposal.
- Pg 7 – item 12a – Nightingale Centre – Annual Report and Accounts for year ending 30 September 2012 – The need for a revaluation of the land and buildings was raised **and agreed. Robert to convey this to the Management Committee.**
- Pg 8 – item 12c – EC Responsibilities – it was agreed that more work needs to be done on this item. **Louise to email documents relating to this to EC members.**
- Pg 8 – item 13 – General Assembly office space requirements – The Essex Hall Trust had received the views of the EC and had integrated them within their plans for changes which are being progressed.
- Pg 8 – item 14 – Experts – Louise reported that there were some difficulties but will be moving on with this item through the LLSG.

#### 4. Reports of Strategy Groups:

##### 1). Local Leadership Strategy Group

**a) Notes – August 2013 (Document EC70/13) – Noted with the following:**

The summary report was welcomed although the Chief Officer considered full Minutes were necessary to ensure accountability and information for the EC on meeting discussions. Concerns were expressed about the purpose of the LLSG Volunteer Training Seminar weekend to take place on the 1 – 3<sup>rd</sup> November and Louise will convey these to the LLSG when she attends their next meeting on 19 October 2013. There needed to be clarity of aims and objectives. Following the resignation of Kate Buchanan a new member with the required skills needed be identified.

Louise noted that the Hibbert Trust was investigating funding a congregational leaders' conference in 2014 and raised the question of whether they had notified the EC? The Chief Officer indicated that as a Hibbert Trustee he was aware of the suggestion, which had arisen from discussions about the "Shaping the Future" report, and that LLSG members were involved. The **Convenor** was asked to contact the Trust's Chair to ask them to keep the EC informed of progress.

**b) fm Scotland (Document EC 71/13) – Noted with the following:**

A report had been obtained by Margaret Robinson from Iain Brown of the SUA. The proposed training day on small group ministry in November has been postponed till February 2014. Following discussion there was a general impression that the project had stalled and it was **agreed** that a six month timeline be put in place with a report to the EC on their achievements and recommendations being received by April 2014. **The Chief Officer to action.**

It was noted that the Glasgow Congregation was attempting a collaborative ministry team model. The consensus was that collaboration requires dedicated time over a period of time and not energy put in at discrete intervals if momentum was to be sustained. This raised the issue of staffing rather than volunteer resource

It was reported that the pilot has been funded by restricted donations and SUA contribution and that should the pilot be wound down a number of financial issues would have to be resolved.

**The Chief Officer was asked to email the original fm Report to members of the EC.**

**2). Ministry Strategy Group**

**a) UCM (Document EC72/13) – Noted with the following:**

Joan reported on the meeting held on the 9 September 2013 at Essex Hall with representatives of the EC, the Ministry Strategy Group and the Unitarian College Manchester with regard to the current structure of Unitarian Ministry training, including a review of the current position of UCM within the Luther King House structure. Wendy Sudbury gave an excellent presentation of her

work on this subject. However Joan felt disappointed about certain aspects of the meeting.

A discussion on the report was held, and the email received from Jeff Teagle on the 1 August 2013 with regard to a Grant from a Trust of £20,000, which meant they would not have to approach the General Assembly for financial support was noted. It was also noted that as of September 2015 new students will be responsible for their own funding which needed further discussion. The Chief Officer and Jeff Teagle will investigate ways in which the students can be supported.

The Ministry Strategy Group to be congratulated on their ongoing work and offered the full support of the Executive Committee.

**b) Sustentation Fund (Document EC73/13) - Noted with the following points being raised**

The notes of the special meeting of the Sustentation Fund held on 15 May 2013 were received. The Sustentation Fund was seen as too small to have any real impact on sustaining the number of ministries receiving grants, and recommendations for major change had been proposed. .

Issues raised included asking what other avenues open to new ministers, eg. Chaplaincy or outreach such as 2020. It was also recognised that although there are ministry vacancies, it does not follow that there are ministers compatible to that particular congregation. Shared ministries will be the future if congregations cannot afford a full time minister. Ministers should be driving growth and this is something that the MSG should take up or form a group to look at it. It was also noted that some congregations do have the funds to pay ministers, but feel no need for a full time minister. The relationship with the fm pilot was also highlighted

Discussion took place on the proposal surrounding Associate Ministers/lay pastors. It was accepted that communication could have been improved. However the Ministerial Fellowship has requested that they go into a more extended period of consultation, with all ministers/lay pastors etc being invited to submit a paper on their concept of what ministry means in the Unitarian Movement. The general consensus appeared to be that the word "Lay" will disappear. Once the EC has received the Ministerial Competency Document it will be able to make a decision on how to move forward. Robert to convey the EC decision to Stephen Lingwood.

The Competency Document will be presented at the Ministry Strategy Group meeting to be held on the 14 September 2013, with final EC approval at the November EC meeting as it is a significant policy document. Any future changes would be delegated to the Ministry Strategy Group.

**Session 2**

**3). Visibility Strategy Group**

**a) Using new Strapline (Document EC74/13) – Noted with the following:**

A paper was received from Angela Maher. The EC is grateful to the Visibility Strategy Group for the strapline work, which now features on the left window of the reception office in Essex Hall, although its appearance was affected by internal and external lighting conditions.

Alison reported that there has been some confusion as to responsibilities for the soft launch of the Strap-line. It was suggested that there should at least be an article in the Inquirer with regard to the Strapline with a link to the website where templates with the new Strapline on various products will be available for downloading. James volunteered to do the graphics on these. The Chief Officer thanked him for his offer, however, he would consult with staff on plans.

It was suggested that a worship pack based on the Strapline could be developed and this idea would be passed to Jane Blackall of the LLSG by the **Chief Officer**

**b) Leadership & Membership:**

The Chief Officer reported that Dorothy Haughton has resigned as the VSG Chair due to ill health, and it was later ascertained from the Group. It was also reported that Angela Maher had also resigned. Diane Bennett has emailed to say that she did not want to be Chair due to other commitments but she will not be resigning. Phillip Tomlin was the other remaining VSG member and a 5<sup>th</sup> member has never been identified for the Group.

Discussion took place on the development of the Group and requirements for membership. It was agreed that the Chief Officer and two EC members (James & Louise) meet with the remaining members of the VSG before the next EC meeting to discuss how to take forward the group's work. There needed to clarity of skills and objectives. James put forward a name for the EC to consider when future membership was discussed. It was also noted that the UCCN meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> November 2013 would be a good place to look for volunteers.

**4). Youth Strategy Group**

**a) Draft Terms of Reference (Document EC75/13)**

At the July EC meeting, the Youth Group and the EC agreed to explore the establishment of a Youth Strategy Group. The Chief Officer presented a paper on a Draft Terms of Reference for consultation with the Youth Panel, LLSG, and BUYAN.

The following aim was agreed:

“A Unitarian community which values young people (0-35), prioritises their needs for personal and spiritual growth and encourages young people's involvement in the wider Unitarian Movement”

Comments were received on areas to be included and amendments would be made to the final paper which would then be circulated by the **Chief Officer**. Suggestions of possible members were discussed and would be discussed with John Harley

#### 5. Annual Meetings Panel - 13 July 2013 (Document EC76/13)

A report was received on the further meeting held the previous day. As this is the first time that the Annual Meetings will be taking place on privately owned property as opposed to a University Campus, the question of event insurance was raised. It was **agreed** that Andrew should organise the insurance with the cost being borne from the Annual Meetings budget designated fund in 2014 and subsequently included in the budget. We will try to arrange cover for a period of two years. Andrew Mason was thanked for all his hard work on the Annual meetings.

A discussion was held on EC activities at the meetings and the following was agreed:

- Plenary presentation on the Annual Report and Accounts to allow sufficient time for questions. To include launch of new Youth Strategy group and changes eg IT upgrade.
- Single session on UUA Partnership.
- Double session EC workshop.
- Single session on Congregational Census Results
- MSG to consider if they needed a plenary session for Competencies or simply a workshop? **Chief Officer to talk to Stephen Lingwood**
- Service Plan to be referred to in EC Plenary session on and then in EC workshop

Marketing plans were outlined and Penny Quest has produced a colour flyer with regard to the 2014 GA meeting at Whittlebury Hall which was a very different venue to a university. Midland Unitarians will be produce "Celebrating our Community".

The subject of technical problems at the 2013 was raised and a plan was requested on how these will be addressed. It was noted Whittlebury Hall has a private company that will be installing and setting up all the technical equipment at the 2014 GA with a technical expert on call whilst the Annual Meeting is going on.

There was a disappointing response to the survey after the 2013 meeting. It was felt that a hard copy survey handed out at the beginning of the meeting as well as making it available online would produce better results next year. The link to the online survey could be actively promoted during the event EC needs to look at the reasoning behind feedback and what is achieved by it. It was also suggested that the Annual Meetings Group consider specific objectives by which success could be measured. It was agreed that Robert assist in undertaking a Risk Assessment on the Annual Meeting preparation. It was reported that the Panel was still in discussion with UKunitarianTV.

Arrangements for 2015 Annual Meetings had not been finalised but if they return to Whittelbury Hall, Louise suggested that UkunitarianTV could be asked to produce a promotional video as the Quakers have recently done for their annual meeting.

### **Session 3**

#### **6. Finance (Document EC77/13):**

##### **a) Management Accounts to 31 July 2013 – Noted**

It was explained that the Budget is about day to day revenue and how we spend it. Outlook for year end was a deficit of £6917

##### **b) Budget proposals 2013/14 – Noted and agreed.**

##### **c) Designated and restricted funds – Noted with the following:**

Proposals for rationalisation of the designated and restricted funds were presented by the Acting Treasurer and the Chief Officer and following discussion approved. It was explained that un-designating certain funds was to reimburse general funds for expenditure that should have been coded to these funds eg assisted dying pack, reprinting of leaflets.

**d) Quota:** A letter has been received from Sandy Ellis from midland Unitarian Association with regard to the timing of the EC decision on Quota which frustrated his efficient collection of the payments. The excellent work of Mr Ellis was commended, however, it was considered that the level of Quota could only be set when information on the budget was available in September.

The Acting Treasurer explained the proposal on provision for legacies. Over a five year period our estimate is that £50,000 will be received and only amounts above this sum would be available for additional expenditure.

Discussion took place on the level of the quota. A £1 increase would result in a deficit of £23,000 remaining due to the significant demand from the Pension Trust to cover past pension liabilities and a below inflation pay rise for staff. It was noted that a proportion of the provision set aside for a VAT liability had been drawn down following discussion with the Auditor. James proposed a £2 increase in the Quota, Louise seconded this and the EC **agreed** to the increase with the reasoning that although it would be marginally above the rate of inflation the General Assembly will still budget for a deficit. of £16,000.

##### **e) General comments under Finance:**

It was suggested that an article should be placed in the Inquirer on how the Quota is set. Once the census is completed we will have more details on attendance and what membership means. The five year financial plan to be developed would have to include the Strategy Groups. This would be preparatory work for the ending of Bowland Trust funding to ensure that the General Assembly was financially viable. A Reserves Policy would be developed as part of the work of the Funding Development Group.

James Barry left the meeting at this point.

#### 7. Millennium Fund

**a) Highland Place Unitarian Church, Aberdare (Document EC78/13) –**

This was an active and growing congregation with a childrens' programme and lots of community activities attracting older people. It was agreed to award £1,500 to Aberdare toward the implementation of a loop system.

**b) UKunitarianTV (Document EC79/13)**

Louise Roger declared an interest and left the meeting for this item.

It was noted that whilst UKunitarianTV was an independent body it did offer a valuable service to the Unitarian Movement with improving quality and on that basis the EC were willing to fund half of the cost on the mixing/editing equipment. It was agreed to award £800 to UKunitarianTV.

#### Session 4

**8. An update on the upgrade of the GA's IT Infrastructure (Document EC80/13) – report Noted**

The Chief Officer confirmed implement by December remained on target. Thanks were offered to the Steering Group.

**9. District (regional association) and Congregations (Document EC81/13) - Noted with the following:**

A paper was presented by Louise Rogers on admission of new congregations (possibly but not necessarily arising from 2020) and support from a district association. Joan stated that in Scotland, there is observer status for congregations that do not belong to Districts.

It was proposed that the constitutional issues raised the lack of provision for ending membership and be referred to the Constitutional Review Group.

**Chief Officer.**

C.I.O. status was again highlighted which would require a major Constitutional Review and then put it to the General Assembly at the Annual Meeting. There is no provision in the budget for legal advice, however, the Chief Officer was asked to obtain an estimate of the potential cost. There was also an acceptance that the General Assembly needed a "fit for purpose" Constitution which should address a number of gaps in the current document.

**10. ICUU Update (Document EC82/13) - Noted with the following:**

The Chief Officer presented an update on the work of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists. In January 2014, the ICUU Council will meet in New York to elect a new Executive Committee and Nominating Committee. It was agreed to nominate Rev David Usher and Rev Celia Midgley respectively. Rev David Gyero from the Hungarian Unitarian Church had been nominated as ICUU President and the EC supported his nomination. David and the Chief Officer would represent the General Assembly at the Council.



## Session 5

**11. Chief Officer's Report (Document EC83/13) – Noted with the following:**

A correction was made on page 1 of the Report - item 2 – Ministry - bullet point 2 - the meeting was held 13 August 2013 and not 13 September 2013. The Chief Officer verbally added to his Report that many of the congregations are excepted Charities and that the current legislative provision for this status which concludes in April 2014 was being reviewed by the Charity Commission. In relation to Visibility the Chief Officer was commended for his appearance on Ahlebait Networks TV, an Islamic TV station, and asked to ensure this was included in the Annual Report as valuable in reaching out to the Muslim community. The Chief Officer was asked about any work with Pagans and he explained that he was working to change the membership criteria of the Inter faith Network which should facilitate their involvement and also had been referred to the LGBT officer of the Pagan Federation. He reported that he had spoken to Andrew Copson, Chief Executive of the British Humanist Association and been invited to attend the World Humanist Congress in 2014 in Oxford. As he was unable to attend Jacky Woodman agreed to represent the General Assembly. Louise asked if the report could also describe more of the work of other members of staff not dealt with in other EC reports and reporting on general human resources issues such as annual and sickness leave.

The Executive Committee expressed its thanks to Dr Carwyn Tywyn following his resignation as Welsh Department Secretary on 6 September 2013. The Chief Officer was discussing with the Welsh Department options for the future.

**12. Nightingale Centre (Document EC84/13) - Noted with the following:**

Robert reported that work on the Terms of Reference of the Management Committee was required. No nominees for the Management Committee had yet been presented. In relation to a "green car park" the requirements or not for planning permission was discussed and **Robert** was asked to investigate further with the Centre.

**13. Welsh Department Report (Document EC85/13) - Noted with the following:**

Carwyn Tywyn had discussed with Megan Jones the handover and has expressed his willingness to help further if needed.

**14. President & Vice-President Reports (Document EC86/13) - Noted with the following:**

As with previous Presidents as they draw to the close of their Presidency, Bill has expressed his concern about what to do with the experience he has gained during his year in post. It was agreed that it would be valuable for the Chief Officer and the Convenor to have a meeting immediately after the Annual meeting for a debrief with the retiring President. **The Chief Officer will respond to Bill.**

**Session 6**

**15. Arrangements for future meetings:**

It was **agreed** that the February 2014 EC meeting will take place at the Nightingale Centre in Great Hucklow as the venue was not available in November 2013. Mary-Jean to confirm the provisional reservation.

**16. A.O.B.**

It was asked if there was any follow up on the District/EC meeting held in Manchester in November 2012. The EC Agenda is emailed to all District secretaries before each EC meeting, but no feedback from the Districts themselves – the notes from the District/EC meeting will be re-circulated among EC members. **Mary-Jean**

It was noted that the changes to the last Annual Report had been well received but it could be improved further and agreed that this would be an item for the EC meeting in November. **Chief Officer**

Louise indicated that she would no longer be able to produce the summary for the Report and she was thanked for all her hard work on this over several years.

It was noted that the Chief Officer would now be able to update the draft service plan and present to the next meeting. **Chief Officer**

**17. Key Messages – to be circulated separately.**

**18. Confidential items –**

The Chief Officer and Mary-Jean left the room at this point.

Arrangements for the appraisal of the Chief Officer were agreed.

**Non-responsive check-out**

*Closing Devotions: Jacky Woodman.*