

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

**Approved Minutes of meeting of Executive Committee
Friday 13th and Saturday 14th January 2017
Essex Hall, London**

Present: Robert Ince (Convenor), Marion Baker, Joan Cook, Philip Colfox, Peter Hanley (Honorary Treasurer), Lynne Readett, Jacky Woodman (from item 7.).

In Attendance: Dot Hewerdine (General Assembly President), Derek McAuley (Chief Officer), Barnaby Low from Investment Advisors, Barnett Waddingham for item 8, Rev Daniel Costley item 10, Rev Celia Cartwright, Janet Poole & Joy Foster item 11, Andrew Mason item 12 and Mary-Jean Hennis (Minute taker).

Session 1

Opening Devotions: Robert read a piece from "Humility, Anger and Grace" written by Nancy Crumbine – "Humility – with references to Alice in Wonderland"

1. Apologies

Gwynn Pritchard and Jacky Woodman (Friday morning)

2. Minutes of the meetings held on 14th November 2016 – (DOC EC02/17)
– after a minor alteration the Minutes were signed as a true record of the meeting on the 14th November 2016.

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

There was no Appendix N. The Convenor has two confidential items for item 22. And ethical Investment needed to be re-visited as part of investment item.

4. EC Action List - (DOC EC03/17) - noted and updated

Concern was raised with regard to Safeguarding not being given continuing attention as a serious issue for congregational action **Action: Marion to raise the issue at the LLSG meeting in February.**

5. GA President - (DOC EC04/17)-

EC agreed to the nomination of the Rev Charles VanDenBroeder as General Assembly President for 2017/18. **Action: Chief Officer to respond**

6. Honorary Membership - (DOC EC05/17)

EC agreed to the nomination of Rev Cliff Reed as an Honorary member of the General Assembly. **Action: Chief Officer.** It was noted that there is no fixed number for Honorary membership.

7. Update on Next Steps Priorities - (DOC EC06/17)

An update report was presented by the Chief Officer and progress on priorities considered:

Priority	Update
1. Develop a comprehensive response to explain our identity	It was reported that 11 contractors had been identified and invited to submit an expression of interest. The panel will decide who of the 5 will be invited to interview prior to the February EC meeting. Funding would be from the Millennium Fund.
2. Support a web based spiritual learning resource with UCM	Clarity about the scope of the project was required and the next step would be to conduct a definition workshop with Electric Putty, Rachel Skelton, the Convenor and Rev Kate Dean with a report to the February EC. The objective will be to produce a “minimum viable product” for the Annual Meetings requiring at least 9 days work. Thereafter it would take 6 months to fully develop the site. It was agreed in principle to a proposed limit of £8,000 from the Millennium Fund.
3. Engage with the wider community on today’s issues	Waiting for funding application from Jane Blackall
4. Increase collaboration with other like minded organisations	Needs more work, but positive feedback from Findhorn event at which Rev Martin Whitell had presented “Next Steps” Over £90,000.00 has been raised to date for the British Red Cross Clara Barton Fund and they are willing to send a senior member of staff to speak at the Annual Meetings. EC needs work to map out who we currently collaborate with eg Panel Affairs activities. The Chief Officer is representing the Accord Coalition at a fringe meeting on admissions to faith schools at the Lib Dem Conference in York in March.
5. Promote more Unitarian thought and writing	A guide to publishing work was in preparation for launch at the Annual Meetings by the Lindsey Press.
6. Formulate a plan to undertake Campus Ministry	The Cambridge congregation had indicated that they would not be drawing down the allocated funds for campus ministry as they were reviewing the project following the departure of the worker. Manchester District had expressed disappointment in lack of response to their interest expressed. Joan will be attending the MDA meeting in February. It was understood, however, that the original project was under review.
7. Support a new	Chief Officer to liaise with the Rev Andy Pakula with regard

congregational development	to progress by 2020 and thinking about the future. Districts, as shown in Derby with the East Midlands, could play an important role in any initiative. Church “planting” is widely recognized as essential for overall growth as other communities will close.
8.Grow our volunteer pool	To be progressed by Simon Bland - MCSO.
9.Find more flexible ways of training for Ministry	Linked to the TED project
10.Develop and integrate different forms of ministerial training (including recognised lay ministry training)	Linked to the TED project
11.Work with the Districts to create a new forum for national involvement	Will be progressed after the Annual Meetings.
12.Understand and reduce threats to building and financial sustainability	Simon had been looking at discounts on various initiatives open to congregations eg treasurers’ software, utilities and would be developing. He has met with the newly appointed property officer of the Quakers.
13.Review the effectiveness of our organisation	Philip to come to February EC with ideas as highlighted in ministry discussion (below)
14.Update “Help is at Hand” as an on-line resource	In-house IT resources will be able to offer support. No additional funding required. How this would be promoted at the Annual Meetings was an issue to consider?
15.Reduce our carbon footprint	BAP at Annual Meetings

- a) Cutting on Humanist Weddings provided by Philip - **(DOC EC07/17) noted**

8. Investment Advice - (DOC EC08/17)

Barnaby Low from Barnett Waddingham, Investment Advisors, joined the meeting and introduced the report they had prepared for the Executive Committee. Barnett Waddingham had been selected following a selection process undertaken by the Honorary Treasurer and the Chief Officer with interviews held on 14 December 2016.

Their recommendation was that the Executive Committee consider investing in a broader range of assets classes and changes to the governance structure. This would allow them to achieve a more efficient risk/return profile, a better alignment with ethical and other constraints and greater flexibility to develop the investment strategy over time. It was recommended that there be a move to a discretionary fund manager structure with a segregated approach set up specifically for the General Assembly.

The Convenor indicated that the concern was that once Newton's withdrew their discretionary role and no longer gave advice, were the Trustees acting in a way in which they should or were they in contravention of the Charity Commission guidance and even if they were acting correctly, were they actually getting the best return on the money invested.

A lengthy discussion took place in which the following issues were raised:

- The Unitarian Investment Panel had lots of experience, however, this was not sustainable in the longer-term
- Ethical consideration needed to be given greater attention
- It was agreed that the "mix" of assets could be widened eg property
- Cost of investment management should be clear
- Use of a discretionary fund manager will make the draw down of funds that will be required from the Bowland trust donation easier
- In selecting a discretionary manager the key was finding the "right" manager and Barnett Waddingham could assist.
- The asset types actually matters more than individual shares in improving returns
- Implications for trustees time commitment of more active management?
- Cost of holding a selection process for a new investment manager if the discretionary route was chosen
- Operational implications of the drawdown requirements for staff to fund both current running costs and "Next Steps"
- Professional advice will be required to help the Executive Committee in its decision-making.

The Convenor thanked Barnaby for attending the meeting and Neil Davies for preparing the Report.

It was accepted that there were three options:

1. No change to current arrangements
2. Remain with Newton and the UIP and take advice from an independent financial adviser
3. Discretionary management requiring a selection process

After further discussion, Option 2. was agreed.

It was agreed that the way in which the Trustees would operate was not contrary to due care but required them to take advice, agreed a revised Investment Policy in place as a matter of urgency.

It was agreed that the Trustees would be in a position to invest the £1,5 million donation once they had taken advice from the financial adviser.

Action: Hon Treasurer, the Chief Officer and Marion to progress this item.

The Executive Committee noted that due diligence had been exercised in the appointment process for Barnett Waddingham to give advice on the investment portfolio and they were duly appointed to provide financial advice.

8. (1) Ethical Policy – Appendix G (1) – (DOC EC08/17) – noted with the following;

It was agreed that the EC should develop a fuller policy on ethical investment taking into account Charity Commission guidance and the experience of other charities. It was suggested that this would be a good issue to engage with local communities and could be a focus for the 2018 Annual Meetings.

Action: Chief Officer to investigate an ethical investment policy expert as keynote speaker

It was agreed that a paper outlining the policy issues be produced – **Action: The Hon Treasurer**

Session 2

9. Updates on Strategy Groups

a) Email exchange with Rev Andy Pakula on growth **(DOC EC09/17) - noted**

10. Ministry Matters

a) TED update - **(DOC EC10/17) - noted with the following:**

The Convenor welcomed Rev Daniel Costley to the meeting.

The report of the project manager was received with a Steering group meeting planned for the following week to sign-off a plan which would enable her to produce the signed-off version of the prototype at the Annual Meetings.

A lengthy discussion took place on the relationship between the work of the MSG and the Executive Committee, especially with “Next Steps” project and Training and Education Development. The overarching issue for the MSG was strategic direction and where it came from recognising that clearly in governance terms the MSG report to the EC. Did this imply a need to focus on delivery?

The Training and Education review as it had developed had highlighted these issues for some time, particularly the link to the UCM project. . The Convenor assured Daniel that the Executive Committee valued the work of the MSG on training and education and that this would continue as both Rev Sarah Tinker and Daniel sat on the TED Steering Group.

It was highlighted that there needed to be greater clarity about what the objectives of the TED project were and this should be addressed at the next Steering Group meeting. This clearly linked to “Next Steps” priorities 9. And 10. (see above) and had major implications for capacity.

It was recognised that the MSG had focused on ministry with LLSG leading on local leadership training. The MSG would continue to focus on ministers in training, leaving the TED project to take forward the wider agenda for the future.

It was noted that there was a need to support “ministry in all its forms” as a key theme which raises issues of “how” this might be governed and delivered, especially given the limited and reducing resources. It was agreed that these issues needed further discussion by both the EC and the MSG.

The Convenor thanked Daniel for attending the meeting.

Session 3

11. Presentation by Women’s League

The Convenor welcomed Rev Celia Cartwright, Janet Poole and Joy Foster to the meeting and looked forward to this opportunity to explore their views of the future and how the Women’s League might be involved in “Next Steps”.

Janet gave a short history of the Women’s League and that currently there were 37 branches and 8 districts. They were the backbone of many churches and chapels and over the last 10 years plus, had raised over £100,000 for various Unitarian and other charities. Membership was, however, in decline and they were changing their focus to attract younger members. It was felt that the League was at a turning-point and “looking after each other and others” was emerging as a purpose. Being proactive in new areas was a challenge as was raising their profile. They appreciated publicity given recently by the Chief Officer and The Inquirer.

Discussion took place on differing perceptions of the role of women within the Unitarian Movement and the role of segregated activities. How differences were celebrated could be a fruitful discussion at an Annual Meeting? Joy emphasised that the original purpose was “to quicken the life of the church” which, despite the language, still remained valid ie to “enliven”.

In response to the question of how to raise their profile in the Movement it was suggested that they put an article in the General Assembly Annual Report. They are in the process of updating their web-site and requested that once this has been done a link from the GA website be established – this can be done.

The Women’s League thanked the EC for the invitation to attend this meeting and will be taking back the discussion held today to their next meeting in February.

The Convenor thanked the WL for attending the meeting.

Session 4

12. Annual meetings – (Andrew Mason attended)

a) Minutes of Annual Meetings Panel - (DOC EC11/17) – noted.

There will not only be a sole photographer and Ed Fordham will co-ordinate a group of photography volunteers linking to social media. .

The impact of the unexpected absence of Andrew Mason had been identified as a risk and previously identified mitigation measures were no longer operational. **Action: management of the risk to be reviewed by the Chief Officer and the Annual Meeting Panel.**

Ed has suggested that Philip, himself and one other person hold discussions at tables during lunch times on social media and congregational growth rather than an organised training stream.

Philip to liaise with James Barry with regard to the Visibility slot.

The Chief Officer and Andrew would be working on the breakdown of the Business Sessions. There will be no separate Strategy Group Report sessions as this would be included in an overall Annual report session with lots of time for questions and answers.

The Chief Officer to liaise with Rev John Harley with regard to the Youth slot.

The Convenor to liaise with Mike Tomlin with regard to the Investment Panel.

The opening ceremony and the Anniversary service have been trimmed down.

b) Survey Results - (DOC EC12/17) – noted with the following:

Disappointing response, however, of the people who responded 80% agreed that the meetings should be changed. The changes in time and format would impact on business activities. Discussion took place on how more electronic communication could save money, reduce environmental impact and improve participants' experience in the digital age.

It was agreed that the EC would propose a Motion to this effect:

“That this General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches supports changes to the length and format of the Annual Meetings; [as set out in report AGM XX/17]

and therefore, requests the Executive Committee and Annual Meetings Panel to bring forward proposals to the next Annual Meetings, including any amendments to the Constitution and By-laws, to enable such changes to take place for future Annual Meetings.” Text to be discussed with the Steering Committee on 16 January 2016.

The report would be required for the next Executive Committee meeting prior to be circulated in the February mail-out.

The Convenor thanked Andrew for attending the meeting

13. Non – responsive check out

Closing Devotions – Joan read a piece by Susan Manker-Seale – “ Out of Our Yearning”

Saturday

Session 5

Opening Devotions: Philip recited an old family Unitarian Toast

Here's a health to all those that we love

Here's a health to all those that love us

Here's a health to all those that love them that love those, that love those that love them that love us.

14. Annual Report 2015/16 - (DOC EC13/17) - noted with the following:

The Convenor indicated that the objective of the Annual Report was to:

- 1) Meet legal requirements.
- 2) Provide the framework for discussion and accountability to the GA.
- 3) Enable people outside the Movement to understand us.
- 4) Acknowledge the work of many volunteers and staff.

Concerns raised about the format and the visually impaired and the Rev John Clifford was to be contacted for advice.

The Annual Report was approved subject to any changes and the insertion of the outstanding Reports.

15. Annual Accounts 2015/16 - (DOC EC14/17) - noted with the following:

David Joseph and John Crosskey were thanked for their work on the Report.

The requirements of SORP had changed with the inclusion of a Consolidated Statement of Cash Flow page. **Action: Marion to enquire from her auditors whether this will also be a requirement from the Nightingale Centre on their Annual Accounts.**

Page 10 – a note with regard to the transfer of £109.412 is needed.

Page 20 should be amended to clarify the sub-totals

It must be highlighted that the principle of supporting Ministerial Students has not been lost.

Travel and subsistence of Trustees to be reviewed.

Issue of property valuation – Nightingale centre was noted.

Subject to the changes the Annual Accounts were approved.

16. Management Accounts - (DOC EC15/17)

The Chief Officer reported that the paper was not presented due to the focus on the Annual Accounts. Philip suggested that delegation of budget management responsibilities could be a key tool for staff to deliver the “Next Steps”. This would require changes to the budget structure. It was reported that the Finance Manager would be working on how to improve the current management accounts to include restricted as well as unrestricted funds.

17. Presidents Report - (DOC EC16/17) - noted with the following:

The President has noted that the Presidential Guidelines were out of date and she would undertake some revision work but was not able to do so until after the next Executive Committee meeting. Difficulties arise when congregations do not look at the Guidelines.

She suggested that a flyer should be sent to congregations when a new President and Vice-President are chosen with a photo, a short summary of the person and their contact email address on it, to enable contact to be made with them.

18. Chief Officer Report - (DOC EC17/17) – noted with the following:

The position on Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) status was noted..

The Chief Officer has been invited to Cumberland Lodge in July to speak to a group of Commonwealth and Chevening Scholarship international postgraduate students, who were young leaders from around the world, on religious freedom.

19. EC Link Reports

Derby 2020 project is running well with support of the East Midlands District.

Jacky advised that a new EC Link member to NELUM should make contact as soon as possible.

Session 6

20. Key Messages to be circulated separately

21. Dates of future meetings - 2017:

February - Monday 20th – 9.00 – 5.30pm – Essex Hall, London

May - Friday 19th 9.00 – 5.30 pm & Saturday 20th 9.00 – 12 noon.
Essex Hall, London

July - Friday 14th 9.00 – 5.30 pm & Saturday 15th 9.00 – 12 noon. Essex Hall, London

September - Monday 25th 9.00 – 5.30 pm & Tuesday 26th 9.00 – 12 noon. (arrival at the Nightingale Centre Sunday evening 24th September).

November – Friday 17th 9.00 – 5.30pm Essex Hall, London.

Mary-Jean left the meeting at this point.

22. Confidential Items:

1. Chief Officer's Appraisal – Chief Officer left the meeting at this point

23. Non responsive check-out

Closing Devotions – Lynne Readett