

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

**Approved Minutes of Executive Committee
Friday 19th January 2018
Essex Hall, London**

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

In Attendance: Derek McAuley (Chief Officer), Rev Charles VanDenBroeder (GA President) and Joan Cook (GA President – Designate)

Session 1

Opening Devotions: Marion Baker read from Cliff Reed's book "Unitarian? Whats That?"

1. Apologies and Welcome:

Apologies: Lynne Readett

Welcome: The Convenor welcomed Hilda to her first EC meeting and thanked her for agreeing to serve as a co-opted member until April 2019. She also thanked Joan for agreeing to be nominated as President.

2. Minutes of the meetings held on 17th November 2017 - (DOC EC02/18)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17th November 2017 were signed as a true record.

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

LLSG – Peter had emailed Simon Bland. He would raise the matter of apprenticeships later in the meeting.

4. EC Action List – (DOC EC03/18)

Updated as per circulated list.

5. TED Report – (DOC EC04/18)

The Chief Officer presented the notes of the TED Project Governance Group meeting held on 13 December 2017. It was agreed to support the Orientation Retreat up to an amount of £7500 from the Chalice Fund as a one-off cost. The implications of the establishment of a new institution to co-ordinate training and education were highlighted and would require further discussion.

The future structure of the planned CIO and the role of any “representatives” of key stakeholder bodies in ministry training on a Governing Board also required further work. The fundamental nature of the changes that were being proposed was highlighted with key strategic risks around purposeful design needing to be managed. Marion provided an update on the position at Unitarian College Manchester. The TED Project Governance Group were thanked for their work to date.

6. Ministry Training

It was agreed that the following be offered entry into the transitional programme commencing September 2018; Stephanie Bisby, Jane Blackall and Lizzie Harley.

It was agreed that the following be awarded Full status on the General Assembly Roll of Ministers: Rev Kate Dean and Rev Lewis Rees.

7. Next Steps Progress Report – (DOC EC05/18)

The Chief Officer presented an update on the “Next Steps” priorities. The relationship with the growth agenda (item 8,) was emphasised. Discussion took place on specific priorities:

3. Engage with the wider community on today’s issues - It was clarified that the priority was intended to be focused upon spiritual development in small groups within congregations on the engagement group model.

4. Increase collaboration with other like-minded organisations – Peter and Sheena would be giving a presentation on “Next steps” at the forthcoming Findhorn Unitarian Network event.

15. Reduce our carbon footprint – it was queried if this was being considered for the Annual Meetings and it was agreed that the Annual Meetings Panel be asked to review. **Action: Chief Officer**

In summary, the major focus had been on education and training with exploratory work commissioned in certain areas, such as the web project and identity. Others, such as campus ministry, would not be taken forward in the way originally intended. There was a recognition that the priorities needed to be kept under review and built upon to reflect changing circumstances.

8. Growth 2020

Matthew reported on discussions since the last meeting. It was agreed that this issue was more than simply about growth but required the Movement to address its engagement with the wider culture. Growth is not enough as a goal. Clarity about the underlying purpose had been emphasised in their paper and in comments by Simon Bland. It was acknowledged that this was done in differing ways in congregations. It was agreed that further detailed

work was required on models that were being used within the broader view of congregational development not simply the “planting” of new groups. The Executive Committee had to have clarity on how this would be taken forward by September 2018. **Action Chief Officer and Ministry and Congregational Support Officer.**

Session 2

9. Organisational Effectiveness- (DOC EC07/18)

Peter, Philip and Matthew had been discussing the priority since the last meeting. Clarity about what the General Assembly was seeking to achieve was necessary to enable our effectiveness to be measured.

It was agreed that the role of the General Assembly was to support Unitarians locally and that the strategy group structure needed to be super-ceded by a project/task group approach, such as TED. Panels should be accountable to the EC directly given our smaller structures. It was suggested that organisational effectiveness was actually about “achieving a lot with a little” which was about going where the energy was. It was agreed that further work was required on what this might mean in practice. **Action: Philip and Chief Officer.**

10. Strategic Communication – (DOC EC08/18)

The Chief Officer presented a paper on the strategic communications capacity that was required to progress the communications strategy considered at the previous meeting. This highlighted the issue of “who and what we are” as a Movement and clarity about this was required before any substantial investments could be made.

Christine proposed that the Executive Committee set aside a significant proportion of its September 2018 meeting to consider its shared vision and values, which would then allow a review of “Next Steps”. This would require external facilitation. The timing would allow members to contribute to the brief which would be required for the July EC meeting. **Action: Chief Officer**

11. General Assembly Annual Report and Accounts – (DOC EC09/18)

The Annual Report and Accounts of the General Assembly for the year ended 30 September 2017 were approved.

A report from Shaw Gibbs dated 16 January 2018 was presented which included a management report highlighting seven matters. Comments had been received from General Assembly management on these matters which were considered. David Joseph was thanked for responding so quickly to the management report.

It was agreed that as five years had passed since the appointment of Shaw Gibbs as auditor that a selection process for audit requirements be

undertaken. It was noted that resources would have to be allocated to this task. **Action: Hon Treasurer and Finance Manager**

12. Sustentation Fund Accounts – (DOC EC10/18)

The Annual Report and Accounts of the Sustentation Fund for the year ended 30 September 2017 were noted.

13. Sustentation Fund – New Arrangements - (DOC EC11/18)

A proposal for new arrangements to manage grants, including those of the Sustentation Fund, was approved. **Action: Chief Officer and Ministry and Congregational Support Manager**

14. Nightingale Centre Accounts – (DOC EC12/18)

The Annual Accounts of the Nightingale Centre for the year ended 30 September 2017 were approved. The Annual Report text would be circulated later.

15. Nightingale Centre Minutes – (DOC EC13/18)

The Notes of the Management Committee meeting held on 2 December 2017 were noted. The reference to General Assembly staff vacancies was questioned.

It was agreed to appoint Karen Hicks to the Management Committee.

Session 3

16. Apprenticeships

Peter reported on his email exchange with Simon Bland and concerns that what was planned may not be flexible enough to meet our needs. Comments were required by 6 February 2018.

17. Stipend Review Committee Report - (DOC EC14/18)

Matthew Smith and Rob Whiteman declared an interest and left the meeting.

The Report of the Stipend review Committee 2018 was approved for presentation to the Annual Meetings.

18. Annual Meetings Panel Minutes – (DOC EC15/18) - Noted.

19. Annual Meetings Panel Update – (DOC EC16/18)

The Chief Officer updated members on the current arrangements.

President - Joan Cook would be seconded by Ann Sinclair.

Honorary membership – Ann Peart would be seconded by Joan Cook and Alan Ruston by Peter Hewis and Andrew Hill. The honorary memberships should be considered separately.

Discussion took place on the Executive Committee plenary report and the need for a range of voices to be heard.

The Anniversary Appeal should be presented by a woman – suggestions to the Chief Officer.

A session on Resolutions Follow-up was agreed. Robert Ince had agreed to present on assisted dying. The Chief Officer would investigate with David Warhurst getting a message from Irene Clennell. **Action: Chief Officer**

EC Motions – small congregations to be proposed by Rob, seconder to be determined.

- format of annual meetings to be proposed by Sheena; Martin Whitell to be asked to second.

The EC workshop was a double session and should be less of a Q&A from the front and more inter-active in smaller groups. Plan to be developed.

Action: Convenor and Christine.

The transport needs of disabled people was raised and would be conveyed to the Annual Meetings Panel. **Action: Chief Officer**

20. Correspondence from UALM - (Unitarian Association for Lay Ministry) - (DOC EC17/18)

Discussion took place on the bullying raised by UALM in an email. It was acknowledged that this raised very difficult issues that were not easily addressed and that the General Assembly could offer support but it required action at congregational and district level as well, such as covenants. The Essex Hall lecture of 1999 by Paul Beasley-Murray was also valuable,

Action: CO to reply

21. EC ways of working

Peter reported on a course on poor decision-making he had attended and agreed to circulate the papers. This could lead to some bespoke training.

Action: Peter

22. President's Report – (DOC EC18/18) - noted

23. Chief Officer's Report – (DOC EC19/18) - noted

24. EC Link Reports – (DOC EC20/18)

NELUM – the reference to the amounts and timing of future Sustentation Fund grants was noted and it was pointed out that the new grant year would begin on 1 October 2018 and was dependent upon the new arrangements (see above item 13.)

Western Union/Southern – a mini-FUSE event was planned and Southern Unitarians were being approached to participate. He would be presenting on community engagement / volunteer development at a SUA meeting.

Yorkshire – there were concerns about the Lydgate congregation.

Manchester – Unfortunately Dob Lane was closing. Concerns were expressed that the quota demand were now entitled “invoice” and was too business-like. It was thought that this reflected the new accounting arrangements to improve how the quota payments were dealt with to avoid under-payments building up.
Action: Chief Officer to investigate

25. Key Messages

To be distributed separately.

26. Non responsive check-out

Closing Devotions – Rob Whiteman

Session 4

The GA President, GA President – Designate and Chief Officer left the meeting.

27. Confidential Item – Chief Officer

The Chief Officer gave notice to the Executive Committee of his intention to retire on 30 April 2019. The EC was grateful to Derek for giving fifteen months’ notice, allowing time to plan for the future. The EC established a small working group to take forward a recruitment and selection process for his successor.

The Appraisal report for the Chief Officer and objectives were approved.