

**Approved Minutes of the GA Executive Committee (EC) Meeting  
held 16 November 2018 at Essex Hall**

**Present: (EC)** Marion Baker (Convenor), Philip Colfox, Hilda Dumbleton, Peter Hanley (Honorary Treasurer), Lynne Readett, Christina Smith, Matthew Smith and Rob Whiteman.

**In attendance:** Rory Castle Jones (Communications Officer), Joan Cook (GA President), Gavin Howell (Youth Officer, item 15), Derek McAuley (Chief Officer), Andrew Mason (Minutes), Jeffrey Teagle (item 14).

**Session 1**

Opening Devotions: Phillip Colfox gave a reading.

**1. Appointment of Chief Officer**

The President and GA Staff members were not present at this item. A report was received on the recruitment and selection process.

**2. Nomination of GA Vice President**

The President and GA Staff members were not present at this item. Consideration of this item was postponed to the next meeting.

**3. Apologies**

There were no apologies. Rory was welcomed to the meeting.

**4. Minutes of the meeting held on 23-25 September 2018 (Document EC72/18)**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23-25 September 2018 were **AGREED** as a correct record, and signed by the Chair, with two minor amendments: to the page 5 paragraph on the quality framework; and to page 9, adding apologies for the second day for Peter Hanley.

A tabulated issues and requirements list from the Minutes would be created by Lynne Readett and Philip Colfox.

**ACTION: Lynne & Philip**

Andrew Mason was thanked for producing comprehensive Minutes of the last meeting.

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

There were no matters arising not already on the agenda.

**6. EC Action List (Document EC73/18)**

18 May 2018

Kereki Trust – The Chief Officer had received a response from David Gyero, the Deputy Bishop, indicating that the Hungarian Unitarian Church but would take the issue of nominees forward and that in the meantime, the GA would continue to act as steward of the fund. It was unlikely that there would be a student or minister nominated every year.

23-25 September 2018

Small initiatives fund – The Chief Officer would remind the Ministry & Congregational Support Officer about the need to create criteria for grants.

**ACTION: Chief Officer**

Collaboration – The Chief Officer would provide an update of the grid of organisations we interact with for the January EC meeting.

**ACTION: Chief Officer**

## 7. Follow up to previous meeting

### Quality Framework, Page 5

The Chief Officer had asked the Ministry & Congregational Support Officer for feedback on where the Ministry Strategy Group (MSG) and the Interview Panel (IP) were on these issues.

#### Unitarian College (UC)

With the assistance of working groups, this process was well underway. The MSG would begin to explore and learn from the new College as the pilot training programme progresses with a second cohort in 2019.

#### Harris Manchester College Oxford (HMCO)

With a new Tutor inheriting an existing system, discussions have started on the curriculum and the need to evidence competencies had been discussed. There were opportunities for development in partnership with the GA and Unitarian College and engagement on this had begun.

The Chief Officer had attended a meeting involving members of the Manchester Academy Trust and the Tutor in Ministerial Studies with the new Principal of HMCO, Professor Jane Shaw. Professor Shaw has a large agenda, but had extensive knowledge around liberal religion and Unitarianism. The Principal had commented on how students could engage with other denominations. There was a need for the wider Denomination to recognise that the provision of ministerial training was only a small, but important, part of the Objects of HMCO.

The need for continuous assessment of students throughout training in order that the competencies were met was stressed and the Ministry & Congregational Officer would be asked to continue to follow up with the Tutor on how this would be dealt with. **ACTION: Chief Officer**

#### Unitarian College Manchester (UCM)

A update was received on the Governors' meeting at Unitarian College Manchester AGM. UCM was in process of ending its formal relationship with the Partnership for Theological Education, with the registered address being changed to Cross Street Chapel, Manchester. Students would, however, be able to study at Luther King House at the same preferential rates and ongoing engagement was welcomed.

#### Unitarian College (UC) progress

It was reported that Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) status had now been granted by the Charity Commission, and that the College Board would meet formally on 5 December 2018 (rather than a shadow board). The position of Director had been advertised with a closing date of 4 December and interviews on 12 December. It was hoped the appointee would be able to start in April. An independent academic, Professor David Sims (formerly of Cass Business School), would be involved in the recruitment panel. The position would be home-working, so there was no geographical restriction.

Marion reported that there were three founding trustees, Dot Hewerdine, Derek McAuley and herself but that nine trustees would be needed. Derek would shortly be standing

down. Anyone knowing of people with the right skills to recommend were asked to contact Marion.

### 8. District Engagement

Philip had received a request from one district to receive papers. He had asked for written reports to be sent, which had already increased their engagement. It was pointed out that any wider circulation of EC papers and minutes should only take place if all authors were aware this was the practice and this had been agreed.

It was noted that the Eastern Union no longer existed, and that were some implications if districts were therefore used as a communications mechanism. There were further questions about how the purpose of district associations had changed over time, the difference between those districts with and without resources for grant-making to local congregations, and how best we should engage as a result. The Chief Officer would circulate an report produced by Sir Peter Soulsby for the Denominational Support Commission about the role of districts. This would be on the agenda for the next meeting.

**ACTION: Chief Officer**

The Chief Officer remarked on the practical issue that, if more material from districts were to be considered by the EC, the papers needed to be submitted by the stated deadlines to properly administer this.

### 9. Nightingale Centre Minutes (Document EC74/18)

The Minutes of the Nightingale Centre Meeting held 13 October were accepted. In response to a query about archiving papers, it was noted that copies of the Minutes were held at Essex Hall as they formed part of the EC papers.

### 10. Nightingale Centre Investment Proposal (Document EC75/18)

The Centre was holding £300K in their bank account, and felt that £150K was needed for day to day activities, and £100K for contingencies. The Centre's Management Committee were therefore recommending that £50K be invested in long-term investments for income growth, as this required approval by the EC as the trustees. This was **AGREED**. Suitable investment advice would be sought.

## Session 2

### 11. Feedback from Honorary Treasurers' Forum (Document EC76/18)

The feedback report was noted. The GA Treasurer remarked on the fact that trustees are often disengaged from finance, and education was needed

In the context of the EC, he felt it was necessary to make more decisions on which projects we would prioritise, and how we would plan the management of our resources to ensure funding was available at the correct stages in development. The Investment Guide was a good starting point for this. In terms of policy, technical financial expertise would be helpful to translate from the agreed policies to the big picture outcome. Marion offered to speak to an individual to see if they would be interested in being involved. **ACTION: Marion**

### 12. Future Investment Policy (Document EC77/18)

The Treasurer presented a report on the role of an Investment policy including a draft Investment Policy, using the London District's Policy as a guide. The trustees needed to first consider the GA's overall strategy, then create a GA statement of objectives. This

would then establish the Investment Policy, which in turn would give a mandate for implementation and operation.

In answer to a question as to whether the ethical investment policy would need to be approved by the Annual Meetings, it was clarified that this was a responsibility of the EC as trustees. It was requested that it be minuted that the EC were working hard towards this achievement. There was a statement of investment policy already, which could be drawn on. There was a default trustee responsibility to invest where a 'good return' rather than 'best return' could be obtained, unless there was a Resolution against this. The GA Resolutions would be used to inform the policy, though with a focus on the most recent Resolutions as having the most relevance (there were historic resolutions on the evils of alcohol, for example, reflecting the influence of temperance). The investment policy also needed to tie in with the Business Plan to ensure cash-flow could be matched to project timetables.

On page 10 of the report, there was a suggestion that there was a concern about Gilts. It was unclear why this should be there, and the Treasurer would review this.

**ACTION: Peter**

The Investment Panel were looking at how ethical issues influenced investment.

The issue of pooled funds was raised. The disadvantage of pooled funds was that disinvesting completely in any area was very difficult, and a performance standard needed to be met. However, Investment Managers were very aware of ethical issues and would challenge company practices seen as non-ethical. On the issue of fossil fuels, the draft policy had given the environment a classification of 'very concerned' on our negative issues to inform the Investment Managers. The Treasurer would write an additional page on disinvestment and funds.

**ACTION: Peter**

It was agreed that this would be discussed further at the next meeting.

### **13. Unitarian Investment Panel Succession Planning (Document EC78/18)**

The report was noted. It was **AGREED** that the United Reformed Church (URC) Pension Fund, about the environmental, social and governance focussed Sustainability Fund, in which they had invested. Mike Tomlin's decision to stand down from the Panel was noted and he was to be thanked for many years of service. The commitment to serve on the panel was for three meetings a year, for someone with financial knowledge.

### **14. Ministers Pension Fund (MPF) Guarantor of Last Resort**

Jeffrey Teagle attended for this item to brief the trustees. Lynne Readett and Matthew Smith declared an interest as members of the Fund, and Rob Whiteman declared an interest as Treasurer and member of the Fund.

The agreement for the GA to act as Guarantor for the MPF was signed by the EC in February 2008, after an original decision to start negotiations in 2001.

The reasons for the agreement had been: 1) Concerns about financial pressures on the Fund; and 2) a strong desire to give a clear signal to ministry that the denomination valued and cared for its ministers. The scheme is on a final salary basis, not money purchase. Jeff indicated he is the remunerated Secretary, not a trustee, of the MPF.

In 2008 the Fund had a considerable deficit of £561K. Today the deficit stood at around £184K. The GA has three appointees on the MPF Trust, so there is a strong GA link and influence. Historically trustees have been former GA Presidents with detailed knowledge of the denomination. The MPF has professional administration from Jardine Lloyd Thompson, and legal advice from Roderick Ramage, a pensions and insurance law specialist. The MPF participates in the Unitarian Investment Panel and this has been a big part of the reason for improvement in deficit. At the time of the agreement, the contribution rate for the fund was 8.5%, and this had since been increased to 10% to give more live income. Pension ages had since risen, so the MPF Constitution had been amended to match the drawing dates to those of the state. The Widows Fund amalgamated with the MPF in 2017, and the actuarial valuation estimate was good and it had also meant a reduced shared overhead.

In the decade since the guarantee was made, things have improved and according to the actuary, this was expected to continue. The GA had taken a risk, knowingly, and the MPF Committee had gone forward to greatly improve the risk factor.

The MPF Committee had met three days ago, and accounts were provided. The position was not significantly changed. There had been a slight dip in finances from the current instability in the financial markets, but the income stream was good. The MPF trustees have no material concern about investments or how the Fund is running. Should the stock market move adversely over period of time, the trustees would consider increasing the contribution rate further.

Risk was managed through the Management committee regularly reviewing the risk criteria, and good professional advice from the Investment Managers, with a spread of funds both geographically and by sector. It was noted that people were joining the ministry later in their careers, and that there were a reduced number of funded ministries. Their might be a scope to widen the fund for lay leaders as a result of the new training plans. The greatest risk over the last 20 years had been increased bureaucracy and costs from government initiatives.

The MPF recently had a meeting to discuss succession planning. The Board was refreshed every three years at the GA Annual Meetings. This year, Mike Tomlin would be standing down as Chair after over 20 years, Peter Hewis would not standing for re-election and Joyce Ashworth would be standing down as one of the three GA appointees. One of the other GA appointments already had a vacancy. The GA appointed trustees would need to be decided at the January EC meeting. Marion had agreed to stand, and had one other person in mind to approach. **ACTION: Marion**

Jeff Teagle was thanked for attending and for his full report.

### **Session 3**

#### **15. Youth Programme Presentation**

Gavin Howell, Youth Co-ordinator, attended for this session and gave a presentation following a recent weekend strategy event on the national youth programme. He highlighted that the programme would be looking to build partnerships across the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement. There was scope for a more co-ordinated curriculum across the age groups and he was working with the Youth Panel to draw up an improvement and

development plan. Opportunities exist to share the thinking about future direction and how support could be offered across the country on work with children and young people.

The following questions and comments were made:

- Where were the voices of young Unitarians in the process? There had been some youth voice in the review, and attenders' feedback at the end of every weekend, though it was difficult to get a broader view due a thin spread and geographical dispersion. Gavin felt that it was most important to have trained professionals working on a sound and robust theory for the curriculum, with feedback then helping to flesh this out.
- Where is youth in our development plan? Youth was not specifically mentioned in the list of Next Steps Priorities, as the programme was seen as integral to the work of the General Assembly. The presentation went a long way to addressing this, and the EC now needed to consider how to progress this.
- There were questions about the relationships between strategy, delivery, volunteers and paid staff and where responsibilities lay, including for UniFest.
- We had not yet clarified how we saw the Unitarian journeys of our young people going, and Gavin was asked to provide more information for the EC to look at.

**ACTION: Youth Co-ordinator**

- There were issues with numbers, and resource allocation for those numbers.
- There were issues with supporting youth leaders at local level and training was needed to help with retention. We needed to assess the needs of our volunteers as well as our young people. Success can be inspirational.
- A conversation would be needed with the new Unitarian College, who will be responsible for lifelong learning for all within the next 2-3 years, after their new Director had been appointed.
- Gavin and all those volunteering with the national youth programme were thanked for their contributions and commitment.

#### **16. Financial Update (Document EC79/18)**

Management Accounts to the 30 September 2018 were presented. Comments were:

- There were no surprises in the year end first draft, which was subject to audit.
- Funds had been drawn down from the Bowland Trust monies, as planned.
- There had been a credit of £33K for recognition of a reduced deficit on the staff pension fund.
- There had been gains on investments of £168K as at 30/09/18 but it was noted that the market had since fallen.
- Summer School appeared to have made a slight deficit above the usual £3,350 subsidy. The subsidy would remain the same in 2020.
- Actual administration costs were greater than in the outlook. The main reason for that was a revaluation of the Essex Hall gift-in-kind office space from a notional value of £64K to £99K which was also reflected in notional income.

Full Final Accounts would be presented at the next meeting for approval.

**17. Report of Meeting with Unitarian and Free Christian UNITE Branch (Document EC80/18)**

Matthew Smith declared an interest as a member of Unite. A report was received of the meeting held on 15 October 2018. There were some items which the Ministry and Congregational Support Officer would be taking forward, including policy changes which would be presented to EC for approval.

**ACTION: MCSO**

The report was noted.

**18. Notes of Sustentation Fund Meeting (Document EC81/18)**

The Sustentation Fund Committee had convened, and written grant requests were received. These are sent via District Associations, so those without District Associations could not apply. Matthew Smith declared an interest as a Minister of a congregation without a District Association. This needed further consideration. The Ministry and Congregational Support Officer would be asked to devise a procedure to deal with this. He was working on making the process more robust going forward.

**ACTION: MCSO**

This document was noted.

**19. Appeal from Robin Hood Tax Campaign (Document EC82/18)**

An email request had been received requesting financial support. Several members expressed concern that there could be political or integrity issues, as this was not a Registered Charity. Some money had been given three years ago at the time of the Resolution. It was decided that additional funding would not be given at this time. The Communications Officer asked whether it would be reasonable to share messages from the campaign and this was felt to be acceptable.

**Session 4****20. GA Associate Proposal (Document EC83/18)**

The proposals from Rosemary Ruston to discontinue the annual physical membership card and increase the basic subscription to £40 per annum single payment or £4 per month were **AGREED**.

**21. Roll of Lay Preachers (Document EC84/18)**

It was **AGREED** that Graham Phoenix would be added to the Roll of Lay Preachers.

**22. Notes of Annual Meetings Panel 18 September 2018 and Update (Document EC85/18)**

The Panel had met on 15 November 2018. Marketing had been discussed. It was noted that there would be a half-hour opening celebrations rather than a short prayer, to get the event off to a good start. The need for training sessions had been identified. Group Registration forms were due back by 23 November. Matthew Smith had given advance notice of his intention to resign from the Panel after the Meetings. The new EC in May 2019 would be invited to appoint a new representative.

**ACTION: Chief Officer**

**23. President's Report (Document EC86/18 & EC86b/18)**

The President's report was noted. An updated report on the Cenotaph Service was also noted. Joan planned to pass on some information on this for Celia Cartwright. Celia had attended a Baha'i dinner in Joan's absence due to a prior commitment.

**24. Chief Officer's Report (Document EC87/18)**

Item 3 – Antisemitism

The Chief Officer has sent a holding reply to a request from the Campaign Against Antisemitism for information on our formal position on antisemitism (and the definition thereof), including the text of the relevant 1933 and 1943 GA Resolutions. The President mentioned that some of our churches house liberal Jewish congregations. It was **AGREED** to accept the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition to guide any work on antisemitism as reflected in the Resolutions of the General Assembly.

**25. EC Link Reports (Documents EC88/18 & EC88b/18)**

The link reports were noted.

**26. Key Messages**

As circulated.

**27. Dates of future meetings**

The dates of future meetings were: Friday 25 January (9-5), Friday 17 May (9-5) and Friday 26 July (9-5) all at Essex Hall.

**28. Non responsive check-out**

The check-out took place.

Closing Devotions – Peter Hanley read 'Mind Buddy Spirit', a short poem, in response to Philip's opening reading, followed by mediation by Peter Rhodes, and the meeting closed.