

Paper 01

Report on recent work

Human resources advisory group (HRAG)

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Geoff Shaw, Convenor geoffshaw2810@sky.com Jane Baird, Secretary jane.baird@urc.org.uk
Action required	Take note.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To update Mission Council on the recent work of the group.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Previous HRAG reports to Mission Council.
Consultation has taken place with...	The General Secretary.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

1. Membership.

Geoff Shaw (Convenor), Alastair Forsyth, Bridget Fosten, Barbara Ellis, Revd. John Bradbury, General Secretary (ex officio), Jane Baird, Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources) (ex officio).

Mike Gould, who had served the group for many years, had come to the end of his latest term of office in March 2020 and had been replaced by Barbara Ellis. Mike's service to the group was recognized and he was thanked for his support and valuable contribution both within the meetings and the supplementary roles he had performed.

The members bring to the group a wide range of HR and management experience within the Church, the Public Sector and in Industry.

2. Remit

HRAG was established in 2012. The remit is to provide a unified reference point on HR matters for Mission Council/General Assembly / URC Trust and Church House staff. Its remit was reviewed in 2015 and again in 2018. At the latter review Mission Council agreed to amendments to the Terms of Reference of the group and clarification of the length of service of its members.

3. Meetings

HRAG has two regular meetings per annum and supplements these with email consultation and / or video or telephone calls as the need arises. Recent meetings have taken place by video conference. At each meeting the group receives a comprehensive report from Church House HR team detailing the staffing level and the team's activities.

4. Routine work

4.1 Safeguarding. The necessary changes requested to support the team had been reviewed by HRAG in October 2019 and March 2020. It was agreed that additional support from both temporary and permanent resources was necessary along with changes to hours of work. Some of the workload was caused by the need to 'digitize' all records and it was uncertain at this stage the long-term impact of this work. HRAG requested that any future needs be presented once the longer-term requirements had become clear.

4.2 Communications. HRAG reviewed the proposals to reorganise some of the work within the Communications team. This included a new role of 'Digital Content Officer' and changes to the role of the Graphic Designer. HRAG endorsed the proposed changes but noted the considerable number of revisions to roles within the team and hoped that overall longer term organisation objectives were now being achieved.

HRAG also received early notice of the proposal to bring 'in-house' the administration of 'Reform' subscriptions.

Whilst endorsing the headline needs and objectives of the proposal HRAG wished to review Job Descriptions and other supporting information as soon as these were available.

4.3 Payroll system. The need to change the system had not been expected. However, the initial parallel runs of the old and new systems had balanced. There are now five separate but linked payrolls (Ministers, Pensioners, Church House, synods, Westminster College) and it was noted that the Church House Payroll would have linked HR functionality.

4.4 Staff Survey Feedback. A summary of the results of the staff survey carried out as part of the main General Secretary recruitment / role survey had been presented to the Staff Association and had also been placed on the Church House 'public' drive which is available to all Church House staff.

4.5 Development Worker (CRCW). A number of changes to the Job Description were proposed following the merger of the Church Related Community Work (CRCW) and Special Category Minister (SCM) Sub Committees. The Job Description was reviewed and agreed by HRAG with the addition of the standard line management paragraph which would ensure consistency.

The change had also resulted in a need to amend the Job Description of the Programme Administrator and increase the contracted hours of work.

HRAG endorsed the changes outlined above following clarification of a number of issues.

4. Westminster College. Mission Council in November 2019 had agreed to the proposal that the position of Principal, Westminster College, could be renewed for a period of five years following the initial seven-year term of office. However, a query had been raised as to who would make the decision to renew. Following consultation with the Chair of Governors and others, HRAG recommended that this should be the responsibility of a group of the college governors supplemented by a member of the General Assembly

appointments panel. A paper regarding this was presented to and approved by Mission Council in November 2020.

- 5. Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship).** The recruitment for this position had been discussed in detail at the HRAG meeting in March 2020. Following that meeting two unsuccessful recruitment campaigns had taken place and a paper on the current situation had been produced by the General Secretary, the Revd John Bradbury. This outlined a number of concerns including management of the department while the recruitment situation was reviewed. The HRAG meeting in October discussed the paper and agreed to the proposal that a temporary appointment should be made from within the denomination to cover some of the key elements of the role, with the remainder covered by the General Secretariat. HRAG also confirmed that the permanent recruitment process should be suspended until there was a much clearer understanding as to why it had failed. It was agreed to call an additional meeting of HRAG to agree the way forward. This meeting was held in December 2020. It was suggested that one of the issues potential candidates faced was the difficulty of grasping the full scope of the role and the balance of accountabilities which resulted from this. This would be a particular obstacle for those candidates who had not had close involvement with Church House or the role itself. It was agreed that whilst the Job Description correctly described the main elements of the role some of the wording should be updated to aid understanding. It was also agreed to revise the wording of the Job Advertisement to better position the role. This revision would be the one to be published in Reform in February 2021. Given the difficulties being encountered the matter would be kept under constant review.
- 6. Movement of Ministers.** The paper on this, written by the Revd Paul Whittle (Convenor of the Ministries Committee) was reviewed by HRAG. The group welcomed the report and requested that a number of areas which had been highlighted as needing attention should be formalized to avoid misunderstanding and future issues. Examples of this were the taking up of references at an appropriate time in the recruitment / appointments process and the need to review information held in applicant files.
- 7. Coronavirus.** HRAG noted the extra work that had been generated as a result of the pandemic and the impact that this had had on all staff. In particular the impact on HR was noted, most notably related to the difficulty in remote working while dealing with issues such as the furloughing of staff and recruitment via video conferencing. The IT systems in place had facilitated working from home and HR had maintained telephone contact with staff throughout the lockdown. HRAG wished to recognize the contribution that had been made by so many in what had been a very difficult time.