

# Paper I1

Mission committee

Church of Scotland membership  
of the Joint Public Issues Team

Church 2016  
**United**  
Church **Reformed**  
**Church** Church 2016

# Paper I1



## Mission committee

### Church of Scotland membership of the Joint Public Issues Team

#### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	The Revd Tracey Lewis <a href="mailto:tracey.a.lewis@btinternet.com">tracey.a.lewis@btinternet.com</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Decision
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Mission Council accepts the recommendation from the mission committee that the Church of Scotland become full partners in the Joint Public Issues Team alongside the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church, and the United Reformed Church.</b>

#### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Church of Scotland membership of the Joint Public Issues Team
<b>Main points</b>	For the past year the Church of Scotland has been a member of the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) on a trial basis. An evaluation of the pilot year has taken place and has found that the outcomes have been positive. On the basis of this evaluation the mission committee recommends that the Church of Scotland becomes a full partner of JPIT
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Paper I4 Mission committee update (Mission Council – May 2015)
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	JPIT strategy and policy group URC Synod of Scotland

#### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	Increase in travelling cost for URC staff when meetings happen in Scotland. These can be met from the current Mission budget
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	Closer relationships with the Church of Scotland.

## Church of Scotland membership of the Joint Public Issues Team

1. In February 2015 the mission committee agreed in principle that the Church of Scotland join the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) on a trial basis for one year, from 1 March 2015. It was further agreed that the one-year pilot would be evaluated towards the end of the year and that a recommendation would be brought relating to the Church of Scotland becoming a permanent member of JPIT.
2. A formal six-month evaluation was conducted and following that it was agreed that the strategy and policy group (SPG), which has representatives from all the denominations, would make a final evaluation, including input from the staff, at the residential in January 2016. The SPG took time to consider all the issues raised in the six-month report and felt that these could be better handled by dividing them into two categories: strategic and operational. The purpose of this was to identify which issues might perhaps be longer-term and would only be resolved by ongoing work which might involve 'external' voices. Whereas operational issues could be addressed within the life of the team or SPG. At the six-month stage it was felt that the success criteria for the initial pilot had been largely met but it was wise to continue with the pilot through the beginning of another work cycle.
3. The SPG believed that an external evaluation process would not produce anything which we had not been able to identify ourselves and so agreed on 8 December 2015 that following the SPG residential on 13-14 January 2016 a final decision would be made on what to recommend to the various oversight bodies about the future of the partnership.
4. The following were identified as the enrichments that had taken place due to the wider partnership:
  - An increased and more diverse expertise in both the team and the SPG which makes JPIT more effective
  - A louder public voice with a wider reach
  - A greater capacity to respond to issues arising in the public square as well as to tackle longer-term projects
  - A better ability to respond to issues in light of the changing political landscape of the United Kingdom: namely, increasing calls for devolved, regional politics and the emergence of a uniquely Scottish voice in Westminster in the form of the Scottish National Party
  - The recognition of a stronger relationship and understanding of the Scottish government at Holyrood as well as a stronger link to one of the main parties in Westminster
  - A deeper pool of creativity from both the staff and volunteers connected to the denominations
  - A greater wisdom drawn from the history and experience of an increased number of participants at the table
  - Links and learning to the Poverty Truth Commission – especially the ongoing efforts to ensure that work done on an issue always involves those who are most affected by it
  - A step on the journey to a true embodiment for those churches who exist in three nations

- The increased partnership ensures the work and focus is less London- and Westminster-centric
  - A broader ecclesiology within the partnership means that some of the more traditional differences are less marked and helps us all to see things from different perspectives
  - A recognition of the importance of Scottish issues as concerns which affect the whole of the Union
  - The work of JPIT has been given more breadth.
5. Many of the areas listed above were identified as being the kinds of positives that were looked for as success criteria in the initial six months of the pilot. They represent the clear belief that we have a greater impact and are more effective by working together in an enlarged partnership than we are working alone or even in one-off campaigns.
6. The analysis of the work to date also enabled the team and the SPG to engage with the challenges for the next stage. Many of those challenges will remain with the staff and the SPG to tackle as they are operational and concern issues such as how and where staff meet, the increased use of video conferencing, liaison between denominational media teams and experts, and the need for a working knowledge of the wider areas of concern for partner denominations. These challenges will be the ongoing daily work of those involved and will dissipate over time and no doubt be replaced by others.
7. The more strategic challenges which will remain the work for the future include:
- JPIT exists primarily to support the congregations and members of the various denominations to be better informed, active and engaged on a wide range of public issues. How each denomination uses those resources and expertise needs to be flexible to ensure the most effective reach within our own constituencies. This may mean that we do not always speak into the public square as all the partners within JPIT at the same time, but it does mean we do those things together which further enrich our communities. This may mean that some reflection is required on the place of the 'brand' of JPIT and how messages are communicated to the wider constituencies.
  - With more partners comes the need for even greater intentionality and prioritisation of the overall workload. This will mean a more active role for the SPG than has sometimes been the case in the past. This will need addressing in a new Service Level Agreement for the partners.
  - With more partners we have a great responsibility and opportunity to look further ahead and identify those issues that may be of greatest significance in the future. This will challenge the need to safeguard space for responsive work as well as being able to devote time and energy to the looking ahead. Further thinking on how the different patterns of denominational oversight affect the setting of priorities may need to happen.
  - For those denominations who are present in Scotland there needs to be further consideration about how the voices and concerns of members there feed into the JPIT agenda in ways that take into account the relative size of the various denominations. This may also lead to considering what a variety of levels of engagement in the work of JPIT might offer for other denominations.

8. The SPG was therefore minded that the criteria for a successful pilot have been met and indeed surpassed. There is no doubt that, in the complex changing political landscape of the United Kingdom, the voice of the churches is heard more effectively when we work and speak together. By drawing on the resources and richness of all four traditions, while consistently championing the inclusion of the most vulnerable in our society, we will seek fully to live out our discipleship in the world around us.
9. The mission committee endorses the findings of the evaluation and recommends that the Church of Scotland becomes a full partner in the Joint Public Issues Team alongside the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church. It also requests the strategy and policy group of JPIT to make the necessary changes to the service level agreement to reflect the Church of Scotland's full and permanent membership.

