

# Paper O2

Human Resources Advisory Group (HRAG)  
The future of HRAG

United Church 2015  
Church 2015  
Reformed Church 2015  
Church 2015



# Paper 02

## Human Resources Advisory Group (HRAG)

### The future of HRAG

#### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Keith G. Webster kwebsterwms@btinternet.com
<b>Action required</b>	Decision.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	See end of paper.

#### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Review of the role of HRAG and a recommendation that the group continue as an advisory group to Mission Council.
<b>Main points</b>	The background to the establishment of HRAG is summarised together with a review of its work since its establishment in 2012, proposals for the means of carrying out specific aspects of its future remit and hence updated Terms of Reference.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	The paper from the former Staffing Advisory Group presented to Mission Council in October 2012 recommending the establishment of HRAG.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	General Assembly Moderators.

#### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None – other than a continuing commitment to committee expenses.
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	None.

# The future of HRAG

## Background

1. In November 2011 Mission Council agreed that the Staffing Advisory Group (SAG) would be responsible for proposing interim arrangements to cover the head of Human Resources post during the review of Church House management processes.

This requirement was in the context of the request by Mission Council through MCAG for the establishment of a group to review the overall Church House management processes and procedures with a particular emphasis on the respective roles in the central secretariat department. At that time the role of SAG was to review Assembly posts, noting that support and non-assembly staff were overseen by the Church House Management Group (CHMG).

2. As the review progressed it became clear that it would be good to have one group overseeing all the posts. Therefore SAG proposed that a Human Resources Advisory Group (HRAG) be established combining the human resources elements of both SAG and CHMG for the following reasons:
  - Gain consistency of approach for the process of change brought about by the budgetary decisions for 2013 and through the review of the general secretariat
  - Provide a single group for HR staff to relate to
  - Provide one reference point on HR matters for Mission Council (General Assembly)/Trust and Church House personnel
  - Enable all staff to be regarded on a similar basis leading to a single staffing policy.
3. Since the draft terms of reference for HRAG combined aspects of the terms of reference of both SAG and CHMG, it was also proposed that SAG could become this new group with the addition of the HR specialists currently on CHMG.

Accordingly, in October 2012, Mission Council agreed: *“the establishment of a Human Resources Advisory Group until July 2015 and appointed the current Staffing Advisory Group as the interim Human Resources Advisory Group with the addition of those with human resources expertise currently serving on the Church House Management Group”*.

The fixed timescale was to cover the interim period as new structures were being put in place – and in the event the new structure was in place for General Assembly in July 2014.

4. The accountability of HRAG was to be as follows:
  - HRAG was to be accountable to Mission Council as the employer but could be called on to report to the Trust with regard to legal and reputational management issues
  - HRAG was given delegated authority from Mission Council in relation to all operational HR matters including the agreement of HR policies and procedures and will provide regular reports.
5. The membership was to comprise:
  - Convener (appointed by Mission Council or the Nominations Committee)
  - 4-6 members with HR and/or management experience including those with experience of accredited ministries in the church
  - Ex-officio general secretary
  - Member of HR staff.

6. The responsibilities were:
- a) Oversee and sign off all central staff employment policies and procedures; that is all staff employed at Church House (i.e. by or on behalf of the central church), whether based on or off site with the exception of synod moderators.
  - b) Monitor, review and approve staffing strategy – including grading, numbers, expertise, career development, remuneration policy (currently Remuneration Committee reports to Finance and policy is a CHMG matter).
  - c) Agree all central staff posts for appointment and renewal in accordance with the staffing strategy. Review and approve with operational people or with committee convenors as appropriate the job description and person specification for each post.
  - d) Terms and conditions of employment. The Group shall oversee the development of, approval and implementation of the terms and conditions of staff. These shall include taxation and benefits, housing policy and the provision of cars and training. Terms and conditions of Assembly-appointed staff who are ordained ministers shall come within the framework of the Plan for Partnership.
  - e) Review Lay Pensions policy – in conjunction with the Pensions Executive.
  - f) Oversight of training and development in management skills and the evaluation of outcomes
7. The current membership of HRAG, as at May 2015, is:
- Keith Webster (convener)  
 Alastair Forsyth  
 Bridget Fosten  
 Mike Gould  
 Peter Pay  
 John Proctor (general secretary)  
 Jane Baird (deputy general secretary [administration & resources]).

## HRAG'S work since October 2012

8. There have been three strands in the work of HRAG:
- a) The **Review of the Church House Management** processes remitted in the first instance to SAG in November 2011 and subsequently taken on by HRAG. The work could not be undertaken in isolation and hence across 2013 and 2014 HRAG held a considerable number of meetings both on its own and with members of staff at Church House. The output from these meetings enabled interim reports to be presented to Mission Council in March 2012 and October 2012, the report setting out the full recommendations being presented to Mission Council in May 2013 with a follow on report in November 2013. The latter report included the job descriptions for the general secretary and the three deputy general secretary (DGS) posts. Subsequently HRAG provided support to the recruitment processes for the DGS posts.
  - b) **Interim Human Resources arrangements**  
 From November 2011 SAG kept a 'watching brief' on HR, supporting the HR team as necessary, and this role continued following the establishment of HRAG. One of the objectives was to facilitate the appointment of a new HR manager. In the event

that was not possible and so an alternative approach was adopted in that an interim HR manager was appointed effective from May 2013.

c) **Routine work**

This has been quite varied and did not only comprise the review of Assembly Appointed posts and other staff posts – in fact 26 job descriptions (14 Assembly Appointed posts and 12 other staff posts) have been reviewed during the current life of HRAG.

Other work has included:

- Input to the review of the schedule of Assembly Appointed posts – with particular reference to the issue of religious affiliation and the implications for Genuine Occupational Requirement (GOR) in these posts.
- Working with the then Youth and Childrens Work department in its restructuring and the establishment of the new staff posts.
- Supporting the initiation of the review of the employment policies.
- Reviewing the work undertaken by the deputy general secretary, the Revd Richard Mortimer, and recommending the short term appointment of an interim assistant general secretary to cover some of the work, mainly line management responsibilities, and arranging interim cover for other aspects of the work of the DGS.

Having noted the above, HRAG also recognises that there are areas within its original remit which have not been addressed, in part because the major part of its time and activity was the review of the general secretariat.

## Should HRAG continue beyond July 2015?

9. HRAG, as a sub-committee/advisory group of Mission Council, has been able to undertake work that would otherwise have had to go to Mission Council, subsequently presenting its recommendations to Mission Council.
10. The **benefits** of having a group such as HRAG can be summarised as follows:
  - Act on behalf of and report to Mission Council, having the delegated authority from Mission Council, hence contributing to a more efficient use of time at those meetings
  - Can take an overview at the strategic/policy level, including ensuring that the organisation structures are efficient and effective and accord with the requirements of General Assembly and Mission Council
  - Act as a unified reference point for all HR matters at Church House
  - Is not involved in operational issues and so can maintain a level of independence
  - In reviewing posts and associated job descriptions and person specifications, is in a position to question and provide input to organisation structures and the development of job requirements
  - Provide an independent and supportive resource to HR questioning and acting as a 'prompt' as appropriate, and helping to ensure consistency in approach, through having a membership comprising experienced HR people.
11. The **disadvantages** of such a group can be seen as:
  - Diminishing the role of HR or being put in the position of being an alternative source of advice with the opportunity to 'to play both ends against the middle'
  - An extra layer of bureaucracy, possibly slowing down decision making or acting as a block on action
  - Not necessarily being in touch with the work of the departments or of Church House in general
  - Becoming too powerful in terms of the perceived influence it might wield.

## Conclusion

12. We believe that in comparing the benefits and disadvantages the balance is in favour of the benefits and hence that HRAG can make a positive contribution to the overall operation of Church House and indirectly to the wider URC through ensuring the provision of a unified approach to HR.

Furthermore, since HRAG has the delegated authority from Mission Council it means that the group can undertake specialised, detailed work with regard to HR matters, with any appropriate recommendations or resolutions being taken to Mission Council for decision. This method of working helps to ensure the optimum use of Mission Council's time when considering such matters.

It is clear also that in the manner in which it carries out its remit, HRAG must work to ensure that any perceived disadvantages are minimised, if not eliminated.

13. We recognise that a major part of the work of HRAG since its establishment in November 2012 has been the review of the general secretariat. At the same time HRAG has been able to provide a significant input into a range of other HR activities as noted above.

In undertaking this work HRAG has also become very aware of the need to distinguish between:

- HR policy/strategy issues – the prime concern of HRAG
- Operational HR – the day to day work of the HR department
- Line management issues – the responsibility of the individual line managers within the framework of advice and guidance as appropriate from HR.

The danger of blurring the boundaries between these three areas became apparent during the period immediately following the departure of the head of HR and prior to the appointment of an interim HR manager when SAG and subsequently HRAG had a more 'hands on' role.

14. We also recognised that if Mission Council agrees to the continuation of HRAG then, in the light of experience since November 2012 and the new structure, new terms of reference will be required and a proposed draft is contained in Appendix A to this report.

There will therefore be some changes in the way of working, in particular with regard to the review of posts and this matter is currently under review as set out below.

15. The relationship of HRAG with the relevant deputy general secretaries (DGSs) is of significance in relation to the review of Assembly Appointed posts. HRAG's role could become secondary with regard to making recommendations for the continuation of posts since the new general secretariat could refer such matters direct to Mission Council and General Assembly within the framework of the departmental plans and the overall strategy. In order to support, as necessary, the role of the DGSs in this area we believe it would be appropriate for the review work to continue to be undertaken by HRAG which would then provide the necessary information and make the appropriate recommendation to the relevant DGS.
16. There is a further issue concerning the review of posts and the associated job descriptions. Historically, dating back to the days of SAG and fixed term appointments for all Assembly Appointed posts, such posts were reviewed every five years to match the duration of the appointment, whether the post holder was ordained or lay. Employment legislation however changed and so for lay staff any appointment for longer than four years automatically is considered to be open ended and the "fixed term" approach has ceased.

17. An additional benefit of the fixed term reviews was that it provided an opportunity, on a regular basis, for posts to be reviewed in the light of the current overall requirements of General Assembly and so confirm the continuing need for that post. It should be added that at no time has a decision been made to discontinue a post as a consequence of the outcome of such a review.
18. The decision to recommend continuation of a post was made based on a proposal from the relevant committee. Whilst HRAG has been able to challenge role content and certain aspects of the documentation, and even to query aspects of the requirement, it has also been very difficult for the group to deny the continuation of a post when the relevant committee has identified an ongoing requirement for the role and there is a budget for it, and in practice continuation has always been recommended.

Hence the future role of HRAG in the '*post review and recommendation/approval process*' can be seen as ambiguous, although clearly there has to be an effective way of balancing the need for a post and its affordability.

In the light of the new structure the role content and responsibilities should be reviewed annually within the particular department as part of the annual appraisal and the question of affordability should be done annually as part of the departmental budget submission.

There is also one further opportunity to review the scope of and the need for a post, and that is when an individual, whether lay or ordained, leaves a post, whether it is permanent or fixed term, but this should be seen as part of an ongoing process rather than a huge exercise.

19. Two alternative approaches to HRAG acting on behalf of Mission Council in the review of job descriptions of Assembly Appointed posts are therefore under consideration in order to determine the optimum approach for the future:
- a) Review in accordance with a fixed timetable, confirming or otherwise the job description and associated person specification based on the assumption that there is a continuing need for that post in that it meets the overall requirements of the department and the denomination.
- or
- b) Review the job description and associated person specification at the request of a particular department or the general secretariat or Mission Council in order to ensure the specific requirements and work programme for that department, within the overall requirements of the denomination, can be met.

Following through the implications of the statement in para 18 above, option b) would be the favoured approach, noting that in adopting either approach HRAG is in effect acting as an internal consultant.

20. The job descriptions for other senior posts that are not Assembly Appointments will also not be subject to 'timed' reviews and so will only be reviewed in accordance with one or more of the following conditions:
- major change(s) to the job
  - potential for grade change
  - re-structuring of the department or section.

21. HRAG also must work closely with the Remuneration Committee and it is noted in this regard that the DGS (admin & resources) is a member of both committees.
22. HRAG can also provide an input to the work of the Pensions Executive in respect of what can be classified as the “terms and conditions” aspects of lay staff pension provision.

## **Draft Resolutions**

1. **Mission Council agrees to the continuation of the HR Advisory Group, effective from July 2015, as an advisory group to Mission Council with the current membership.**
2. **Mission Council agrees that the terms of reference set out in Appendix A of this report shall replace the terms of reference of HR Advisory Group previously agreed by Mission Council in October 2012.**
3. **Mission Council agrees that the HR Advisory Group henceforth consist of:**
  - a) **A Convener appointed by Mission Council or General Assembly, upon the recommendation of the Nominations Committee, for a renewable term of four years; the current convener to serve until 31 July 2017;**
  - b) **4-6 members with HR and/or management experience, including those with experience of accredited ministries in the Church to serve for a term of four years, the current members to continue to serve;**
  - c) **The deputy general secretary (admin & resources);**
  - d) **The general secretary will be an ex-officio member of the Group;**
  - e) **A member of the HR team – to take notes and deputise for the DGS (A&R) if required.**



## Appendix A

# United Reformed Church Human Resources Advisory Group (HRAG) Constitution, Proceedings and Terms of Reference (ToR)

### 1. Constitution and Quorum

- 1.1 The purpose of the Human Resources Advisory Group (HRAG) is to provide a unified reference point on HR matters for Mission Council/General Assembly/URC Trust and Church House personnel.
  - 1.2 The HRAG will be accountable to Mission Council (as the employer) but may be called upon to report to the URC Trust with regard to legal and reputational management issues.
  - 1.3 The HRAG will have delegated authority from Mission Council in relation to all operational HR matters, including the agreement of HR policies and procedures, and will provide regular reports to Mission Council.
  - 1.4 HRAG will consist of:
    - a) a convener (appointed by Mission Council or General Assembly, upon the recommendation of the Nominations Committee);
    - b) 4-6 members with HR and/or management experience, including those with experience of accredited ministries in the Church;
    - c) the deputy general secretary (admin & resources);
    - d) the general secretary will be an ex-officio member of the Group and;
    - e) a member of the HR Team – to take notes and deputise for the DGS (A&R) if required.
  - 1.5 The HRAG may invite other members of staff (e.g. line managers) and committee conveners to attend meetings for specific issues if they feel it appropriate to do so.
  - 1.6 The Nominations Committee will review (but not necessarily revise) Group membership and convenership at least every four years (see also paragraph 5.1).
  - 1.7 The quorum for meetings of the Group shall be four members.
  - 1.8 The HRAG will work closely with the Remuneration Committee to ensure that there is consistency in the work of the two groups. In carrying out its remit, the HRAG will also be mindful of the work and responsibilities of the Church House Management Group.
- ### 2. Chairing
- 2.1 The committee will be chaired by a convener appointed by Mission Council; the committee may choose to appoint a vice-chair from amongst its members.

**3. Meetings**

- 3.1 The HRAG will meet at least three times per annum and on such other occasions, as they deem necessary.
- 3.2 Outside of meetings, and where urgent need demands it, the HRAG will have authority to make decisions by email circulation of all relevant papers.
- 3.3 The DGS (A&R) will arrange for a member of the HR team to act as clerk to the HRAG (save where their personal terms and conditions of employment are under consideration, in which event the DGS (A&R) will clerk that part of the meeting).
- 3.4 All reports shall be submitted to the HRAG sufficiently in advance of meetings to allow for their proper consideration.

**4. Terms of Reference**

- 4.1 The role of the HRAG is to:
- a) Oversee, and sign off, all Assembly Appointed and central staff employment policies and procedures – that is all staff employed at Church House (i.e. by, or on behalf of, the central Church), whether based on or off site (with the exception of synod moderators;
  - b) Advise the Mission Council of its responsibilities towards the staff as an employer in the context of legislative requirements;
  - c) Monitor, review and approve staffing strategy – including staffing establishment, grading or re-grading of posts, expertise, career development and succession planning;
  - d) Review and approve the job descriptions and associated person specifications for Assembly Appointed and central staff posts (with the exception of synod moderators) with input from operational staff or committee conveners, as required);
  - e) In conjunction with the Remuneration Committee, review remuneration policy and other aspects of compensation and benefits;  
**(Note:** The terms and conditions of Assembly-appointed staff who are ordained ministers shall come within the framework of the Plan for Partnership.)
  - f) Oversee the development, approval and implementation of any changes to the terms and conditions of staff, including: benefits, housing policy and the provision of cars and training;  
**(Note:** The Terms & Conditions of Assembly-Appointed staff who are ordained ministers shall come within the framework of the Plan for Partnership.)
  - g) In conjunction with the Pensions Executive, monitor and comment on the Lay Staff Pensions Policy;
  - h) Have oversight of the training and development policy for all Church House staff (particularly those in managerial positions) and monitor its effectiveness.
- 4.2 The HRAG will structure their work so as to ensure that they address all of their remit on a timely basis and can, where necessary, advise Mission Council and/or the URC Trust accordingly.
- 4.3 The HRAG shall also have the power to seek other external professional advice if they deem it necessary with reference to the general secretary as budget holder.
- 5. Review of Constitution and Terms of Reference**
- 5.1 These Terms of Reference will be reviewed by both the HRAG and Mission Council at least once every four years.