

# Paper S1

Medium Term Strategy Group  
The Role of Synod Clerk

United Church 2015  
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# Paper S1

## Medium Term Strategy Group

### The Role of Synod Clerk

#### Basic Information

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<b>Action required</b>	Decision.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<p><b>Mission Council:</b></p> <p>a) notes the wide range of tasks for which synod clerks are responsible;</p> <p>b) thanks those who fulfil these tasks with dedication within our various synod structures; and</p> <p>c) agrees that the Medium Term Strategy Group does not need to promote any further work on a standard role description for a synod clerk.</p>

#### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To explain the work done by synod clerks and to demonstrate that a standard role description is not necessary.
<b>Main points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The specific tasks undertaken by synod clerks vary enormously from one synod to another.</li> <li>• A checklist of tasks that needs to be done in each synod is provided and is potentially a useful tool.</li> <li>• Given the variety in who in practice undertakes which tasks, attempting to construct a standard role description for a synod clerk is not a worthwhile task.</li> </ul>
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Mission Council Paper S1 of March 2014 and Minute 14/03(1).
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Synod clerks.

#### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None.
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	None.

# The Role of Synod Clerk

## Background

1. One of the outstanding issues Mission Council remitted in October 2012 to the Medium Term Strategy Group (MTSG) was whether the Church would benefit if a standard or model role description for a synod clerk was produced.
2. The initial review of this by MTSG, in the light of the extensive work the Group had done on the role of synod moderator, was that a role description for synod clerks were best done in the individual synods. This view was reported to the March 2014 meeting of Mission Council.
3. Mission Council was not persuaded and asked for MTSG to oversee a more detailed piece of work on this issue.

## What do synod clerks really do?

4. MTSG worked with the existing synod clerks to clarify what tasks in practice the 13 of them currently undertake. The clerks appointed a sub-group led by Melanie Campbell, the Northern Synod clerk, to draw together their thoughts.
5. Initially the clear objective was to respond to Mission Council's request to produce a standard role description. However, the more work was done the more evident it became to both the clerks and MTSG that the very widely different circumstances in which the different clerks work would make this either too broad brush to be useful or massively complicated if it tried to accommodate necessary differences between synods.
6. MTSG therefore agreed with the clerks that they would prepare a summary of what the different clerks do. In the short term this would be useful to Mission Council to see the variety of work involved. In the longer term this could be useful checklist of tasks that need to be done by someone in each synod, even though not necessarily by the clerk. This summary is attached as an Appendix.

## The Way Forward

7. MTSG invites Mission Council to note the long and varied list of tasks that are undertaken – sometimes by our synod clerks and sometimes by others – in each synod in their 13 different patterns of working.
8. MTSG invites Mission Council to note that there is no desire amongst the current synod clerks for a standard role description.
9. MTSG invites Mission Council to discharge the MTSG from pursuing this part of its brief further.

## Appendix

# A description of the tasks undertaken by synod clerks

### Introduction

1. Following an analysis of synod clerk job descriptions, and additional information from synod clerks, it can be concluded that the role, scope and level at which each clerk works, varies enormously.
2. A total of 11 synod clerk job descriptions were analysed, of the remaining two, one clerk did not have a job description, and the other was not available.

### Findings – general observations, terms and conditions, and scope of role

3. There are substantial differences in terms and conditions, working hours and arrangements; some are salaried, and some are volunteers, some work up to four days a week, and others far less. Given these differences, it follows that there will be variations in the degree, to which the clerk is responsible for the day-to-day life of the synod. The composition of the synod clerk role is influenced by the configuration and capacity within the wider synod team, and not least the way in which moderators prefer to use their time and skills.
4. It is a fact that tasks addressed by clerks in some synods, are not being attended to elsewhere. This can be explained by practicalities such as the support available from other synod staff and the numbers of hours worked. Additionally there are wide variations in the scope of the synod clerk role. Some have a relatively narrow, *administrative* focus, concentrating upon record keeping, maintaining minutes, co-ordinating and consulting with committees and ensuring papers are distributed correctly. Others are weighted towards '*operational*' practical matters. These will include some problem solving, and generally ensuring that people and tasks across the synod are organised. There are some clerks who have a more *strategic* role, which can encompass all aspects of synod life, providing leadership and guidance.
5. These divergent emphases are used below to cluster similar task descriptions found in the job descriptions. The headings *administrative*, *operational* and *strategic* are used to distinguish between the types of tasks, for ease of reference only.

## Administrative Tasks

6. All synod clerks are responsible for **synod meetings**:
  - a) Organising synod meetings, planning agendas, Books of Reports/papers, and attending to any practical arrangements required for the meetings. These tasks can involve considerable amounts of consultation with committees.
  - b) Some of these events are residential and therefore will require considerably more time, than those lasting a day.
  - c) Organising the synod includes ensuring that matters referred from General Assembly/Mission Council are considered as needed, and subsequent actions followed up.
  - d) Synod clerks are also responsible for ensuring synod minutes are taken and that news articles are available following the meeting. Some are assisted by office staff in these tasks, whilst others have little or no support.
  
7. All synod clerks are responsible for synod involvement in **General Assembly/Mission Council**.
  - a) Tasks include making arrangements for synod representatives to attend Mission Council and General Assembly and for any synod resolutions to be considered.
  - b) Twelve synod clerks are required to attend Mission Council and all are required to attend General Assembly.
  
8. All synod clerks are required to participate in the **synod clerk networks**.
  
9. All synod clerks are required to attend **synod committee meetings**.
  - a) Involvement ranges from being ex-officio members, to full voting members, in some or all meetings of the synod. Time commitments and levels of responsibility therefore differ.
  - b) Some synod clerks are responsible for secretariat duties for meetings, whilst others will ensure these tasks are undertaken by other office colleagues. See (15) below.

## Operational Tasks

10. **Administration and management**
  - a) Most synod clerks have responsibility for the administration of the synod. This varies in extent and depth; some are responsible for providing administrative capacity themselves, whilst others have full **line-management responsibility** for some or all office staff and their activities.
  - b) Some synod clerks have office **budget** responsibilities.
  - c) Some synod clerks have responsibility for undertaking **risk assessments**.
  - d) Some synod clerks are responsible for **planning**.
  
11. **Synod Business**
  - a) A number of synod clerks are responsible for **planning and organising synod activities**, chairing working parties, facilitating and enabling short term tasks.
  - b) In terms of regular synod business, some clerks job descriptions specify a requirement to ensure that matters referred to synod by wider church councils, are attended to appropriately. However in practice, this falls to all synod clerks, who will co-ordinate or oversee this element of synod work.

- c) One synod clerk is responsible for maintenance of the **procedures book**, ensuring the implementation of synod policies. This includes statutory requirements such as Health and Safety and Equal Opportunities. In practice other Synod clerks are also involved in ensuring statutory duties are complied with, although to varying extents.
- d) Some synod clerks are responsible for the preparation and distribution of the **Synod Year Book**, and that statistical and other information is sent to Church House as needed. This task is also undertaken by other clerks, although it is not specified in their job descriptions, whilst in other synods this may be the responsibility of office staff.

## 12. Human Resources

- a) Most synod clerks are responsible for the review and **appointment arrangements for synod moderators**.
- b) Most synod clerks are **responsible for recruitment** of office and synod paid staff, and have line management responsibilities including **staff appraisals and reviews**.
- c) Some synod clerks are required to participate in disciplinary processes.

## 13. Synod Executives

- a) Most synod clerks have responsibility for preparing agendas for Synod Executive meetings in consultation with moderators. Some are responsible for ensuring that actions agreed, are followed up and implemented. Whilst others are responsible for shaping the programme of work which is followed by the Executive (see below).
- b) Some synod clerks are responsible for arranging the secretariat duties for the Executive meetings, whilst others are required to undertake the administration themselves. Some receive office support to do this, whilst others have little support.

## 14. Communications

- a) Two synod clerks have responsibility for **communications planning**, and one for effective working of **communications systems**.
- b) Others are required to keep **websites** up to date, maintain websites, and edit the content of them.
- c) One synod clerk is required to maintain good links with area committees and their officers, local churches and others to enable **effective communication between committees and the churches**. In practice this task falls to all synod clerks, although it is not clearly specified in all job descriptions.
- d) One synod clerk also holds responsibility for the confidentiality of information. However in practice others are also required to attend to **data protection** issues, although this is not specified in their job descriptions.
- e) One synod clerk is specifically required to offer advice and guidance upon the correct response to incoming mail, particularly where there is no procedure in place.

## 15. Synod Committees

- a) All synod clerks are required to **chair committees** such as Nominations and to ensure secretariat duties are fulfilled for all committees, if not by them, then by other office staff.



- b) One synod clerk is required to represent the synod in the **annual review** of an RCL and make reports to other stakeholders.

#### 16. Synod Trusts

- a) Most synod clerks are expected to be **appointed trustees**, with two required to be directors of Trusts and others are **authorised signatories**.
- b) Some synod clerks have line management responsibility for the Trust officers.

#### 17. Wider Church Activity

- a) Most synod clerks are required to **represent the synod** in other wider church committees, or special projects.

#### 18. Ecumenical Activity

- a) Some synod clerks are required to **represent the synod/URC at ecumenical events or regional/national ecumenical bodies**.
- b) Others are responsible for **providing advice on ecumenical matters** and being responsible for giving or securing advice on constitutions and any other related matters.

#### 19. Specialist Advice

- a) Most clerks are responsible for **providing specialist advice** upon the constitution, manual, General Assembly decisions and similar guidance for life of the churches including URC charity, policy and governance regulations.
- b) One synod clerk is required to be the person who **secures specialist legal or employment advice**. In practice other synod clerks are also responsible for ensuring specialist advice is obtained as necessary, although it does not feature in their job descriptions.
- c) At least one synod clerk is involved in checking Terms of Settlement.

### Strategic Tasks

#### 20. Strategic Oversight

- a) At strategic level, most synod clerks are required to be the **senior lay officer** of the synod, keeping the moderator up to speed with any surfacing issues developing in committees or elsewhere. Synod clerks are also informed and consulted by the moderator when matters of serious concern exist.
- b) Their responsibilities include convening meetings as needed, monitoring the work of the synod, and that the committees, paid staff and other synod organisations, are working collaboratively and coherently towards synod priorities.
- c) One synod clerk is responsible for **devising strategy** in collaboration with synod and the moderator and **advocating** on behalf of the Executive for the work of the synod and its committees.
- d) One synod clerk is tasked with reviewing the synod **structures and processes**, whilst another is required to supervise the **constitutional structure** of the synod.
- e) This element of the role includes assisting the moderator to discharge their duties in **policy development** and problem solving as well as working with the moderator to **shape the executive and synod programme**.

## 21. Deputising for Moderator

- a) Most synod clerks **deputise for the moderator**, in a full range of circumstances. These include illness, or other absence, and ensuring that the synod is represented as appropriate internally and externally.
- b) Some have a specific brief to deputise for the moderator, particularly in **external relations**.
- c) At a strategic level this aspect of the role also includes **addressing serious concerns** which would normally be taken to the moderator.

Tasks not included in job descriptions which are undertaken by synod clerks.

- a) Some synod clerks are undertaking **safeguarding** responsibilities in the absence of other appropriate individuals.
- b) Some organise training events, synod workshops or other activities, which may be undertaken by a training and development officer elsewhere.
- c) Some synod clerks have very **active roles within synod** and church life including presenting at inductions, **preaching, leading worship**, and supporting individual churches. These tasks are not necessarily included in their job descriptions.