

Paper M3

Acting with strategic intent

Alan Yates

Basic information

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Action required	Decision on whether and how to progress this.
Draft resolution(s)	See foot of paper.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Strategic planning for 'back-office' services for the URC in the decades ahead. Reflection on group discussions at last Mission Council meeting.
Main points	There was quite wide support at the last Mission Council for greater co-ordination of our services.
Previous relevant documents	Alan Yates' presentations at the last two Mission Council meetings.
Consultation has taken place with...	MCAG; Convenor of law and polity advisory group.

Summary of impact

Financial	We are not at a stage of precise financial planning, but in general good organization of admin is economic.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	We might well be able to deliver some of our legal obligations more efficiently.

1. Introduction

Following Alan Yates's presentation to last November's Mission Council, group discussions were held. This note provides an overview of the feedback from these groups and provides a suggested way forward. Since Mission Council Alan has delivered similar presentations to synod meetings in Yorkshire and Thames North (Eastern heard it shortly before the November's Mission Council). All three presentations were well received.

2. Summary

Overall, the feedback is broadly positive. It appears there is an appetite for radical change, perhaps even more radical than I'm suggesting! It is clear that more detail is required, which warrants doing more work to address specific elements of the strategy.

3. Overview of the feedback

Question one: Would such an approach be beneficial to the URC at the present moment?

Yes, was the simple answer from most groups. Some specific guidance was given: the 80/20 rationale will identify the most valuable services to offer, assessing our wealth and investing in people is the key, northerly synods work indicates this could add value. But there were a few warnings given: not to do it in isolation from the wider mission of the church, and one group said that we've heard a lot about church but we also need to be talking about Kingdom.

Question two: What elements of the approach do you feel are workable and which elements are not?

There could be advantages to centralised procurement, safeguarding and employment. Uniting the Trusts would be good and would free resources. Some people were not convinced that structures are the only factor at the heart of our problems. Some thought that amalgamating trusts would be expensive. One group thought that rather than too many synods some synods were already too big, and there is a risk that further centralisation would give the perception of power being even more detached.

Question three: What changes would you suggest to enhance the approach (either its functionality – making it work better – or its implementability – making it easier to achieve)?

There needs to be greater thought given to mechanisms for strengthening redistribution of resources not only between synods, but also within synods – rich and poor churches near to each other. One group had a preference for having more field workers, more local training of elders and others (e.g. mentors in *Stepwise* programmes) rather than back office, centralised functions. Another group highlighted the concept of subsidiarity, ie taking decisions as close to those affected as possible, and they felt that synods have a key role in communicating with local churches.

Question four: How should we start the process? Note this is not a decision to start, simply early planning on what we would do if approval is given.

The following ideas were suggested:

- Exploring the possibility of one trust; it was felt a good cost benefit analysis was necessary. Prepare a proposal for each Trust to evaluate
- Appoint a vision action group
- Prepare the people for major change
- Start with one element e.g. HR advice and then add others one by one
- Talk to the five northerly synods to learn from their experience
- Build on the success of specific expertise in the synods. It doesn't all have to be provided from one central place
- Always ask how this works for the local church.

4. Next steps

There is an appetite for change, and mostly for radical change. We still have time to plan this and to prepare our churches and synods, if we can generate and keep some momentum. Of the many suggestions for next steps these are the three that seem to have support and provide a coherent platform for change:

1. Continue to communicate the message
2. Conduct a feasibility study for the amalgamation of Trust assets
3. Plan to launch one or more coordinated central services (perhaps starting in the northerly synods, if possible).

5. Synthesis and consultation

- 5.1 Any work on trust matters would need careful liaison with the law and polity advisory group, who have already been asked by an assembly commission to clarify the interlocking responsibilities of synods and their associated trust companies (see paper M1, paragraph eleven). The Convenor of LPAG has given initial encouragement to proposal 4.2 above, as a potentially helpful complement to the group's work on these matters. But contact with LPAG would need to remain close, in order to keep lines of discussion and understanding as clear as possible.
- 5.2 Further, any work on trust matters – however preliminary and exploratory – would require careful and measured discussion from the very outset with trustees in the synods. The following draft resolution is worded with this in mind.

6. Possible draft resolution on 4.2, above:

Mission Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly, expresses its desire to consult widely, in order to allow discussion about the possible advantages and disadvantages of any move towards amalgamating Trust bodies. Therefore, Mission Council directs [person or group to be determined] to initiate consultation with synods, with provincial and National Trust companies, and with the URC Trust, with a view to promoting an appropriately careful discussion.

7. Possible draft resolution on 4.3, above:

Mission Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly, expresses its desire to explore in more detail possible central provision of support services, and therefore directs [person or group to be determined] to initiate consultation with synods, and to bring forward any appropriate proposals that emerge.