

Paper M4

Consensus Adviser

Mission Council Advisory Group



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Mission Council Advisory Group: Consensus Adviser

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Roberta Rominger roberta.rominger@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Mission Council re-affirms its commitment to the use of consensus decision making for the strategic decisions facing the Church. Mission Council asks the Education & Learning Committee and the General Secretary to ensure that ongoing reflection and training on consensus methods takes place, not only for incoming Assembly Moderators but for others in leadership roles across the Church. Mission Council agrees that the role of consensus adviser should come to an end at the conclusion of General Assembly 2014.
Alternative options to consider, if any	

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	The current consensus adviser's post finishes in 2014 and a decision is required about the future of the post.
Main points	The Mission Council Advisory Group (MCAG) recommends discontinuing the post and fostering consensus decision making through other means.
Previous relevant documents	May 2009 Mission Council paper
Consultation has taken place with...	Assembly officers and present and previous consensus advisers

Summary of Impact

Financial	The recommended reflection and training will incur costs; some money will be saved by not having a dedicated consensus adviser at Mission Council and Assembly.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

Consensus Adviser: future of the post

The Revd Pauline Barnes completes her term as consensus adviser in July 2014. It would be good for Mission Council to decide whether a successor should be appointed. This paper comes to Mission Council with Pauline's support.

The Clerk has researched the origins of the post. Here are her findings:

- Neither the documents in support of the adoption of Consensus Decision Making nor the Standing Orders which implemented it make any mention of a Consensus Adviser.
- In December 2008 Mission Council passed a resolution from MCAG which appointed Elizabeth Nash as Consensus Adviser "until General Assembly 2010 in the first instance".
- In May 2009 proposals were brought to Mission Council (see the first item of Session 2) which included at 1.10 «A Consensus Adviser be nominated by Nominations to both General Assembly and Mission Council, and four consensus facilitators be nominated by Nominations to General Assembly". The minutes record the decisions reached for many of these proposals, but do not record what was decided concerning this one. I can find no reference to it in subsequent minutes. No resolution in these terms was presented to Assembly.
- In 2010 Assembly appointed Pauline Barnes as Consensus Adviser until Assembly 2014.
- The Standing Orders include in the remit of the facilitation group "help and support the Moderator". (See SO 2c.(b))

The Clerk concludes from this that Assembly, although it has appointed a Consensus Adviser, has not resolved that there should always be one. The previous Clerk, James Breslin, treated the post as transitional in anticipation of the day when all procedural advice would once again lie with the Clerk.

The Assembly officers exchanged emails on this subject over the summer. There seems to be clarity that it is no longer felt to be helpful to have a consensus adviser at the Moderator's elbow giving procedural advice, especially when there is a Clerk at the other elbow speaking into the other ear. The Clerk is confident that she can give appropriate procedural advice as required.

However, there was also an observation from the officers that the URC is at an early stage in its practice of consensus decision making and that we must continue to develop our skill in this area. This view was strongly endorsed in conversations with Pauline Barnes and Elizabeth Nash, her predecessor as consensus adviser. The question is whether that development need is best served by a dedicated consensus adviser or whether it can be entrusted to the other processes of our Church (review, agenda planning, induction sessions for new Assembly Moderators). Obviously there is nothing to prevent us from calling on the consensus "experts" among us for occasional training and review events.

Resolution

1. **Mission Council re-affirms its commitment to the use of consensus decision making for the strategic decisions facing the Church.**
2. **Mission Council asks the Education & Learning Committee and the General Secretary to ensure that ongoing reflection and training on consensus methods takes place, not only for incoming Assembly Moderators but for others in leadership roles across the Church.**
3. **Mission Council agrees that the role of consensus adviser should come to an end at the conclusion of General Assembly 2014.**