

Paper O2

Human Resources Advisory Group (HRAG)

Line management of the General Secretary

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Paper 02

Human Resources Advisory Group Line Management of the General Secretary

Basic Information

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Action required	
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Mission Council resolves that:</p> <p>a) The line manager of the General Secretary should be a General Assembly Moderator, whether elect, current or immediate past.</p> <p>b) The GA Moderator who will undertake the role of line manager of the General Secretary will be selected by a group comprising the Officers of Assembly, but excluding the General Secretary.</p> <p>c) This group will also have the authority to seek advice from a person with line management experience and it is proposed that this should be a member of the HR Advisory Group.</p>

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Recommendation for the line management of the General Secretary
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Resolution 38 Paper P1, Mission Council November 2014 – from LPAG
Consultation has taken place with...	LPAG Officers of Assembly

Summary of Impact

Financial	
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

Line Management of the General Secretary

1. Background

1.1 The response to Resolution 38 as set out in Paper P1 presented to Mission Council in November 2014 by the Law and Polity Advisory Group expressed the following concerns regarding the line management of the General Secretary:

12. ... with its infrequent sessions, Assembly is not well-placed to hold the General Secretary to account or to supervise her/his work. The question is whether the moderators are any better placed.

13. There is, of course, an issue of finite time: the moderators cannot at the same time be visiting local churches and hearing reports from Church House staff. Moderators of synods face a similar dilemma on a different scale. But there is a deeper issue of gifts and calling. To expect the moderators to 'manage' or 'supervise' the general secretary and simultaneously to discharge their representative role may not only expect more of their time than is fair, but also demand a combination of talents which few possess.

14. We feel the Commission's doubts about the moderators' suitability as the general secretary's 'line managers' are well-founded. Yet to designate some other individual for this role would simply move the problem up a notch – to whom would that individual then account?

1.2 Following discussion Mission Council passed by consensus the following resolution:

Mission Council requests the Law and Polity Advisory Group to consult with the General Secretary and Deputy General Secretaries (once the new and recent appointees are all settled in post) on an appropriate line management mechanism in the light of considerations at paragraph 14.

1.3 It was also agreed at Mission Council that LPAG would consult HRAG on this matter. Subsequently it was agreed between LPAG and HRAG that HRAG would take the lead in this review consulting with LPAG as appropriate.

1.4 During 2015 HRAG prepared a discussion paper for submission to LPAG which subsequently confirmed its agreement with the recommendation in the paper.

1.5 In February 2016 this same discussion paper was submitted to the Officers of Assembly as from General Assembly 2016 and they also agreed with the recommendation in the paper.

1.6 Finally, it should be noted that it has been confirmed that the concept of a General Secretariat is proving to be sound in practice and that the members are working well together. Being able to take an overview of the work of the URC and in turn ensure that the particular work of the various Departments is integrated as necessary is proving to be of value.

2. Current situation

2.1 HRAG, in its review of the Church House organisation structure, had proposed that the General Secretary should be line managed by one of the General Assembly Moderators – noting that there would be a choice from six possible people, two elect, two in post and two immediate past Moderators.

2.2 The considerations taken into account when advocating this approach can be summarised as follows:

- 2.2.1 Line management needs to be on a “one to one” basis rather than by a group of people; multiple reporting lines tend to be fraught with difficulties and unless meticulously organised generally result in the individual being over-managed, under-managed or receiving conflicting messages.
- 2.2.2 The General Secretary is ultimately accountable to General Assembly, and hence an Assembly Officer was seen the appropriate person to undertake this role since he or she already had the authority of General Assembly.
- 2.2.3 It would be possible to identify a suitable person from amongst the set of six GA Moderators to undertake this role bearing in mind the particular experience and skills required.
- 2.2.4 Since the time frame for a GA Moderator from becoming “elect” through to “immediate past” is six years there is the possibility of establishing a long term relationship.

2.3 With regard to the three Deputy General Secretary (DGS) posts the line management issue was rather more straightforward – to be precise the three DGSs are each line managed by the General Secretary.

2.4 Hence this discussion paper is concerned solely with the line management of the General Secretary.

3. What do we mean by line management at the General Secretary level?

3.1 The job description summarises the role of the General Secretary as follows:

To provide theological and pastoral leadership and operational oversight to the URC by:

- *Implementing the policies and decisions of General Assembly/Mission Council*
- *The management of Church House through the General Secretariat*
- *Ensuring links with the wider Church and the fostering and maintenance of positive external relations*

3.2 The ‘line management of someone at ‘Chief Executive’ (CE) level is quite different from that for operational staff in that the nature of the CE role is longer term and harder to measure in terms of output.’

3.3 Hence, the “line management” of the General Secretary is **not** concerned with routine operational matters such as:

- allocating work and rotas
- monitoring work and checking quality
- day-to-day people management
- managing operational costs.

3.4 Rather it is concerned with motivating, enabling and supporting the General Secretary, with a focus on strategic matters and the oversight of the denomination in general, including the oversight of the General Secretariat and the integration of the activities of the three Departments in order to support the wider work of the denomination.

3.5 The prime functions of a line manager for the General Secretary are therefore to

- a) Hold the General Secretary to account for their work
- b) Hold periodic 'performance reviews' (and share them as appropriate)
- c) Jointly reflect on priorities and achievement of objectives
- d) Act as a 'sounding board' when needed and offer feedback as appropriate
- e) Initiate or suggest suitable responses to any difficulties or issues arising in the performance of the role.

3.6 The test of whether appropriate line management is in place for the General Secretary is:

- It helps them to perform their role fully and well
- It can help to deal with performance issues, personal problems or relationship or organisational problems should they arise.

3.7 What the line management should **not** be is a "support group" in respect of the personal well-being of the General Secretary. Such a group if required must be established as a separate body.

4. Review of options

4.1 There appeared to be the following options for the line management of the General Secretary:

4.2 By an **Individual**:

4.2.1 GA Moderator as already proposed – is already an officer of General Assembly and so has the necessary authority and awareness of the strategic requirements and associated plans of GA.

The downside is that it might not be possible to identify a suitable GA Moderator out of the pool of six or the demand on the time is too great, though we believe both these concerns are of low probability.

4.2.2 AN Other – acting on behalf of and given that authority by General Assembly

- whether a named individual by virtue of meeting specified criteria such as experience, knowledge of the URC, etc.
or
- by virtue of position/appointment, for example an Assembly Committee convener or Committee member or a member of Mission Council or General Assembly, e.g. the Chair of the URC Trust with a focus on governance and related matters.

4.3 The benefit of an individual undertaking this role is that there is a clear reporting line and hence clarity with regard to communication and expectations.

4.4 It is however recognised there might be a general concern if an individual undertakes this role since it becomes possible for a significant amount of power to be held by that person on account of the direct access to the General Secretary.

4.5 By a **Group or Committee**

- A group or committee established specifically for that purpose
or
- An existing Assembly Committee - given an additional item for the terms of reference for this purpose

4.6 The assumption underpinning the “committee approach” is that since the URC is a conciliar church and the councils of the church have a primacy then a conciliar approach should be adopted in respect of the line management of a senior officer.

4.7 Although this approach does accord with the conciliar nature of the URC it does depend on the group being of one mind with regard to the work and performance of the General Secretary in order to ensure clarity in any discussions. The danger is the possibility of differing views being expressed and so sending out confused messages and hence leading to a lack of clarity.

4.8 A variation on the group/committee approach is that a nominated member of that group represents the group when meeting with the General Secretary and hence is the sole link between the group and the General Secretary

5. Conclusion and recommendation

5.1 This matter was discussed in considerable detail at the HRAG meetings held on 19 February 2015 and 20 April 2015. Both the General Secretary and the Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources) are members of HRAG and were present at those meetings. The General Secretary had also sought and received comments in advance from the other Deputy who was in place at that time.

5.2 The members of HRAG recognised the concerns expressed in the Paper P1 concerning not only, for various reasons, the feasibility of a General Assembly Moderator acting as the line manager of the General Secretary, but also the unanswered question – “who else?”.

5.3 For the reasons given above HRAG is still of the view that “*Line management needs to be on a “one to one” basis rather than by a group of people*”.

5.4 Furthermore, it also was felt to be important that the “line management” of the General Secretary had a strong link to Mission Council and General Assembly since there is an ultimate accountability to General Assembly.

5.5 Our attention was drawn to the model of the teaching staff at Westminster College in that there are five members of staff, who operate in some ways as equal colleagues, although the Principal line-manages the individual work of the others and reports to the Convener of Governors on the work of the staff as a whole. The Convener, in turn, can refer to other Governors if critical or urgent issues arise.

5.6 It was felt that this model could be replicated for the line management of the General Secretary but structured in the following manner:

- 5.6.1 The line manager should be a General Assembly Moderator, whether elect, current or immediate past.
- 5.6.2 The GA Moderator who will undertake the role of line manager of the General Secretary will be selected by a group comprising the Officers of Assembly, but excluding the General Secretary. This group will also have the authority to

seek advice from a person with line management experience and it is suggested that this should be a member of the HR Advisory Group.

- 5.6.3 The GA Moderator would be able to refer to the above group as necessary to discuss any important or difficult issues.
- 5.6.4 It is reasonable to assume that the group will be able to agree, on the occasions when critical or urgent action is needed.

5.7 HRAG recognises that this approach does not depart from its original recommendation that the line manager should be a GA Moderator. In this regard the response in Paper P1 had in effect stated that if the GA Moderator was a staff member at Church House then he/she would be precluded from being the line manager. With a pool of six GA Moderators to choose from this should not present a problem.

5.8 The major change however is the formalisation of the link between the line manager and the appropriate Officers of Assembly – and, in addition, the line manager would not be “on their own or isolated”.

5.9 It was therefore felt that this approach would not only provide sound line management of the General Secretary but would also provide the necessary link with General Assembly, at the same time ensuring that the GA Moderator so appointed had recourse to a wider group as necessary, since such a group already has the authority of General Assembly. Furthermore, it would enable the joint reflection on priorities and objectives to be undertaken more fully with the Officers of Assembly as a group.

