

15. Larger Than Circuit

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Resolutions	Listed at end of report

Summary of Content

Subject and aims	To present the Conference with the report and recommendations from the <i>Larger than Circuit</i> Coordinating Group.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Range of consultation undertaken • Lack of widespread desire for radical structural change, but important not to continue with <i>status quo</i> • Desire for change to come about from within Districts about how leadership is exercised across the District • The changing role of District Chair • How Chairs are identified, selected, appointed and nurtured • Exercising the ministry • Recommendations for how leadership in Districts might be exercised differently
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	Learning from Mapping a Way Forward: Regrouping for Mission for larger than circuits report to the Conference (2011) Larger than Circuit report to the Conference (2013) A background paper, Larger than Circuit: Consultation, Methodology and Findings, is available from the Conference Office (conferenceoffice@methodistchurch.org.uk)
Consultations	Listed in paragraph 9

Summary of Impact

Standing Orders	Significant in relation to the role of Chair
Faith and Order	Potentially significant (depending on which resolutions agreed)
Wider Connexional	Closer working together across neighbouring Districts is encouraged
External (eg ecumenical)	Greater cooperation is encouraged
Risk	Risk in maintaining the status quo

1. This report presents the Conference with a summary of the findings and recommendations of the *Larger than Circuit* Coordinating Group (CG). The Council has considered this and commends this report to the Conference.
2. This paper might usefully be read alongside *Larger than Circuit: Consultation, Methodology and Findings*, which contains detailed information about the processes and consultations undertaken. *Larger than Circuit: Consultation, Methodology and Findings* is available from the Conference Office (conferenceoffice@methodistchurch.org.uk).

Introduction

3. The *Larger than Circuit* Coordinating Group (CG) was established by the 2013 Conference in line with the recommendations of the initial *Larger than Circuit* Working Party, which had been appointed by the Methodist Council to review district patterns and structures in the light of the *Mapping a Way Forward: Regrouping for Mission* process. The CG now combines the group charged with considering the entity *Larger than Circuit*, and also those considering the role of District Chair and the implications for the District of any changes in approach to district leadership, which the 2013 Conference made clear should be part of this process.
4. The Terms of Reference for both the Coordinating Group and District Chair Working Party were agreed at the 2013 Conference and by the Methodist Council in January 2014 respectively (the latter are shown in an Appendix to this Report). Broadly speaking the CG was charged with undertaking further explorations of the role and responsibilities of the District and developing proposals for patterns and structures which most effectively express the 'larger than circuit' aspects of connexional life. The Working Party looking at the role of District Chair was asked to consider 'What is a District Chair today' with particular reference to changes in personal, corporate and collegiate leadership, and to engage in some fresh, creative, prophetic, theologically-informed thinking on what district leadership models could look like and present suggested models. Full details on the Terms of Reference can be found in *Larger than Circuit: Consultation, Methodology and Findings*. (see para 2)

Process and analysis

5. The CG was keen to ensure that the consultations and discussions for their work were framed in a Methodist theological context. To ensure this context remained at the forefront of the CG's activities, a number of reports were considered, including:
 - *Called to Love and Praise* (1999)
 - *The Missional Nature of the Circuit (Faith and Order Committee)* (2008)
 - *What is a District Chair?* (2006)
 - *Nature of Oversight: Leadership, Management and Governance in the Methodist Church in Great Britain* (2005)
 - *Our Calling* (2000)
 - *Priorities for the Methodist Church* (2004)
6. *The Missional Nature of the Circuit* highlights that the Circuit holds to the conviction that the Holy Spirit leads the Church to adapt its structures as it faces new situations and challenges and that "this flexibility is itself an important principle, rooted in Scripture, theology and experience"¹. The notion of reviewing structures and ways of working, of being flexible, fluid and dynamic in order to respond to the contemporary calling of God is a strong feature of the 2008 report, and also underpins the approach taken by the *Larger than Circuit* Coordinating

¹ Paragraph 4.7.11 of *Called to Love and Praise*, quoted in *The Missional Nature of the Circuit* (2008)

Group. The CG believes that the way leadership is exercised in Districts needs to be flexible, fluid and dynamic to support the development of Circuits in ways that are appropriate to their contexts.

7. *What is a District Chair?* argues that the role of a District Chair is more important than the structures of a District in enabling the District to fulfil its purposes, which is a principle that the CG has borne in mind throughout this process.
8. The work of the CG builds upon *Mapping a Way Forward: Regrouping for Mission (2007)*, which encouraged Districts to seek new shapes for their Circuits through reviewing their roles, ways of working, purposes and boundaries. It also encouraged Districts to review their District's ways of working, purposes and boundaries within five years.

Meetings and Consultations

9. The CG has met regularly and has consulted with a range of groups:
 - District Chairs
 - the Connexional Leaders' Forum
 - Superintendents (at their annual conference)
 - Deacons (at Convocation),
 - Connecting Disciples conference
 - Senior leaders in the Connexional Team
 - Team Leaders in the Connexional Team
 - Superintendents of 'larger circuits' (as defined by the superintendents of these circuits)
 - Synods
 - Resourcing Mission training event
 - Faith and Order Committee representatives
 - 3Generate
 - Ecumenical partners
 - World Church partners
 - Groups in a number of Districts
 - Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network regions
 - the Methodist Council.
10. The CG has undertaken three major pieces of consultation work:
 - 1) Each District Synod was invited to respond to a number of questions (toolkit)
 - 2) District Chair consultation on the 'Role of the Chair'
 - 3) Online survey

Summary of findings:

From the extensive consultation carried out, it has become clear that there is no widespread desire for radical change of the *structures* of Districts, but what has been made very clear is that the Methodist Church cannot continue to stay as it is. There does appear to be desire for change to come about in the ways in which leadership is exercised in Districts, and a number of areas where the CG believes further development is necessary are highlighted.

11. The CG now presents a number of areas containing recommendations for how leadership within Districts might be developed:
 - The changing role of District Chair
 - How Chairs are identified, selected, appointed and nurtured

- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Direct stationing
- Exercising the ministry of a District Chair
 - Continuing Development
 - Collaborative Ministry
- Exploring the possibilities of different ways of working – number of Districts, larger multi-Chair Districts
- Exercising ministry across a number of levels: district, regional, connexional, ecumenical
- Process of invitation and re-invitation
 - District Commission

The changing role of District Chair

12. The research has indicated that across the Connexion, including among some of the existing District Chairs themselves, a better understanding of the role of District Chair is needed. Towards addressing this, we recommend that the role of Chair is developed to respond to current needs.
13. In the evidence gathered from the District Chairs' questionnaire a number of Chairs stated that the demands of the role had increased during their period of service. Whilst very little has changed in terms of Standing Orders, expectations of the role across the Connexion appear to have shifted.
14. The consultations have revealed that District Chairs employ a variety of leadership styles according to the situations in which they find themselves: these include personal, corporate and collegiate leadership, with the highest percentage of time being offered in corporate leadership. The increasingly varied patterns of leadership make demands of time and energy upon the Chairs as connexional leaders. Chairs operate differently reflecting the context into which they are stationed and their ability to work alongside others.
15. District Chairs are often asked to be the chair or be a member of working parties appointed by the Conference, but it is important to ask whether this is in line with the priorities of the Conference and whether this is best use of significant spiritual leaders in the church, and whether others could better perform this function? The CG recommends this is reviewed by the Secretary of the Conference.
16. From the consultations, the responses suggest that what the Methodist Church wants from its District Chairs is spiritual leadership, strategic development and pastoral care. It is important to ask whether we are doing all we can to free up time to enable this. The CG suggests that serious further consideration be given to removing some roles from the District and these become Connexional Team based roles – serving the Districts as needed. The CG recommends that is also reviewed by the Secretary of the Conference.
17. One consideration arising from the research that should also be reviewed is the name(s) of those in district leadership. 'Chair' is disliked by many, while others in the Methodist Church would seek to embrace titles perceived to reflect better the nature and purpose of the role.
18. The working party encourages each Chair to review their diary commitments and hear the call from the church to prioritise preaching and leading worship. The consultations show the majority of people believed that their Chair is doing a good job – but many believe that often the job in reality is undo-able.

Recommendation 1:

The Conference directs that the Secretary of the Conference oversees a review of:

- a) the use of District Chairs to chair or serve on working groups appointed by the Council/Conference;
- b) the roles performed by the District Chair (and identify the roles that might be more appropriately carried out by the Connexional Team thereby allowing District Chairs further to exercise spiritual leadership); and
- c) the title 'District Chair, and whether an alternative title for the lead person in District leadership would be more appropriate'

and bring recommendations to the Conference as soon as possible.

How Chairs are identified, selected, appointed and nurtured

- 19. The consultations have revealed that the roles and responsibilities of a District Chair and the expectations the Church lays upon them appear to be ever changing, as Chairs increasingly have to deal with rapid change and ever more complex issues.
- 20. The research undertaken suggests disquiet about recruiting policies. The CG believes that further work should be done towards the nurture, recruitment and selection process of District Chairs in order to ensure that strategic appointments are made that best suit the whole Connexion, taking into consideration that the role has changed considerably in recent times, and that there are a variety of differing types of leadership roles in the Methodist Church.

Recommendation 2:

The Conference directs that a process of discernment is facilitated to identify and nurture potential leaders in the church; such a process would enable potential leaders to be guided to the most suitable of the wide variety of leadership roles that exist in the church.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 21. The 2014 Statistics for Mission revealed that:

	Church Membership	Presbyters and Deacons	District Chairs
Male	31%	60%	73%
Female	69%	40%	23%

(2014 Statistics show 201,689 Methodist members.)

- 22. These statistics show that when considering the gender balance of the membership of the Methodist Church, the percentage of female leadership is very stark. Two thirds of the District Chairs are male when two thirds of church members are women.
- 23. It is even more stark how few District Chairs there are from ethnic minority backgrounds. The CG is concerned that both the lack of women and ethnic minority backgrounds does not reflect either the Methodist Church profile or that of wider society, and that the Church needs to pay serious attention to this.
- 24. It is the view of the CG that urgent consideration and reflection must be given to the role of women as District Chairs as well as addressing the lack of ethnic minority representation that exists at present.

Recommendation 3:

The Conference directs that work is undertaken to review the processes for the selection of District Chairs with the aim of increasing gender and ethnic diversity among the District Chairs.

Direct Stationing

25. In the consultations and discussions with District Chairs, direct stationing was a key feature of the discussions that took place. Some Chairs voiced this idea very positively, although others less so.
26. As District Chairs are connexional leaders, the CG encourages the Conference to move towards establishing a process of direct stationing of District Chairs. The group feels that this would enable those presbyters with the appropriate gifts to become District Chairs to go where they are needed most. A pool of such people could be built up rather than waiting for people to apply or be nominated.
27. One model that the CG was particularly drawn to in this research was the Brazilian model, where Bishops (in their case) are elected, for five years, by the general Conference and then appointed to the regional Conference in which they are to serve. If we were to adopt a similar approach our Chairs would be nurtured and directly stationed by the Conference, rather than being recruited and selected by a connexional/district panel. We recommend a model akin to this in terms of direct stationing be considered further.

Recommendation 4:

The Conference directs that further consideration be given to the direct stationing of District Chairs.

Exercising the ministry of a District Chair

Continuing development

28. Many of those consulted requested further training for District Chairs particularly in strategic leadership (this might not only mean giving them the skills but also the power to enable strategy), as well as a freeing up of time to enable prayerful pastoral care, spiritual leadership and regular preaching. The CG believes that the Conference needs to take these requests seriously.

Collaborative ministry

29. Most Chairs indicated that their role has progressively changed and that they are working in a more collaborative way, not just with other people in their own District, but also with other Chairs across district boundaries. This said, the results of the survey suggest that many Chairs feel that there is much they need to do themselves. Many Chairs listed things that they would like to do beyond what they are doing already - these included giving spiritual, biblical and theological leadership, as well as teaching and preaching more. Chairs want to spend more time building up the body of Christ, but feel that there is little they can give up in order to make space to do it. This is not to suggest that the Chairs are not open to change. The Chairs suggested that they could see the role developing to be more strategic (possibly across a larger geography), even more collaborative, to allow for increased creativity and imagination.
30. The CG encourages Districts to explore increasing the numbers of those involved in leadership of the District, so that District Chairs (who are selected for their particular gifting), are able to lead the District alongside others who have complementary gifts, for a strategic missional approach to be developed (with reference to SO 962). Many Chairs work in a collaborative

way with a leadership team. The CG encourages a collaborative approach to leadership ensuring the variety of gifts of people within the District are used.

Exploring the possibilities of different ways of working – number of Districts, larger multi-Chair districts

31. There are now 31 Districts, many with largely the same configuration as in 1957. All but three have 'separated' Chairs. Two of those three operate as single circuit Districts: Shetland and Isle of Man. There are two Circuits in the Channel Islands. Synod Cymru (also a single circuit District) acts as a District within Wales with a 'separated' Chair.
32. The consultations and deliberations have given the CG the opportunity to consider a number of models for how district leadership might be exercised in a collaborative format. Details of these models can be found in *Larger than Circuit: Consultation, Methodology and Findings*, and Districts are encouraged to consider whether these models might be suitable in their context and pursue implementation of them if such change is desired from within. One example of where such change has taken place is in Shetland which will have a Deputy Chair (who is also superintendent of the Shetland Circuit), and the CG notes developments taking place in Yorkshire where consideration is being given to what sort of leadership is most appropriate for the geographical area.
33. Further examples are to have a number of Chairs in each District each holding different functions where responsibility on strategic leadership, pastoral care and spiritual leadership (plus other roles/responsibilities of district leadership) are divided up appropriately between them.
34. A further model which Districts may wish to explore is where the work of the Chair is done by a team of people, who (if ordained as a presbyter) could have pastoral charge of a church community or a regular place where they would lead worship. This might allow for leaders further to exercise spiritual leadership within local church communities and could also increase understanding and awareness of ministry taking place at a local level.
35. The CG also wishes to acknowledge that we have heard the call of many of our Methodist people and others, to consider the merits of opening up the district leadership roles to deacons and the laity. However the CG feels that when considering the theological context of this report, the lead person in any District should remain a presbyter (further details in *Larger than Circuit: Consultation, Methodology and Findings*).
36. The CG recommends closer working together with neighbouring Districts, and urges Districts to explore models that facilitate this. This analysis builds upon *Mapping a Way Forward: Regrouping for Mission (2007)* which states at paragraph 9.2 that:

"...cross-district co-operation and sharing of resources are encouraged wherever possible. Further development of district structures may emerge, in the spirit of the changes in the south-east area of England (the Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire, London and South East districts) and in the Methodist Church in Wales. The very small Districts may network together and substantially link their life with neighbouring larger Districts. All this is to happen through natural evolution and 'light touch' encouragement..."
37. The voices heard from the *Larger than Circuit* consultations also emphasise the need for change to take place in this way. The CG wishes to stress the risk of maintaining the *status quo* and urges Districts to seek how they might best adapt their leadership to the missional challenges in the current climate.

38. Any change to the way Chairs of District are deployed should also take into consideration that currently whenever the Chairs gather together with the Secretary of the Conference (the latter having oversight of those who serve or reside aboard) and the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order every minister in the Connexion has some form of representation.

Exercising ministry across a number of levels: district, regional, connexional, ecumenical

39. The CG believes that any changes that Districts may wish to pursue as to how District leadership might be best fulfilled, should build upon the Conference reports *What is a District Chair?* and *The Nature of Oversight: Leadership, Management and Governance in the Methodist Church in Great Britain*. These papers highlight the importance of ensuring that we watch over one another in love across the Connexion, and the need to balance district and connexional priorities, while also considering the stationing regions and the regions of the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network.
40. The consultations also revealed that a number of areas exist where there is significant ecumenical co-operation, and offered reflections on the leadership models used by our ecumenical partners. The CG encourages closer ecumenical cooperation where geographical boundaries permit this.
41. Exercising the ministry – in summary:
The CG recommends that leadership development training is made available for existing and future Chairs in respect of strategic leadership, spiritual leadership and pastoral care, for a greater consideration of how these ministries might be best fulfilled in each District, taking into consideration the need to work collaboratively on a number of different levels and ways.

Recommendation 5:

The Conference directs that training for leadership development of District Chairs be produced to cover the issues raised in paragraphs 28-41, and provided to existing and future District Chairs, and that this is overseen by the Secretary of the Conference.

Process of invitation and re-invitation

42. The consultation findings have alerted the CG to concern about the process of appointing a new District Chair, and especially the re-invitation of a presently-serving District Chair. Often these processes are substantially driven by the perceived needs of the existing District. As a consequence, the level of connexional engagement (particularly with the re-invitation of chairs) can be minimal, as can reference to the wider regional and ecumenical contexts.
43. The CG believes that the Church would benefit from a much more robust, connexionally-engaged and connexionally-consistent, process of discernment when it comes to the time when a District is discerning whether the present District Chair ought to be reinvited, or when the District is seeking the appointment of a new District Chair.

District Commission

44. To this end, the CG recommends that whenever a new Chair is being sought, or the present Chair is exploring the possibility with the District of a re-invitation, the Secretary of the Synod in consultation with the Secretary of the Conference, convenes a 'District Commission'. Such a Commission would be jointly appointed by the District and the Conference to oversee and undertake a thorough review of the life of the District, set in the wider regional, connexional, and ecumenical context.

45. In the development of this work, the CG was particularly exercised about how the North West and Mann Districts conducted such a process, and the CG commends that such a process should take place whenever invitation or reinvitation of District Chairs takes place in the future. It is important to acknowledge that additional cost will be incurred where a District Commission is carried out, but costs will vary due to the differing nature and size of Districts.
46. Further details on the suggested purpose and role of the District Commission can be found in the Appendices section of *Larger than Circuit, Consultation, Methodology and Findings*.

Recommendation 6:

The Conference directs that when a new Chair is being sought, or the present Chair is exploring the possibility with the District of a reinvitation, or a District or Group of Districts wants to engage in the process of reflection of review, the Secretary of the Synod in consultation with the Secretary of the Conference shall convene a District Commission, jointly appointed by the District and the Conference to oversee and undertake a thorough review of the life of the District, set in the wider regional, connexional, and ecumenical context.

[If the above is accepted]

Recommendation 7:

The Conference directs the Methodist Council to bring a process for implementing the creation of a District Commission, and the nomination of those to be appointed by the Conference as District Commissioners to the 2017 Conference.

Conclusion

47. The Acts, Standing Orders, Conference Statements and Reports of the Methodist Church point in the same direction: chiefly that the church needs to focus itself around its mission. The findings of the *Larger than Circuit* process would also confirm this.
48. The CG believes that the District's primary function is to provide the link between the Conference and the Circuits. Having listened to a variety of voices in the Methodist Church, the CG has considered the most effective way to provide the resources, encouragement and support that will enable God's mission in specific locations.
49. The CG has identified a number of ways that leadership of each District can be adapted for God's mission to be furthered, and encourages each District to consider the most appropriate ways of exercising ministry in their locality. The CG hopes that the resolutions offered will give Districts permission to enable change to take place from within, for the furtherance of the Kingdom of God across the Methodist Church in Britain.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

15/1. The Conference received the Report.

15/2. (Recommendation 1)

The Conference directed that the Secretary of the Conference oversees a review of:

- a. the use of District Chairs to chair or serve on working groups appointed by the Council/Conference;**
- b. the roles performed by the District Chair (and identify the roles that might be more appropriately carried out by the Connexional Team thereby allowing District Chairs further to exercise spiritual leadership); and**
- c. the title 'District Chair', and whether an alternative title would be more appropriate; and bring recommendations to the Conference as soon as possible**

15/3. (Recommendation 2)

The Conference directed that a process of discernment is facilitated by the Methodist Council to identify and nurture potential leaders in the church; such a process would enable potential leaders to be guided to the most suitable of the wide variety of leadership roles that exist in the church.

15/4. (Recommendation 3)

The Conference directed the Secretary of the Conference to review the processes for the selection of District Chairs with the aim of increasing gender and ethnic diversity among the District Chairs.

15/5. (Recommendation 4)

The Conference directed that the Stationing Committee gives consideration to the direct stationing of District Chairs.

15/6. (Recommendation 5)

The Conference directed that training for leadership development of District Chairs be produced to cover the issues raised in paragraphs 28-41, and provided to existing and future District Chairs, and that this is overseen by the Secretary of the Conference.

15/7. (Recommendation 6)

The Conference directs that:

- (a) At the times specified below, the Secretary of the Synod in consultation with the Secretary of the Conference shall convene a District Commission, jointly appointed by the District and the Conference, to oversee and undertake a thorough review of the life of the District, set in the wider regional, connexional and ecumenical context.
- (b) A review shall take place:
 - (i) At a time which will allow the outcome of the review to inform the work of the Chairs Nomination Panel when a new Chair is sought or the present Chair is exploring the possibility with the District of a reinvitation; and
 - (ii) At any other time when a District or group of Districts wants to engage in the process of reflection or review.

[For a resolution regarding when Resolution 15/7 comes into effect, see 59/1 at Daily Record 8/42/2]

15/8. (Recommendation 7)

The Conference directed the Council to bring a process for implementing the creation of a District Commission, and the nomination of those to be appointed by the Conference as District Commissioners to the 2017 Conference.

Appendix

Terms of Reference for the District Chair Working Party

1. The group will present to the Conference a snapshot of “What is a District Chair today” referencing how it has changed since the 2006 report “What is a District Chair” with particular reference to changes in personal, corporate and collegiate leadership.
2. In conjunction with the on-going review of the CLF the group will reflect and report on the purpose and effectiveness of the Chairs’ meeting and the Connexional Leaders’ Forum (CLF) – with particular reference to what is distinctive about each and how the role of lay leadership is exercised within the CLF.
3. The group will engage in some fresh, creative, prophetic, theologically informed thinking on what “District” (or larger than Circuit) Leadership could look like in the future. In light of this thinking, and taking into account the work of the Larger than Circuit Coordinating group and the various Conference reports that relate to leadership and oversight, the working party will seek to present suggested models of leadership.
4. The group will consult across the Connexion to ensure a wide range of perspectives and understandings are heard .

Clarity of Definition

1. The group will give particular reference to changes in personal, corporate and collegiate leadership.

For the purpose of this work we define

Personal Leadership = believing that God has called you to do this in line with your gifting, passion and personality.

Corporate = (Connexional) as laid down by the Methodist Constitution, Conference and Connexional Leadership

Collegiate = (Collaborative) hearing the voices of those you lead with and leading from that gathered perspective