

THE METHODIST COUNCIL: PURPOSES, WAYS OF WORKING AND PROFILE FOR POTENTIAL MEMBERS

The Council – Purposes and Responsibilities

The purposes and responsibilities of the Council are set out in Standing Orders 210 – 212. A summary of what is expected of the Council and of related groups was agreed by the Council in Spring 2005, included in the 2005 Conference Agenda and updated in the 2010 Conference Agenda. It is included here as an Appendix for information.

The Council – Ways of Working

The Council is a large body (60 people) which meets three or four times a year, sometimes for a day non-residentially, and sometimes for 24 hours residentially. It works in a number of different ways, depending on the nature of its business. These may include formal debates or more informal conversations in plenary sessions in which members are expected to raise relevant issues and to make contributions from the floor. At other times the Council may divide into smaller groups of about ten for more in-depth discussions. These sessions are chaired and recorded by members of that group and a summary of the discussion passed on to those responsible for the piece of work or reported back to the Council.

Worship is at the heart of the Council's life. In that context, the Council engages in a process of prayerful and thoughtful conversation to discern the gracious presence and love of God and how the Methodist people are being called to respond graciously in return ("Christian Conferring"). Members contribute their insights in order to discover the Holy Spirit's insight in the Council. To help with that process papers or other presentations are prepared by other committees and bodies or by members of the Connexional Team. The papers give details of a named contact person who can answer queries in advance of the meeting. Unless the matter is marked as confidential Council members are encouraged to discuss the paper with key people in the body which they represent before the meeting, but they then come to the meeting as representatives not as mandated delegates.

Each matter before the Council is normally dealt with by general discussion before specific decisions are made. The latter are dealt with by means of formal resolutions. Often these are put by the Chair of the Council asking if the members agree and the members responding verbally. In these cases if any member of the Council strongly disagrees they should intervene and ask that there should be a show of hands which, if necessary, can be counted. For formal votes (particularly where the Council members are acting as Managing Trustees) the vote may be counted and recorded, or a written ballot may take place.

If members of the Council wish to amend a resolution they should indicate that fact as soon as possible to the Chair, or to the Assistant Secretary of the Conference who acts as its Secretary and who can offer help with drafting appropriate words.

Just occasionally more formal procedures have to be invoked to ensure clarity in the decision-making. The general rules of procedure then apply which can be found in Standing Order 131 (where they are expressed in terms of the Conference and then have to be re-expressed with relation to the Council or other Methodist bodies).

As well as participating in plenary discussions members of the Council may also now be asked to take part in Scrutiny Groups and Reference Groups working on the Council's behalf (see below). These groups may involve some work between the meetings of the Council (which in some cases may be by phone conference or e-mail).

Some Definitions

Scrutiny Group

Scrutiny is basically an exercise in accountability relating to the delivery of an agreed procedure or range of responsibilities within a body or institution for which the Council is ultimately responsible or within the work of the Team. A group to perform this task is typically three in number: an SRC member, a Council member and an external member. The group reports to the Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC), which deals with issues raised or alerts the Council to significant matters needing attention. The SRC informs the Council in note form when the scrutiny process has been satisfactorily completed.

Reference Group

A reference group engages on behalf of the Council with the authors of an emerging policy in order to finalise the detail of a report for the Conference whose principles have been endorsed by the Council. It also looks in detail at reports prepared for the Council by the Team or Team-related groups and highlights any issues needing discussion and decision at the Council. A group to perform this task is typically five in number, and consists of members of the Council with appropriate skills and experience. The group may be helped by a check-list of items to look out for in its work.

Chair

The Conference has agreed that the Council be chaired by a former President or Vice-President of the Conference, for three years. The Conference makes the appointment, on the nomination of the Council. The current Chair is David Walton.

Council Membership

10 ex officio members:	President
	Vice-President
	Secretary of Conference
	Ex-President
	Ex-Vice-President
	President-Designate
	Vice-President-Designate
	Chair of the Council
	Assistant Secretary of the Conference
	The lead connexional Treasurer

4 District Chairs (*nominated by the Chairs' Meeting*)

31 District representatives

(A rota has been devised to balance ordained and lay representatives, on the assumption that the appointment of all District representatives will be for four years.)

3 Connexional Team Secretaries

The Chair and 2 representatives from the Conference-appointed members of the SRC

1 representative of the Methodist Diaconal Order

2 representatives of the Youth Assembly

2 representatives nominated by the Committee for Racial Justice

Up to 4 Conference-appointed persons:

(This provision has not yet been taken up. If the Council identifies areas of experience, expertise or strengths that may be lacking in its membership, it can recruit accordingly).

Participant Observers (i.e. not voting members of the Council)

Chair of the connexional Audit Committee

The Conference Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice

The Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee

NOTE: Members of the Council will normally serve for a four-year period.

Profile for Potential Members

1. Council members are representatives of the bodies which appoint them, not mandated delegates. They are expected to represent their appointing body to the Council; and to represent the Council to the appointing group.
2. In appointing people to the Council, the various appointing bodies should therefore look for people who:
 - are interested in and committed to the whole life and mission of the Connexion, and have some particular area of experience and expertise
 - can contribute ideas and insights as well as respond to them
 - are able to work in plenary sessions and a variety of smaller groups, and deal with paperwork
 - have the time to attend meetings and, if appropriate, take part in a Scrutiny Group or Reference Group
 - are willing and able to consult appropriate people in the body which appoints them [e.g. for representatives appointed by Districts, the Chair, District Treasurer and other appropriate District officers and bodies] about the business coming to the Council, and to inform them about the outcomes of the Council's deliberations after meetings.
3. The Council is charged with ensuring that its membership is representative of a Church which aspires to be inclusive, in particular with regard to gender, age, ethnicity, ability/disability and a broad spread of theological conviction.

To enable the Council to understand the make-up of its membership in any one year, it will ask its members to provide a brief biographical paragraph and to fill in an equal opportunities/diversity monitoring form. When the profiles are known of those who expect still to be members of the Council in a following year, appointing bodies can then be invited to contribute in making their new appointments not only to the skills, experience and representative and participatory roles outlined above, but also towards creating a more 'balanced' Council.

APPENDIX: EXPECTATIONS OF VARIOUS GROUPS

This paper has been prepared for information to help various connexional bodies to exercise their general responsibilities and to fulfil their proper roles in relation to each other in the oversight of the life, work and mission of the Methodist Church in Britain. It is essentially a restating of what is set out in Standing Orders.

This paper succeeds earlier versions which were produced to support the process of reviewing and reshaping the work of the Connexional Team in the light of the responses of the wider Church to the Priorities for the Methodist Church (i.e. the process known as Team Focus 2005/2008). The earliest versions were adopted by the Council in February 2005 and presented to the Conference in 2005. Further editorial work was then done to make the document coherent with the changes in Standing Orders which followed the reviews of both the Council and the Conference adopted by the 2005 and 2006 Conferences, and revised versions printed in the Conference Agenda in 2007 and 2008. With the end of the formal Team Focus process it was revised for general rather than specific application. Further work has now been done to bring into its purview the work of the Stationing Committee (and the Conference) in stationing presbyters and deacons, and to clarify the role of the Connexional Team. The Council approved this version for presentation in the Conference Agenda at its meeting in April 2010.

The Conference

The Conference is the governing body of the Methodist Church under God. It has responsibility for what the Deed of Union calls the government, discipline, management and administration of its affairs. It fulfils this responsibility through a process of “Christian conferring”. This involves its members in seeking to discern the will of God through taking counsel together in a mutual, prayerful and thoughtful conversation that leads to collective decision-making. Overall it is responsible for exercising oversight. Much of this is in the form of governance i.e. exercising final authority over things. Another major expression of that oversight is in the form of exercising leadership i.e. inspiring Methodist people to be imaginative, to articulate vision and to act faithfully and courageously. Less of the Conference’s activity is to do with expressing oversight through management, the direct exercise of which is the duty of the other groups mentioned below. [See further the 2006 report on The Review of the Methodist Conference, and in particular the section of it concerning The Purpose of the Conference adopted by the 2006 Conference].

The Conference is expected to:

1. formulate and adopt the principal vision, purposes and policies of the Methodist Church in Britain under the guidance of the Spirit and in the light of scripture (within the parameters set by the Methodist Church Act 1976, the Deed of Union, the Model Trusts and other foundational documents) for the life and work, faith and practice, worship and mission of the Church.
2. set parameters for the implementation of those policies, and to bring to the attention of the whole Church issues and opportunities that may need to be considered as its policies are applied.
3. set the parameters and structures of accountability and support for the Methodist Council and other connexional bodies to act on its behalf in particular matters; authorising them to exercise

appropriate oversight directly, seeking to ensure that they do so under the guidance of the Spirit and in an attitude of stewardship, and encouraging them to adopt best practice in the fulfilment of their governance responsibilities.

4. receive and assess reports from the Methodist Council and other bodies and officers charged with monitoring the fulfilment of the Conference's agreed purposes.
5. adopt the budget of the Connexional Team and to set the assessments on the Districts.
6. appoint a small number of senior officers, who are to work collaboratively to enable effective linkages between the Conference and key bodies acting in its name so that the policy-making of the Conference is well-informed and visionary and that the decisions of the Conference are effectively implemented through appropriate groups and bodies.

The Methodist Council

The Council comprises some senior connexional officers, representatives of some major connexional bodies, and, predominately, representatives of the districts. The elected Chair of the Council, the Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee, the Secretary and Assistant Secretary of the Conference have particular roles to play in the preparing of its agenda and executing its decisions. The Council has to keep in review the life of the Methodist Church and propose to the Conference changes which will make the Church's work more effective; and to give spiritual leadership to the Church. This involves elements of leadership, in that the Council seeks to harvest insights from and articulate vision for the work of the Districts and the Team, and to motivate and inspire them. It also involves major elements of governance. Many other major connexional bodies (with the exception of the Law and Polity Committee and Faith and Order Committee [see below] and the Stationing Committee and Committees dealing with the selection and oversight of presbyters and deacons) are accountable or report to the Council. The Council is the trustee body for the Methodist Church Fund. It is also the employing body for lay staff in the Connexional Team (and for some such as Training Officers and District Development Enablers who are not members of the Connexional Team) and nominates to the Conference any presbyters and deacons who are to be stationed to serve in the Team. The Council aspires to adopt best practice in fulfilling these responsibilities and looks for best practice to be applied in the management of staff in the Team. (See further Standing Orders 210-212.)

The Council is expected to:

1. take the lead in encouraging every part of the Connexion to apply the vision and policies of the Conference (such as the programme *Our Calling* and the *Priorities for the Methodist Church*) to its life, work and mission.
2. hold to the vision endorsed by the Conference in the process known as *Team Focus 2005-2008* for the way the programme *Our Calling* and *Priorities for the Methodist Church* affect the work of the Team and the wider Church.
3. work with the General Secretary (S.O. 300) and the Connexional Team Secretaries (S.O. 304) to create an environment of trust, courtesy and openness, within which rigorous conversation, scrutiny and exploration can take place, to the benefit of the Church's work; with respect given, as may be required, to the need for confidentiality.
4. hold the Strategy and Resources Committee to account for overseeing the Connexional Team, and for the implementation in the Team of the Council's ambition of delivering 'best practice' in the management of the Team.

5. insist that any proposals for change presented by the SRC or other bodies have a rationale which can be tested in the light of approved Conference policies and directions.
6. agree and commend to the Conference any criteria which decisions taken in the Connexional Team must meet, and any major changes of direction, focus, commitment and resource allocation in the life of the connexion and the work of the Team.
7. endorse the annual WorkPlan as proposed by the General Secretary and Connexional Team Secretaries, and report its essential features to the Conference.
8. agree a budget which is to be recommended to the Conference for approval.
9. accept collective responsibility for the ownership of all Council decisions.

The Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC)

The SRC is appointed by the Conference to have oversight of the Connexional Team (SO 213(5)); following detailed exploration of suggestions from the General Secretary and Connexional Team Secretaries, it prepares proposals for the Council about significant developments in the work of the Team that affect the wider Church; and undertakes particular functions with regard to the budget and the accounts. To help with the last of these it has a Finance Sub-Committee. (The SRC comprises thirteen voting members, along with the General Secretary and Connexional Team Secretaries, who are non-voting members.)

The Strategy and Resources Committee is expected to:

1. work with the General Secretary and Connexional Team Secretaries at the stage where proposals for the Team are being formulated (i.e. before they are placed before the Council) in order to ensure that such proposals and their rationale are robust, and that all relevant stakeholders in the decisions have been adequately consulted.
2. examine critically
 - (a) the strategy of the General Secretary and Connexional Team Secretaries for communicating with the members of the Connexional Team and those amongst them who are charged with managing it;
 - (b) the procedures proposed by the Team for formal consultation with its members where required; and
 - (c) the Team's adherence to good employment practice and employment law.
3. agree with the General Secretary and Connexional Team Secretaries what issues must be presented to the Council for debate and approval, and what matters appertain to the management responsibilities of the General Secretary, Connexional Team Secretaries and those members of the Connexional Team who are charged with its management.
4. scrutinise in detail (with the help of its Finance Sub-Committee) all proposals relating to the connexional budget and to any access to funds, ensuring that all such proposals comply with charity law and any particular Methodist trusts that apply to them.
5. require from the General Secretary and Connexional Team Secretaries a risk assessment for all major proposed changes.
6. monitor the implementation of changes endorsed by the Council and/or the Conference
7. accept collective responsibility for the ownership of SRC decisions.

The General Secretary, Connexional Team Secretaries and the Connexional Team

The General Secretary (S.O. 300) and Connexional Team Secretaries (S.O. 304) share in the oversight of the whole Church with other senior leaders in the Connexional Leaders' Forum (see below). So far as their particular responsibilities are concerned, they are required to work together to lead and manage the Connexional Team (whose purposes and responsibilities are set out in S.O.'s 302-303) in its service of the wider Church. Two of the Connexional Team Secretaries exercise strategic leadership in the fields of internal relationships and external relationships respectively. A third exercises strategic leadership in the management of the operations of the Connexional Team, directing and working with other members of the Team who exercise senior management responsibilities for the various clusters of staff within the Team. Together the General Secretary and Connexional Team Secretaries must ensure that the work of the Team is carried out effectively in accordance with legal and constitutional requirements and the directions of the Conference and the Council (S.O.'s 302-303). The General Secretary and Connexional Team Secretaries prepare suggestions, for the SRC to consider in the first instance, of major changes in the Team's work and its ways of working.

The General Secretary and Connexional Team Secretaries are expected to work together to:

1. exercise leadership in developing proposals for the ways in which the Connexional Team will change and adapt its work in the service of the worship and mission of the Church in the short, medium and long term in order to enact the vision that the Conference and the Council develop that work.
2. communicate to the Council, the Team, the wider Church and to ecumenical partners (as appropriate in each instance) a clear understanding of the stages of reflection, consultation or decision-making in the development of those proposals for the work of the Team, briefing them as appropriate concerning the content of those stages and providing updates and additional information as requested.
3. help create an atmosphere of trust and openness in the Team and the wider connexion, which will be marked by sensitivity both to the pressures and anxieties released in members of the Team and in people in other parts of the Connexion by the prospect of change, and also to the need to care for individuals under stress.
4. put in place support and resources which ensure full compliance with the law and aim for best practice in managing change.
5. propose draft annual WorkPlans to the SRC, setting out their budgetary implications in the context of a Forward Financial Plan.
6. apply Conference and Council decisions and policies fairly and firmly.
7. make decisions about the detailed or routine application of Conference and Council decisions and policies and about minor changes in the Team's work, without further reference to the Council.
8. accept collective responsibility for the ownership of decisions made by the General Secretary and Connexional Team Secretaries.

The Connexional Team is expected to:

1. assist the Church in fulfilling the purposes of the Methodist Church.

2. enable the Church to fulfil its calling of responding to God's love in Christ and working out its discipleship in worship and mission.
3. provide support for local churches, circuits and districts that it can uniquely or best provide.
4. act on behalf of the Methodist Church in relation to national institutions and public issues.
5. exercise particular responsibility for the areas of work prescribed in the Deed of Union, specified in Standing Orders, or approved from time to time by the Conference and the Methodist Council.
6. act in accordance at all times with Standing Orders and any directions or resolutions of the Conference.
7. assist the Methodist Council in considering future policies.

The Connexional Leaders' Forum

The Connexional Leaders' Forum (S.O. 230) is a body where those appointed to exercise leadership in different parts of the connexion and to contribute to the leadership of the whole connexion can meet and support one another in those tasks. It is led and directed by the General Secretary, and also comprises the Presidency (i.e. the current, ex- and designated Presidents and Vice-Presidents), the District Chairs, the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order, the Connexional Team Secretaries, the chairs of the Methodist Council, Strategy and Resources Committee and the Stationing Committee respectively, and the Youth President. It is called a 'forum' to emphasise that its purpose is to support and encourage individual and collective leadership, and it has no part to play in the governance or management of the Church.

The Connexional Leaders' Forum is expected to:

1. meet together to engage in prayerful reflection, share insights and help develop vision as a contribution to the oversight of the whole Church.
2. watch over one another in love to support each person in the exercise of his or her particular responsibilities.
3. confer about how the vision and policies adopted by the Conference might be implemented in the Church.

The Law and Polity Committee

The Law and Polity Committee (S.O. 338) is accountable to the Conference and has to advise the Conference. Like the Faith and Order Committee, it has to ensure that, within the terms of its remit, the life and work of the Church is properly provided for and supported. It is at the same level of governance as the Methodist Council, and acts as a necessary check or balance if appropriate. A representative of the committee has participant-observer status at the Council, but no vote.

The Law and Polity Committee is expected to:

1. advise the Conference and other connexional bodies as to the interpretation and application of its laws and Standing Orders.
2. scrutinise all new legislative and administrative proposals as to their coherence with existing usage and other proposals that may be under consideration at the same time.

3. examine, correlate and propose any necessary amendments to the various elements of the constitution of the Church.

The Faith and Order Committee

The Faith and Order Committee (S.O. 330) is accountable to the Conference and has to advise the Conference. Like the Law and Polity Committee, it has to ensure that, within the terms of its remit, the life and work of the Church is properly provided for and supported. It is at the same level of governance as the Methodist Council, and acts as a necessary check or balance if appropriate. A representative of the committee has participant-observer status at the Council, but no vote.

The Faith and Order is expected to:

1. advise the Conference and other connexional bodies on all matters touching the faith and order of the Church both in the internal life of the Church and in its relations with other Churches and ecumenical bodies .
2. stimulate theological reflection and study throughout the Church and encourage reflection of the theological implications of all the work undertaken by the Connexional Team.
3. consider and report on all matters remitted to it concerning particular proposals and projects that relate to local, regional or connexion-wide work with ecumenical partners.
4. scrutinise all matters presented to the Conference by other bodies as to their coherence with the existing faith and order of the Church.
5. propose revisions from time to time of the forms of service authorised by the Conference for regular and general use in Methodist worship.

The Stationing Committee

The Stationing Committee (S.O. 322) is accountable to the Conference. It has to recommend to the Conference where each presbyter, deacon and probationer shall be stationed for the ensuing year. Like the Law and Polity Committee and Faith and Order Committee, it has to ensure that, within the terms of its remit, the life and work of the Church is properly provided for and supported. It deals with strategic policy concerning stationing. It oversees the Stationing Matching process and the work of the Stationing Advisory Committee and other related groups. It is at the same level of governance as the Methodist Council. Because it deals with the resources of ministerial personnel and strategic issues affecting their deployment, the chair or other representative of the committee is a member of the Strategy and Resources Committee.

The Stationing Committee is expected to:

1. ensure that the most appropriate appointment is found for each presbyter and deacon, and the most appropriate presbyter and deacon for each appointment to further the work of God in and on behalf of the Church.
2. ensure that guidelines for good practice in deploying presbyters and deacons and dealing with representatives of circuits or other appointments are developed, disseminated and followed.
3. develop and make recommendations to the Conference about strategic policy in the development and deployment of ordained ministries in the life of the Church.

KGH September 2010