

## Synod Moderator Review

### Arrangements and staffing for Ecumenical work within the Synod

#### Recommendations for future arrangements and staffing for Ecumenical support within the Synod

This is the final report of the working group set up initially to review the results of the Synod-wide consultation concerning whether the Moderator should be nominated for reappointment, then considering and recommending a revised Job Description and finally addressing the issue of future arrangements and staffing for Ecumenical support within the Synod and now bringing recommendations such that the Moderator's Job Description can be finalised in this last element.

Those recommendations are summarised in bold print within the paragraphs of this explanatory commentary.

1. The acute shortage of ministerial resources within the Synod highlighted the need to review whether the relatively recent policy of appointing Ecumenical Officers for each Synod Area remained the right use of the resources involved, particularly since a number of significant ecumenical responsibilities still remained with the Moderator.
2. As part of our work we took time to explore carefully the roles of each of the existing Ecumenical Officers, and express again here our thanks to them for responding to our detailed questionnaire and for the time they gave us. It was possible, as anticipated, to discern some common issues from those responses, but perhaps the most striking thing was that each Ecumenical Officer had such widely differing experiences and issues in their roles, despite the commonality of the Job Descriptions that each had been working under. That finding of itself meant that the rationale for the Ecumenical Officer role required re-examination.
3. Certain quite significant ecumenical responsibilities in terms of time commitment (see the next paragraph) has still fallen to the Moderator despite the existence of those Ecumenical Officers. Given the wide range of other responsibilities that fall to the Moderator we consider this is not a sustainable position. It is particularly important that in future certain central roles or Synod matters are properly serviced and supported.
4. The significant ecumenical responsibilities referred to in the paragraph immediately above include ensuring that the periodic reviews of LEP's are carried out consistently and effectively, ensuring consistent and effective central oversight and guidance for sharing agreements, and combinations, for legal aspects of agreements and for helping churches already in LEP's or seriously considering such moves. Along with those essential matters which require *inter alia* good administrative skills, there is also a need for effective dispute resolution skills to be available centrally if required. At present the Moderator is also responsible for representing the Synod at all Ecumenical meetings at which a senior URC person from the Synod has to be present, including representation at Methodist Liaison Groups at Synod.

5. It can be seen immediately that unless such matters are grouped and appropriately resourced, that these responsibilities would continue to fall straight onto the Moderator's desk as at present.
6. **We therefore recommend that a job description for a part time Synod post, which addresses such matters, (including allowing effective delegation by the Moderator so that she can be suitably represented at meetings at which a senior URC person from the Synod has to be present, and as a subset of this, effective and consistent representation at Methodist Liaison Groups at Synod) be prepared as a matter of urgency (coupled with a person and necessary skills description). We make this recommendation in the hope and expectation that someone can be found to take on *lead* ongoing responsibility for such matters at Synod level, thus leaving the Moderator as a resource and ultimate back-stop but not as the person with primary day-to-day responsibility. It follows that some recruitment will be needed, even if, as we would expect, this is a part-time role.**
7. We have also taken a completely fresh look at what responsibilities *then* have to be carried out Synod Area level, and which could be better carried out at local Church level, given a change in the Synod policy towards Ecumenical work summarised in paragraph 2 above. We concluded that virtually all tasks and roles of the existing Ecumenical Officers could be handled at Synod level, or at local level. **Clearly, in those geographical areas where ecumenical working is central to our activities *continued* local support for ecumenical work will be needed, at least for the time being and probably for the foreseeable future, and we so recommend. However, in areas where it is peripheral this will not be the case. Some work will be needed to clarify and crystallise exactly what such local support will entail, and existing and recent past Ecumenical Officers will doubtless be able to help with this. It is thus implicit that we recommend that transitional arrangements ensure that responsibilities presently carried on by Ecumenical Officers are handed on, or no longer continued, as a result of a considered and deliberate decision.**
8. We are aware that even during the time that we have been considering these matters, a number of existing Ecumenical Officers, have been, or are about to be unable to continue in that role through changes in responsibilities, retirement plans or transfers. Thus, we have reason to hope that the effect of implementing our recommendations would not be disruptive.
9. Our role in this review stems from the requested extension of our role agreed by Synod Together in autumn 2016 to add the responsibility to advise and recommend with regard to ecumenical matters in connection with the Moderator's job description. We believe that by making these recommendations, our responsibilities in that regard have now been completed and so we offer them to Synod Together for approval.

Nigel Macdonald

Secretary of the Working Group [September 2017]