

Management Summary of responses to the World Church Mission Partner (MP) Survey

From all submissions – survey closed 24th March 2018

The survey generated a large response and represents a very rich resource of both data and commentary. Copies of the full ‘quantitative’ response (in the shape of pie charts) will be made available on request but the ‘qualitative’ (free text) replies are considered confidential as they may identify individuals. The quotes used below have been selected to give a flavour while avoiding that risk.

Out of 185 submissions, respondents self-identified as follows (multiple answers allowed):

Current MP	19
Former MP	58
Worked in similar role	26
District Chair	12
One Mission Forum	25
Council	28
SRC	11
GRSOSC	3
Connexional Team	12
None of the above	38

Part One – general questions for all respondents

In general, there was a high level of agreement with propositions suggesting that the existing programme benefits MCB, our overseas partners and Mission Partners (MPs) themselves. There was an emphatic endorsement of mission partnership being a “calling” and a strong agreement that the programme is an important reflection of One Mission, although some of the qualitative feedback indicated a lack of understanding of what that is all about.

“Mission partners express an incarnational aspect of partnership. Over the years the nature of the relationship has changed and needs to continue changing but it remains an important expression of our overall global relationships”

“Having seen the work of our mission partners in Haiti first hand, and the huge difference this makes to the local churches and communities there, I am so proud that such a programme exists. It makes a world of difference”

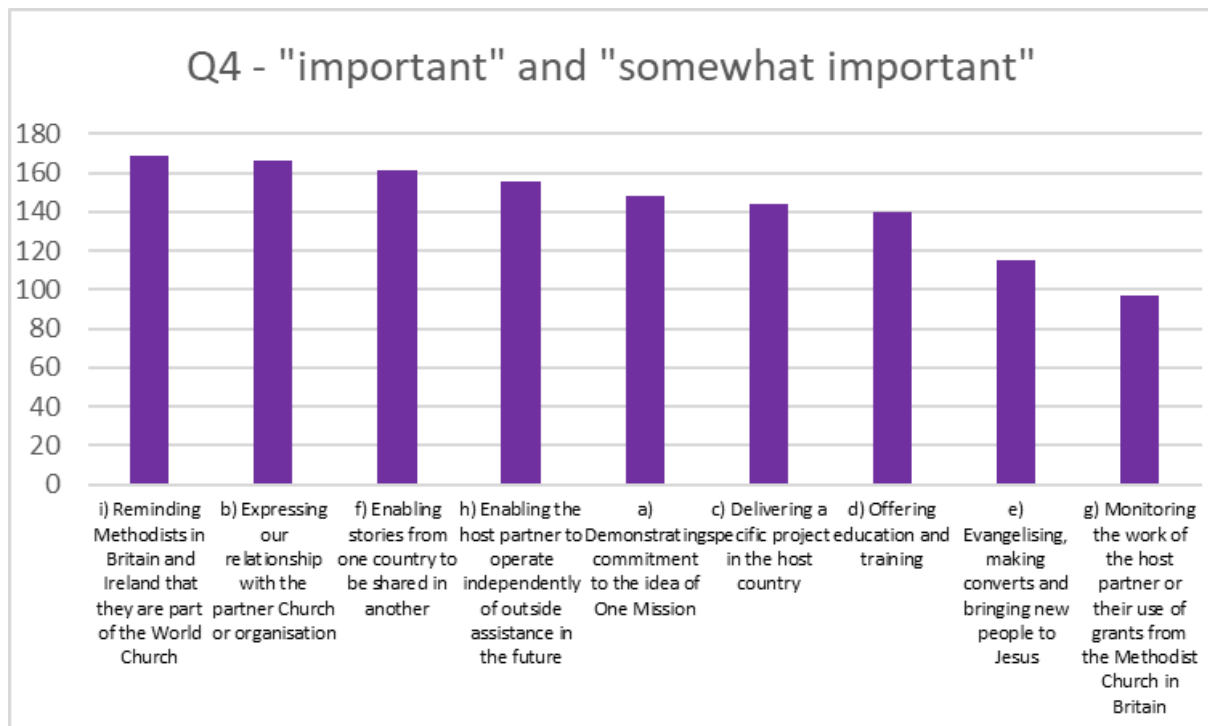
“What EXACTLY is the idea of “One Mission”? It feels an unexplained answer to a problem I'm not fully aware of”

Whether the programme is well suited to contemporary needs and priorities was a question that produced a less emphatic ‘yes’, with approaching 20% actively disagreeing and some of the qual comments reflecting a concern that sending MPs may reflect an outdated concept of mission.

“The MP programme seems from another age and needs to be modified and presented better to meet the present age. That can come through publicity, placements, and a more engaging way of advertising and placing people”

“If we could find a way to run the mission partner programme better, and continue to improve on moves away from colonial thinking, there is a possibility for this to be a good programme with benefits for all parties. At present however, understaffed and resourced centrally, with inadequate training and poor understanding of some overseas contexts, the programme may do more harm than good”

Most of the suggested ‘aims’ of the programme received strong ‘support’, but the following ranking shows the nuances in the level of endorsement:



“Starting point is relationship, relationship and relationship and out of that will determine some aims and priorities in the same way it should do for a minister going to a new congregation in the UK. One person may go with the aim of offering a project but find when they get there, the reality may be somewhat different”

There were quite a few comments expressing concern at the suggestion that a role of MPs might be to “monitor” the work of host partners. The suggestion was supported by 55% of respondents (50% of MPs themselves) but strongly criticised by some:

“Monitoring and evaluation should be a separate but very important function that MUST be carried out by independent person(s)”

“I cannot understand why we should wish to monitor the work of an independent church; if we need to monitor the use of grants it seems dishonest to call the people doing it 'Mission Partners'”

Suggestions of restricting the programme to only ordained people, or only lay people, or only young people, were all rejected pretty emphatically. Expanding the programme, or also bringing more people from other countries to the UK, received reasonably firm support, with comments here and elsewhere emphasising that alternative programmes should be seen as a case of “both/and” rather than “either/or”.

“I want to say YES to bringing more people from overseas to the UK. HOWEVER we NEED to treat & support them better, face up to and tackle racial injustice in our churches, and be less patronising. Also, it must not be to the detriment of mission and ministry in their own context”

“I think that the only way to challenge our one-way paternalism is to be ruthless about making sure that all 'partnerships' go both ways round... but I don't know how practical that is”

Asking respondents whether or not they saw themselves as “well informed” about the work of Mission Partners produced a strongly polarised response, with broadly equal numbers saying yes and no. Only a quarter of respondents thought that our mission communications are effective, almost twice as many actively disagreeing.

“One Mission Matters and Connexion often provide good, well-written stories. The communications from WCR directly via their web updates and trip reports are appalling”

And 20% of respondents admitted that they do not actively seek out the information that is available.

**“There is plenty of material around to inform people, but it gets left at the back of the church!
There is a reluctance in some churches to use even the Prayer Handbook”**

Despite all that, most respondents seemed to think that they were well informed (from where?) about how we undertake mission and the respective roles of WCR and All We Can.

Most respondents said they would welcome more information on the programme, with video being marginally the most requested format. There was a very emphatic ‘yes’ to receiving more material suitable for use in church services, and more material suitable for house groups, with just slightly lower demand for resources aimed at young people.

The questions on ‘value for money’ were answered by fewer respondents, and there were typically quite a lot of ‘don’t knows’ in the answers. Some objected to the very idea of this:

“Value for money is putting the cart before the horse”

There was some support for better information and more transparency, but little sense of demand that we should spend the money on other programmes (such as grants) instead of on Mission Partners.

Levels of engagement between districts and the MP programme appear to be quite low, with only 21% of respondents saying that they felt their district was well connected and many who did not know who the MPs from their own district were.

“It would be wonderful if U.K. churches did invite ex-MPs to speak about their work but so few seem to now have much interest in the W[orld] C[hurch] and I feel this is very sad”

“I have not once been asked to do anything in the UK to promote my mission partner appointment”

As many disagreed as agreed with the proposition that “in the district, people feel enriched by the work of Mission Partners”. But over 40% of respondents claimed to keep eyes open for potential mission partners.

The idea of creating further links between districts and the world church was strongly supported, but not as an *alternative* to the Connexional programme. And only a few resisted the suggestion that the Team might help districts put such links in place, with almost three quarters of District Chair respondents saying they would welcome this.

Finally, there were some quite strong comments about the lack of support for our current partners in the programme, which is a theme reflected also in part two of the survey.

“The most important change in the programme is not listed above: better support and resourcing from the church to provide for our mission partners. We have not been able to provide adequate support and training since cuts to the team many years ago. There is, of course, a requirement for us to focus on what is achievable, but true partnership is expensive and if we are committed to overseas mission, we should be doing it properly”

Part Two – further questions for current and former Mission Partners (MPs)

83 respondents went on to Part Two, but around twenty of those appear to have been interested to see the questions without answering them, so most questions were in fact answered by 55-60 individuals.

Along with a wide variety of personal experiences, reflected in both the quantitative and qualitative responses, it should be noted that the survey also reflects mission partnership over a significant time period. Five respondents had trained in the 1960s (the earliest in 1961) and four in the 1970s. Terms of service ranged from less than a year to 35 years, with the longest service for someone still in post being 10 years. At this stage, no attempt has been made to analyse separately the views of those who have commenced service in (say) the last five years.

Overwhelmingly, MPs said that they were motivated to apply by a sense of God calling them to this work. They also felt they were responding to the call of the Gospel, had been inspired by the stories of those who had gone before, and felt that they had specific skills to offer. Other factors were less important.

Asked about the application process as they had experienced it, feedback was generally positive on most of the specific sub-questions but with a small minority (4-10%) rating it as poor.

“I found the process of application and discernment extremely useful in confirming my own call to be a mission partner. In the difficult periods of my service I often fell back on this confidence in my calling, brought about through the process”

“The interview process was very slanted towards assuming all applicants were to be employed professionally. I felt they could not understand MY sense of calling to be a full-time wife and mother, supporting my husband and family”

When it came to the placement of MPs in specific places/roles, there was a strong demand for better information to be provided and an opportunity to be in contact with the host before taking a decision, as well as the possibility of giving candidates a shortlist of posts to choose from. The option of advertising specific posts was actively supported by two thirds of respondents, with just 12% actively opposed to it.

“Offered two positions and given time to consider both after receiving information on the one that was unfamiliar to me. After prayer and reflection the decision was mine”

“I think that the process of 'matching' has to be unique for every individual. Some may feel very 'called' to a certain place, others may be open. Some posts may require very specific technical skills so need advertising, other placements may be loose and 'grow' with the partner who goes”

“Please don't lose sight of the role of the Holy Spirit in the placement process. As you seek positive change please avoid the temptation to become like a secular business organization as the Church is much more than that!”

Training proved to be a more divisive topic. Across this section of the survey, typically around 25% of respondents found it to be poor, although half or more rated most aspects as good. Lack of Methodist content, or low quality of it, were a particular concern, while interaction with other course participants and the quality of materials to take away were favourably rated. We do need to remember the time period covered, and that some of this training took place at institutions which no longer exist.

“10 weeks felt short but they were among the ten most inspirational weeks of my life. Hard work but brilliant”

“I found not enough flexibility for candidates of differing theological and international experience. I would have benefited from less time in UK and more in-country training and language training”

Moving on to 'preparation' for their work overseas, the levels of dissatisfaction among some respondents rose further. Questions about the information provided about the placement in general, the specific job and the place where the MP would be living, all split the sample pretty much down the middle between those who were happy and those who were not. Lack of opportunity to have eg a Skype call with the host in advance was particularly criticised. Health and safety issues were felt to have been dealt with more adequately, but still with over 20% rating the briefing as poor.

“I go back to what I said about an adventure of faith. We didn't know what it would be like - would we have gone if we had?! - but we learned SO much and were hugely enriched by the experience, which has continued to enrich our lives and ministries ever since”

“The issue of security was never discussed with us even though we were going into a country that had just come out of civil war. We got most of our information from friends and colleagues when we got to the host country”

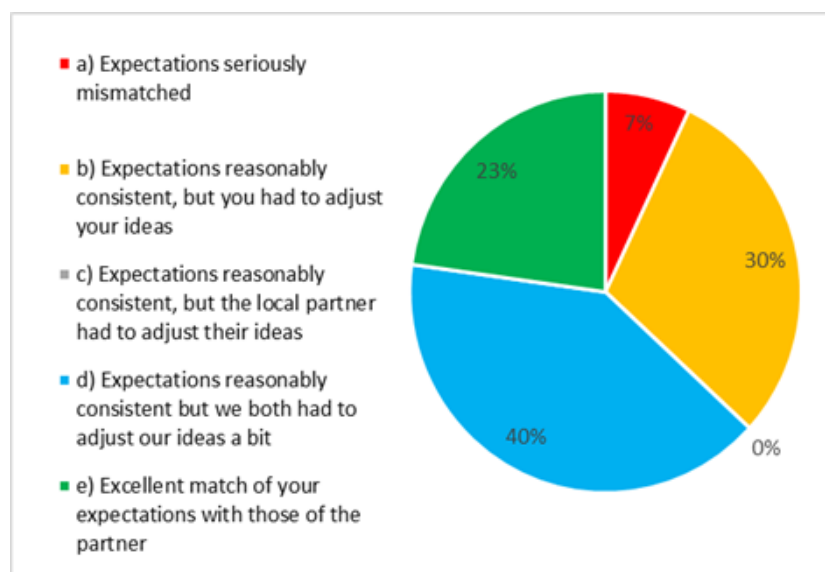
“There was very little information provided about our roles or about where we would be living. To some extent we were okay with this, but it was far from ideal. I did request information, but very little was forthcoming. Did MCB explain to the partner church what information was expected from them?”

“My memory is that there wasn't really a lot of personal interest in us. People with more pastoral skills/inclination are paramount at this stage”

The same pattern continued across the ‘settling in’ questions: MPs’ experiences had clearly varied greatly, and a degree of resilience and self-reliance was evidently called for in many cases!

“Settling in was difficult as information was not readily forthcoming and we had to find a lot of things for ourselves. The host Church seemed at a loss as to what to do with us”

Asked about the ‘match’ of their expectations with those of the host partner, respondents gave a very interesting split reply:



As can be seen, only in a minority of cases were expectations well matched and some adjustment was generally required, although that was not necessarily seen as a problem:

“The culture from which we came is considerably more "politically correct" than the one to which we went! We had to learn to compromise some unrealistic ideals in the face of the culture in which we were learning to live. That was fine”

“We both just did what we felt God was calling us to do and to fit in with the demands of the local church even when it was not really in line with our gifts and abilities. We tried at all times to be respectful of the culture of the local church and community which meant a lot of adaptation on our part with no support”

More positively, over three quarters of MPs found that things worked out generally OK in the end; but there was still disappointment for a fifth of the sample.

“More opportunities than I could have imagined opened up the longer I stayed”

Questions about their supervision or management while in post again elicited a very mixed response. A third rated local management as poor or quite poor, while almost a quarter said the same about their supervision by WCR staff, and a similar proportion reported that they were not well supported either practically or in their faith journey.

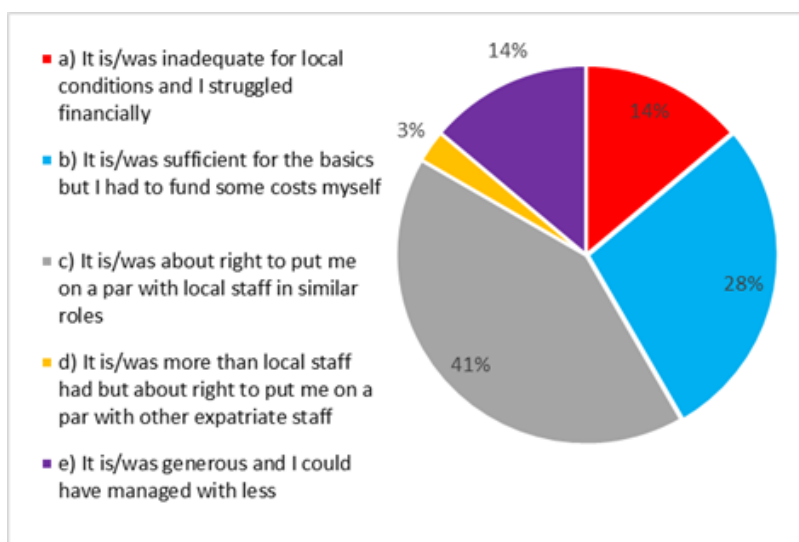
“The local leadership were bullying and controlling and not supportive. We had no visit from WCR staff. We had no support from WCR staff other than an occasional phone call”

“Each year WCR ask us to submit an appraisal form which I have completed the past few years. No response is made to this or follow up conversation so it feels like a paper exercise and I find it very dissatisfying. I confess I haven't completed it this year and no-one has followed this up”

“We found our partnership co-ordinator to be excellent. However I got the impression that due to structures within the World Church Office, she was limited in what she could do to help”

“When we needed medical support from WCR staff in UK it was there immediately, no questions, no delay. Thank you”

The length of placements was generally found to be about right, although 15% of MPs would have wished to stay longer. Stipends were a more divisive topic: 40% either struggled or had to chip in a bit themselves, but for 15% the stipend was ‘generous’:



Many MPs felt they had put effort into talking to churches and circuits during furloughs and after their return, but this experience was patchy and some felt they had not been invited or encouraged sufficiently (or even at all) to do this.

“Not all circuits seemed to know quite what to do with me when I came on furlough visits. Others were very well prepared, especially in Northern Ireland and were very enthusiastic to meet a mission partner”

“This area needs a massive injection of support. I felt very unsupported and ill equipped in handling the furlough... I found the whole experience exhausting”

Room for improvement, certainly.

Only 40% of MPs felt that the debrief at the end of their stay had been adequate. For 13% it was basically non-existent. And a third felt that they were not given adequate opportunities to feed back any concerns they had. Some very strong feelings were evident in the qualitative comments:

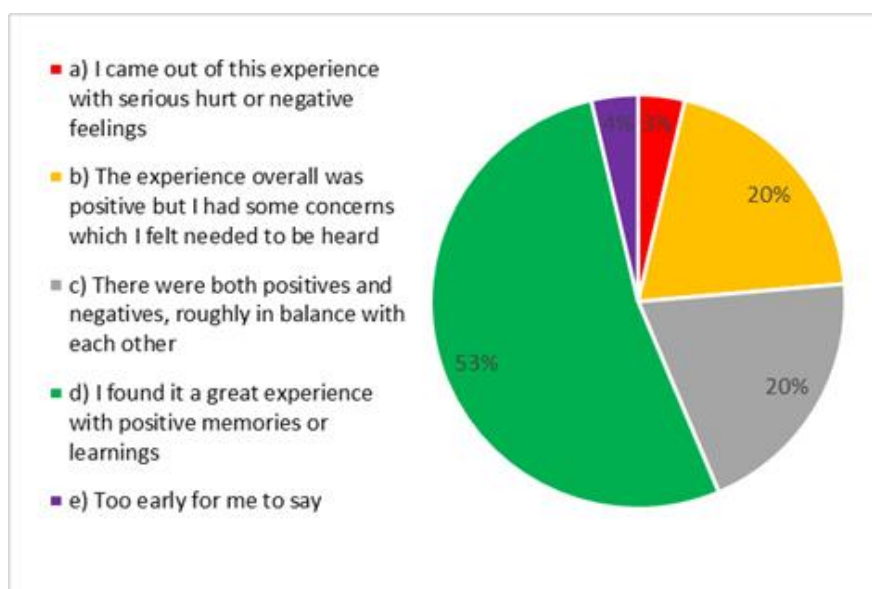
“I had about 4 hours at church house - on what felt like a conveyor belt - people wanting information from me - but little support or concern about where I was or how I felt about it”

“Thankfully we were assigned a UK chair of district who listened to us once she realised what was going on with WCR and helped us”

“Feel this was definitely the biggest failing as had no time to speak about the very difficult situation that the new MP was going into, which was bad both for us and the new MP, who did not stay very long”

“The reality is that reverse culture shock is harder to deal with so I hope there will be some help in handling this”

The bottom line: Rather more than half of Mission Partners came out with positive memories or learnings but almost a quarter had serious concerns or, in the case of two individuals, reported serious hurt or negative feelings.



Conclusions and Recommendations

- The Mission Partner programme continues to enjoy widespread support in the Church. It is seen as an important expression of our engagement with the World Church and of benefit to MCB, Partner Churches and Mission Partners themselves.
- A minority of respondents raised questions about the relevance of this programme in the 21st Century, with some suggestions that it continues to reflect outmoded models of mission.
- With this exception, there was a general willingness to see the programme expanded, and a definite rejection of ideas that would limit it to certain groups of people, eg only Presbyters or only young people.
 - **Recommendation 1. Subject to the recommendations below on mission communications and resourcing, the Mission Partner Programme should be maintained as an important expression of One Mission.**
- While there is support also for developing other forms of “People to People” programmes, neither these nor grants are generally seen as *alternatives* to the current MP programme. Bringing more people to the UK, for example, should be developed in its own right: there is a clear desire for this to be a case of “both/and”, not “either/or”.
- There are serious weaknesses in our mission communications. Telling the stories of mission effectively, and getting them known across the Connexion, are essential. A significant proportion of respondents felt we were not doing this well enough.
- Levels of engagement between Districts and the work of Mission Partners are patchy, at best, with only a minority of respondents feeling ‘well connected’ and many not knowing which Mission Partners come from or have links with their own District. There was strong support for helping Circuits or Districts organise more visits themselves to World Church partners.

- **Recommendation 2. The management of Mission & Advocacy must take action to address urgently the failings of mission education/communications and ensure a much higher level of engagement with the Connexion.**
 - **Recommendation 3. The Director of Global Relationships should continue the work already in hand to encourage links between all Districts and Partner Churches both in Europe and beyond.**
- The experience of Mission Partners themselves is very varied, with a degree of polarisation in the answers: some had very positive experiences, others reported quite the opposite. Some of this may be contextual, in other cases the differences may reflect changes in the running of the programme over a period of some decades. However, themes that emerged frequently were:
 - A strong sense of being called by God to this work, which does not preclude a desire to have more 'say' in the matching of individual to placement.
 - High levels of support for Mission Partner posts being specifically advertised.
 - Mixed experiences with training, acknowledging that this has happened at multiple institutions over the years.
 - **Recommendation 4. Further work to be done by the Director of Global Relationships in consultation with the Overseas Service Panel to review the application and placement process for Mission Partners.**
 - Widespread desire to have better information and contact with the overseas Partner Church or Organisation prior to the placement beginning. Significant minorities were dissatisfied with the information/briefing about the job, about where they would be living, etc.
 - A significant proportion of Mission Partners reported poor supervision locally or by WCR staff, with a lack of pastoral support when it was needed. At the extreme, serious pain had resulted from this.
 - **Recommendation 5. The Mission Partner programme needs to be properly resourced, recognising the many other demands on WCR staff time. In particular, better pastoral support and 'backup' should be available. Management should take these needs into account in the allocation of resources and consider the recruitment of voluntary 'accompaniers' who will maintain regular (eg monthly) contact with MPs by phone/Skype and report on any issues that they pick up.**
 - Views on the level of the stipend were quite mixed. Given that arrangements have varied over time, it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions but it certainly appears that the 'flat rate' stipend may not be appropriate to local costs and conditions in all places and that more flexibility would be desirable.
 - **Recommendation 6. The Director of Global relationships should take this forward by reviewing the current missionary stipend levels and length of service and considering ways to respond to the need for greater flexibility.**
 - Very patchy / erratic encouragement or facilitation of visits to UK churches or circuits during furloughs or at the end of a placement. Some Mission Partners had done quite a lot of this, others little or none due to a perceived lack of interest in the Church.
 - **Recommendation 7. Ensure better facilitation and encouragement of such visits as a part of the new approach to mission education/communications proposed in Recommendation 1.**
 - Serious failings were reported in the 'debrief' procedures for Mission Partners returning to the UK, with a substantial minority of MPs feeling that this had not been adequate.
 - **Recommendation 8. The Director of Global Relationships should ensure urgently that all returning Mission Partners have full opportunity for debriefing and discussing any issues arising from their placement.**

Some final words from the Mission Partners in the survey

“It is impossible to boil 6 years down, but overall it was an amazing privilege to work as a mission partner with all its challenges and joys. I hold on to some pains... but I hold on to many more joys”

“Being a mission partner was one of the most enriching experiences of my life”

“Of course there were negative as well as positive experiences. That is normal in any job - but being a mission partner is more than a job”

“I did feel broken and bruised as we arrived home and a little disillusioned with the World Church but over time feel God has brought healing to me”

“My heart is still there 47 years later”