

Personnel Files for Ministers

Basic Information

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| Contact Name and Details | Nick Moore, Head of Support Services Carmila Legarda, Director of Development & Personnel |
| Status of Paper | Draft |
| Action Required | Discussion |
| Draft Resolution | Council is asked to note the attached paper and to comment on progress to-date. It is asked to support wider consultation and to propose that final policies and procedures be brought to Conference in 2010 |
| Alternative Options to Consider, if Any | This paper is a response to the report "With Integrity and Skill" approved by Conference 2008. The alternative would be to decide that such files are not viable or appropriate and therefore halt all development work now. |

Summary of Content

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| Subject and Aims | The report "With Integrity and Skill" approved by Conference in 2008 recommended that the Methodist Council be directed to explore the development of the use of personnel files for ministers (presbyters and deacons). |
| Main Points | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ In approving the report "With Integrity and Skill", Conference agreed the principle of holding all relevant details of a minister's development in a central file. ❑ Records will naturally start from the candidating process ❑ Files will allow the church to more readily assist ministers in the process of continually developing and utilising their gifts and skills ❑ Files will assist with the stationing process ❑ Any minister will be able to access their own file in accordance with to-be-agreed procedures ❑ A Code of Practice will be developed |
| Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function) | The report "With Integrity and Skill" approved by Conference in 2008. |
| Consultations | Consultations are at an early stage as this is a first draft paper. |

Summary of Impact

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| Standing Orders | Not yet ascertained |
| Faith and Order | N/a |
| Financial | None at this stage |
| Personnel | Not yet ascertained |
| Legal | All proposals must satisfy the Data Protection Act 1998. |
| Wider Connexional | Since it will cover all ministers, procedures will be required regarding the maintenance and update of files from circuits and districts |
| External (e.g. ecumenical) | Should assist with ministers transferring in and out of the Methodist Church |
| Risk | Any proposal regarding sensitive information needs to be handled sensitively and in accordance with best practice. |

Covenantal and Professional Diligence

The report "With Integrity and Skill" approved by Conference in 2008 recommended that the Methodist Council be directed to explore the development of the use of personnel files for Ministers (Presbyters and Deacons).

This paper sets out to propose to Conference what possibilities exist for the Methodist Council to explore with regards to development of personnel files for Ministers. The primary target of this exploration is the paramount importance of the security and safety of Ministers files. Research into potential methodologies will only consider those avenues that can give reassurance to this primary target.

This exploration will also include a wide consultation with Presbyters and Deacons and a variety of relevant interested parties around the connexion. The exploration will also include the consideration and content of a Code of Practice as well as the potential for the development, content, oversight and safeguarding of personnel files for Ministers.

The starting point of a Minister's relationship with the Church is candidating. It is intended that improvements to the administration of that process be considered within this paper.

Code of Practice

It is proposed that a Code of Practice be established with regards to:

- what is kept on file about a Minister and others within the Church
- what is retained
- for how long it is retained
- in what place and for what purpose
- who might have access and for what reason.

It is proposed that the Code of Practice will propose an expressed commitment to transparency, openness and dialogue in order to maintain personal and professional relationships of respect and trust. All this belongs to the essence of pastoral oversight and expresses a commitment to basic fairness and justice within the common life of the Methodist Church as part of the Body of Christ. It is expected that each Minister may be permitted by request to see/view their own personnel file within the covenantal relationship and this is also expressed professionally as an inherent right under the Data Protection Act 1998.

It is also proposed that any breaches of this Code of Practice would lead immediately to a disciplinary under the relevant disciplinary procedure.

Content of Personnel Files

It is proposed that wide consultation be conducted with Ministers as well as additional research to explore what the contents of a Minister's personnel file may include and for what purpose. In terms of good standards of personnel

practice a Minister's personnel file could possibly include some or all of the following:

1. Personal data

2. Sensitive personal data

(1 and 2 as defined by the Data Protection Act 1998 and as outlined in the report "With Integrity and Skill")

3. Administrative data such as bank account information for payment of stipends, allowances and pensions, address of manse, next of kin details, etc.

4. Methodist Heritage data: at the request / permission of a Minister, a list of publications, written articles, achievements, speaking engagements, etc could be kept on a Ministers personnel file so as to keep historical records of Ministers who contribute to the life of the Church in their own unique and best way. This historical and valuable information is too often lost through the current use of paper based files.

The proposed electronic keeping of records will allow Development and Personnel to produce a brief summary report on the minister for receiving Circuits and Districts who may wish to know more about their new Minister – such as previous Circuits, Districts, special skills, profession, talents and publications.

It is proposed that viewing rights (but not editing rights) be allowed through a password protected manner to those who request this information. It is the hope of this proposed exploration that in the long term such viewing requests/request for a summary report would be under the control of the Minister concerned.

This brief summary report is also of particular use when a Minister has passed on and the community wish to celebrate their life with a brief history of their achievements and accomplishments, particularly for the obituary. Currently Development and Personnel has neither the information nor the means to produce such a record to celebrate the life of a Methodist Minister.

Oversight of Personnel Files

The research into the possibilities of the use of technology to develop personnel files for Ministers will include the possibility of the use of passwords to limit access to appropriate persons. Whilst some information may be made available for the processing of data (such as bank account details, addresses or emails) full access to the personnel files will be limited to post holders specified in the relevant data handling procedures.

The Senior Management Team of Development and Personnel will be responsible for ensuring every personnel file is up to date and relevant. The

SMT will also ensure that procedures exist to ensure that time-bound documents are deleted from files as appropriate.

Safeguarding Personnel Files

Research will also be undertaken to maximise the levels of security to the methodology such as making use of a password protected web secure environment. These web-secure environments are currently in existence for payment of airline tickets and books, etc over the internet. Popular examples are PayPal and Amazon – both of which use web-secure environments. This research will enable the safeguarding of Ministers personnel files.

It is proposed that research will also include the use of passwords to access the basic software, and from there identifying and assigning different levels of access through unique passwords for every individual who needs to view a personnel file. Each password will determine what an individual can and cannot do within the personnel file. For example, some access will be for administration details only, whilst others will be for email /contact informational purposes only. These passwords will be in addition to the passwords that would be intrinsically assigned to each and every personnel file.

Development and Personnel will explore the best source of software for this purpose with expert advice externally and from the Connexional Team IT Department.

It is proposed that an audit trail be produced which will inform the SMT every time a document has been downloaded or printed off from the system. The audit trail will be able to track the identification of the computer that downloads a document and the identification of the printer which prints off a document. Audit trail reporting will be on a weekly basis. Inappropriate access or unauthorised printing of documents will automatically be considered as a disciplinary offence under the relevant disciplinary procedure.

SUMMARY

In summary this paper proposes that Council approves the following:

For Development and Personnel to consult widely with Ministers and relevant experts to explore and research:

- 1) The development of a Code of Practice for the use of personnel files for Presbyters and Deacons to ensure that the paramount importance of security and safety of all Ministers personnel files
- 2) The proposed contents of personnel files for Ministers
- 3) The use of technology and exploration of suitable software for the development of personnel files
- 4) The use of password protection to tighten security and access
- 5) The exploration of audit trail software to enable the tracking of document printing or downloading from personnel files