

Report from the Business and Economic Affairs Forum (BEAF)

Basic Information

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Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	Comment
Draft Resolution	We present this report to Council, and invite its comment, suggestions, approval and response.
Alternative Options	None

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	BEAF is committee appointed by and responsible to Council. This paper aims to inform Council of BEAF activities and plans. Comment and suggestion is invited.
Main Points	Description of BEAF Membership Communications Initiatives and Activities
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	BEAF is a Council appointed body. In order to facilitate accountability, understanding and feedback BEAF presents this report for comment Council Paper MC/08/98: Further submission from the Business and Economic Affairs Advisory Group (BEAAG) and the Mission in Business, Industry and Commerce (MIBIC) Chaplains Council
Consultations	BEAF is a consultative body with ecumenical links and contacts throughout the Connexion

Summary of Impact

Standing Orders	None
Financial	None
Personnel	None
Legal	None
External	None
Risk	None

Annual Report from the Business and Economic Affairs Forum

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Business and Economic Affairs Forum (BEAF) is a practitioners forum constituted by and reporting to the Methodist Council. It is therefore proper to present an Annual Report. It seems most appropriate to do this at the January-February meeting of Council each year, reflecting our work in the previous Connexional year and plans for the current one.

2.0 History

2.1 Originally established as a support group for the then Secretary for Business and Economic Affairs (John Ellis), the formerly named Business and Economic Affairs Advisory Group (BEAAG) developed its role as John Ellis moved on and we discovered new opportunities as the wider Methodist Church structure evolved. Then, in 2008-2009, responding to Council's programme of revitalising the Committees of the Church, BEAAG submitted responses, broadly accepted the proposals¹, renamed itself BEAF, and intends to continue to energise and support our work in the wider mission fields of the workplace, business and economics within the framework of the Church's overall priorities and strategies.

3.0 Remit and Relevance

3.1 BEAF strongly believes that God's mission through the Church in these areas is vital and relevant. In conjunction with the Workplace Chaplaincy network (one BEAF meeting each year overlaps on the same day with the Workplace Chaplains' Council), BEAF seeks to promote and advance our calling to these areas of mission².

3.2 We rejoice that the particular theme of two recent Vice-Presidents of Conference – David Walton in 2008-2009 and John Bell in 2005-2006 – focussed on discipleship in the workplace, business ethics and behaviour, and the relation between faith and work, and Church and business in general, raising awareness in complementary ways of the importance the topic in the lives of many people. Moreover, the message was received with equal enthusiasm outside the Church as well as inside: both David and John found that they were pushing at open doors when they visited places of work, and managements encouraged continued engagement with the Church. Church-goers – from many denominations – welcomed the attention given to an often neglected aspect of mission in the wider world.

3.3 In conjunction with other networks and groups within the Methodist Church and elsewhere, BEAF is convinced that the Methodist Church has a vital role to play.

¹ BEAAG used to administer the so-called 'Luton Fund', a fund established after the sale of the Luton Industrial College to support mission projects in workplaces. As a result of the rearrangement of Methodist Church grant-making processes, this now comes under the remit of the Connexional Grants Committee.

² The currently agreed Terms of Reference are set out in Appendix 1.

4.0 Membership.

- 4.1 BEAF is an eclectic group, comprising members of different denominational backgrounds, lay and ordained, with business, trade union, chaplaincy and academic experience³. We seek to meet two or three times a year, once overlapping with the Chaplains' Council, as mentioned above.
- 4.2 In addition to the voluntary members, the Connexional Team is represented by Paul Morrison (Joint Public Issues Team) and we are served by David Wrighton (Chaplaincies Team) as Secretary.
- 4.3 Reflecting our terms of reference, BEAF recognises that it is indeed a Forum in which issues can be discussed, initiatives can be suggested, support and guidance can be given to the Connexional Team members, and resources can be offered to participate in projects (either from BEAF, or drafted in). However, we may only advise and bring proposals for consideration within the processes of the wider Church, and we ask that this is borne in mind whilst reading the next section.

5.0 Activities and initiatives.

- 5.1 **Business Sunday:** The October 2008 consultation, sponsored by David Walton in his Vice-Presidential year, mooted the idea of having a 'Business Sunday' in 2009. This duly happened on May 3rd and was significantly observed, often using materials prepared by a group convened by the Diaconal Order⁴. BEAF believes that it is imperative to enable the relation of work and faith to be celebrated and observed in the context of worship, and proposes that we encourage churches to nominate a "Business Sunday" where a service is held emphasising links between faith and work. Last year we used the first Sunday in May to promote 'Business Sunday'⁵ worship materials. We are pleased to say that this year the Faith and Work group of the Diaconal Order will be producing new resources to be launched for use at the same time (May 2nd 2010). Subject to further consultation and evaluation, a continuation of this pattern for the next two years is proposed.
- 5.2 **Communication.** The eternal questions facing many voluntary organisations is 'how do we enable people to know what we're doing (that we think will be helpful), and then enable them to share their experiences?' To address both questions BEAF is supporting the initiative, arising from a consultation held in October 2008, to establish a 'network of Christians in business/work', enabled by a website. There are currently nearly 400 participants from many walks of life and Church denominations who are able to share their experiences, promote on-line discussions, including ways in which the topic can be disseminated throughout the churches.
- These contacts allow BEAF's and JPIT's actions to be informed by a wide range of well informed and interested parties, and provide a new and stimulating way of working.

³ The current list of members is given in Appendix 2.

⁴ The 'Faith and Work' Working Group chaired by Deacon Dr David Clark prepared a rich variety of worship resources that came to be used. Two members of BEAF are part of this Group.

⁵ BEAF considered the naming of this Sunday, and, reflecting the media interest stimulated in 2009, that we would stick with a winning title as anything else would be too cumbersome. Nevertheless, Council's view would be welcomed.

BEAF has become aware that there are many individuals exercising wide-ranging roles in the world of work – employees, business owners, contractors, chaplains, consumers – who have much to offer to our collective understanding of issues and challenges, and perhaps, even, a few guiding lights and answers. We wish to enable communication between them to be facilitated as openly as possible.

- 5.3 **Links with the TUC.** Successive Presidents and Vice-Presidents of Conference have been warmly welcomed at the Trade Union Congress annual conference. Since 2001, focussed conversations have led to the identification of common causes between the TUC and the Methodist Church – in such areas as vulnerable employment, the gambling industry, community advice centres which BEAF is seeking to oversee to provide continuity of contact and sustained relationships. It is also suggested that Methodist delegates to the TUC would be pleased to know when the Presidential visit is happening in order to meet and share conversation.
- 5.4 **Confederation of British Industry (CBI) links:** In 2005-2006, John Bell, as Vice-President, sought to meet the CBI: such an unusual request was greeted with suspicion and disbelief. We are still working to establish a link with the CBI, as we have readily done with the TUC over many years.
- 5.5 **“Value of Work” Project.** BEAF is resourced by the Joint Public Issues Team. In line with the ecumenical ethos of JPIT the Value of Work project is being designed in conjunction with partner Churches.
As one response to the current Economic Crisis, BEAF has helped to develop a project to explore issues relating to our view of ethical business practices. This will build on work done by the Churches Investment Group (CIG) on usury, fair remuneration practice and ethical behaviour within markets.
The initial phase of this project focuses on issues which will feed into the General Election campaign, most specifically the issue of remuneration. Our aim is to be able to make a theologically informed, distinctive contribution to the major economic debates that will form the basis of the next election campaign. Plans for the later phase will be consulted on this year with proposals to be finalised being discussed at our January 2010 meeting. The aim is to produce a resource which will assist Church members to be active disciples both in their church and work lives. This will acknowledge the value of work not only in term of remuneration but also in terms of living out our calling as Christians.
- 5.6 **The Financial Crisis:** BEAF is indebted to Bill Seddon from the Central Finance Board, and one of our members, for his masterly summaries of the British and world economic and financial scene. We are aware that several Church-related bodies might express their views – the CFB itself, the Churches Investment Group (CIG), Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (which arranged in conjunction with JPIT a high profile seminar on the financial crisis in January 2009), the Joint Public Issues Team and others. The question is – what can Christians in general and Methodists in particular usefully and distinctively do? We believe that as this is the preeminent issue in the public sphere we must have thoughtful and theologically informed views if we are to be relevant at this time.
- 6.0 Invitation to Council:** We present this report to Council, and invite its comment, suggestions, approval and response.