

Responsibility for making decisions about the Conference

Contact Name and Details	The Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler, Secretary of the Conference SoC@methodistchurch.org.uk
Resolutions	76/1. The Council receives the report. 76/2. The Council agrees the proposals in paragraph 4. Going Forward, and directs the Secretary to consult the Law and Polity Committee and to arrange for a report with draft Standing Orders to be made to the 2022 Conference.

1. For some time, there has been some uncertainty about the role and the remit of the bodies which are charged with various responsibilities tasks in relation to the Conference itself. The Council is asked to consider clarifying where the decision-making responsibility lies in particular areas. The current position is outlined below and some suggestions are offered to provide greater clarity.

2. The Current Arrangements

2.1 The Conference Arrangements Committee

The Conference Arrangements Committee is established under SO 140 with responsibility ‘for all arrangements for the accommodation of the Conference and its members, public services and meetings in connection with the Conference and all financial and other matters relating thereto.’ This does not seem to cover questions of the overall format of the Conference, with the associated constitutional and legal issues that arise. The Conference Arrangements Committee is appointed by the Council. The SO predates the creation of the role of Events’ Coordinator within the Connexional Team so many of the expectations of the committee are undertaken by one person.

2.2 The Conference Arrangements Team

Not to be confused with the committee, the arrangements team brings together the volunteers who steward with others responsible for chaplaincy, worship and technical aspects to assist the Events’ Coordinator in the smooth running of the Conference. It has no formal decision making powers but advises on practical issues.

2.3 The Conference Planning Executive

In 2009, the Council established a Conference Planning Executive with ‘executive powers to make policy and practical decisions relating to the Conference as an event, with the intention of providing a forum where speedy direction and decision could be given on practical, administrative, organisational and financial matters.’ However, although it has met in the intervening years, this Executive has never been established in Standing Orders. This has led to some confusion as to its role and its relationship to the other groups, particularly the Arrangements Committee. When the Council established it, the Council heard about the need for it to bring together the various aspects of planning for the Conference, to ensure that it remained within budget and to provide policy direction (see Appendix 1).

The Executive is a small group comprising the Secretary of the Conference (Chair), the Assistant Secretary of the Conference, the Chair of the Business Committee, a member of the Conference Financial Committee, a representative of the Connexional Team’s management, the Events Co-ordinator (Secretary).

2.4 The Conference Business Committees

The Business Committee for each Session of the Conference has the responsibility of drawing up the order of business for the Conference, and to allocate time to each item (SO 136 and 150). The Representative Session Business Committee has additional responsibilities of considering which items might be suitable for consideration in workshops, hearings, reference groups during the Conference. However, there is no responsibility given to the Committees for considering the overall format of the Conference.

2.5 The Law and Polity Committee

The Law and Polity Committee is charged with advising ‘the Conference as to the interpretation and application of its laws and Standing Orders’ (SO 338(3)), including, of course, those which relate to the Conference itself. Largely through the subcommittee which meets during the Conference and through the Conference Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice (COLCP), the committee has a voice in conversations about how the Conference is enabled to operate in a constitutional manner.

2.6 The Council

The Council does not seem to have any specific responsibilities in relation to the Conference as an event, beyond being required to ‘recommend to the Conference what date it shall fix for the date of the commencement of the next Conference and what date it shall provisionally designate for the commencement of the next Conference but one’ (SO 212(6)).

3. Issues

3.1 The past 18 months have revealed a number of questions which no body has clear responsibility to answer. The decision to hold the 2020 Conference online was taken by the Council on the advice of the Law and Polity Committee; the decision that the 2021 Conference be held in hybrid form was discussed by the Secretary with the Planning Executive and members of the Arrangements Committee and the COLCP and ratified by the Council. At the time of writing, a recommendation about the ordination venues in 2022 from the Ministries Committee and MCPOC is to be considered by the Planning Executive.

3.2 The particular issues surrounding the 2020, 2021 and 2022 Conferences, however, have only highlighted a lack of clarity that was already apparent and which has probably been present since host districts ceased to take responsibility for Conference arrangements.

4. Going forward

4.1 The situation could be clarified and, as the then Secretary suggested to the Council in 2009, ‘decisions about Conference practicalities.... made in a timely and coherent manner’ if the Council were to reaffirm the decision to create the Conference Planning Executive (CPE) and to ask that its role be included in the Standing Orders (Section 14). The Standing Orders should be clear that it is the CPE which has authority to make executive decisions about the venue and mode of meeting of the Conference, about the Ordinations and other public acts of worship, about expenditure (including allowances to representatives), and the Conference Exhibition, Fringe, and public lectures. The Standing Order relating to the Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC) would need to be revised in order to remove any duplication with the tasks of the CPE, leaving the CAC responsible for the stewarding, technical details, and other practical arrangements of the Conference.

4.2 In order for the CPE to be effective and to make properly informed decisions, its membership might be helpfully expanded to become:

The Chair of the Business Committee (Representative Session)

The Events Coordinator

The Secretary and Assistant Secretary

The Conference Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice

The Connexional Treasurer

The Connexional Secretary.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

76/1. The Council receives the report.

76/2. The Council agrees the proposals in paragraph 4 and directs the Secretary to consult the Law and Polity Committee and to arrange for a report with draft Standing Orders to be made to the 2022 Conference.

The Formation of a Conference Planning Executive

Contact Name and Details	Martyn Atkins x5146
Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	Decision
Draft Resolution	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Council resolves that a Conference Planning Executive be formed with immediate effect. 2. The Council approves the membership of the CPE as listed.

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	This paper invites Council to set up a Conference Planning Executive to co-ordinate the planning of Conference, and to accept the membership proposed.
Main Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The February 2009 Council broadly supported the creation of a body charged with co-ordinating the planning of the Conference in its various parts. • Further meetings have demonstrated the potential usefulness of a Conference Planning Executive. • This paper proposes a representative of the existing major Committees and groupings join to form a small Conference Planning Executive (CPE). • A membership list for the Conference Planning Executive is also proposed.
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	This paper refers to <i>Making a Better Conference</i> MC/09/09, which was presented to the February 2009 Council for discussion.
Consultations	<p>The Conference Business Committee</p> <p>The Conference Arrangements Team</p>

Summary of Impact

Financial	The costs of the CPE would be absorbed within the Conference budget.
Risk	Without a CPE necessary decisions about Conference practicalities will not be made in a timely and coherent manner.

Background

1 In February 2009, as part of paper MC/09/09 *Making a Better Conference*, the Council discussed the desirability of creating a 'Conference Planning Executive' charged with co-ordinating the planning of the Conference in its various parts. The Council generally supported the creation of such a group, recognising the need for 'joined up thinking' in relation to the planning of the Conference, and directed that further thought be given to the remit and membership of such a Group.

Outline of context: Why a Conference Planning Executive is needed

2 The Conference is the sum of a Ministerial Session and a Representative Session, in which formal business, worship (including Holy Communion, Ordinations, and prayers), and numerous fringe and exhibition events take place. The start of the Representative Session includes the induction of the new President and Vice-President, the formal welcome of World Church and Ecumenical guests, Conference worship, and reception of Probationers and Ministers into Full Connexion. Consequently this 'showcase'

part of the Conference has four or five times the number of people present than are present at the remainder of the Representative Session. The Conference is therefore multi-faceted, and there are a large number of interested groups with varying and sometimes competing needs and aspirations involved in it.

3 As a result, the planning of the Conference currently lies in several places, reflecting the various aspects of the Conference.

(i) The Conference is the supreme governance body of our Church and as such is a place of Christian conferring. It is ultimately the responsibility of the Secretary and Assistant Secretary of the Conference to ensure that the Conference is able to undertake this core function properly and well. They, together with the Methodist Council and various other bodies (the Strategy and Resources Committee, the Stationing Committee, the Memorials Committee, etc) and with numbers of others both inside and outside the Connexional Team, ensure that the *Agenda* and numerous other publications required by the Conference (e.g. booklets for Candidates etc) are prepared by members of the Connexional Team and others and distributed for the Conference. This 'formal business' continues throughout the year between Conferences and by people and bodies acting on behalf of the Conference.

(ii) The present and incoming President and Vice-President contribute to the planning of the Conference. The present President presides over the Ministerial Session of the Conference and the incoming President and Vice-President preside over the Representative Session of the Conference. Traditionally they allocate those who will lead worship on Sunday, preside at daily Conference Communion services, and choose (but not organise) those responsible for leading Ordination services. They deliver the addresses which often make clear a theme and, together with their chairing of the Conference, set the tone for the Conference.

(iii) There is a Conference Business Committee which meets prior to the Conference to help plan the initial order of business. The main work of the Committee is done during the Conference when it meets twice daily to arrange the business of the Conference in light of any Notices of Motion that have been submitted, any unfinished business from the previous day etc. A separate Business Committee meets to plan the Ministerial Session of the Conference in the same way.

(iv) Historically much of the practical, preparatory work of Conference has been undertaken by a Conference Arrangements Committee that came from what were known as the 'host district(s)'. That Committee has been headed by a team leader and staffed largely by volunteers and has been the formal link with the venue owners and managers in relation to the arrangements for the main hall and ancillary rooms. It has organised the exhibition hall, catering, allocated venues for fringe events, administered tickets for key elements of Conference and stewarded the event, etc. A series of reports to the Conference from 2005 to 2008 have led to decisions to have a small number of venues for the Conference to which the Conference returns regularly, rather than 'host districts'; and therefore a connexional arrangements team. From the Conference of 2010 in Portsmouth, this role will be overseen by the Events Co-ordinator in the Connexional Team dedicated to this purpose.

(v) Responsibility for certain functions of the Conference lie with other groups. Practical aspects of the Ordination services, for example, are the responsibility of the Connexional Team. It is they who choose the venues, allocate the lists of Ordinands to the venues and send out the information to local organisers. However, ticketing is undertaken by the Conference Arrangements Committee and officials for Ordination Services are chosen mainly by the incoming President.

4 All these strands of Conference design and organisation, mostly supported by extensive work within the Connexional Team, seek to work co-operatively despite the complexity of the overall task. From 2010 there will also be a clear and agreed overall Conference budget, within which the consequences of all the individual decisions about the Conference, wherever taken, need to sit. This can be of particular concern immediately before the Conference, when opportunities to share issues around all the interested groups become impossible to organise and lines of accountability can become unclear. Therefore an executive group has increasingly looked highly desirable.

A recent, useful development

5 At the initiative of the Assistant Secretary of the Conference, a 'Joint Meeting of the Conference Secretariat and the Conference Business Committees and those with responsibilities for Conference Arrangements' met in 7 November 2008, and recently on 3 September 2009. This meeting is too large to serve as the proposed Executive, though is useful in its own right and should continue to meet annually. The meeting clearly demonstrates the potential usefulness of a Conference Planning Executive and the proposal here comes with the support of the 'joint meeting'.

Proposals and remit

6 It is not proposed that the different Committees and groupings functions listed above be brought together into a single Committee, which would be unwieldy, given our Constitution, the different natures of Conference activities and the very different cycles of preparation and delivery. Rather it is proposed that a representative of the existing major Committees and groupings join to form a small Conference Planning Executive (CPE).

7 The CPE would provide a forum where the different sorts of preparatory work required by the Conference can be co-ordinated. Recognising the responsibilities identified in Standing Orders as belonging to Officers of the Conference and other Committees, it would have executive powers to make policy and practical decisions relating to the Conference as an event, with the intention of providing a forum where speedy direction and decision could be given on practical, administrative, organisational and financial matters. It would also be responsible, with others, for the continuing implementation of the recommendations in the *Review of the Conference*. The Events Co-ordinator and others involved in the practicalities of arranging Conference would be particularly helped by such a group. It would meet prior to the Conference but it is envisaged that much of its work would be undertaken by email and/or telephone.

Proposed membership of the CPE

8 A small group is proposed, representing only the major groupings responsible for Conference. Namely:

- the Secretary of Conference (Chair)
- the Assistant Secretary of Conference
- the Chair of the Business Committee (who is currently also a past Vice-President)
- a member of the Conference Financial Committee appointed by that Committee
- a representative of the Connexional Team's management appointed by the Connexional Team Secretaries
- the Events Co-ordinator (Secretary)

Resolutions

1. The Council resolves that a Conference Planning Executive be formed with immediate effect.
2. The Council approves the membership of the CPE as listed above.