

3-day Annual Meetings – Report to the 2018 Annual Meetings

Introduction

The 2017 Annual Meetings passed the following Resolution:

“That this General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches supports changes to the length and format of the Annual Meetings [as set out in report **AGM13/17**];

and therefore, requests the Executive Committee and Annual Meetings Panel to bring forward proposals to the next Annual Meetings, including any amendments to the Constitution and By-laws, to enable such changes to take place for future Annual Meetings.”

This report is intended to try and crystallise some of the aspects that will be necessary to have the 3-day Meetings as outlined in report AGM13/17.

Why are we doing this?

The objectives of the Annual Meetings (in no particular order of importance) are:

- To bring us together as a Community.
- To achieve our needs at the Meetings – summarised as Business, Inspiration (including worship), Education and Socialising / Networking. Other activities include Sectional Meetings, Motions, Sales & Promotion and Training.
- To ensure sufficient attendance to allow accountability and democratic decision making.
- To get more, and younger / working age, people to attend the Annual Meetings.
- To ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the Meetings.
- To achieve value for money for attenders.

The Annual Meetings Panel have identified that the objectives set for the Meetings are becoming increasingly difficult to deliver due to: 1) increasing pressure on personal time for potential attenders; and b) increasing venue and other costs, which must be reflected in the attendance charges. Both act as deterrents to attendance.

How do we achieve it?

1) Reduce the Business Meetings time

There is scope to reduce the Business meetings, and to inject a greater sense of focus. In fact we trialled this at the 2017 Annual Meetings and it was felt to be beneficial.

Reports – Reports from GA Strategy Groups and Panels will ordinarily be taken as read, except for questions (preferably submitted in advance). The presentation of the Annual Report and Accounts will also be streamlined, and include future plans. The time allocated for questions will be increased to facilitate better accountability. Other reports from connected groups will be retained but reduced.

Final session – The final session is primarily ceremonial and will be streamlined, for example, the procedural motions of thanks etc. will be taken en bloc rather than read out individually.

Motions – The motions are the largest item of uncertainty in the time required. There is currently no limit on the number of motions which can be proposed, and very limited grounds for rejecting motions. It is almost impossible to plan for the 3-day Meetings when there is a potential for a massive time commitment to be added.

The Panel is therefore proposing a maximum of one emergency motion (except in exceptional circumstances) and four slots for ordinary motions. In the event a greater number of ordinary motions have been received, the Steering Committee would be authorised to select the four motions for debate (changes being required to the Constitution). If applicable, a fifth ordinary motion would be selected as a 'reserve motion' in the event that no emergency motion was received. In the interests of transparency, any rejected motions would be circulated to the movement along with the accepted motions. This would enable interested congregations and individuals to take action as they wished. A new category of 'procedural motions' would be created in Standing Orders, being motions intended to facilitate the business of the General Assembly. This would include items such as the existing 'further motions' and other items such as the grant of honorary membership and minor changes to the constitution or standing orders. The Steering Committee would be given authority to designate procedural motions, which would not be taken into account which considering ordinary and emergency motions.

- 2) Redefine the purpose and profile of the John Rely Beard (JRB) lecture to incorporate the keynote speaker item.

The JRB lecture and the plenary keynote speaker items will be merged, in partnership with the Ministerial Fellowship and the GA Executive Committee. It is hoped that this might raise the profile of the activity by arranging a single high-quality speaker using our shared resources.

- 3) Cancel the Opening Celebrations and Social Evening

Instead, there will be a 30-minute Opening Worship, replacing the 10-minute Opening Welcome, to take place at the start of the Meetings. This will give a more defined start to the Meetings, emphasising our Business and time together take place in the context of a religious community.

- 4) Shorten the Anniversary Service

The Anniversary Service would take place on the second evening, for an hour of high-quality worship (plus up to 15 minutes for the Ceremony of Recognition).

- 5) Amend the slot system from 40 and 90 minute slots to just have 60 minute slots.

We appreciate this is probably the most contentious aspect of the proposal. There are two main objectives to this. The first is timing – it will help allow us to retain contributions from the GA groups, panels and strategy groups as well as the affiliated and non-affiliated societies within the available time. However it is equally aimed at a second objective of improving the quality of the event and experience. Underlying the entire proposal is a belief that making the Meetings more focused will improve the quality of the experience for the majority of people attending. We feel that 60 minutes is the optimal timing for retaining attention and concentration, particularly in a warm meeting room. Attention drops over the course of a talk. Most University lectures are scheduled at 50 minutes.

What will it achieve financially?

In 2019, reducing the meetings from 72 to 48 hours will reduce the cost for a single participant from c£400 to c£260 – a saving of around £140.

Additionally, it will save the GA and associated funds money by reducing attendance subsidies (EC, retired ministers, students, volunteers, young adults, children etc.) by around £7,000. It will also release staff time for other projects.

For other Unitarian groups, the saving is greater. The indication from our Meetings attendees' survey is that roughly 2/3 of people have the majority of their attendance costs paid by their congregation or other Unitarian body. Taking a figure of 300 people, that's 200 X £140 = £28,000 saving to other Unitarian groups.

3-day Annual Meetings Schedule – Example for discussion

DAY 1				DAY 2				DAY 3								
ARRIVALS				Morning Worship				Morning Worship				07:30				
				Free time				Free time				08:00				
				PLENARY II				PLENARY IV				08:45				
				Coffee				Coffee				10:00				
				PLENARY III				Slot 1	Slot 2	Slot 3	Slot 4	10:30				
				Break				Break				11:30				
				Slot 1	Slot 2	Slot 3	Slot 4	Closing Session				11:40				
				LUNCH				LUNCH				12:40				
				Opening Welcome				Slot 1	Slot 2	Slot 3	Slot 4	DEPARTURES				13:45
								Break								14:00
PLENARY I				Break				14:30								
				Slot 1	Slot 2	Slot 3	Slot 4	14:40								
				Slot 1	Slot 2	Slot 3	Slot 4	14:45								
Newcomers' Welcome		Tea		Tea				14:55								
Slot 1	Slot 2	Slot 3	Slot 4	Slot 1	Slot 2	Slot 3	Slot 4	15:55								
Break				Break				16:25								
Slot 1	Slot 2	Slot 3	Slot 4	Slot 1	Slot 2	Slot 3	Slot 4	17:25								
DINNER				DINNER				17:35								
Break				Break				17:35								
JRB KEYNOTE LECTURE				ANNIVERSARY SERVICE				<p>Slots: <i>There are 32 slots, all lasting one hour. In 2016 there were 29 slots booked (15 single, 14 double). In 2017 there were 33 slots booked (22 single, 11 double) due to 5 extra Next Steps workshops.</i></p>				18:20				
												18:35				
Break				Break								20:05				
SOCIAL TIME				SOCIAL TIME								20:15				21:30
																Break