

Equality and Diversity Report for Conference: Present situation and Recommendations

Basic Information

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Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	Decision
Draft Resolution	The Council agrees that (a) a Stakeholders Forum should be established as set out in paragraph 4 of the report, and that (b) the Equality and Diversity report be developed under the aegis of that Forum and brought to the Conference in 2012; (c) a report to this effect be made to the Conference in 2010.
Alternative Options to Consider, if Any	To continue to seek to carry out the work within the previously agreed timescales.

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	To appraise the Methodist Council of the present situation of the E&D work and make recommendations for the future time line for the report and theological statement.
Main Points	The report sets out the constraints under which the work has taken place so far, discusses the risks posed to the successful delivery of an E & D policy/strategy if the work was to continue in its present time frame, and sets out a proposal for delivering the work in a revised time frame.
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	Conference received a report on proposals for developing an E & D policy in 2008. A further report was made to the Methodist Council in April 2009.
Consultations	Faith & Order, SRC. SRC supported the new timetable.

Summary of Impact

Standing Orders	Changes may be required at a later stage.
Faith and Order	This committee has been involved in discussions on the development of the E & D policy and strategy, and will continue to be closely involved.
Financial	n/a
Personnel	n/a
Legal	n/a
Wider Connexional	In due course the policy will impact upon the wider Church.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	n/a
Risk	It is essential that the E & D Policy is robust and appropriately consulted upon. The proposed revised timescale allows for this, thus minimising risk.

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1. Background and concerns

The 2008 Conference received a report of Equalities and Diversity [Agenda Item 50] which promised that theological work on the issues and an Equality and Diversity Policy would be brought to subsequent Conferences. They have most recently been scheduled to come as an Equality and Diversity report to the Conference in 2011. But the progress of the proposed Equality and Diversity (E&D) report to Conference and the history to it, has been chequered and has now reached a critical stage in its development.

1.1 The theology working group has identified and worked on theological themes but the wider policy was not part of its remit. Therefore there are real concerns around how to engage with and interweave the two strands.

1.2 The group are concerned about their ability to deliver according to expected outcomes.

2. Constraints

Partly because of the period of time that elapsed between the end of employment of one E&D officer and the next, neither part of the report is near to completion.

2.1 Recently too many members of the group have been unable to be present at meetings and most importantly the group no longer has the diversity intended included within it - which questions their ability to write with integrity. The group has too few people involved to deliver the required outcomes even if all the skills were round the table necessary.

2.2 Reflecting back on the process the Working Party considered that what happened to the previous work, which was remitted back for further work by the Council, was likely to happen again, although they do not wish to see their achievements ignored and hope that what has been written so far will be further developed and refined.

3. Risk Assessment

The group unanimously felt that it was too great a risk to continue the project in its current structure which would lead to a bad outcome. It would be better to postpone and start a new process with an acceptable outcome.

3.1 The group wanted to honour the seriousness of producing, for the Church, a foundational document upon which future developments could be wisely and compassionately based.

3.2 From what has been learned, the Theology Working Party would propose a new process which reflects the successful process that developed the Domestic Abuse report and wish to offer the work of this report to the E&D Stakeholders Forum as the first piece of work this body deliver so that it is seen as the foundational work that it is and better owned by the Connexion.

4. A New Process

Harnessing the agreed work structure for E&D the Working Party strongly recommends that the E&D **Stakeholders Forum**, the core group for all E&D work, and having on it representatives from Faith and Order (F&O) and Law and Polity (L&P), should be directed by the E&D officer to assist with:

- developing E&D policy, including the theological underpinnings of such a policy;
- implementing the policy once it has been approved by the Conference/Council;
- monitoring and evaluating any agreed policy with a view to future development.

4.1 The Stakeholders Forum will need theological expertise and rigour and will act to mainstream E&D within the life of the local church and wider Connexion.

5. Timing

Given the need for the Forum to be established and develop its own dynamic, and given the amount of work that it is now recognised is required, aiming for a Report to go to the Council early in 2011 in order for it to be part of the agenda of the 2011 Conference looks unreasonable to those most closely involved with this area.

5.1 However if the report were to go to 2012 Conference then working to a completion date of the end of 2011, to meet the February 2012 Council meeting, would give 18 months to complete the report begun from the time of the likely implementation of focus groups.

6. Conclusion

In the clear light of reality the Working Party felt that they had no alternative but to ask to stop the work they are currently engaged in, for a while. The overwhelming recognition that the E&D report needs to be of the very best and that it could not aspire to that at this time determined the recommendation to temporarily cease work.

6.1 The new work structure for E&D offered the group the hope that the work could be developed in a better setting. This would indicate that it is not possible to deliver a complete and finished report until the 2012 Conference.

7. Endorsement of Strategic Leaders

The strategic leaders have read the full proposal from the Working Party and are content to agree with the revised process and target date of 2012 Conference.

Donald Eadie (co Chair)

Sue Dunstan

Sam McBratney

Pete Phillips

Anthony Reddie

Margaret Sawyer (facilitator)

Alison Tomlin

Helen Tyers (co chair)

November 2009