



Appointing an Administrator

TN40 Training Notes series: Administration

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These notes provide a number of checklists for churches considering what will probably be a part-time appointment of someone to handle much of the day-to-day administration. This will often coincide with the setting up of a church office in some form.

Job titles for posts like this include 'Church Office Secretary', 'Parish Administrator', 'PA to the Pastor', or something similar. The notes should prove just as useful if your church already employs someone but is seeking to reappraise either the post or the work of the church office.

They are not aimed at churches thinking in terms of a higher-level appointment such as a 'Director of Operations' or 'Church Manager'.

The idea is to provide lists of ideas to consider rather than to give detailed advice. The headings provide a framework for your thinking. References such as 'A4' or 'TN5' refer to other articles or training notes on this website which will provide further details.

Justify the appointment: seven current issues

The following points form the background, and therefore the justification, for such an appointment. To those who argue that your church has managed without such a post in the past, the answer is that the world has changed in a number of significant ways.

- 1 An increasing complexity in national legislation (in areas such as child protection, health and safety, employment law).
- 2 Changes in employment patterns leading to lack of availability of volunteers during 'office hours'.

- 3 A changing church ethos regarding collaborative ministry and small group structures leading to a greater need for co-ordination, communication and support.
- 4 A need for greater administrative professionalism if the Church is to be taken seriously in today's society.
- 5 A culture of variety and choice leading to a need for weekly service sheets or data projection slides rather than a book-based liturgy.
- 6 Fewer ordained staff available, with a growing number having to take responsibility for several churches.
- 7 Ministers diverted from what should be their priority roles if their church is to be effective in mission.

Define the purposes: seven possible roles

Here is a selection from which to make a choice or on which to base a more appropriate definition of what already exists. What is the priority to be? Several of the following do not sit easily together.

- 1 To provide high-quality administrative and print services for the church.
- 2 To protect the clergy and other staff from as much routine business and unnecessary interruption as possible.
- 3 To act as a focus for church life, a communication hub where questions are answered, data is stored and information disseminated.
- 4 To be the church's interface with the outside world, providing a neutral and unthreatening point of contact.
- 5 To staff a drop-in centre for welcome and counsel, giving the building a human face and a feeling of being open not just on Sundays.
- 6 To manage a reception point for the church plant, especially in a church centre that is let out to a variety of external groups.
- 7 To manage the ministry of all church members so that volunteers are properly selected, equipped and supported.

There are other possibilities for more executive appointments such as responsibility for strategic planning, turning visions into actions, project management, oversight of all business operations, and managing a base for all staff to work out of.

In all this the aim should be to bring efficiency, innovation, confidence and spirituality to the church's administration, and thereby to enable the total ministry of the church to flourish.

Select your priorities: fourteen areas of work

Here is a list of different tasks required within the roles above. Some will be the responsibility of the person appointed, some will be covered by volunteers, others may need to be bought in. Most actual appointments will cover a number of these. In alphabetical order:

- 1 **Administrator**
Supplies, equipment, official registers, forms/returns, contractors on site.
- 2 **Book-keeper**
Day-to-day finance, envelopes, petty cash, Gift Aid, pay to bank.

- 3 **Caretaker**
Oversight of buildings and cleaning, maintenance, contractors.
- 4 **Centre manager**
Lettings, payments, catering, church diary.
- 5 **Communicator**
Website, press ads, media releases, notice-boards, internal systems, year planner.
- 6 **Co-ordinator**
Heart of communication, co-ordination of activities, information point, calendar/diary.
- 7 **Engineer**
IT hardware and software, trouble-shooting, equipment maintenance.
- 8 **Manager**
Co-ordination and management of volunteer ministry, training.
- 9 **Organiser**
Special events, projects, stewardship materials.
- 10 **PA**
Minister's diary, planning work, papers and filing, arranging meetings.
- 11 **Publisher**
Service sheets, newsletters, rotas, PowerPoint slides for worship, programme cards.
- 12 **Receptionist**
Enquiries, bookings, giving the church a human face, neutral contact point.
- 13 **Registrar**
Central database of church members, filing system, registers, CRB checks.
- 14 **Secretary**
Secretarial back-up for staff and office-holders, papers and minutes, supplies.

Employ well: seven decisions to take

Whether you are setting up an appointment from scratch or reviewing an existing one, here are some employment details that will have to be decided.

- 1 Type of appointment (as in the previous two sections), job title (more important than you may think) and work base (office or home).
- 2 Paid or voluntary or different people in both categories, hours per week, flexibility, time on Sundays. (TN37)
- 3 Salary level or wages (an 'honorarium' may contravene minimum wage legislation), all other contract terms. (A8)
- 4 Office accommodation, central telephone number / email and postal addresses (and how to promote these).
- 5 Person profile: a church member essential, desirable or unimportant (and issues of Genuine Occupational Requirement – GOR – to justify employing a Christian). (A6)
- 6 Line management (Minister, or someone else), and whether a full member of the staff team or not. (TN20)
- 7 Recruitment and selection procedures. (A17)

Be prepared: fourteen problems that arise

These appointments can go wrong, usually because not enough care has been taken over the selection process or in ongoing management.

- 1 **Clash of roles**
For example, one person trying to produce weekly print to tight deadlines while acting as receptionist for a church centre. Need different spaces, or times, or people.
- 2 **Office a compromise between purpose and availability**
Many Administrators are forced to work in an environment that is the best that the church building can provide. Be prepared to spend some money.
- 3 **People ignore the office**
Many first-generation Administrators have experienced a tough time – from the congregation. People will try to by-pass them. The key to success is a Minister who refuses to fall for this, and continual education. (TN21)
- 4 **Administrator caught between doormat and dragon**
Either they do everything people ask of them, or get a reputation for coldness. A good job description is helpful (include negatives in it too). (A6)
- 5 **Lack of realisation of responsibility by the employing body**
They have a duty of care: ensuring good management, health and safety, salary issues, etc. Appoint one or two people to oversee this.
- 6 **Poor management of the Administrator**
Ministers are not always the best managers. Explore other options. (TN20)
- 7 **Relationship between Minister and Administrator breaks down**
The fault may lie within either person, but more likely with both. Have someone skilled to keep an eye on how they are working together, to avoid dangers both of over-familiarity and coldness. (TN15)
- 8 **Poor standard of equipment and facilities**
If you are paying someone to do a good job, they need good equipment, good surroundings (room, furniture especially chair, heat and light), and safety.
- 9 **The wrong person in this role**
If this appointment goes wrong, the implications can be serious for the spiritual health of the whole church. It is worth taking great care over the selection process. (A17)
- 10 **Denying every-member ministry**
It is possible to so professionalise the church that the principle of everyone contributing to the body becomes lost. So ensure that the Administrator mobilises others rather than takes work off volunteers.
- 11 **Failing to attract the best people**
It is quite a risk for someone to leave a career behind and take on a pioneer church post. But your best candidates may be right under your nose doing very well in their present jobs. Be ready for surprises.
- 12 **Gifted secular administrators floundering**
Some people have impressive CVs but cannot cope in the unstructured environment of a church, especially if they are called to pioneer a new role. Don't make unfounded assumptions about people on the basis of their CV alone.
- 13 **Lack of shared spiritual values**
It is vital that the Administrator fits into your value system. Usually this means a Christian happy to worship with you (whether they do in fact or not). Check this out.
- 14 **Administrator underperforming**
The wrong person can stay for years to everyone's frustration. Take day-to-day management, regular reviews, discipline and person profile seriously. (A6, TN17)

Plan for development: seven areas of growth

- 1 **A vision statement for the church's administration**
If starting from scratch, how do you want this post to develop over time? How do you see it, ideally, three years from now? Where does it fit into your church's vision? (TN32)
- 2 **A development plan for the employee**
How do you hope this person will grow into the job and take it forward? Consider probationary period, training, annual review with the aim of growing this responsibility.
- 3 **The faith of the Administrator**
How will this post grow their faith in Christ? Who will be responsible for praying for them and their work? How do you hope they will witness to their faith in the contacts they have with people through their work?
- 4 **Education of the congregation**
What teaching programme might you plan to help the church understand that administration is a spiritual ministry of vital importance? (TN21)
- 5 **Support for the Administrator**
As well as line management, who will offer professional support and genuine interest? Would some form of commissioning service be appropriate? Will they be seen as part of the staff team?
- 6 **The relationship of Minister and Administrator**
Are both seeking to make the partnership work well and grow into something even better? Who is checking up that there is proper development in this area?
- 7 **The skill of delegation**
Will this post really help the Minister to focus on what should be priorities? That was the original aim, but does the Minister need help to make it actually work? (TN15)

These notes are available at www.john-truscott.co.uk/resources/training/tn40.pdf. See also Article A15, *Christian administration?* and Training Notes TN4, *Advice for all church administrators*, plus all the other resources referenced in the text. For indexes of all items available on the site, visit the [resources page](#).

Contact John if you would like to enquire about the possibility of help on making an appointment of this kind, or appraising an existing post.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN40 under Administration.

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