



The UCAN story

*Networking Church
Administrators: 1981 - 2017*

A51 Articles series: Administration

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The UK Church Administrators Network, known as UCAN, is a thriving gathering of people employed by their church as a Church Administrator or Operations Manager in some form with over 1,800 listed.

From its launch in 2009 until 2017 it was run as one arm of my professional ministry as a church consultant and trainer and was hosted in its own section of my website. In 2017 it became its own independent organisation run by a Board of Directors.

UCAN now runs an annual conference, specialist training events, a professional HR service, a management course for operational staff and a distance learning course. It provides a monthly members' e-mailing, online resources and lively members' forums.

But how did it start, and in what ways does its development tell a story of how such appointments have grown in the UK to a place where Administrators are now seen as the norm in churches rather than the exception?

I was involved in the launch and operation of an earlier version of UCAN, a part of the Administry organisation known as the 'Church Administrator Resource Centre' (CARC). Administry existed to champion the understanding and use of spiritual gifts of administration in UK churches.

It ran from 1981, initially from a small spare bedroom in our house, until it closed at the end of 2003, four and a half years after I had left to work as an independent church consultant and trainer. CARC closed with it. There was then no Administrators' network for a few years but in 2009 I relaunched CARC under the new name of UCAN as an additional arm to my own work and led it through its early years.

In 2017 I was able to hand UCAN over to a gifted and enthusiastic team of Directors who shared my vision for this work in local churches. It has flourished since then under its new leadership in a way that would never have been possible when I led it and I am thrilled to see its ongoing progress and development.

So this story comes in two distinct parts and begins not in 2009, but back in 1981 for UCAN's earlier form. It then runs to 2017. Others can continue the story later.

The Church Administrator Resource Centre

Part 1 of the story: 1981 - 2003

This article is about the work of a number of brilliant people who shared a passion for a biblical view of administration as a spiritual gift and a valid ministry. I list many of them in what follows. It is dedicated, with thanksgiving to God, to them and to all those who shared the journey in both those early years and in the new, resurrected UCAN. At some future date I hope to write up the wider Administry story but restrict myself here to work with Church Administrators. But I need to explain first, how I came into this work.

Administry's birth and growth

I seemed to be attracted to administrative roles in Christian groups both at school and university. After three years in a conventional transport engineering job I believe God called me to focus my career on an administrative ministry. I worked in a Christian organisation for five years and then spent three years pioneering a role that would today be called 'Operations Manager' (the term was almost completely unknown then) in a large London church.

The church already had a well-established and gifted Rector's PA but my role was to be more strategic and break new ground. Among other things, I developed principles for communication to build ownership of the church's ministries.

But this kind of church appointment was new. Few churches outside the very large ones had any paid administrative staff in 1978 when I took on this role. Ministers were assumed to handle the limited amount of administration that there was. Church life was very different from what we know today.

My appointment, being unusual for that time, attracted attention and Ministers in other churches were intrigued. The norm at the time was to see roles in teaching, outreach and pastoral care as 'spiritual' whereas administration was generally seen as 'practical' and definitely not 'ministry'. The idea of paying staff for church administration was a novel one.

So the idea of promoting administration as a spiritual ministry, as I firmly believed Scripture showed it to be, started to take shape and eventually Administry was born. I asked a group of people to form a 'committee' under the leadership of John Roberts, a member of my own church. Their first meeting took place on 27th July 1981 and they then took the considerable risk of employing me from 12th October that year.

The name Administry was the brainchild of my friend, Lance Pierson, who sadly died in 2021, and cleverly combines the two root words of administration and ministry.

So Administry was set up, and although most of its work was about a specific and broader project to research how different areas of church life might be organised, one of its ministries (perhaps about 15% of its total work) would be to support the idea of appointing this new idea of a Church Administrator. These were the seeds of what was to become, 28 years later, the UK Church Administrator Network or UCAN.

Administry was eventually launched in public on 30th September 1982 at an event in London with Bishop Timothy Dudley-Smith as the speaker. Even the Church Times covered it in some detail! I was the one employee at the time working under the guidance of what would later become the Board.

The work grew and others joined the staff. The first 'staff conference' (rather a grand term for what it was) took place in June 1984 with myself, Ann Capps as my PA and, in a consultancy role, Lance Pierson.

More staff joined in the years that followed, some based in the St Albans office in our house, a few key people (Martyn Dunning, then Ian Harvey, Jeni Farnhill and Rob Norman) in regional posts. But everyone on the team helped build strategy and played a key part in the creative approach to our subject.

Administry started off with the research project which produced 'resource papers'. Later we added our own writing of 'Adminisheets' and, later still, 'Mini-guides'. Many of these papers were of special interest to Church Administrators so every aspect of Administry's work fed into other parts.

I led the growing Administry staff team until 1993 but then handed over, after an interim arrangement, to Rob Norman who led from 1994 onwards so I could focus on creative work. At this point Administry hired office accommodation in St Albans.

Eventually I moved on to become an independent church consultant and trainer in 1999 and the Administry office then moved to Sheffield.

The organisation had always struggled to find sufficient funds to pay for a staff team. Churches were not prepared to pay realistically for the kind of services we were providing and finding external funding for administrative work is far from easy. We almost closed down at least twice during my leadership and finance was always a live issue, but eventually in December 2003 closure very sadly proved the only option. Perhaps it was simply that its work was done.

Administry's Administrator strand

But, as already noted, within Administry's work there was a small but strategic project to support Church Administrators and promote the value of paid appointments of this kind. It started off as a mailing list, in the days when you typed the list out on a typewriter, reproduced it on a photocopier (a new toy for churches at that time which was replacing the Roneo ink duplicator), and mailed it in an envelope with a stamp on it. Contemporary Administrators have no idea what they are missing!

Administry's first small photocopier cost £25 under a charity scheme. We invested in a state-of-the-art daisy-wheel typewriter right at the start.

Much of the work at the time was with Anglican churches alone, but the Church Administrator mailing list was open to any Christian church.

In 1981 when Administry was first launched Church Administrator appointments were, on the whole, restricted to the large churches when the Minister might have a Personal Assistant in some form. The early appointments tended to be in Church of England churches (there were fewer independent churches then) where a part-time Parish Administrator post was set up.

Most early church offices were in unsuitable places, often in the Minister's Vicarage or Manse but sometimes in an old vestry in the church. Some large churches were able to see the future and built new halls with a purpose-built church office within it (such as Holy Trinity, Platt in Manchester). But the norm would have been, if anything at all, space in the Minister's home, with a range of difficulties and dangers that that offered.

During the 1980s and 1990s the need for churches to comply with a growing body of legislation and the greater complexity of church life when the idea of 'every member ministry' came in, resulted in a steady increase in Administrator appointments. The idea of an operations specialist was almost unknown at this point. Administry was ideally positioned to offer advice and networking for this growing movement.

What we were also attempting was to build a theology for such appointments, with help from practitioners like Michael Saward in London and theologians such as Walter Moberly in Durham, all co-ordinated by Lance Pierson. A number of our early publications on Acts 6 and 1 Corinthians 12 and our thinking on the place of administration in church life, came out of this 'theological consultation' as we called it. It gave us a theological back-bone to our very practical work.

Towards the end of 1986 Administry received two requests to give fuller advice to individual churches on the working of a church office and the setting up of an Administrator post. Both involved a full day's visit and a printed report to follow.

We did not realise it at the time but a consultancy service was coming to birth – and it was Church Administrator work that was at its heart in those early days. A few similar requests followed in 1987 and, without seeking it, another arm to Administry's work came into life.

The Church Administrator Resource Centre

As part of this Administrator strand, a mailing list of administrative staff was launched in 1982 with an occasional newsletter. The list grew steadily to 107 by September 1985, mostly part-time Church Administrators.

Nine issues of the newsletter were produced between 1982 and 1985, growing in content with each issue. Then in 1985 the simple newsletter was given a facelift and turned into a broadsheet. Ten issues of this were produced until 1989 with colour coded pages for various types of article. In 1989 the broadsheet went into a new loose-leaf format which was mailed bimonthly.

The 1989 broadsheet material included the following main articles. As can be seen, we were putting out a considerable amount of printed resource for our Church Administrator members.

- Time will tell (*self-management*)
- Is your church plural? (*a theological look at what a church is*)
- A question of employment (*legislation*)
- Bind us together? (*contracts*)
- Deeds of covenant (*the forerunner of Gift Aid for charities*)
- Putting theory into practice (*a church office story*)
- The care-takers (*employing an Administrator*)

- I went into print (*a report of an Administrators' conference*)
- Baptist pioneers (*case studies of Church Administrators*)
- Who's the boss? (*self-employment for Administrators*)
- All fit and well (*health and safety just becoming the feature it is today*)

All this brought about increased demands for support and advice and the small number of Administry staff at the time were struggling as there was also growth in their wider work. By then this aspect of our work had become known as the 'Church Administrator Resource Centre' or CARC (pronounced as you would expect, rather like a rook's sound!).

The mailing list was eventually printed as a 'Directory of Church Administrative Staff, a national register of Church Administrators and Ministers' Secretaries/PAs'. This listed everyone in membership of CARC with their churches, addresses, telephone numbers and type of appointment. In those days, a database consisted of a printed listing! By 1994 this had risen to over 800 entries compared with the 107 in 1985.

Day conferences

Back in January 1983 Administry held two one-day conferences which would allow employed Church Administrators to meet others in similar roles. One was in Leeds with Michael Botting as the speaker, the other in London with Michael Saward (both well-known Vicars of that time).

Both gave fascinating insights into a theology of administration and how the topic had been mistakenly viewed by the Christian church over the centuries. It was so encouraging for those early Administrators to hear that they were in a 'proper' ministry, not just an ungodly 'admin'! Both conferences were entitled 'Stewards of God's resources'. 45 Administrators came to London and 25 to Leeds.

Those who came to these day conferences were thrilled to discover others in similar work meeting similar problems to the ones they faced. These pioneering appointments attracted quite a bit of negative feedback from church members who saw this as a drift away from the true purpose of a church. Meeting others in similar circumstances was a first for many and a great encouragement.

The conferences became annual events. They were clearly meeting a need. Numbers coming grew from 70 in 1983 to a total of about 120 between the two events in 1985 and again in 1986 but dropped a little after that.

Early day-conferences

1983 Jan	Stewards of God's resources London/Leeds
1983 Nov/Dec	People-centred administration London/Leeds (<i>relationships</i>)
1984 Nov	Administrator interchange London/Leeds (<i>sharing ideas</i>)
1985 Oct	Hide and seek! London/Leeds (<i>information handling</i>)
1986 Oct	Who's in control? London/Manchester (<i>self-management</i>)
1987 Jun	The first two years London (<i>for those new to post</i>)
1988 Jun	Any volunteers? London/Sheffield (<i>volunteers</i>)
1991 Jun	Staff teams London
1992 Apr	Watch my lips London (<i>data/IT</i>)

Regular day conferences were replaced with occasional Administrator events and other types of seminar after 1992.

We also held occasional day conferences for Church Administrators in Northern Ireland. The first was called 'Set the Minister free' and was held in Lisburn in April 1994 with almost 90 people present including Ministers. There was also a Church Administrators Day in October 1997 also in Lisburn.

Administry's training event on church offices was held near Belfast in 1999 as well as a range of more general training topics in most years in various venues throughout the Province.

Hothorpe Hall conferences

In 1986 the small staff team decided the time had come to launch out on a residential conference for Church Administrators. This would be quite a financial risk, booking a centre at significant cost not knowing whether churches would pay for their Administrators to come. It needed a central venue to encourage people from both North and South to attend, preferably a site with good motorway and rail links.

It was just before this time that three families from the London commuter belt had bought up a large rural centre called Hothorpe Hall just outside the village of Theddingworth west of Market Harborough. It was close to the M1/M6 junction and had reasonable rail links. Two of the couples had moved there to be on site. It had previously been used by the Lutheran Church of

Great Britain but was much in need of renovation.

The three couples were turning it into a Christian conference centre and between the four members on site were handling maintenance, management and catering without the need to hire other staff. They then covered daily house-keeping by inviting European interns to work with them for a year. They were taking a huge risk and we decided to join in with them at a time before they became known nationally in Christian circles. So we were one of their early bookings and we so liked what we found that we returned each year thereafter.

We made the main event at that first conference one of the new training events that Administry had been writing and putting on for churches. 'But no one ever told me!' was our event on church communication and this seemed an ideal theme for Administrators. So that took centre stage filling the central day of the three-day conference and that pattern was repeated for the following five years at Hothorpe before, in 1992, a new approach was tried.

That first conference, though small in numbers with 32 bookings, proved to be a great success and we recognised that an annual event of this kind was now a valuable addition to what we could offer. Numbers eventually rose into the 70s for later conferences.

Day conferences gave a chance for lonely Administrators, many of whom knew of no others in similar posts to them, but a residential event gave enough time to share joys and frustrations in greater depth and open up to others in a way that no day event could ever offer. These conferences were the prototype for UCAN's 'Cutting Edge' events some years later. Here are the Hothorpe events (see next column).

Note: Hothorpe Hall struggled in the Covid pandemic of 2020/21 and was eventually bought up by a secular company.

The Church Administrator manual

The idea of a manual for Church Administrator appointments was first considered soon after Administry launched but it took almost ten years before the time could be set aside to write it. In fact it became something of a standing joke that this was the resource that never materialised. This was completely my own fault!

In the meantime a more modest publication covered the ground as a simple A4 stapled paper. Titled simply as 'Church Administrators' the paper was available from almost the very launch of Administry in 1982 and was revised in 1988.

Hothorpe Hall conferences

1986	Jun	But no one ever told me! Part 1 <i>(communication)*</i>
1987	Oct	Open for business <i>(church offices)*</i>
1988	Oct	But no one ever told me! Part 2*
1989	Nov	Get into print! <i>(use of print in churches)*</i>
1990	Nov	Time for business <i>(self-management)*</i>
1991	Nov	Teamworks <i>(building and running a team)*</i>
1992	Nov	Handle with care! <i>(stress – Walter Stockdale)</i>
1993	Sep	Help! I need somebody <i>(pastoral – David Bolster)</i>
1994	Nov	Mission accomplished <i>(mission – Derek Tidball)</i>
1995	Nov	Going for growth! <i>(Stuart Pascal)</i>
1996	Nov	Going for growth! <i>(Bryn Hughes)</i>
1997	Nov	Going for growth! <i>(Paul Swann)</i>
1998	Nov	Going for growth! <i>(Mark Greene)</i>
1999	Nov	Standing in between <i>(Paul Harris)</i>
2000	Nov	Standing in between <i>(David Spriggs)</i>
2001	Nov	Filling the gap <i>(Jill Garrett/Michael Moynagh)</i>
2002	Nov	Filling the gap <i>(Paul Harris)</i>

*These are the titles of the training events used, not necessarily the title given to the conference. These first six conferences had no external speaker.

It covered principles, advantages of such appointments, potential dangers, types of appointment, job descriptions, terms of employment, and more. This was first published before computers had become established and so was set, as were all other Administry publications, by the use of a daisy-wheel typewriter and some actual cutting and pasting.

But at last the manual came to be written and was published by Administry in 1993. Its format was pretty grand by our standards. It comprised an A4 four-ring binder with about 140 pages plus section title-sheets. It was printed on tinted 120 gsm paper with a cover card inserted. It sold for £15.

It was titled, 'Appointing and Employing an Administrator – A step-by-step guide for churches'. The copyright page has the dedication: 'This manual is dedicated to pioneer

Church Administrators who have had to suffer much because they dared to blaze a new trail.'

In those days many such appointments were the first one of its kind for the church concerned, and early Administrators often had to endure misunderstandings and opposition. Some church members deliberately avoided contact with the Administrator by always going direct to the Minister as a protest at such an appointment. Hence the manual's dedication.

The manual was made up as follows:

- A An explanation
- B Why appoint a Church Administrator?
- C Thinking it through
 - C1 What kind of work do they do?
 - C2 What kind of people should they be?
 - C3 How much will it cost?
 - C4 How do we present our case?
- D Making the appointment
 - D1 The job description
 - D2 The contract
 - D3 Announcing the job
 - D4 The interview
- E Being a good employer
 - E1 Pastoral care
 - E2 Training and review
 - E3 The office
 - E4 Employment legislation
- F Working with an Administrator
 - F1 Male-female relationships
 - F2 The working relationship

Appendix

True to Administry's creative approach the text was illustrated not only with cartoons but also with four made-up case study churches: Emmanuel Ecumenical, Christ Church and St Stephen's, Blessville Baptist and Faithsend Fellowship.

In fact there was always a zany sense of humour within Administry. We wrote case studies about Church Administrators with names such as Dot Matrix and Daisy Wheel. Younger Administrators may fail to get the joke! We peppered our publications with cartoons which became a standard and much-admired feature of our work. They were drawn for us by Micki Hounslow.

Part B of the manual, 'Why appoint an Administrator', was also reproduced as an A5 booklet for much wider circulation. It stated, 'Many church leaders and members see no need for Church Administrators. This booklet sets out reasons, from the Bible and from experience, why most churches would benefit from one.'

The manual, which was updated in 1999, had a considerable impact on the appointment of

Church Administrators in churches of all denominations and none, and copies remain to this day in a number of church offices. Much of UCAN's work today is based on these earlier publications which gradually saw Church Administrators becoming accepted for both biblical and practical reasons.

Other Administry themes

CARC was only one small part of the Administry brand, though an important one. But much of Administry's work in its other two strands, the Inter-church Organisation Project (ICOP) and its Education and Training Ministry (EATM), touched on work with Church Administrators though aimed at a wider audience as they promoted spiritual gifts of administration. Here is a listing of some of the other resources especially relevant to Church Administrators.

Publications

Administry published Resource papers (from ICOP) later replaced by How-to Guides, Mini-Guides and Adminisheets (from EATM). In the 1980s there had also been a set of DIY Training Packs.

In one sense all of them related to church administration but those more obviously for or about Church Administrators included the following selection. See box on page 7.

Training events

Administry ran a range of training events, a separate strand for the Church Administrator conferences and days. These included:

- Get Your Church Organised (GYCO – an annual residential event covering several training themes run in the summer of 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1997)
- Open for business (church offices)
- Working in tandem (Minister and Administrator together)
- Set the Minister free (Acts 6)

But there was a wide range of other topics including meetings, communication, change, vision, stress and much more. Many Church Administrators came to these though the target audience was much wider.

Some of these events were organised by Administry with direct bookings sought. Others were undertaken for private clients. In Administry's training period from 1983 to 2003 over 250 were run as private events and over 500 for public booking, a total of over 750 events.

Resources of special interest to Administrators

Adminisheets

- 2 An Administrator for your church?
- 3 We believe in God ... the Administrator!
- 5 Open for business *(church offices)*
- 7 A computer for our church?
(when the idea was a very novel one!)
- 12 The spiritual gift of administration
- 13 What's so spiritual about chaos?
- 19 Please speak after the tone ...
(when answerphones were a new idea)
- 20 Why waste your time on administration?
- 23 Whatever did we do before we had photocopiers? *(another new idea!)*
- 24 Condemned to desk *(paper control)*
- 35 The principle of release *(Acts 6)*
- 36 File and seek *(filing)*
- 40 Designed To Please *(desk-top publishing as it was)*
- 41 Spiritual gift of administration – what is it?
- 51 Let's play fair on copyright

Mini-guides

- 1 Being better organised
- 3 Preparing a welcome pack
- 7 Handling paperwork
- 8 Caring for your customers
- 9 Planning projects
- 14 Keeping people in touch
- 18 Producing a strategy

Resource papers

- 82:5 Internal communication
- 82:8 Letterheads and logo's
- 84:2 Open for business *(church offices)*
- 85:2 The good news paper round
- 86:1 What's the news?
- 92:1 We came, we saw, we joined
- 93:4 Office aid
- 94:2 News for the world

How-to Guides

- 1.1 Producing print
- 1.7 Implementing vision
- 2.4 Checking your church's health

Consultancies

Administry started undertaking consultancies in 1986 and by its closure in 2003 had conducted over 150 with reports and an additional 50 without. Many of these related to the working of a church office and the appointment of administrative staff. This was very much the initial picture during 1986-1990 but topics became broader as time went on covering overall audits, leadership structures, future planning and much more. But Church Administrator-related topics remained as an important part of this ministry throughout its time.

Early report titles, to give a flavour of content, included:

- A review of the church office and its equipment needs
- The possible appointment of a Church Administrator
- Present and future needs for administrative staff
- A brief evaluation of administrative structures with particular reference to the parish office

Later reports had a wider spread of topics and became more complex. Some of the most detailed ones were for Christian mission agencies, although churches remained the primary source of work.

Mailbase

In 1991 Administry even went into software production at one point, selling a database program which we called Mailbase and which was then used by a number of Church Administrators. This software had been written for our own mailing list and was easily adapted to serve churches long before church management systems became available.

Summary

So although only one limited strand of Administry's work was specifically for Church Administrators, much of its other ministries related to church offices and administrative staffing. This meant that there was a wide range of resources for Administrators to call on and this can now be seen again in the work of UCAN.

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With heartfelt thanks to all those creative, innovative, enthusiastic staff who worked for Administry over the years, whether up-front, in the office or as consultants or volunteers. They and others are the true heroes of this story: Jenny Bailey, Johnnie Boxhall, Marion Brown, Ann Capps, Martyn Dunning, Jeni Farnhill, Greg Fletcher, Dianne Hanna, Ian Harvey, Lucie Harvey, Micki Hounslow, Anna de Lange, Jerry Marshall, Karen Meadows, Sarah Middleton, Rob Norman, Lance Pierson, Mary Seward. Michael Streeter, Stephen Tinsley-Marshall, Eleanor Truscott, John Truscott, Frances Yates.

And to the Council members. The Chairs were (surprisingly male!), in order, John Roberts, Alastair Hubbard, Nic Laycock, Charles Marnham, Tony Lowman, Martin Bird, David Bradley, Rob Shimwell, Jon Pocock.

The wider Administry story will be told in a later publication. This has only focused on its Church Administrator work. But it is time now to move on to Part 2 and the birth of UCAN itself.

The UK Church Administrator Network

Part 2 of the story: 2009 - 2017

This second part tells the story of UCAN itself from launch in 2009 to when I handed it over to a Board of Directors in 2017.

A new birth

I had left Administry in 1999 and was now an independent church consultant and trainer specialising in creative organisation. When Administry closed down at the end of 2003 the Church Administrator Resource Centre closed with it and so for a few years there was no central networking for Church Administrators.

But over this period a number of people approached me to see if I would restart such a network. Someone else associated with Administry was also considering running a new CARC in partnership with a Christian organisation so I said I would leave it to them to initiate. But after a year they felt that this was not right for them so I decided to launch a new network myself.

I chose the name UCAN, for the UK Church Administrator Network. Note that 'Administrator' then was singular – when I handed UCAN over to others in 2017 it became plural. It would be part of my own personal church ministry, at least while in its infancy.

My prayer was to launch it and develop it into a going concern that others would then take over. I could see no easy way of funding it so decided to make it free of charge with occasional requests for a small donation. But how to launch when there was no longer any network to grow it from?

I decided to do it the hard way and spent over a year following this procedure.

- 1 Work from an old CARC listing of Administrators to find churches in each UK county that were likely to be still employing an Administrator.
- 2 Look up the website for each of those churches (a feature that did not really exist in Administry days!) to find the name and contact details of their Administrator – if I could.
- 3 Approach the named Administrator with a personal, mailed letter and sheet describing the new UCAN and an application form. If I could not find a name I would have to address the letter impersonally.

- 4 Repeat the process a couple of months later if I heard nothing. Or send an email in this case if I could find an email address. Or make a telephone call.

I started work on this project in March 2009. This process was slow, time consuming and pretty disheartening as many Administrators did not reply or showed little interest in a network. I almost gave up when the response seemed poor. All the time I was trying to maintain my main professional ministry as a church consultant and trainer.

The key problem was that each church website put their Administrator details, if they put them at all, in different places: under 'staff team', on a 'Contact us' page, or hidden away on that week's notice-sheet.

After three months I had 113 members (but had approached many more), another 48 came in over the summer months and 91 more by the end of the year, giving 250 members by Christmas. The total a year later was just under 400 and a little over 550 by the end of 2011.

Numbers continued to grow by about 150 a year, crossing the 1,000 mark in September 2014. By the time I handed UCAN over in October 2017 there were 1,372 members.

One significant disappointment was the lack of interest from the largest churches in the country. A few joined but most felt they had the necessary resources themselves, whereas my longing was for them to input into the network for the benefit of others.

Initially membership application was by paper form through the post, but in 2014 my website was upgraded to enable online application.

In all this I was seeking a membership that included all levels of administrative and operational appointments in churches, and all traditions within the Christian family.

However, keeping on top of the membership administration was proving difficult. Administrators may not stay for many years in their post and discovering changes, coping with vacancies and maternity covers and then persuading any replacement to take on the membership, all took time week by week. I was struggling to maintain my 'day job'.

UCAN's purpose

This was expressed at various times to Church Administrators as follows:

'The UK Church Administrators Network (UCAN) was set up in 2009 with two main aims.

- 1 It serves people like you whether you are a church's full time Director of Operations or a part-time Office Assistant. It links you up with others doing similar work, offers you support in many practical ways and shares professional church good practice.
- 2 But the aim is also to bless the whole Church by promoting the value of such appointments, encouraging a higher national profile for God's gifts of administration and helping churches grow spiritually healthy.

For this you need us and we need you.'

A new type of appointment

Back to 2009. The new UCAN membership had one key difference from the older CARC Administrators. A number of new members had job titles such as Operations Manager, Director of Operations, or Business Manager. There were over 200 of these by the time I handed the membership over in 2017.

In 1981 the new idea was of a Church Administrator as opposed to a very part-time Secretary helping the Minister out by typing correspondence or managing some rotas. But by 2009 Church Administrators were everywhere, and the new idea was the Operations Manager. What had happened?

The whole point of an Administrator appointment is to release the pastoral staff from administrative duties so they can focus on their priorities of leadership, preaching and prayer. It also enables a more professional approach to administration in churches.

But the national culture was changing. Matters I had never heard of when I was a Church Administrator were now vital: safeguarding, health and safety, HR compliance with employment legislation, policies, the effective use of IT, communications in a crowded market and more could not be ignored and so fell to Ministers and senior office-holders as well as to some Administrators.

The administration that spiritual leaders needed to be freed from had not changed but a new tier of operations had been added to it. And whereas in the closing days of CARC the largest churches were starting to think of operational

appointments, by 2017 any medium-sized church was having to do the same.

It could also be said that the experience and skill required for a Church Administrator had gone up a gear. In the 1980s it was assumed that almost anyone could manage an Administrator's job. Now it was becoming more specialised and people needed to be clearly gifted for it, able to make effective use of IT. So what UCAN could offer its members would need to be one gear up from what CARC provided a decade or more earlier. Perhaps it needed the fresh start to bring this into focus.

But there were advantages in a more advanced tech to be utilised. I hosted a range of UCAN pages on my website and eventually included the database, so that all members could access it, and interactive forums. No more printing and distributing lists for all the members! Mailings were now by email instead of by post, a change which cut out many hours. We had Twitter and Facebook pages for Administrators. A great deal more would be digitalised when I handed UCAN over as my tech skills are limited to say the least.

As well as all the usual contact details the online database also included job title, hours worked and date appointed. Church size had options in blocks of 100 up to 500 and then 500+ where the number related to the number of people normally present at Sunday services.

There were four categories for type of appointment. Most UCAN members fitted into the 'Church Administrator' category but operational staff were given their own 'Senior Manager' option. The other categories were 'Office Assistant', 'Project Co-ordinator' and 'Personal Assistant'.

Cutting Edge conferences

In 2009 it seemed wise to organise specialist conferences for these senior Administrators. I gave them the generic title of 'Cutting Edge'. It seemed an appropriate name for what we were attempting to do. The strap-line was 'sharpening up our skills in the areas of [the theme of the event]'. The idea grew into alternate day conferences with residentials year by year. I knew I could not organise these on my own: it needed a group of operational staff to plan the event and manage the day or three-days, even if I acted as their Secretary.

So I asked some 'Senior Manager' members of UCAN if they would form a planning group. They were brilliant. Meetings were great, their commitment was second to none, and they worked together as a team, even though the group changed a little year by year.

The first meeting took place in March 2010. The initial group comprised Pauline Carr-Woods, Sally Dowell, David Moss, Mark Parsons, Mark Rance and myself with Peter Brierley generously acting as our consultant. They represented a good range of roles, denominations and areas of the country.

We agreed that the aims of Cutting Edge events should be:

- 1 To offer high-quality training input for senior-manager Church Administrators to enhance our professionalism in term of understanding and skills in areas in which we hold responsibility.
- 2 To provide opportunities for networking with others in similar specialised high-level roles for encouragement and mutual learning.

Both of these to be within a clear Christian context to link faith and work. But the aim at these events is not primarily to provide spiritual refreshment as many other opportunities for this already exist.'

The group continued to meet to plan each conference. David Moss became the Chair and Julian Mander and Margaret Proud later joined the group in place of Mark Rance and Peter Brierley who moved to a new Oversight Group (see below). Pauline Carr-Woods also came off the group.

In November 2014 Brian Howells joined the group and later took over as Chair. In 2015 Margaret Proud and Sally Dowell came off as did David Moss, and Irene Nash joined. In 2016 Becky Thomas joined.

At two of the conferences we had a photographer shooting promotional videos which we then put on the Administrator pages on my website to encourage future bookings.

The tech side of all the Cutting Edge conferences at this time was in the hands of Mark Parsons who did a brilliant job.

Day conferences

The following shows the day conferences held with speakers and number of people booked in. The Ealing events were held at St John's Church, the City event at City Temple and the West End event at Bloomsbury Baptist.

I hope all that is written here is accurate, but if you were involved in the story and spot any point that needs amendment, please let me know. I update all my printed resources regularly and can easily correct anything.

Cutting Edge day conferences				
2010	Jul	Ealing	Legal <i>(Edwina Turner & Matthew Wort from Anthony Collins)</i>	57
2012	Jun	Ealing	Finance <i>(John Preston)</i>	40
2014	Jul	City	Team-building <i>(Bryn Hughes)</i>	58
2016	Mar	West End	Risk Toolkit <i>(Daryl Martin)</i>	92

Residential conferences

The following shows the residential conferences with main speakers and numbers booked in. The general pattern was to have two contrasting themes in the hope that most UCAN senior-manager members would find that at least one fitted their needs well. We also ensured we had Chaplains present for pastoral advice and a Bible reading.

Cutting Edge residential conferences				
2011	Mar	High Leigh	Digital communication / Unpaid staff <i>Andrew Graystone, Phil George, Peter Crumpler, Andrew and Miriam Dow*</i>	57
2013	Mar	Northampton	Vision / Working with Senior Minister <i>Mark Greene, Claire Pedrick, David and Sue Bracewell*</i>	55
2015	Mar	Northampton	Change in the Church / Using data <i>Rebecca Stewart, Pete Worthington, Jon Winter, Sara Batts, Nick and Lois Cuthbert*</i>	63
2017	Mar	Northampton	Healthy hearts / Staff relations <i>Trevor Stammers, Jez Barnes, Jules Morgan, John and Pauline Tindall*</i>	79

*Chaplains

Area Training Days

Cutting Edge was designed for senior-manager Administrators and so those with operational responsibilities. So we ran a series of Area Training Days in more local venues to offer training to the majority of UCAN members in more normal Administrator appointments.

Series 1 ran from August 2011 until May 2013 (with two later events) with material on the role of both the Administrator and the church office.

'Developing our role' ran in nine venues and covered:

- Why am I here?
- My job description
- My person profile
- My development
- The role of a church office
- My vision for the office
- My aims for this year
- My time to do this planning

This event was run at St Albans, Birmingham, Guildford, Leeds, Sevenoaks, Sale, Bath, London and Southampton. Events on the same theme were run later in 2016 in Hexham and Plymouth. An event with a communication theme as part of this series 1 was run at Holywood in Northern Ireland. Numbers at each venue varied from 16 to 78. Total attendance was well over 400.

Series 2 ran from October 2014 to November 2015 with material on customer care. This ran in twelve venues and covered:

- The reception facility
- The conflict between roles of welcomer and worker
- Put yourself in their shoes
- The challenge facing us
- 'Problem' people
- Practical action.

This event was run at Ware, Coventry, Woking, Nottingham, Belfast, Stirling, London, Sale, Bristol, Tonbridge, Leeds and Southampton with numbers ranging from 16 to almost 50 and again totalling over 400.

Series 3 ran from May 2017 to June 2018 with an event titled, 'Administration: biblical and creative'. This ran in seven venues and covered:

- The principle of release (*Act 6*)
- Gifts of administration (*1 Cor 12*)
- The creative nature of administration (*seven pieces of advice*)
- What could possibly go wrong?

This event was run at Birmingham, Guildford, Nottingham, Belfast, Manchester, Bristol and Leeds. Numbers ranged from 14 to the mid-50s.

We also ran two specialist IT days for Administrators at Guildford in 2013 and Leeds in 2014, co-ordinated by Andy Bagwell.

Mailing resources

Cutting Edge was aimed at senior-manager members of UCAN but the majority of the

resources on offer were designed for all types of Administrator. I was particularly keen to offer support and encouragement to lone Church Administrators in churches where they felt isolated, battling away on their own. So mailings were designed very much for them.

UCAN News Update was a bimonthly e-mailing to all UCAN members. The first one is dated 2nd June 2009 and was just one side of A4.

Two years later, UCAN News Update 12:4 dated 7th July 2012 was almost six sides of A4. It included reports of the recent Leeds day conference for Administrators, the Sevenoaks Area Training Day and the Cutting Edge day conference. There was an article on social networking and a list of newly published resources of interest to Administrators.

Each issue also contained a listing of new members and a second list of those who had taken over in their church from another member. This enabled a public welcome for each new member, a feature I was keen to promote.

Two years later, UCAN News Update 14:4, looking somewhat more professional with the new UCAN masthead, had Cutting Edge reviews from two members, news about forthcoming training events of interest to Administrators, news from UCAN Local Groups, a summary of the previous year's UCAN accounts, various news items and again a welcome to new members.

Two years later, UCAN News Update 16:4 had news of progress in turning UCAN into its own organisation, information on war memorials, news from a range of local groups, other general news items and, as always, a welcome to new members.

One feature of the updates was descriptions of their role by Administrators in very ordinary positions. Many found these so helpful, to know that their routine work was little different from many other church servants beaver away to keep websites up-to-date, rotas in good order, Sunday print all out on time, visitors to the office welcomed, church office holders supported and Ministers freed up for their primary roles.

Website resources

The UCAN website during this time was simply a set of pages on my own site. The whole site was significantly upgraded in 2014 and this offered a more professional appearance for the UCAN pages. These included a range of resources for Administrators as well as forums for exchange of views and questions to be asked. The pages were as follows:

- Overview
- Application to join
- Events
- Recordings
- Local groups
- Distance learning
- News (members only)
- Resources and forums (members only)
- Database (members only)

The resources came in various forms..

Written case study examples from members

A series of these appeared in the members-only section of the website from 2015. A total of 41 of these were published over a three-year period. They provided examples of good practice in all kinds of areas: lone worker policies, how-to manuals, GDPR, policies, health and safety, financial controls, fire issues, music events in church, and much more. These were live examples of procedures and policies from members to help others prepare their own materials with a head start. Most were in pdf and available for downloading.

Resources from UCAN sources

The website from 2011 also contained a range of conference hand-outs and reports, Area Training Day materials, remuneration survey, news on grant making trusts, and more.

Conference recordings

The site eventually hosted 25 audio recordings from UCAN conferences.

So in addition to resource material included in the bimonthly mailings, we were building up a library of other resources of use to Church Administrators

The UCAN remuneration survey

Over the summer and autumn of 2011 I carried out an online survey of members to discover details about remuneration packages. It proved quite a job to analyse all the findings but in August 2012 the UCAN Remuneration Survey was published, having made an interim version available earlier in the year.

This was the first time that salary levels and other benefits had been charted by type of appointment, area of the country, details of church and part-time or full time. This provided not so much any recommendation of payments but a picture of what was happening over the UK. This was later updated in the Essential

Benchmarking Survey of 2019 produced after UCAN had become independent.

Relevant resources from my wider work

Just as CARC had benefited from Administry's resources from its wider work, I was producing materials for the Resources section of my website that included material of direct relevance to Church Administrators and Operation Managers. This article is one example of these. These will continue to be accessible by UCAN members without charge. Relevant titles include:

Principles of administration

- A15 Christian administration? *A theological introduction*
- A27 Reliability in ministry *For administrators and leaders*
- A46 Redefining 'management' *Three Bible images to consider**
- HC8/9 A Gift Assessment for Administrators *Introduction/Questions and tests**
- TN4 Advice for all church administrators
- TN21 Ideas for a sermon on administration
- TN72/73 Church administration explained
- TN111 A church policies checklist*
- TN115 Identifying gifts of administration*
- TN138 Categories for church operations*

Offices and administrators

- A33/A34 Roles for a church office *Six perspectives*
- A38 Appointing an Operations Manager *Or reviewing a post*
- A42 What do Church Administrators do? *Defining roles*
- TN26 A checklist for an office move
- TN40 Appointing an Administrator
- TN60 Administrator types
- TN68 Administrators who miss the point
- TN77 Administrator wisdom
- TN86 Customer care for churches?
- TN102 People who visit the church office
- TN112 Set my leaders free!*
- TN126 The small-church administrator*
- TN131 Helpful handover documents*

*Produced later than 2017

The distance learning course

In 2013 St John's College in Nottingham asked me to write a distance learning course for Church Administrators. I had already written a ten-unit course for church members on administration in general (for the Good Book

Company) but this was to target those employed by churches as their Administrator. It was to be at NVQ Level 3 so was not designed for operational staff.

The completed module, 'The work of a Church Administrator' launched in March 2014. It has ten units covering

- 1 Different roles
- 2 Character and people-skills
- 3 Biblical viewpoint
- 4 The office base
- 5 Being well organised
- 6 Working with colleagues
- 7 Principles of communication
- 8 Systems and structures
- 9 Handling files
- 10 Personal development

Tracy Jassal, John Williams and Simon Jones agreed to form a tutor team with me. They came with considerable experience in tertiary education. This course has continued beyond 2017 when it was taken over by UCAN and, later when St John's College closed down, transferred to Cliff College near Sheffield for the academic provider.

Students are expected to complete the course within 18 months. I estimated that you could complete in one year working at about five hours per week with holiday periods allowed. Several students struggled with this. They believed their church would give them time in work hours for the course, but they were then expected to deliver the same work output as before!

17 students had successfully completed the course by October 2017 (the cut off point for this UCAN story) and a further 33 by the time it migrated to Cliff and the St John's end closed in December 2021. By this stage a further 74 students had started the course but not felt able to complete it.

Andy Bagwell took over the management of the course when St John's gave notice of closure and ensured the look of its handbook and materials was much improved. The tutor team, at that point, remained unchanged and so I continue to be linked to UCAN in this way.

Local groups and the forums

One feature of UCAN that had not been present in CARC was the formation of local groups so that Administrators could meet others in their immediate area. The idea was launched in 2013. By 2017 there were 21 such groups and we produced guidance notes for how to run such a group. Here are the groups that existed when I handed UCAN over in 2017. We were

UCAN local groups in 2017

Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire
 Bath Area
 BH Postcode (Wimborne, Poole, Bournemouth)
 Bristol Region
 Bucks/Herts Border
 Cheltenham
 Farnborough Area
 Lancashire Methodists
 Loughborough
 Greater Manchester
 M11 (Essex/Hertfordshire borders)
 Northampton
 Northern Ireland
 Oxfordshire
 South Yorkshire
 Taunton
 Woking
 Worcester

Senior-manager member groups

Greater Manchester Plus
 Surrey Plus
 West Midlands Plus

in correspondence with a further 20 possible groups.

They shared news through a local groups section in most UCAN mailings (to give them a profile to all members) and there was encouragement for members to start new groups.

Forums

When my website was upgraded in 2014 we introduced a set of interactive forums so that members could ask questions and receive replies from others. It was possible for any member to opt to receive email notification when posts were added to the forums so they could check on what was being requested and what was being suggested.

The idea worked but the number of members accessing the forums was less than I would have liked. It was to grow significantly at a later date under the new ownership post-2017.

Governance

UCAN from 2009 to 2017 was simply one strand of my own self-employed ministry so there was no legal structure for it as such. The one group I had set up was the Cutting Edge planning group but I was becoming increasingly uneasy that all the ownership and decision-making for UCAN other than Cutting Edge was in my hands alone. All this would change in 2017 when UCAN was at last properly

constituted as a company with a Board of Directors.

But some years before this, in January 2012, it seemed wise to form what I termed an Oversight Group as a sensible step to broadening the ownership and decision-making. I approached Mark Rance, then Operations Director of St Michael le Belfrey Church in York to see if he would chair such a group and the first meeting took place in January 2012.

The members, in addition to Mark, were Peter Brierley, Joyce Gledhill, Lindsay Robinson and myself. Later, when Mark moved on, Joyce Gledhill took over as Chair.

We set terms of reference as follows:

- 1 To take responsibility for overall vision and strategy
- 2 To provide oversight of (my) running of the network
- 3 To provide oversight of UCAN funds
- 4 To demonstrate to the members that the 'show' is being managed properly
- 5 To decide on new initiatives and policies and advise me on issues when I requested
- 6 To note how developments in the wider Christian community might impact UCAN work'

The group met twice a year and was brilliant in the way it worked. Lindsey Mansfield joined and later Colin Rye and then Jules Morgan in place of Lindsay Robinson.

Its final meeting was in January 2017 when its work transferred to a new Board for a new UCAN limited company which we had set up to prepare for when UCAN went independent of my work.

But I need to go back a few years to explain how we got to this point.

Handover

The decision to plan my departure from UCAN came first of all during one of my annual Planning Retreats, a week away in the Shropshire countryside when I reviewed my work and planned for the future. I wrote a paper in August 2012 which I shared with the UCAN Oversight Group over how my total work might continue when I was no longer in the driving seat. I felt this needed to happen before 2020.

Things moved forward slowly for the next two years but in 2014 the website was upgraded so that UCAN could have its own web address and

logo to show it was moving away from my professional consultancy and training work.



At my August 2014 retreat, I was thinking and praying carefully over the theme of succession planning for every aspect of my work. But in particular I did not want UCAN to die when I moved on, and I also felt it needed new leadership rather earlier than that. I updated the paper I had originally written but a new, independent UCAN organisation was only one possible way forward so the future was not yet clear.

But this time things started to move towards establishing a new UCAN organisation. In January 2015 Julian Mander of Riverside Church in Birmingham submitted a paper, titled 'UCAN 2015 and beyond' setting out a possible way ahead. The key breakthrough came at the end of the 2015 Cutting Edge conference when I shared something of my future vision for UCAN and that resulted in three people coming to talk to me to tell me they shared that same vision and wanted to explore what that might mean for them. I now see that as the watershed moment.

The vision was expressed as follows:

- 1 'UCAN proactively working towards enabling the Church in the UK to
 - o value the spiritual gifts of administration;
 - o give due recognition to those who exercise this ministry (changing present perceptions);
 - o rethink Minister training, UCAN speaking directly to Ministers and senior church leaders.
- 2 UCAN able to offer professional consultancy/training services to the wider Church.
- 3 By 2020: UCAN as a separate organisation, with at least 1,500 members across a wide range of churches, independent of (my) work, staffed in an appropriate way.'

A Transitional Management Group was now formed to work on ideas for how independence might function. This group was then in 2016 merged with the Oversight Group. Things came

much clearer to me at my August 2016 Planning Retreat and I then put a proposal to the UCAN Oversight Group saying I felt it right to come off the Cutting Edge Planning Group after the 2017 conference and to run the membership until summer 2017 but then to hand over to a new body that autumn and at least by Christmas. It was now clear to me that I should move away from UCAN before the end of 2017, rather earlier than I had originally supposed.

There were many foundational issues to work out and much of the creative input for this was provided by Colin Rye who led a key training event for the Oversight Group.

The Board for the new company met for the first time in January 2017 on the same date as the last meeting of the Oversight Group. Its directors, including the three that had shared their vision with me after Cutting Edge the previous year, were Andy Bagwell, Peter Brierley, Joyce Gledhill, Kevin Lawrence, Julian Mander, Jules Morgan and Colin Rye with Jules in the chair. It met seven times in 2017 which included the October 2017 period when I left UCAN and the Board took full control, having formed a limited company.

Peter Brierley came off at this point. His wisdom, independence and broad understanding of the UK Church had been a huge bonus for us.

UCAN appointed Isabel Willerton to handle membership and other aspects of administration as a paid appointment and I handed all the files over to her in October 2017. I was then able to refocus on my professional work of consultancy, training and writing.

The new Board initiated a new UCAN membership structure using ChurchSuite, seeking to enable UCAN to have a tiered subscription system to enable it to function as a financially viable operation.

Later Isabel had to move on and Andy Bagwell and Julian Mander became the two Executive Directors, fitting this in with their other work. Things have developed further since then. That will all belong to a later chapter in this story.

I am so grateful to God for the smooth transition to a new and independent organisation. Much would change over the next few years, but the vision for spiritual gifts of administration and the value of administrative and operational appointments on church staffs would not.

The story from 2017 will need to be written a little later when it can all be seen in perspective, but it was wonderful to see God at work in bringing new people in to take UCAN over. May the glory belong to him.

Summary UCAN timeline

April 2009

Launch of UCAN.

July 2010 then March 2011

First Cutting Edge day conference for senior-manager Church Administrators in 2010 and first residential at High Leigh in 2011.

September 2011 onwards

First of a series of UCAN Area Training Days around the UK, followed by two more series.

January 2012

The Oversight Group is set up to start a process of taking over ownership for UCAN and eventually becoming a properly constituted Board.

October 2013

Launch of UCAN local groups.

February 2014

Launch of 'The work of a Church Administrator' distance learning course in association with St John's College, Nottingham.

June 2014

My new website incorporates an extended UCAN section with our new logo and distinctive design features as a first step towards UCAN separating out from my own professional work.

August 2014

UCAN membership reaches 1,000, of whom about 170 are senior-manager members.

March 2015

UCAN Cutting Edge conference includes my vision input.

August 2016

My conviction the time had now come to hand over before the end of 2017.

January 2017

New Board formed with a limited company structure.

October 2017

I hand over the files and the new Board takes over with a new membership structure.

Since then there has been a huge amount of development which would never have been possible under my leadership. UCAN is now managed by Andy Bagwell and the Board with administrative support from Nicola Islip.

So that tells the UCAN story up until 2017. There is a more detailed version in the 2017 handover paper I wrote, but that is more technical. This has been written for anyone interested in how UCAN came to be what it is today.

My sincere thanks to Rob Norman for checking and correcting the Administry part of this article. I hope to write up the Administry story at a later date.

If you work as a Church Administrator or Operations Manager in any form, be sure to join UCAN. It has so much to offer. See [their website](#).

This article is available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles-index> then A51. See also Articles A33/34, *Roles for a church office*, A38, *Appointing an Operations Manager*, and A42, *What do Church Administrators do?*, plus Training Notes TN40, *Appointing an Administrator*, TN102, *People who visit the church office*, TN115, *Identifying gifts of administration*, and TN126, *The small-church administrator*.

Contact UCAN if you would like to enquire about the possibility of advice or training on Administrator appointments.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File A51 under Administration.

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