

Section 10 AA Service Handbook GB Now forms 4.1 and 4.2 of Chapter 4 AA Structure Handbook 2011 (Draft)

CHAPTER FOUR: THE GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCE

4:1 General Service Conference of AA in Great Britain

The exploratory Conference held in Manchester in October 1965 concluded that the time had come when the responsibility for safeguarding the continuance and growth of AA within the Twelve Traditions should be spread more broadly. It was therefore agreed that a General Service Conference, representative of AA throughout the UK and the Republic of Ireland, should be set up.

This brought together the General Service Board and the Intergroups and Groups throughout England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and provided a means of sharing experience and ideas. In this way the Conference hoped to further the Three Legacies, namely Recovery, Unity and Service, and ensure the healthy growth of an expanding Fellowship by creating closer ties and greater co-operation throughout these Isles.

Tradition Two states that the only authority in AA is that which expresses itself through the Group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants who do not govern. This Tradition is the basic authority for all AA services, whether for Groups, Intergroups, Regions or for the Fellowship as a whole. The General Service Conference therefore begins with the Group conscience. It also leads back to the Group, since the Group has final responsibility not just for initiating, but for implementing the decisions agreed upon by Conference. The General Service Conference is the practical means by which the Group conscience in Britain can express itself in matters that concern the Fellowship as a whole. The existence of Conference is moreover a guarantee that the Fellowship will be able to function under all conditions. It is, in effect, the successor to the founders of AA, ensuring the continuity of the work within the framework of the Twelve Traditions.

As its name implies, the Conference is primarily a service body, not a government for AA in Great Britain. Its decisions therefore relate to the services provided by AA, particularly those administered from the centre, and they are addressed in the first place to the General Service Board as the body responsible for any action that may be required as a result of resolutions approved by Conference. A simple majority vote by Conference is a recommendation to the Board to take any necessary action; a proposal which is carried by a two-thirds majority of those voting at Conference is binding on the Board, provided that in each case the Board is legally competent to act. In this sense only, Conference acts as the legislative body of the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous in Great Britain. For the rest, Conference can only make suggestions to the Fellowship. Any suggestion by Conference is an expression of the national Group conscience and must therefore carry considerable weight. Conference has itself adopted the following procedures (points 1-8 below) for the conduct of its affairs.

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The Fifteenth Conference in 1980 approved the establishment of 14 Regions, 9 in England and Wales and 5 in Scotland (Ireland left the General Service Conference in 1980). The Twenty Third Conference in 1988 approved the establishment of a fifteenth Region – AA Europe: English Speaking – which Conference 1995 agreed would be renamed Continental European Region. At Conference 2004 a second London Region was approved, bringing the number of Regions up to 16.

1. Conference elements

There are three essential parts to a General Service Conference:

- Firstly, there is a comprehensive report on the previous year's activities dealing particularly with the major policy decisions that were taken by the previous Conference. The principle of accountability to the Fellowship by its servants is of great importance: therefore the Conference Steering Committee (CSC) allocates time for the careful consideration of reports by the General Service Board.
- Secondly, part of each Conference is spent in the consideration of a major subject (or subjects) of importance affecting the Fellowship in the widest possible way. Any subject that is chosen for review should not be looked at in an abstract way, but as a matter of vital importance affecting our primary purpose to stay sober ourselves and carry the message of sobriety to the still-suffering alcoholic.
- Thirdly, Conference draws together in its Final Report the decisions it has reached in the form of clear directions to the servants of the Fellowship so that they may be quite sure about the action they have to take over the coming year. Conference must give accurate guidance to those who will carry out its wishes and then check whether its proposals are being put into effect.

2. Location of the Conference

The Conference shall continue to be held in York.

3. Composition of Conference

- a. Each Region shall be represented by six delegates, regardless of the number of Intergroups in the Region.
- b. It shall be for Regions to select their own delegates to the Conference, bearing in mind such considerations as the need to ensure continuity of representation from year to year and the desirability of ensuring that one of the officers of the Region is given the opportunity to attend, if possible.
- c. Members of the General Service Board shall be counted as full members of the Conference.
- d. The *SHARE* and *Roundabout* Committees shall each be represented by one of their members.

4. Election of Conference Chair

- a. Each Annual Conference shall elect from among its third-year delegate members, a Chair for the following year's Conference. Also eligible for election will be those delegates who came to Conference as alternates and are attending their third Conference. This procedure keeps the spirit of

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rotation. The Conference Chair shall be closely involved in drawing up the agenda from the beginning.

- b. Nominations for the Chair of the following year's Conference shall be put forward at the Friday evening session of each Conference, and the list of nominations then closed. A period should be set aside during the opening of Conference (Friday) for nominees to give a summary of their experience in AA service. The election of next year's Chair shall be held during the Sunday morning (or final) session of the Conference.

5. Delegates

a. Qualifications

Quality of sobriety and service record should be the guiding principles when electing delegates. It is recommended that delegates have a minimum of five years continuous sobriety, and that before electing a delegate, a Region satisfy itself that the member has demonstrated a commitment through service to the Fellowship. Potential delegates should be made aware, before election, of the commitment this post entails. In order to be elected as a delegate, a member need not be a serving member of their Region at the time of their election, but an elected delegate becomes a full member of Region. These recommendations apply equally to Conference delegates and alternates.

b. Rotation

1. Delegates shall be elected by Regions to serve for a maximum period of three consecutive years. If a delegate is unable to attend any Conference during the period of appointment, the place may be taken for that Conference by an eligible alternate delegate. A delegate may serve as an alternate once only, but the eligibility of an alternate delegate to attend later Conferences as a full delegate will not be affected by previous attendance as an alternate.
2. Any attendance by an alternate delegate will count as part of the three-year term of the delegate whose place is taken and may not have the effect of extending the term of the delegate originally elected.
3. When a delegate has completed the three-year term, he or she may not at any future time be elected for a further term as a delegate or appointed as an alternate delegate, either for the Region which elected him or her or for any other Region. He or she may however attend Conference as a member of the General Service Board, if so elected.

c. Preparation

Each delegate shall prepare for these responsibilities by:

- 1) becoming thoroughly familiar with such basic AA literature as the Big Book, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, *AA Comes of Age*, *The AA Service Manual (US)* and *Twelve Concepts for World Service*, the *Structure Handbook of Alcoholics Anonymous, Great Britain* (being reviewed by Conference 2011) and the *Service Manual of Alcoholics Anonymous, Great Britain* (due for review by Conference 2012), if necessary by reading them again;
- 2) studying the proposed agenda for the Conference in the light of his or her understanding of AA principles, and making sure that he or she thoroughly understands what the agenda is about;
- 3) discussing the agenda in the Group, Intergroup, Region and among individual AA friends in order to come to the Conference prepared to represent the views of the Fellowship as a whole as well as his or her own personal views on the matters that will be discussed;

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- 4) getting to know how the Conference works by discussing these matters with another delegate who is familiar with Conference arrangements;
- 5) going to the Conference with a clear understanding that he or she will be there for the primary purpose of making it easier to carry the message to the still-suffering alcoholic, and to help the sober alcoholic maintain sobriety.

c. Reporting Back

- 1) Delegates shall, on their return, report the conclusions of the Conference to the Region which elected them.
- 2) Delegates shall also make available reports on the main conclusions of the Conference to the Intergroups and Groups in their area.
- 3) Delegates shall remain active in pursuing the aims of the Conferences they have attended during the periods between Conferences.

6. Observers from abroad

A warm invitation shall be extended to all countries in which AA is established to send observers from their respective Fellowships to attend the Conference at their expense; and invitations to this effect shall be addressed, as the case may be, to the Chair or Manager of each national service organisation by the General Secretary in York. (These invitations should be sent out as soon as the dates for the Conference are decided.)

7. Conference finances

The expenses arising from Conference shall be charged to the General Service Board other than hotel and travelling expenses of delegates which Regions will pay.

8. Implementation of recommendations

- a. The General Service Board shall be responsible for taking any action that may be required arising from the resolutions adopted by the Conference, and a report on such action shall be presented to the General Service Conference the following year.
- b. The Fellowship shall be informed of action that may have been taken by means of publication in *AA Service News*.
- c. The CSC should monitor progress of Conference recommendations rather than delegate responsibility to General Service Board (General Service Conference 1997, Committee 5, Question 4).

4:2 Conference Steering Committee

Conference 2001 adopted the recommendation that the Fellowship be served by a revised Conference Steering Committee (CSC) comprising as follows:

Structure

- a. The annually elected Conference Chairperson, acting as Chair.
- b. All the annually elected Committee Chairpersons (6)
- c. Two Board Members for guidance, support and continuity
- d. General Secretary (non-voting)
- e. Conference Co-ordinator (non-voting)

The CSC will continue to rely on the General Service Board, the General Service Office, the General Secretary and Conference Co-ordinator for support, advice and assistance with the development of the Conference programme. This ensures continuity and is necessary for the success of the Conference Steering Committee's remit.

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference are reviewed annually by the CSC, being mindful always to observe our Traditions, Concepts and Warranties. They are distributed to the Fellowship with *AA Service News* and published on the AA GB website.

Topics / Questions (referred to as items below) for Conference

All items received by 31 August will be reviewed fully by the CSC. In assessing their suitability for Conference, the Committee will be guided by the criteria set out in the Conference elements above, - "a major subject or subjects of topical importance affecting the Fellowship in the widest possible way..." together with criteria established through Conference recommendations.

In making a decision on an item, the CSC will place it in one of the categories laid out in the annually revised Terms of Reference.

Any items generated during their discussions and considered as suitable for Conference, if not already submitted, may be submitted by the Committee members. The Committee will do its best to obtain relevant background information to the prospective item, whenever possible, to ensure the spirit of it is understood. The Committee will, before non-acceptance of any item under the 'three year rule' that had a Conference recommendation for Board action, check through its Board members that action was taken or is planned. The Committee will submit comprehensive reasons for the non-acceptance of any Conference item to the sender. Receipt of all Conference items will be acknowledged by the General Service Office.

- All items for each year's Conference should be sent to the General Service Office as soon as possible and no later than the 31 August to allow the CSC sufficient time to consider the submissions and to respond accordingly.

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- All items to be addressed to Conference Co-ordinator at GSO with the sender's name and address on the item itself.
- If acknowledgement hasn't been received within 14 days, phone or write to Conference Co-ordinator at GSO.
- All items are passed to the CSC with no information about who sent them in.
- Items from an individual member or Group/Intergroup/Region are treated the same.
- All items received by 31 August from individuals, Groups, Intergroups or Regions are dealt with according to the current Terms of Reference. Special consideration will be given by the Committee to any matters of major importance that have remained unresolved from previous Conferences or have been referred for further deliberation by a Conference.

Items which are accepted together with support material and background information will be distributed by the end of December to:

- Conference Delegates
- Regional Secretaries and Chairpersons
- Intergroup Secretaries
- Trustees

The accepted topics/questions will be published in *AA Service News* and on the AA GB website.

The Conference Programme is part of the remit of the CSC and will be reviewed annually. Any further resolutions from individuals, Groups, Intergroups or Regions must be submitted to the Board at least two months before the Conference for possible inclusion in the final agenda.