

ACTIVITY REPORT: January to May 2011

The part of CLAS's work that is most visible to members is the production of Circulars and updating the material on the CLAS website. At their last meeting the Governors suggested that it might be helpful if we produced regular activity reports so that members are more aware of what is going on below the radar. Following is a summary.

So far in 2011 we have issued eight Circulars – one of which, on employment issues, has already been updated once and is likely to be updated again very shortly.

We have responded to several consultations:

- In January we made a short submission to the consultation on the *Giving Green Paper*, principally concentrating on the capacity of civil society to take over public services and the degree to which that capacity is limited by inadequate funding. The final version of the policy emerged as the *Giving White Paper* in March.
- In March we responded to an e-mail consultation on the new-format Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme. We welcomed the fact that the Scheme was going to continue, albeit in a restricted form, but expressed serious misgivings about the decision to divide up the available money into quarterly packets and turn the business of obtaining a refund into a guessing-game.
- In March, also, we sent a long note to the Treasury Solicitor's Office on what we see as the potential dangers surrounding the Attorney General's Reference of 27 January 2011 to the First-Tier Tribunal (Charity) on the issue of the charitable status of 'poor relations' and 'poor employees' trusts. Members will be aware of our concern that if the issue is widened beyond the Attorney's question to the Tribunal it could begin to engage the issue of trusts for (eg) clergy widows and orphans.
- In April we responded on-line to the Heritage Lottery Fund's strategic consultation, stressing the importance of continuing support for the fabric of places of worship.
- In May we sent a short memorandum to the reopened Treasury Committee inquiry into the future of the cheque-clearing system, reiterating the importance to our members of a simple, foolproof payment system (ie cheques, unless and until someone invents something as good or better) and the need to keep the matter under review lest it become a *fait accompli*.

- Finally, on 31 May we submitted a response to the European Commission's Green Paper on the future of the VAT system. Our main concern is to protect zero and reduced rates for charities, which are extremely important to the charity sector generally and to the Churches as part of that.

In the course of writing the VAT Green Paper response Helen Donoghue has had discussions in Copenhagen with representatives of Copenhagen Economics – who carried out an economic evaluation of VAT on behalf of the Commission – and attended the recent Annual General Assembly of the European Foundation Centre in Lisbon. As a member of the Charity Tax Forum (the successor to the previous Government's Gift Aid Forum) Helen is involved in regular discussions with officials in the Treasury and HMRC both on Gift Aid and tax matters more generally.

Frank Cranmer is a member of various groups, among the more important of which are the Community Sector Law Monitoring Group (which continues its protracted negotiations over mechanical copyright and performing right, following the ending of the charity exemption), the Payments Council's Voluntary Sector Liaison Group on the future of the cheque-clearing system and the Places of Worship Forum convened by English Heritage.

In addition, we have had several informal queries from members (particularly from parish clergy) which we have tried to answer to the best of our ability – though always with the *caveat* that for expert advice on matters such as tax, inquirers need to consult a professional. On the other hand, many of the problems that people present can be solved simply by putting them in touch with the central administrations of their own denominations – a thought which has sometimes simply not occurred to them.

Frank Cranmer

2 June 2011