

NBA

NORTHERN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION



CULTURE REVIEW

2021/2022

Sept 21-June 22

A SUMMARY OF THE ROOT AND BRUNCH REVIEW OF THE NBA

As part of our transition to an association relevant for the 21st century

With the appointment of the Regional Minister: Strategy and Transition in September 2021 the Northern Baptist Association (NBA) started a 'in-depth root and branch review of the Team and Association structures.'

There were three stages to this review:

- Phase 1: Listening
- Phase 2: Values and Vision
- Phase 3: Structure and Implementation

What was (and is) kept in the forefront of this is the purpose of getting the NBA in a place that will be 'a team that will serve our churches into the 21st century, which is pioneering and missional to its core and is:

- Strategic
- Flexible
- Visionary
- Responsive
- Relational
- Imaginative and creative
- Releasing and empowering
- Encompassing of the wide range of gifts given by God to the church'

Revd Hayley (Regional Minister: Strategy and Transition) used the OODA Loop, which is a four-step approach to decision-making. It also allows space for a mixture of qualitative and quantitative information gathering.

John Boyd developed this concept because he viewed decision-making as a recurring cycle:

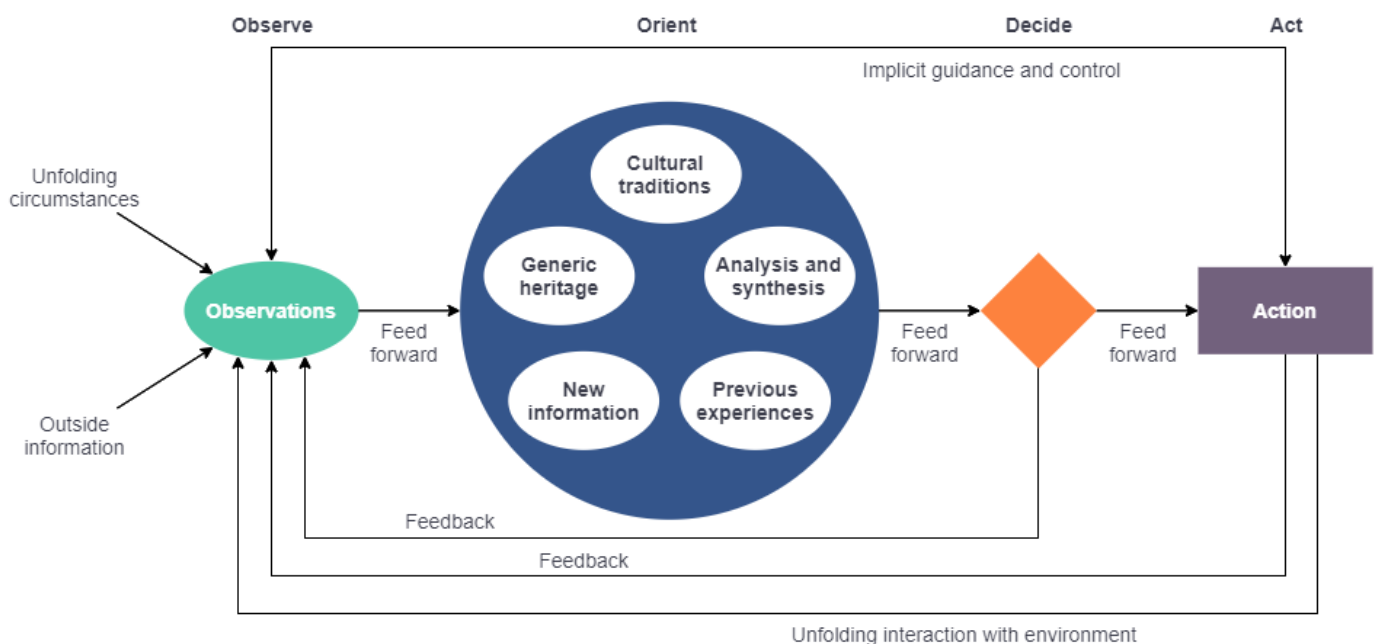
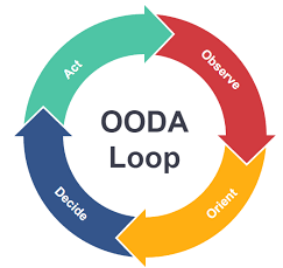


Image from: <https://online.visual-paradigm.com/knowledge/decision-analysis/what-is-ooda-loop/>

There have been two council (trustee) away days where separate reports were discussed and discerned for a way forward.

We are now at the start of Phase 3: Implementation; this document will overview the three phases.

[Phase 1](#): Listening (September 2021 till December 2021)

[Phase 2](#): Values and Vision

[Phase 3](#): Structure and Implementation

[Appendix 1](#): Additional Notes of Finances

Information gathered as part of the observations by:

- Individual interviews / meetings with stakeholders
- Group listening exercises
- Surveys to ministers/church leaders and church leadership teams
- Minute audit of council meetings and committees
- Meeting with churches and their leadership teams
- Listening to the wider Baptist movement
- Observing meetings and different gatherings
- Review of governance documents recorded within the charity commission
- Audit of administration, communication and organisation of the NBA structures and groups

Who engaged in the process:

- 36 out of the 54 ministers and church leaders and with five of the churches CFY workers/leads (paid and voluntary)
- 24 church and missional communities leadership teams
- 18 retired ministers
- In total we have had engagement through all the different forms with 38 of our churches, including the Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) and Independent Methodists that are part of the 50 churches.

Out of the 12 churches that did not engage in the process five are LEPs or Independent Methodist Churches. Of the seven Baptist churches who did not engage six do not have a minister or moderator.

The listening process has been asking all churches and ministers in the association the following:

- What has your experience of the NBA been?
- What do you need/want out of the NBA moving forward?

In different settings these questions were broken down into small areas and expanded as the conversations/listening went on.

Main Threads of the Listening / Observing

As a result of this listening and observing there are three views of the NBA:

1. Everything is brilliant and nothing needs to change (25%)
2. Disengagement with association because it is not relevant (62%)
3. Hurt and pain caused by people within the NBA (13%)

Vision of the NBA - 2021

The stated vision of the NBA is: *"We are passionate to see God's Kingdom come in power to touch people's lives and shape our society."*

The mission statement is: *"We engage together in developing, encouraging and supporting churches to be creative in mission, and facilitating effective ministries."*

The above vision of the NBA is not fully known or owned by stakeholders however there is a real sense of commitment within the stakeholders of 'Building Together for God's Kingdom'. This phrase is an adaption of the strapline of the NBA – this seems to have formed the vision and purpose which is really well owned by the majority.

Although the stated vision and mission statement are not known, it is a real positive that people within the association relate to the purpose and vision of the NBA as 'building together for God's Kingdom.'

Strategy of the NBA - 2021

The strategy has four aims:

- Mission as Priority and Purpose
- Resourcing Preparation and Provision
- Building Partnership
- Pioneering and Planting

This strategy has been in place for over seven years and has not been owned by the majority of stakeholders, although it seems to have formed a helpful organisational aid for the staff team in understanding all that they do.

The main implementation of the strategy appears to have been through creating a culture of mission as a priority, carried out through preaching engagements where the Mission Enabler has offered missional-style worship service such as a café-church event or something with an evangelistic dimension.

[Resourcing through preparation and provision](#) has had a mixed response within the review. Those who are in a more traditional church context have felt that there has been provision made for them and a small number feel prepared for mission, especially through the Re:Imagine course. The Mission Enabler has also provided inspiration for churches to have an evangelic edge, especially within personal evangelism. However, those churches who are seeking more pioneering, fresh expressions or missional communities have not felt supported and equipped.

A good amount of energy and enthusiasm has been placed on provision around environmental justice as mission, starting up of a BUEN hub and a NE JPIT, this is really encouraging however it has not been developed enough to have seen an impact within wider association life.

[Building partnerships](#) in mission has been established and maintained in the past seven/eight years through the overseas mission to Lithuania and the receiving of ministers and missionaries from Texas. There is great encouragement for the work with these two groups within a section of the association. People have commented how the mission trips to Lithuania have impacted them however others have questioned why the association is leading this rather than a church.

In regard to the Texas partnership, this is long established and over time has had a positive impact for a small number of churches. The majority of those I have spoken to question how cultural barriers have been overlooked and currently there is a growing tension around theological differences and understanding.

BMS is a partnership that has been developed over the years while the NBA encourages the work of overseas missionaries. This is work in progress to raise awareness of this in the current years and more could be made to link in the BMS rep to the wider communication strategy of the NBA.

Ecumenical life has been placed into this part of the strategy, this works through the church leaders' group and more informally through the denominational mission specialists as they try to liaise on particular mission issues and projects, such as environmental, church planting, region-wide evangelism initiatives, Fresh Expressions etc. Often denominational geographical boundaries and structures and ways of working vary, so this is not always easy to do.

[Pioneering and Planting](#) is an area of the strategy which is spoken about a lot in the NBA however there is little examples of where the NBA has supported pioneering and church planting. Out of the list of 15 pioneers 13 have not identified as finding support, inspiration or encouragement from the NBA. Pioneers have spoken very clearly that they have not been encouraged or understood within the NBA; many have spoken of the difficulty of trying to get the NBA Regional Team to understand their context or calling, often being put off or delayed from training.

There has not been strategic linking with the Baptist Pioneer Network and our partners within this and the Northern Baptist College have noticed that pioneer ministers have not been supported in the right way which has meant that they often have gone to other denominations.

From observations from stakeholders and reviewing the strategy of the NBA it is clear that this has not been fulfilled or reviewed since it was originally put in place. There have been elements that have been encouraging but as an overview it has not been implemented or embraced.

Governance - 2021

There are systematic issues with the way the NBA is currently functioning.

Governance and accountability across the council and committees is weak and policies have either not been put in place or are outdated. There is not robust challenge in meetings. The skills audit of the trustees shows that there is a lack of members with experience in human resources, CYF ministry, change management, project planning, IT or finance. There is great strength of commitment to the vision of the NBA, a willingness to learn, safeguarding, missional listening, working with people and knowledge of Baptist Together.

Communication -2021

The communication of the NBA has been highlighted as dated and short-noticed, however, many have commented that the information received is relevant to the majority of their context. Most of our ministers/church leaders and church leadership teams gather their information from the emails sent and then the website.

The website was extremely out of date and the information contained not relevant for the purpose of a website. There is limited use of social media, with Facebook being used as an extended noticeboard. What is encouraging is the number of followers on social media, representing a much larger portion of the association giving direct access to congregation members/attendees.

The YouTube channel is well used, partly because of the hymns that were already present at the start of the lockdown. The channel is currently aimed at the older sections of our association and there is no consistency of format or theming.

The NBA logo is extremely dated and unclear; people have commented that the communication of the association puts them off from engaging because from the outset it represents something that is not relevant to them.

Ministers Support - 2021

Ministers in the NBA have a real mixture of views in regard to support that they have received. Those in a traditional church context have commented that they have been supported at times however this has been inconsistent. Ministers coming out of college into settlement have stated that it has been a struggle to communicate anything other than a traditional form of ministry. Ministers in Training (MiTs) have felt extremely supported by the Hub Tutor and a depth of relationship has been formed in the groups of MiTs over the years, sustaining them in their ministry. Newly Accredited Ministers (NAMs) are supported by mentors, and this seems to work really well.

Little work seems to have been done to engage ministers with Continued Ministerial Development (CMD) however this could be due to it launching nationally in lockdown and coinciding with the changeover of regional team.

Support seems to be on a response basis for most ministers and there has not been a proactive approach in recent years for engagement in training and development across the association (again this could be due to time of transition.)

Women ministers have commented that they have felt that some ministers' gatherings have been toxic for them and they have then chosen to opt out of engaging as they are treated with disrespect and subject to sexist comments and attitudes.

The minister's conference has had mixed reviews again, some appreciate the time away and the input however others have struggled to feel like it is a space for them. The ministers value time to connect with others and would find strength in doing this locally rather than trying to cover the whole association.

There is a desire within the ministers/church leaders that are in active pastoral ministry to be more distanced from retired ministers. 29 out of 36 ministers/church leaders have stated on various listening exercises that they feel retired ministers are holding the association back.

In contrast, retired ministers feel they have much to give to association life and to those in active ministry; they expressed regret that the regular gatherings have been separated so they are no longer involved. They see geography as an important part of unity. They communicated that being involved in sub-committees from council was important to them and aided them in feeling connected. They have a high view of the NBA Assembly and value these gatherings as a time to connect with others and find out what is going on.

Ministry Support

Churches and ministries have been supported in various ways over the years; churches within settlement have had a positive experience of the association, although some expressed a disappointment that they did not have more input into who their moderator was/is.

There doesn't appear to be a strategy or process in dealing with church closures or engaging with churches that are under 20 in membership (either preparing them to close or for something missional).

The moderators that support churches seem to be limited in outlook and support for churches, often opportunities are missed as they lean into a traditional way of maintaining church. For some this works well, for others there doesn't seem to be the opportunity to journey with or explore something different.

Churches do not see the NBA has an association that resources or equips them in their ministry or life as a church. Five churches have identified that the Mission Enabler was really helpful in looking at what leadership structures they need for ministry.

Smaller churches have been supported with regular preaching visits and engagements from the Regional Team and retired ministers, this has been really valuable to them.

Many of our larger churches are not engaged in association life as they feel they have no point of connection with the NBA.

It appears little has been done recently to equip on-ordained leaders within the church and in many leadership teams a lack of understanding of Baptist ways of being church.

The Children, Youth and Families (CFY) pastors and workers have observed a lack of support within their roles, one member commented: 'I have been part of the NBA in youth work for 14 years and only had contact 3 times.' There is a longing within the CYF workers to connect more, share resources and relate to each other which does not seem to have been supported in the past.

Within the past two years, there has been a youth element of the NBA assembly which was really welcomed by the groups.

The NBA assemblies run twice a year and there are two dominant views of the assembly: those that really support and like how it has been done in the past and those that find it dated and not relevant to their context. The NBA assembly has been in decline for several years as people no-longer engage with it, however some find it a real source of energy and support. One of the biggest challenges within the assembly is getting people in churches to know of it and support it.

The themes of the assembly in recent years have followed a pattern of the values of Baptist Together and this has been really welcomed and a great way of creating a sense of belonging.

Over the years prayer relays and pilgrimages and have taken place across the NBA; this have been encouraging for those who have attended and created a sense of unity among those who attend regularly. The Mission Enabler has a real heart for this and over lockdown provided opportunities for reflection on what God was saying in various contexts.

In this phase the trustees reflected on the listening phase and observations as a result some developments to the values and vision of the NBA were implemented.

Council discerned that: As a significant number within our NBA family have felt hurt and disengaged through our actions and words, time should be given to acknowledge that pain and hurt.

It is appropriate for us to publicly acknowledge the mistakes we as the NBA have made and agree to change the direction by releasing a statement from the NBA committing to making a diverse space for all people in the life of the NBA and encourage this for our churches.

Equal Opportunities and Justice training be made compulsory for all council members and staff

Council discern the NBA vision would be: Building Together for God's Kingdom

In order to fulfil the vision of the NBA it would be advantageous to have a set of values that form and shape our life together as an association of churches. These values can then inform the priorities of the NBA every year, allowing us to be flexible, strategic, visionary, responsive, relational, imaginative and creative, releasing and empowering and encompassing of the wide range of gifts given by God to the church.

Our Values are:

Centred on Mission: recognising God is at work in the world and we have the privilege in partnering with God to see lives and communities transformed by the presence of Jesus Christ.

Creative in Approach: we believe in a creative God and therefore everything we do as an association should reflect God's creativity in doing new things, stepping out of familiar ways and embracing the adventure that God has for us.

Relational at the Core: we seek to be an association that sees God in all people and all places, we are committed to building relationships that offer support, encouragement and challenge.

Spirit-Led in Practice: we seek to rely on God's Spirit and Scripture to inspire and enthuse the structure, governance and prayer life of the association.

Committed to Justice: as God's people we experience a 'holy discontent' that calls us to work for God's justice in our communities, churches, region and world.

Seeking Well-being: we seek for our association and churches to be a place where people can experience a place of listening, encouraging and guiding in all stages of their mission and ministry.

Priorities of the NBA

These priorities are the focus for a season to implement the vision and encourage our values:

- Developing and Investing in Leadership (including CMD, lay leadership)
- Children, Youth and Families
- Mission: Pioneering and Planting
- Communication: with an emphasis on this being a new season

These values and priorities link into the national Baptist Vision of 'Growing Healthy Churches in relationship with God's Mission.' We believe that the next season of the NBA is to create more synergy with the national vision, values and priorities. The NBA is committed to supporting Baptist Together and working with those in national roles to build together for God's Kingdom. [See more of Baptist Together Vision Here](#)

In this phase the trustees considered what staffing and structures could be in place for enabling the NBA to fulfil its values and priorities. This involved a review of the current financial structure, as well as modelling the financial implications of other structure/staffing options. The trustees discerned what transitions could take place in order to create a suitable structure, enabling our values and priorities to be fulfilled and flourish, as well as flexible moving forward.

In 2026 a review of the effectiveness of the association will then be conducted using the OODA Loop. This review will then form the basis of a discussion with Baptist Together about the feasibility of the NBA with the current levels of budget.

Governance Structure

At last AGM steps were made to change the direction and the NBA council has committed to working in a different way. To move the association forward in having its values at the core of everything we do, we need to move to a governance structure that allows for accountability and transparency. It is important to distinguish the governance issues that trustees (council members) must deal with and the day-to-day management and operational matters that should be delegated to the regional staff.

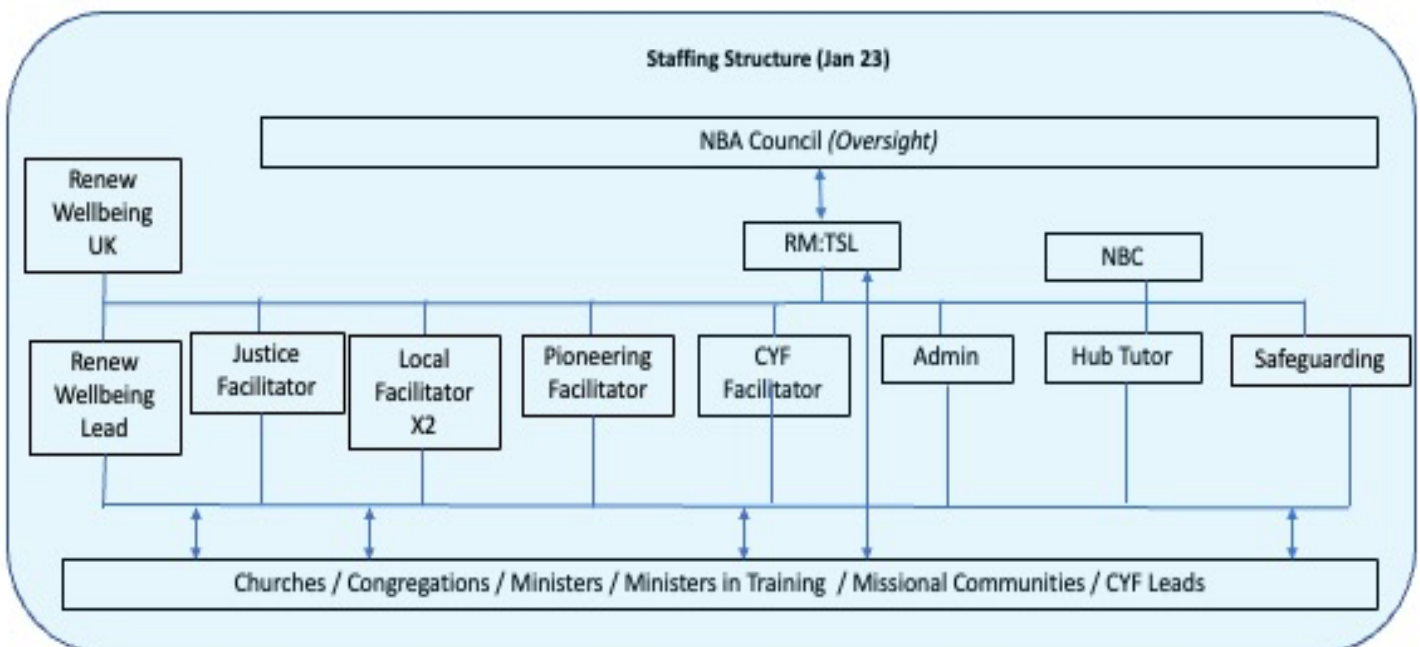
With any new structure there is a clear linking with trustees for accountability and transparently. Having a link trustee for certain priority areas will allow space to meet with the regional team as a critical friend.

Staffing Structure form 2023

Our new staffing structure moves the NBA towards one full time Regional Minister serving alongside leads in certain areas. This means creating a staffing structure that will allow those in local church life to exercise trans-local ministry and make sure that funding is provided for Home Mission Grants, while enabling the vision and values of the NBA to be worked out across the churches and missional communities while supporting ministers, lay leaders and pioneers.

This will allow flexibility within our structures while keeping a good balance of workload for individuals. It allows people to stay in local church/mission contexts while exploring trans-local gifting and puts mentoring at the heart of the association life. It gives space for strategy to be the main aim of the Regional Minister, meaning there is a consistency of service that churches and ministers receive.

This model is financially sustainable and will allow time to develop something new while the national financial review is happening. By creating new posts there is not an established way of working that would hold the association back.



Since associations were formed, all funding has been raised by the Home Mission appeal; churches are recommended to give at least 5% of their income to the appeal¹. This money goes to supporting the national teams, regional teams, and home mission grants to churches/missional communities. Baptist Together use a formula to work out how much each association receives; based on its number of churches.

Associations are now given one figure out of the common purse for the running of the association. This gives associations discernment on how best to use its resources between regional staff members, administration and mission grants to churches or missional communities. An association is given an amount that will support one Regional Minister for every 50 churches within administration support. The association then discerns how best to use the additional finances either on additional staff or mission grants to churches/missional communities.

Associations are not permitted to gain finances for themselves outside of Home Mission giving appeal as it goes against the spirit of the covenant relationship with Baptist Together Home Mission Appeal. This means we are limited in the amount that we can do to raise our income. However, we are able to gain grants for specific roles and projects, which has been achieved in the past.

The NBA Council took the decision over 10 years ago to have an additional Regional Minister to be a Mission Enabler (two appointments over this time have been made to this role); this was to use the resources the association had to decrease the amount in Home Mission Grants to churches to enable mission of the wider association.

In addition to the income from Baptist Together Common Purse the NBA has been successful in gaining a Lady Hewley Trust Grant for the support of the Hub Tutor based at Crammer Hall, as well as being sponsored by Baptist Insurance.

The current finances of the NBA are in a good position for 2022 due to additional one-off income, plus potential savings in expenditure. However, this is an exception and with our current model we are predicting our reserves will be below £10,000 by 2026. It is the reserves policy of the NBA to seek to maintain unrestricted reserves equivalent to a minimum of 50% of the Association's annual unrestricted expenditure.

It is important to note that national Baptist Together are starting a financial review, this will obviously impact the NBA, however at the moment this is something for the association to be aware of and speak into rather than holding off a decision as this could be several years down the line.

¹ https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/220770/Giving_to_Home.aspx