

# Education and Learning Committee

## The Way Forward

### Basic Information

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Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	<b>Resolution 19</b> <b>General Assembly endorses the direction for the Education and Learning Committee described in the Way Forward paper.</b>

### Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To define the strategic agenda of the E&L Committee for the next three or four years
Main points	The E&L Committee remains committed to the aims expressed in Resolution 51 at General Assembly 2005. The paper recognises significant progress already made, and identifies several actions needed to meet the aims more fully.
Previous relevant documents	None
Consultation has taken place with...	Limited consultation on some of the key elements has taken place.

### Summary of Impact

Financial	No significant budgetary requirements have been identified.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

## 1. Introduction

The Education and Learning Committee started to consider its ongoing strategy at a meeting in September 2019. In preparation for that meeting, a questionnaire was sent to our stakeholders, and about a quarter of them responded.

This strategic review has been intentionally ‘low key’ on the basis that most of our work is ongoing and still highly relevant to the denomination. The changes identified build on our core goals and work, rather than replace them.

This document contains the following sections:

1. Aims: revising the statement of the aims of the E&L Committee;
2. Context;
3. Previous strategies: a glimpse of our journey since 2005;
4. Current work: stating what elements of our work are to be continued;
5. Strategic agenda: prioritising our ideas for development;
6. Implementation identifying the immediate actions expected to be taken by the end of 2020;
7. E&L Budget: estimating the financial impact of these plans; and
8. Next steps: defining what we need to do next.

## 2. Aims of Education and Learning Committee

The key goal of the Education and Learning Committee, paraphrased from Resolution 51 at General Assembly 2005, is to cultivate:

*'a church committed to life-long learning where there is integrated education and training offered to the whole people of God'.*

There is no need to change this overarching aim, as it still perfectly describes our challenge today. The strategic directions taken by the committee since 2005 have been driving towards that aim. Much progress has been made, but there is still some work to do to achieve its three key intentions, those being 'life-long', 'integrated' and 'whole people of God'.

## 3. Context

Although the overall aim of education and learning within the URC remains unchanged, the culture and context are significantly different from when this aim was formed. Our church membership has almost halved, EM1 student numbers that were counted in three-digit figures are now under 40. When the URC was formed, the largest Synod was almost as large as the entire denomination is today. As the average age of our congregations rises and the numbers of children (and their parents) who regularly attend traditional services fall, many congregations struggle to 'recruit' the volunteers needed to maintain a healthy church. Yet awareness of spirituality does not seem to have dimmed, and the general decline in church attendance in the UK is not felt by all denominations.

In many parts of our church, there is a palpable need for change, but a consensus for *what* change has yet to be reached. Some change, such as multi-congregation pastorates, is the result of pragmatic deployment policies and some, such as new forms of non-stipendiary and pioneer ministry, are being willingly explored. The role of the Education and Learning Committee is, along with the Synods and our other partners, to equip our denomination to respond to these changing times: mitigating the undesirable effects and accentuating the desirable ones.

## 4. Previous Strategies

There has been evident continuity and development in the committee's strategic agenda over the last decade and a half. Each of the elements of our continuing work, and most of the recent strategic choices we have made, can be traced back

to *The Learning Church. The Next Chapter* (LCNC) process, which in turn addressed the direction set by the 2006 Training Review, following resolution 51 in General Assembly 2005. The detail of this strategic journey can be found in Appendix 1.

## 5. Current Work

A list of the continuing work of the committee is given in Appendix 2. This is quite a long list, and while all of it is important, there are five elements to which most of our resources are directed: Stepwise, EM1, EM2/3, Resource Centre for Learning support, and implementing the agreed Discipleship Development Strategy (summarised in Appendix 3).

## 6. Strategic Agenda

In September 2019, the committee developed a broad range of strategic options to consider in planning for the next few years. These options have been prioritised to form the basis of the medium-term strategic agenda for the committee.

- 6.1 Managing the long list of continuing current work will require adequate resources and a continued focus on our key priorities of Stepwise, EM1, EM2/3, Resource Centre for Learning support and implementing the agreed Discipleship Development Strategy (DDS). For the DDS, the implementation plan needs to be updated and integrated more directly with the Walking the Way steering group's plans.
- 6.2 The committee endorses the URC's aim to become carbon neutral long before 2050. As part of our commitment, a charter for the committee is being developed in conjunction with the Church & Society team in the Mission department. Part of this will be to develop a simple carbon tracker to enable the committee to assess the impact of adopting the charter, and the use of carbon offsetting will be explored.
- 6.3 The committee already significantly contributes to Walking the Way (WtW) by the Stepwise programme. Through its membership of the WtW Steering Group, the committee will further integrate the Discipleship Development Strategy (DDS) into the life of the denomination, and act on other opportunities to support missional discipleship as these become apparent.
- 6.4 One of the three key clauses in the committee's aim is to achieve integrated education and training. How the committee works with other Assembly committees needs to better reflect the way we are mutually dependent on each other. In order to nurture integration, we will develop a shared understanding of what this means at many levels in a learning church.
- 6.5 The fundamental shift that took place as a result of the 2006 Training Review was the identification of three Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs) working together to serve the United Reformed Church. They grow ever closer, and have a vital part to play in the committee's emphasis on integration and collaborative working.

- 6.6 The other two essential elements in the committee's aim of supporting lifelong learning for the whole people of God are being pursued through the intergenerational, accessible approach of Stepwise. This relies on partnership with the Children and Youth Work committee, Mission team, Synods, and ecumenical partners. There is already a strong overlap with the Ministries committee in much of our current work, and this will be strengthened and deepened.
- 6.5 The final part of the strategic agenda focuses on the ways of working of the committee. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the committee was planning to trial the use of videoconferencing techniques to reduce our carbon footprint, enhance our inclusivity, and make us more agile. This preparatory work enabled us to respond quickly to the lockdown. We have been able to hold successfully the equivalent of an all-day meeting via videoconference with 21 active participants. Our vision is that we will hold a single, 24-hour, residential meeting each year, complemented by about four videoconferences, and e-mail discussions as necessary. A key task will be to review the size and composition of the committee, taking into account involvement and representation of stakeholders, ownership of decisions, inclusivity, necessary skills and experience, manageability, effectiveness, and appropriate running costs.

## 7. Implementation

Appendix 4 offers an outline of the core tasks to implement the strategic agenda, showing the next steps, timetable, and the lead individuals or groups responsible for delivery (but not necessarily doing all the development work).

## 8. Education and Learning Committee Budget

Throughout all our deliberations, it has been important to remember that we are serving a denomination whose membership and revenue are declining which, despite all efforts in recent years, shows no signs of abating. This has not provided too many constraints on the committee's budget in the past, mainly because the numbers candidating for ministry and the cost of supporting them have shrunk more quickly than the URC's membership. It is important that the management of the committee's budget is not disguised by lower ministerial training costs. Our planning needs to acknowledge that the URC's Chief Finance Officer predicts that the budget for the education and learning committee will decrease over the next few years.

The initial assessment of the Way Forward plan is that it will not require more central staff resource. Possible minor impacts from the expenses needed for the task groups are expected to be managed within our existing budget.

## 9. Next Steps

Two key areas of work lie ahead. Firstly, to extend the duration and detail in the plan, so that it covers more than the initial tasks and provides more detail in all the tasks; and secondly, to consider how, and with whom, we will work collaboratively to implement the strategy effectively.

## Appendix 1 – Our Journey since 2005

The General Assembly of 2005 (resolution 51) determined that in United Reformed Church educational provision there shall be:

1. Integrated education and training to equip the whole people of God for mission promoted with coherence and in tune with the policies flowing from the Equipping the Saints and Catch the Vision reports;
2. Ecumenical engagement at every stage;
3. The presentation of a distinctive Reformed ethos and history in that ecumenical engagement;
4. The delivery of this policy in a manner appropriate to the circumstances of the three nations in which the United Reformed Church is situated.

The training review, accepted by the General Assembly of 2006, designated Westminster College, Northern College, and the Scottish College as Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs) for the United Reformed Church. The Windermere Centre became the fourth RCL in November 2008 through a resolution of Mission Council. The Centre closed in 2017, and a 2019 Mission Council resolution led to the proceeds from the sale of the building being used to seed a new Discipleship Development Fund as part of the Discipleship Development Strategy.

In the General Assembly of 2012, Education and Learning introduced a number of key concepts:

1. New kinds of Assembly-accredited lay ministries;
2. Emphasis on blended learning and a virtual learning environment (Moodle);
3. A theological research network to link with theology in the academy;
4. Developing relationships in the wider network of trainers, developers and educationalists (CYDO, TDO etc).
5. The agreement of the mandatory EM2 period and the creation of some mandatory training in EM3.

To Mission Council of May 2013, we introduced *The Learning Church. The Next Chapter* (LCNC) to assess the progress made towards realising the aspirations of the United Reformed Church Training Review of 2006. At Mission Council in March 2014, Safer Sacred Space was identified as the first mandatory training for ministers in EM3. September 2018 saw the launch of Stepwise.

### Progress since 2013

Up to 2013, whilst there was constant reference to being more integrated, in practice it was possible for various bodies, networks and committees to operate separately. Budgetary restrictions in 2012 focused the priorities of the committee, whilst the request to RCLs to draw on their own resources and the significant investment of the wider church in the redevelopment of Westminster College prompted greater self-sufficiency of RCLs.

The LCNC report of January 2014 offered 12 recommendations, and much of the continuing work of the committee since then has been shaped by implementing those recommendations, even though they were never taken to General Assembly as originally anticipated. The recommendations spoke of equipping all disciples, using

consistent marks of ministry throughout EM1/2/3, emphasising varied models of teaching and learning in EM1, integrating inter-cultural and all-age learning within E&LC programmes, developing digital learning, consulting and collaborating across the discipleship department, finding ways of protecting funding to elders and other disciples, finding new models of EM1, mapping and developing the extent of URC involvement in academic research, and re-constituting the E&LC to express partnership between Assembly, Synods and RCLs.

## Appendix 2 – Current Work

Many of the key elements of work undertaken by the committee have been influenced by the appreciative inquiry approach which the committee has championed denominationally and ecumenically since 2014.

*Support the URC's emphasis on missional discipleship:* Maintain Stepwise as part of Walking the Way; keep contact with the 'online church' group.

*Discipleship Development Strategy:* Continue the implementation of the strategy and maintain the policy for awarding development grants from the Discipleship Development Fund in conjunction with the Resource Sharing Task Group.

*Developing the Stepwise programme:* Policy, strategy, management and administration of the blended learning programme, in conjunction with synods and in support of *Walking the Way: living the life of Jesus today*.

*Supporting three Resource Centres for Learning:* Regular contacts with Principals; support and attend annual RCL tutors gathering; encouraging the hosting of E&LC events through the RCLs, including the research network; attendance at Governors meetings by invitation; significant funding support.

*Education for Ministry Phase 1 (EM1): initial ministerial development:* Overall authority for EM1 maintained for the URC, in conjunction with RCLs, Synods, and Ministries committee; financial support of EM1 students; policy development and implementation, including establishing NSM Model 4 as a distinctive new route and embedding the use of Marks of Ministry.

*Education for Ministry Phases 2 and 3 (EM2/3): ongoing ministerial development:* Maintain overall authority for EM2 and EM3 in conjunction with Synods; support the Church Leadership Programme; administer 'preparing for retirement' courses for Ministries & Finance; develop and implement agreed policies and mandatory training; embed the use of Marks of Ministry

*Assembly-Accredited Lay Preachers:* Provide clear and consistent routes, with Ministries committee, through which people can become Synod-recognised and/or Assembly-Accredited lay preachers; support RCLs and Synods in providing ongoing development for worship leaders and lay preachers.

*Eldership:* Responsible for providing accessible, accurate and relevant elders resources through the URC website, including course materials for 'Presiding at the Sacraments'.

*Keeping in close contact with relevant officers in Synods:* Follow up leads, bring TDOs together, keep in contact with Mission Enabler and Children & Youth workers networks, liaise with Synod Moderators, Clerks, Convenors of relevant committees, and a host of individual conversations.

*Maintaining positive relationships with ecumenical partners:* Continue ecumenical engagement through RCLs; involve ecumenical partners in Stepwise and ensure that it is open to churches beyond the URC; participate in the Ecumenical Liaison Group for Ministerial Training; provide support for Appreciating Church; keep in touch with wider conversations on blended learning and digital discipleship.

*Digital review:* Encourage contemporary approaches to adult and intergenerational learning in the church, with the aim of ensuring that the URC implements relevant digital projects successfully. We will support this General Secretariat review, via the Church House Management Group.

## Appendix 3 – Discipleship Development Strategy

### Strategy summary

*As God has loved you, so love the world and its people as you encounter them, with all the imagination, energy, wisdom and resources available to you.*

There are four intertwined aspects to this strategy, each of which have defined objectives and implementation tasks endorsed by Mission Council:

- Accounting for hope
- All are pilgrims on the journey
- Ask, seek, knock: God-given senses in the service of learning
- Bread for the journey, shared and replenished

### Accounting for hope

Creating opportunities to encounter, develop a relationship with and enjoy a dynamic prayer life with the living God.

### All are pilgrims on the journey

Intended to address the realities of inequality (due to vocation, age, specific learning differences, economic or time poverty, culture, geography, etc) by emphasising equitable access to resources and opportunities.

### Ask, seek, knock: God-given senses in the service of learning

Developing the necessary gifts, skills and aptitudes, as educators and learners, in order that we all continue to grow in our own vocation and discipleship.

### Bread for the journey, shared and replenished

Evolving our strategy to develop people and congregations through the continued equipping of all in leadership as facilitators of learning, identifying strengths and needs, and advocating policies to share resources in a spirit of generosity.

## Appendix 4 – Way Forward Implementation

PRIORITIES	CORE TASKS	NEXT STEPS	WHEN (initial tasks)	LEAD
<b>Current work</b>	EM1/2/3, Stepwise, RCL support, Discipleship Development Strategy (DDS)	Ensure resourcing, both of existing work and the new strategic projects, is sufficient and priorities are set. Maintain momentum on Stepwise. Identify next steps for DDS	Ongoing	Secretary & Staff Team
<b>Carbon neutrality</b>	Green Charter, carbon tracker, carbon offsetting, meeting venue assessment (together with other committees)	Finalise and publish Green Charter, develop carbon tracker, develop proposals for carbon offsetting	31/12/2020	Task group
<b>Walking the Way</b>	Support WtW Steering Group	Integrate WtW and DDS. Identify how E&L might enhance our support of WtW.	30/09/2020	Convenor, Secretary and DGS Discipleship
<b>Defining integration</b>	Define what 'success' looks like, Involve Synods and RCLs, Identify integration drivers and barriers	Define what successful integration looks like	31/12/2020	Convenor
<b>RCL collaboration</b>	Establish where further collaboration is valuable, evaluate ecumenical and governance needs, prepare change plans	Develop a vision of how the RCLs could develop in the future	31/12/2020	RCL Principals group (which includes Governor and E&L representatives)
<b>Key partners</b>	Working with Ministries and C&YW Committees, Synods and Ecumenical partners	Develop more effective collaboration within Discipleship dept. and continue meetings with relevant Synod teams	31/12/2020	Convenor, Secretary and DGS Discipleship
<b>Ways of working</b>	Use of video conferencing, Style and frequency of meetings, Committee size and composition, budgetary management	Finalise E&L approach to virtual meetings and its impact on meetings schedule. Develop proposals for committee size and composition.	30/09/2020	VM Task Group, Size Task Group