

FAQs on the new Ministerial Disciplinary Process

What is the current Process for disciplinary cases respecting Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Church-Related Community Workers?

The Disciplinary Process which has been in force for many years remains the current Process at present. Any new cases commenced before July 2022 will begin under the current Process. Its rules and guidance can be accessed directly from <https://urc.org.uk/the-urc-manual>.

What is the new Process?

A new version of the Process was approved by the General Assembly in July 2021, but will not come into effect (save as mentioned below) until the close of Assembly 2022. That is conditional on Assembly ratifying certain constitutional changes put forward at the same time as the new Process, which have, in the meantime, been referred to Synods.

How will the new Process work?

The rules of the new Process are contained in two sources – the Framework, and the Appendices. The Framework sets out the basis for ministerial discipline, the steps and safeguards in the Process, and the possible sanctions. In a second column against each paragraph it refers the reader to Appendices which regulate steps in the Process, the composition of bodies serving the Process, and other details more precisely. The Appendices and both columns of the Framework have equal standing.

The Assembly Advisory Group on Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline (MIND) has prepared notes for guidance on the Process, one of which gives a general overview. It may be easier for readers to get an initial idea of the new Process by reading this Guidance Note 1, since it takes in elements from both the Framework and the Appendices. However it is not as comprehensive as the actual Process rules; it only describes the progress of a typical case (not the less usual situations), and it only states MIND's interpretation of the rules. In any conflict between the rules and Guidance Notes, the rules will prevail.

Further Guidance Notes will either be used for training only, or published when the new Process comes into effect. A flow chart to illustrate the steps in the Process will be linked to this page in the Autumn of 2021.

[\[links to Framework, Appendices and GN1\]](#)

What is happening now?

The only provisions of the new Process already in force are those relating to appointments. During the year between Assemblies, people will be appointed to the judicial and investigation roles for which the Process provides. Their appointments will not take effect until the Process comes fully into force, but they will enable the people appointed to be trained in their responsibilities under the new rules in the meantime. It is anticipated that appointments will be confirmed by the Assembly Executive or by the Officers of Assembly in November 2021, and that Synods will make the appointments falling to them by the end of March 2022. MIND will be offering training to new appointees from November onwards, as well as explaining the new Process to certain others particularly affected (e.g. to church Safeguarding professionals) over the year.

What about pending cases?

Any disciplinary case already commenced under the current Process will continue to be dealt with under the current rules until July 2022. If it is concluded before the 2022 General Assembly, then the new Process will not apply to it at all. However, there may be some cases which have not reached a final disposal before the new Process comes into force. Transitional provisions will be needed to

determine how such cases are to be dealt with beyond that date. Those transitional provisions will appear in Appendix Z to the new Process. Appendix Z has not yet been completed, since it will be tailored to the stages which the actual pending cases have reached at the time. It will be brought for approval either to the Assembly Executive in November 2021, or to the Assembly itself in 2022.