



The
United
Reformed
Church



They've asked me to be a
**committee
member**

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Introduction

This booklet has been written for those who are considering taking up the offer of the role of committee member on one of the 11 standing committees of the General Assembly (GA). Much of it is also relevant for those who have been approached about becoming a member of review or appointment panels, other United Reformed Church (URC) committees, boards, sub-committees and task groups at both denominational and Synod level.

What to expect from the committee

You've been asked to become a member of a committee and you may be feeling flattered, delighted, or horrified. Even if you feel certain you want to say yes, it's sensible to take time to find out more before making time to prayerfully consider if membership is for you.

To do this you need to make sure that you have all the necessary information to hand. Invitations to serve on committees are issued in various ways and below is a list of information you may like to ask for:

- A copy of the committee's remit
- Examples of recent work done by the committee e.g. agendas of previous meetings, reports produced etc.
- Where the committee fits into the structure of the denomination/Synod
- The committee's meeting schedule, including details of meeting locations and length. Most Assembly committees meet between two and four times a year; and some of these meetings may be residential, and for members who live some distance from the meeting venue, virtual attendance is encouraged for most, but not all meetings.
- The length of term (for Assembly committees it's normally four years)
- An indication of any possible/likely additional commitments springing from committee membership e.g. work in any sub-groups or sub-committees; reporting to/representation on/attendance at other groups or committees

- The basis on which you have been invited to join the committee – are you being asked to represent a particular group to the committee – or to bring expertise of a particular kind
- What ongoing support will there be? Some committees have a buddy system, where new members are offered a ‘support buddy’ to help them navigate the first few meetings and be the first port of call for any queries and questions
- The opportunity to speak to a current committee member or the convenor – and, during this conversation, do let them know of your particular areas of interest and expertise as they relate to the work of the committee.

What else to consider?

Be honest about what you can bring to the committee and, perhaps more importantly, what time you can commit. In the structure of the URC, committees and the decisions they come to, play an important part in shaping the policy and direction of many work areas.

Not all committees require ‘theological expertise’ but of most importance is quality participation. From the point of view of the convenor, and, if an Assembly committee, the staff secretary (head of team), there is little worse than having committee members who never or rarely attend; or when they do attend, do not contribute helpfully or relevantly. (Part of your commitment to fully participate in committee business is responding promptly to emails: this really helps ensure everyone is heard, progresses urgent committee business between meetings and reduces the workload of the meetings.)

Do consider the following:

- What skills, experiences and interests do you bring to this committee?
- What induction and ongoing support would you receive? If there’s something that’s of particular concern, for example your level of IT proficiency, do speak to the committee convenor.
- Are you being asked to represent a particular group to the committee? If yes, does that bring further obligations?



How to be an effective committee member

So, you have said yes, the dates of the meetings are in your diary and the agenda and papers for the first meeting are in your email inbox. What next?

Before each meeting

- Read the agenda and all the papers well beforehand and make notes if helpful
- Do any necessary background reading
- Prepare to keep a record of travel and other expenses e.g. check mileage and keep all tickets/receipts
- Buy any travel tickets as far in advance as you can – to get the best price. Most train companies release the cheapest advance fares around ten to twelve weeks ahead of the date of travel
- Think about possibilities of sharing travel, e.g. if anyone else on the committee comes from your area.

Ask yourself

- Which agenda item/s are most important to me? To which items do I have something to offer in discussion?
- Pray for the meeting and the individual committee members.

If attending as a representative of a particular group – be clear what that group or committee expects you to do

- Seek information?
- Give information?
- Formulate action?
- Do you need to share the agenda with others? If you do, make notes of any feedback they give you to help you represent them during the committee meeting. But be aware of issues around confidentiality too.

During each meeting

- Listen to, and respect, the views of others
- Refer to notes and raise points
- When necessary, ask for information or clarification

- Share your knowledge, experience, background reading
- When contributing to discussions, state your case clearly and give reasons for your viewpoints
- Consider how much time you have available before accepting any extra work
- Submit your expenses claim form
- Refer to Mission Council's paper 'Listening in the URC: a discussion starter'. bit.ly/URClistening

After each meeting

Be clear which items were for information and think about how best to communicate any decision you have been tasked with disseminating. (Don't forget about your data protection obligations here – see page 6 of this booklet for more information.)

- Which items were for discussion/exploration and which for action?
- Who do you need to share the various items with?
- What tasks have you been asked to do?
- What items do you want to follow up personally?
- Who do you need to contact?

How did you feel about the meeting?

- Are there any points about the way the meeting operated that you need to bring to the notice of the convenor/staff secretary or your support buddy?

Training and ongoing development

- Alone, or with your support buddy, identify what you are learning and discovering.

Virtual meetings

The United Reformed Church has committed to becoming carbon neutral long before 2050; to achieve this vital target most URC business will need to be conducted through virtual meetings, including video and telephone conferencing and effective use of emails. While there are benefits in face-to-face meetings, it is not necessary that every meeting involves face-to-face contact. Regularly travelling miles for a meeting of a few hours or less rarely

makes sense and virtual meetings need to become the rule rather than the exception. We recognise that working this way is new to many and requires a culture change, but given the reality of the climate emergency, it is, without doubt, a change worth making.

If you are new to meeting this way there are a few things to bear in mind:

- Make sure you have good broadband reception
- Do a test run on your PC/device before the meeting starts to ensure the camera and mic are satisfactory
- Agree a visual signal for when you want to speak – perhaps raising your hand so the convenor is aware you have something to say
- Mute your microphone when you are not speaking
- Let those you share your office/home with know you are attending a meeting so they won't disturb you.

If you have any questions about participating in virtual meetings do speak with the staff secretary or committee convenor. Training and help sourcing suitable equipment will be given as required.

Data protection obligations of all committee members

During their term of service, all committee members will receive papers and emails containing personal and confidential information. In order to meet the requirements of data protection legislation, committee members are asked to sign an undertaking to maintain confidentiality. This includes having an email address that no-one else uses. A joint email account, shared, for example, with another member of your household, is not suitable for committee correspondence.

At the end of your term, you are required to delete all confidential emails and return all confidential papers or declare that you have securely destroyed them. It's good practice to delete all confidential or personal papers once the committee matter to which they relate has been concluded. You will also receive a formal request asking you to declare that you have securely destroyed all confidential emails and are returning or have destroyed all confidential paperwork.

Before we finish

It's worth saying that the United Reformed Church seeks to fill hundreds of places on committees each year – from convenors of the 11 standing committees of GA to members of local church committees. At the time of writing the nominations committee, which has the task of identifying members of the Assembly committees and other denominational bodies, were looking to fill dozens of places year on the 11 standing committees alone – and this will just be a fraction of those needed across the whole Church.

Those with the responsibility for finding the people to fill these vacancies are committed to approaching people with the appropriate skills, experience and interests needed by the committee – they don't want to just fill a gap – and rely on being notified of suitable people, most frequently through the Synods. It's often a relatively small pool of people that makes up committee membership; it is not uncommon for people to serve a term on one committee and then be asked to consider serving on another committee or, after a short break, to return to the same committee.

This is not laziness on the part of the nominations committee – it is because they do not know (cannot possibly know!) of the skills, talents, interests and abilities of many in the Church – brilliant people who would be great committee members – willing and able to serve but who are currently unknown to anyone at Synod or denominational level.

If that sounds like you, or like someone you know, then consider letting the Synod clerk or secretary of the nominations committee know, and let's work together to make sure that the URC's many committees are as vibrant, exciting and effective as they can be: filled with people from a diverse range of backgrounds all committed to serving Christ, and making him known in every place across the denomination.

If you have names of those who might be suitable potential members for the Assembly committees please contact the secretary of the nominations committee at nominations.secretary@urc.org.uk

The Assembly nominations committee has a website urc.org.uk/nominations

This is one in a series of booklets designed to give information to those who have been asked to consider taking on a role in the United Reformed Church.

The booklets can be read and downloaded at www.urc.org.uk/ask



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