

Appendix 12 Group voting procedures

1. General Assembly 2018 passed the following resolution (resolution 28): General Assembly encourages a flexible approach to how ministerial calls (both Minister of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community workers) are issued and concurred, noting the variety of existing practice and the provisions of sections 1(1)(b), 1(1)(c), 2(1)(vii), 2(4)(A)(iii) and 2(4)(A)(vii) of the Structure of the URC.

2. The Manual (Section B Structure) states:

1.(1)(b) Where two or more Local Churches together, and in consultation with the synod, decide that their mission will be more effective if they share resources and ordained ministry, they may, with the approval of the synod, form an association known as a group of churches with a structured relationship and a constitution governing the way in which they relate to one another as to the sharing of both resources and the ordained ministry. Each church within the group shall retain its own identity, and its Church Meeting and elders' meeting shall continue to exercise all their functions in relation to that church, save that, so long as the constitution shall so declare, decisions relating to the calling of a minister (see paragraph 2(1)(vii)) may be taken by a single group Church Meeting at which all the members of each of the constituent churches in the group shall be eligible to attend and vote.

and

1.(1)(c) Where two or more local churches together, and in consultation with the synod, decide that their mission will be more effective if they share ordained ministry (but not other resources), they may, with the approval of the synod, form an association known as a joint pastorate, with a structured relationship with respect to the provision of ordained ministry only and a statement of intent governing the way in which they relate to one another in relation to the sharing of ordained ministry. Each church within the joint pastorate shall retain its own identity, and its church meeting and elders' meeting shall continue to exercise all their functions in relation to that church, save that, so long as the statement of intent shall so declare, decisions relating to the calling of a minister (see paragraph 2(1)(vii)) may be taken by a single joint pastorate church meeting at which all the members of each of the constituent churches in the joint pastorate shall be eligible to attend and vote.

2. The URC does not have one clear policy on this but largely leaves it to the pastorate call group to decide on the mechanism which will best suit their needs. The percentage for a call to be issued shall be determined by the vacancy group as is normal practice within the URC.
3. It is important that the church meeting(s) agrees with the interim Moderator and the vacancy call group on the process for issuing a call at the start of the process of looking at possible candidates. This should include the percentage which the church(es) feel is an appropriate percentage to suggest the minister has the confidence of the meeting eg. 85%. Voting should be by secret ballot. Tellers will need to be identified prior to the meeting.
4. In a single pastorate the voting process is more straightforward: only those church members who are present at the meeting should be allowed to vote. Voting should be by secret ballot. The Interim Moderator will inform the church meeting of the outcome of

the vote which should be kept confidential until the Interim Moderator has had an opportunity to convey the outcome of the vote to the minister.

5. In multi church pastorates the following are examples of possible processes to use:
 - a) There should be 1 joint church meeting of all churches involved in the pastorate. Only church members may vote. An agreed percentage eg. 85% of those present and voting is required to issue a call. One church meeting enables members across the group to prayerfully hear the reflections from different congregations;
 - b) There should be 1 joint church meeting with a higher percentage required from the church where the minister will have primary pastoral charge than for the rest of the group eg. 80% and 50% or 85% and 45%.
6. A further factor to take into consideration is an increasing use of synod-directed elements as part of a post to which a minister is called. The usage of such scoping varies widely but it is likely to be direct service in a significant synod role, such as an ecumenical officer, or additional service in a pastorate, which may either be not fully determined at the point of call or deliberately undefined so that it may be moved from one congregation to another in transitional ministry. In some circumstances the synod may be willing to remit the determination of the call to the pastorate. However, it is more likely that a prospective candidate will be interviewed by representatives of the appropriate synod committee. Good practice would be that any such appointment process is completed in advance of the preach with a view.
7. As well as members-only voting, those voting need to be aware that if they abstain, they are not voting, and their abstention will be recorded but will not be included in the % calculation of 'those present and voting'.