

Paper G2

Appendix to the budget: Looking to the future

Business Committee

Basic information

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Action required	Background information
Draft resolution(s)	

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	
Main points	<p>This paper does not represent a final set of proposals. It is at the moment a 'living document' which is being consulted on with regard to possible changes to the make-up of the General Assembly Committee Structure and the General Secretariat. It represents thinking and a direction of travel that have emerged from careful consideration by the Business Committee. A final version of this paper will come to Assembly Executive in February 2025 for full discussion. The paper also sets out some staffing changes that have already been agreed under delegated authority by the appropriate committees. We offer it to this Budget Meeting of the Assembly Executive because the Budget has been prepared on the basis of proposed changes here, even though some of them have not yet been agreed. To fully understand the budget, the line of thinking of this paper will be helpful.</p>
Previous relevant documents	Paper N2 General Assembly 2023.
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission Committee Education and Learning Committee Children's and Youth Work Committee Resources Committee Ministries Committee Safeguarding Committee Equalities Committee Nominations Committee Law and Polity Advisory Group Moderators Employed Staff and Office holders in the Offices of General Assembly

	<p>URC Trust Worship, Faith and Order Committee.</p> <p>The review of the General Secretary role, which involved wide consultation, has also been key in developing this work.</p>
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Summary of impact

Financial	The financial implications of the Head of Governance Services role and bringing legal services in house are already reflected in the 2025 budget. Similarly, there is provision in the 2025 for staffing changes relating to the ministries team.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

1. Background

- 1.1 General Assembly 2023 made some revisions to the Committee Structure, particularly with the creation of a Resources Committee from various related predecessor committees. A suggestion that a Discipleship Committee be formed from the existing committees within the Discipleship Department was not proceeded with, as various issues became apparent. The key issues that at the time were expressed were the following concerns:
- from Children’s and Youth Work that both the participation of young people within the structure could be inhibited by the nature of an agenda that would by necessity at times concern highly technical Ministries and Education and Learning Policy matters.
 - that the overall agenda would be too large for one committee to successfully grapple with.
 - that there is a need for a space for often highly technical matters surrounding ministries policy development to happen that sat uneasily with a committee that could only work at the highest level of strategy across a broad area of church life.
- 1.2 Since that point, there have been some continued developments which mean the situation is now somewhat different. These include:
- the proposals, currently being enacted, to shift responsibility for much of the delivery of Education and Learning away from being located within the offices of the General Assembly, to being held by the Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs) and overseen by a joint oversight group made up of representatives of the RCLs and the relevant committees of the General Assembly.
 - continued closer engagement between the Mission and Discipleship departments, particularly around areas such as lay discipleship development more broadly, and in areas such as collaborative work between Children’s and Youth Work and Global Church and Intercultural Ministries. Both departments are jointly working on a key Church Life Review Consultation on Discipleship and Evangelism for January 2025.

- 1.3 Alongside these issues touching the function of our Assembly Committees, there have been developments within the General Secretariat. These include:
- the retirement of Adrian Bulley as Deputy General Secretary for Discipleship in August 2024, with Jenny Mills being appointed his successor, with a Role Description that made clear that fundamental change in the role was likely.
 - Philip Brooks has indicated he will retire in August 2025 as Deputy General Secretary for Mission.
 - the recent 360 degree appraisal process of the General Secretary recognised the unviable nature of the current role description, and in the light of this the Business Committee have agreed to the creation of a senior governance role, to relieve the General Secretary of the significant burden of Governance work he has been undertaking that is not in his role description, or at the moment in any other role description. The General Secretary role needs primarily to offer theological and pastoral leadership to the United Reformed Church as a whole. As such, it is necessary to ensure there is a staffing structure that creates the space for the role to genuinely function in this way.
- 1.4 There is also an ongoing concern for the deficit budget of the church, which sees the need for the work of the General Assembly to decrease in budget significantly over the next seven year period. Alongside this the Business Committee, in taking an overview of the work of the Assembly as a whole, has, along with the United Reformed Church Trust, been thinking carefully about our risk management, and recognises that at the moment we are carrying some very significant risks, many of which reside in the area of Governance. The Business Committee has thought extensively and carefully about the interrelationship of these various issues, and in part, the proposals in this paper are a product of that reflective process.

2. On being the Church ... on being an organisation

- 2.1 The primary location of the Church in the United Reformed Church tradition is in the local. This is the front line of mission, service, witness, and evangelism. The wider councils of the Church seek to support the local, and also to respond to our vocation as church through those aspects of our work that cannot be done by a local church in isolation, or by Synods in isolation.
- 2.2 The work of the General Assembly, then, is to provide resources and support to local churches and Synods (recognising many other forms of support and resource rightly come to the local from Synods) and also to be the Church in areas the local cannot be alone (for example, having a voice in the public square in national and international spheres, engaging with ecumenical partners at denominational and global levels etc). A significant part of our work is to resource ministry with children and young people, both by providing resources for use locally, and by enabling the engagement of children and young people at the level of the Church as a whole.
- 2.3 Simply to be a denomination of our size, across three nations, requires basic financial, communications, HR and IT infrastructure without which we cannot function. Similarly, as a Church that becomes known as such in the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments and through our engagement in community witness, service and evangelism, we are not the church without the full range of ministries that nourish our life as the body of Christ. The provision of stipendiary ministry (Word and Sacraments and CRCW) locally, and the

recognition of other forms of ministries, along with the education and learning needed to support them, is central to who we are as a Church. There is a simple reality that without the work of the Resources Department and the current Ministries and Education and Learning Committees we do not function as a Church at a basic organisational level, or at the most basic theological level of being a Church.

- 2.4 Beyond these core areas our work shifts into work which is a faithful response to our vocation to be church and which the General Assembly carries out to support local churches and Synods, and to exercise our Christian witness in spheres that require us to act at denominational level. These areas of work are a central part of what it means to be a Church. However, unlike the 'nuts and bolts' of resources work, or the theological, pastoral and practical necessity of the provision of ministries, there is an ability to strategically shape these elements over time, to pick priorities for our work which will change. Ultimately, we would not cease to exist either as an organisation or a church if this work did not happen, however much it might diminish us.
- 2.5 There has been a desire, expressed within the Business Committee and in the context of budget setting, to better enable the church to set priorities to direct the limited resource that we have available for this wider work of the church at denominational level beyond that which is necessary and intrinsic.

3. Towards a proposed committee structure for the existing Discipleship and Mission departments

- 3.1 Currently, the Discipleship Department consists of the staff teams who serve the following committees:
- Ministries
 - Education and Learning
 - Children's and Youth Work
 - Safeguarding.
- 3.2 The staff secretaries for these departments work as a team, but are accountable to their specific committees, and their work is overseen by the Deputy General Secretary for Discipleship.
- 3.3 The Mission Committee covers a wide range of areas of responsibility and is serviced by a staff team who work to the priorities discerned by the committee, and under the oversight of the Deputy General Secretary for Mission.
- 3.4 To facilitate greater joined-up working at the strategic level, and to enable this to be expressed effectively operationally, the initial proposal upon which we wish to consult would see the creation two new committees: a Ministries Committee, and a Mission and Discipleship Committee.
- 3.5 Recognising the vital importance and interrelationship of these areas of the life of the church, the staff team would work as one Ministries, Mission and Discipleship team, under the oversight of one Deputy General Secretary. There would also be cross-representation between these committees.
- 3.6 **The Ministries Committee** would have responsibility for all our accredited ministries (lay and ordained) and the education, learning, training and

development required to equip those responding to a vocation to serve in those ministries. Under it (or in relationship to it, recognising that both committees have direct delegated authority from the General Assembly) would sit the Accreditations Committee and the Assessment Board. Broadly, it would bring together the work of the existing Ministries and Education and Learning Committees, recognising that the immediate oversight of much of the delivery of Education and learning is in the process of shifting to being held by the RCL's and their joint oversight body. It would have high level responsibility at the strategic level for overseeing the governance of the partnership work between the RCL's.

- 3.7 **The Mission and Discipleship Committee** would oversee all the programmatic work of the General Assembly, including our:
- intergenerational work
 - lay discipleship development
 - work with children and young people
 - our witness in the ecumenical square
 - ecumenical and international relations
 - multicultural work
 - work and witness in the public square.
- 3.8 The aim over time would be to enable the General Assembly to set strategic priorities for the work of this committee and its associated staff team. This would enable the (limited) resources (in proportion to the overall budget) available for this work to be focussed to meet the evolving needs of the church over time, as the General Assembly discerns the areas that need to take priority for different seasons of the life of the church in response to our particular vocation to be the United Reformed Church.
- 3.9 There is a sense in which whilst staff will require certain specialisms, that there will also become more emphasis on staff being, for at least part of their time, able to serve generically the discipleship and missional needs of the life of the church to priorities set by the General Assembly from time to time.
- 3.10 It is envisaged that there would be a need for a Children's and Youth Work Programme sub-committee, to ensure that young people are directly and significantly involved in the planning and design of the church's programme work with young people. There would also be formal youth representation on the new Mission and Discipleship Committee where the strategic overview of our intergenerational work would be held.
- 3.11 The Clerk has determined that it is possible to find a mechanism whereby resolutions from Youth Assembly can come directly to General Assembly, without needing to come 'through' the new Mission and Discipleship Committee (as currently they come through the Children's and Youth Work Committee). However, it is worth noting that there already has frequently been great co-operation between Youth Assembly and the Youth Executive and the existing Mission Committee in bringing joint resolutions.

4. Core and specialist committees

4.1 Historically there have been committees of the General Assembly and Task and Advisory Groups of the Mission Council. Since the shift to an Assembly Executive post 2018, the task and advisory groups have become de facto committees of the General Assembly (there are the Safeguarding Committee – which became a ‘full’ committee of the General Assembly after 2021; the Law and Polity Advisory Group and the Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group). The designation ‘advisory group’ is now in effect defunct, and they all function as committees, with the ability to bring business directly to the General Assembly. A regular pattern of these groups reporting to the General Assembly has, however, not yet been established and needs to happen. It is suggested we change their titles to recognise this.

4.2 Rather than a distinction between full committees and advisory groups, it seems appropriate to distinguish between committees which have a broad and overarching programmatic concern for the life of the church and supporting the resourcing of this, and those which have a much narrower, specialist function, to resource the church in their specialist areas (including at times giving advice or assisting more generalist committees in specialist aspects of their work). The distinction is not entirely neat, and may need refining, but broadly conceived the three Core Committees would be the Ministries Committee, the Mission and Discipleship Committee, and the Resources Committee. These three account for the overwhelming majority of both our activity and our budget. As such, they are committees which need broad representation from across the life of the church as well as specialist knowledge.

4.3 The remaining committees are varied in their functions, but are highly specialist, or tightly focussed. They could be listed as:

- the Business Committee (strategic oversight of whole work of the Assembly and its Committees and arrangements for General Assembly and Assembly Executive).
- the Complaints and Discipline Advisory Committee
- the Equalities Committee (though the future of this may be affected by the outcome of an impending EDI review of the work of the URC)
- the Law and Polity Advisory Group
- the Nominations Committee
- the Safeguarding Committee
- the Worship, Faith and Order Committee.

4.4 The distinction between the two forms of committee concerns the primary consideration in their makeup. Programme Committees need to be broadly representative of the church, with specialist knowledge as appropriate. Specialist committees need to be constituted primarily on the basis of specialist knowledge, skills and experience. This is not to say they should not seek to be diverse, but that specialist knowledge is their primary focus (this is largely self-explanatory – a safeguarding committee needs specialists in safeguarding and those fulfilling safeguarding functions within the life of the church, a law and polity advisory group requires those with an active knowledge of the law and specialist knowledge of our ecclesiology and polity, etc).

- 4.5 It is proposed that the Law and Polity Advisory Group becomes the Law and Polity Steering Group as the use of 'advisory' in this context brings unnecessary risk and implications of personal indemnity cover for the practising lawyers on the group. The changes proposed with the Head of Governance Services and in house legal provision better connect the work of this committee to the Offices of General Assembly, and more overtly within our existing insurance cover.
- 4.6 It is also proposed that the Law and Polity Steering Group become a subcommittee of Business Committee.
- 4.7 The Equalities Committee has been in place for a long time but the language of equalities has moved on. It is proposed that the name of the Committee is changed such that it becomes the Equalities, Inclusion, Diversity and Belonging Committee. This change signals something significant as it places a responsibility to address the depth of commitment to matters of equality and inclusion; achieving a true sense of belonging requires a rich engagement. The existing terms of references for Equalities Committee are out of date and an interim set will be drafted. As the work develops with the proposed EDI consultant (GA 2023 Resolution 55), so too will the work, remit and function of the Equalities, Inclusion, Diversity and Belonging Committee evolve.
- 4.8 Matters of equality, inclusion, diversity and belonging the Church understands as integral to our faithful Mission and Discipleship, rather than as simply a matter of 'compliance'. With this in mind, it is proposed that the Equality, Inclusion, Diversity and Belonging Committee becomes a subcommittee of the Mission and Discipleship Committee. This will help establish stronger links to key aspects of church life and other existing networks and working groups.

5. The creation of a legal and governance 'Directorate'

- 5.1 It is very clear from the 360 degree review of the General Secretary, and from the quantity of legal and governance issues that the church is facing at the moment, that for a long time such matters have not received the priority they need – leading to the church carrying unreasonable levels of risk. There is the hope to create two new roles. The first is not really new, in that we currently engage a legal advisor through a firm of solicitors. The expectation is that this role will be brought 'in-house,' in the creation of a **Head of Legal Services** role. This will give us greater accessibility and flexibility of access to legal advice and allow the role holder, as a staff member, to take a strategic lead on major pieces of business (the most immediately pressing being the introduction of a new Disciplinary Process). This role will take a strategic lead on ensuring that the legal risks of the church are well managed, that appropriate outside advice is sought where necessary (as it is at the moment, when specialist advice from Counsel is required, for example). It will also continue to provide advice in the matter of specific disciplinary cases and the like as currently.
- 5.2 There is a need to expand our capacity in the area of **Governance** and also ensure appropriate succession planning. Currently there is a **Company Secretary role**, who services the URC Trust, the Pension Trust and the Investment Committee. The current role is likely to be considerably reshaped in the next couple of years as we move towards pension buy-out and the current role holder has anyway indicated that they are likely to look to retire within the next couple of

years. This role has always been, in many ways, somewhat curiously detached from the inner-Church governance arrangements of the Councils of the Church, which have been overseen by the Clerk to the General Assembly (a voluntary role that has grown beyond that which is reasonably voluntary in recent times) and the General Secretary. There is also a **Head of Compliance and Services** role, which has since the start of 2024 taken on a wider function within the Admin and Resources team.

- 5.3 A very significant proportion of the time of the General Secretary has been taken up with matters surrounding Governance, legal issues, disciplinary issues and complaints. Similarly, a significant part of the Deputy General Secretary Discipleship role has been dedicated to managing complaints. It is clear from the 360-degree review of the General Secretary that what the church is looking from this (and similar) roles is theological and pastoral leadership – not to be a second-rate amateur head of governance. Additionally, over the last 18 months, the Chief Operating Officer has been heavily involved in matters of a legal and governance work. With some of this work removed, the strategic capacity will be increased which in turn will assist with continuing to tackle the budget deficit and with aspects of implementation relating to the Church Life Review as they progress. It is therefore proposed to create a **Head of Governance Services** role. This will work closely with the Head of Legal Services, both being line-managed by the General Secretary. It will pick up responsibility for the oversight of governance issues in general. With the Company Secretary, they will work on the transformation of the relationship between the General Assembly and the United Reformed Church Trust (which is likely to become a CIO). They will be responsible for developing and maintaining a governance decision record keeping system (we currently have no easily accessible definitive log of binding decisions of the General Assembly or decisions taken on its behalf). They will oversee the maintenance of appropriate administrative structures to support both disciplinary and complaints processes, and act as Clerk to the disciplinary process (a role largely done voluntarily but which needs now to be done by a staff member partly because no new volunteers have been identified, and partly to appropriately manage the high levels of risk around the disciplinary process). They would also offer support to the Clerk to General Assembly.
- 5.4 There will be a variety of different roles, lodged in different parts of the organisation who will, for at least some of their time, deal with legal and governance issues. They would initially be the General Secretary, the Chief Operating Officer, the Head of Legal Services, the Head of Governance Services, the Compliance Officer, the Clerk to the General Assembly and the Compliance Officer. It is envisaged that they would form a loose, cross-departmental legal and governance network that would meet regularly under the convenorship of the General Secretary to ensure that all matters were being appropriately handled in a joined-up fashion.
- 5.5 It is hoped that these arrangements will mean that both the General Secretary, and the Deputy General Secretary will have significant time released to make use of their gifts and graces to offer theological and pastoral leadership to the church as a whole. Whilst there will be one fewer person at General Secretarial level engaged in 'theological' work, we believe that this will far better hold our governance work in

the hands of people with genuine expertise in this area and enable the theological members of the General Secretariat to genuinely attend to the worship, witness, mission and evangelism of the life of the Church.

6. A General Secretariat structure

- 6.1 The current General Secretariat, as conceived by General Assembly, consists of the General Secretary, the Chief Operating Officer, the Deputy General Secretary for Discipleship and the Deputy General Secretary for Mission.
- 6.2 The creation of one, joint, Mission and Discipleship Department would see us move to one Deputy General Secretary, who oversees the work of that department. This takes the membership of the General Secretariat to three. This is both an unhelpful number in terms of group dynamic, and somewhat small. The proposal is that the New Head of Governance would be part of the General Secretariat, maintaining the place those issues have at the heart of the General Secretariat once the General Secretary has handed on responsibility for much of this. Given a core function of the General Secretariat is to exercise delegated Christian and theological leadership to the work of the General Assembly, this would give rise to a Genuine Occupational Requirement for the post-holder to be a Christian, in membership of a church with whom we have formal ecumenical relationships through one of the ecumenical or church communion bodies we are part of.
- 6.3 This leaves a question as to which members of the General Secretariat work primarily with which committees. This is the suggested initial responsibilities (assuming from the close of General Assembly 2025 – see the section on timetable below):

General Secretary:	Worship, Faith and Order Business Committee
Deputy General Secretary:	Ministries Mission and Discipleship Pastoral Welfare Reference Committee Safeguarding Committee
Chief Operating Officer:	Resources Committee Pension Committee Remuneration Committee [RMHS Board of Directors]

Governance Lead:

Complaints and Discipline Committee

Law and Polity Committee

Safeguarding Committee

Nominations Committee

Equalities Committee

6.4 It is envisaged that the General Secretariat, as members of the Business Committee, will take the operational strategic lead in the development of the life of the work of the General Assembly and the life of United Reformed Church as a whole.

7. General Assembly staff leadership team

7.1 The recent experience of the work of the General Secretariat has been highly positive. However, we have regularly found it helpful to engage with other senior members of staff and ministers within the staff of the General Assembly.

7.2 One piece of important feedback from the 360-degree review of the General Secretary was that in general within the General Assembly staff team communication could be more effective, and there be greater clarity about the role and function of both the connective and all-staff meetings. Meetings of the Connective have often felt lacking purpose or direction. A recent Connective away-day focussed on engagement with broader theological and thematic questions proved highly valuable and has received positive feedback. Part of that feedback was that a wider range of people from the staff team would have valued being present.

7.3 We have therefore created a Leadership Team, which would be a smaller and more focussed group than the current Connective. Connective would then broaden to an event which can draw in a wider range of staff and General Assembly ministers as appropriate.

7.4 This Leadership Team will take up many of the items in a broader forum that current sit on the agenda of the General Secretariat. This will include:

- the running of Church House
- an overview of the current work of the General Assembly in-hand
- ensuring that where appropriate joined up working is taking place
- being engaged in the budgeting process and
- helping develop our General Assembly staff-wide culture and ways of working.

7.5 It is hoped a broader team will enable better communication, and much more joined-up thinking. It's working, and membership will be kept under continuous review, and subject to an intentional review of its functioning against hope for expectations after 12 months, when its makeup will need revision in the light of other possible structural changes.

7.6 The initial make-up of the Leadership team is made up of post and role holders who constitute the General Secretariat, those with functions central to the remit of the team (Budgeting and Communications) and the staff and office holders who represent the key staff links to each General Assembly Committee:

- General Secretary
- Deputy General Secretary (ies)
- Chief Operating Officer
- Head of Governance Services (when the post exists)
- Secretary for Ministries
- Chief Finance Officer
- Head of Communications
- Head of Children's and Youth Work
- Designated Safeguarding Lead
- Mission and Discipleship Lead (when the post exists – see below).

7.7 It is envisaged that the Connective will be made up of the members of the Leadership Team, those working at staff secretary level, and, where appropriate on occasions, others.

8. Changes to staffing structures

8.1 As a result of the above changes, we foresee the likelihood of further consequential changes to the staffing structure. These will need to be worked out in detail, but we note the following likely possibilities:

8.2 Ministries Department

8.2.1 There will be a need for a post at programme manager level to support the Secretary for Ministries, in particular with matters pertaining to education and learning and the relationship to the RCL's network. There may potentially be a need for additional administrative support too. The Secretary for Ministries will be the lead, working under the Deputy General Secretary, on the Ministries Committee facing work of the Ministries, Mission and Discipleship Team.

8.2.2 It is also proposed that the database now move from the Ministries Department to the Resources Department. The current database had its origins in Ministries, and the careful oversight of it from Ministries has led to its development as a resource used widely across the life of the church by most departments. Given its extensive use now by Safeguarding, the proposal to develop a decision-log element to it, its use by Synods, it is now time for the overall management of the database to shift to the Resources department where it most naturally fits. This is not to suggest that the Ministries department will not continue to need extensive use of the database, not least as the repository of all ministers' files, and the department will need the administrative capacity to ensure that this is possible.

8.3 Mission, Ministry and Discipleship Department

8.3.1 The proposal is that one staff department, the Mission, Ministry and Discipleship department, will service the work of two major committees: the Ministries Committee and the Mission and Discipleship Committee. The hope is this will keep the essential parts of our life as a church joined up. The Designated Safeguarding Lead would be a full part of the department, as safeguarding is at a foundational level a mission and discipleship matter, more than it is a pure compliance matter. The Minister for Digital worship will also be a part of this team, and as now, be in attendance at the Worship, Faith and Order Committee.

- 8.3.2 The creation of one department that holds together the staff teams working with both the Ministries and the Mission and Discipleship Committees creates an unrealistic line management load for the Deputy General Secretary. The current Deputy General Secretary holds a brief for complaints and discipline, which at times can be a hefty workload. The introduction of the Head of Governance Services role means there will be general capacity to take on the oversight of a larger department, but the line management load would be extensive.
- 8.3.3 The proposal is that we follow the model used by the Resource Department, where the have creation of a Head of Compliance and Services role with line management responsibility for key areas of the work of the Resources Department. This has released the Chief Operating Officer and provides greater operational security. Following this model in the context of Mission and Discipleship would mean one of the current staff secretaries within the department being willing to take on a role as a Mission and Discipleship Lead, offering oversight to some members of the team, and acting as a designated deputy to the Deputy General Secretary in this area of the teams work, to mirror the Secretary of Ministries in the Ministries area of work. It is proposed that staff secretaries in the current Mission and Discipleship teams be asked to express an interest in the role, and an internal process leading to an appointment, viable options for continuing to cover the existing work of the post-holder within the wider team will need to be one of the criteria upon which appointment is based.

9. Suggested timeline

9.1 Work to date

	Business Committee
August 2024	Initial personal consultation with the Head of Ministries (conducted by the General Secretary and the Deputy General Secretary Discipleship – given the implications of the changes here span beyond just the discipleship department).
	Initial personal consultation with the Head of Children’s and Youth Work.
September to October 2024	Wider consultation with committee convenors, committees and staff members.
October 2024	The first meeting of the General Assembly Leadership Team (which is an operational matter and not dependent upon changes to committees or other staffing changes in the first instance).

9.2 Proposed next steps

November 2024	Development of proposals in the light of feedback from the consultation process.
December 2024	Consideration of final proposals by the Business Committee and preparation of a paper to take to Assembly Executive in February 2025.
February 2025	Assembly Executive to consider resolutions to effect changes to committee structure and instructing detailed work on Terms of Reference to be brought to General Assembly. Assembly Executive to adopt changes to the General Secretariat membership.
August 2025	New Committee structure and General Secretariat structure comes into being.