

15 January 2025

## To members, staff in attendance and observers at the February 2025 URC Assembly Executive

Dear friends and colleagues,

**Welcome to the Assembly Executive  
Monday 3 to Wednesday 5 February 2025  
The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Alfreton, Derbyshire DE55 1AU**

### 1. Introduction

This is the second mailing for next month's Assembly Executive. It includes the following:

- Agenda for our meeting
- Updated list of attendees
- Breakout session groups list
- Practical information sheet
- Travel information
- Map of the venue.

The first mailing included a cover letter and a list of attendees. If you are missing any of these papers, please contact Izumi Nishizono: [izumi.nishizono@urc.org.uk](mailto:izumi.nishizono@urc.org.uk).

If you are planning on driving to the venue, please help reduce our collective environmental impact by checking the list of people attending, to see whether car sharing might be possible.

The Safeguarding policy for Assembly Executive is available on the URC website: [www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding/](http://www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding/). The Safeguarding contact on site will be Sharon Barr, URC Designated Safeguarding Lead.

### 2. Assembly Executive papers

The papers for Assembly Executive are now available here:

[www.urc.org.uk/assembly-executive](http://www.urc.org.uk/assembly-executive). There may be some last-minute additions, so please regularly check this page.

There is likely to be one late paper, from the Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group. This will be added to the papers, and we will email members of Assembly Executive as and when it is available to consult. We apologise for this, which is a result of the considerable pressures on CDAG at the moment.

### 3. En Bloc

At General Assembly and Assembly Executive meetings, we take certain business *en bloc*. These are items where the Moderator thinks that decisions might be reached responsibly

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without further discussion. You will see that the agenda includes a slot when these items will be voted on.

I suggest you read the *en bloc* papers first. This will give you time to contact the author of a paper if you have questions. Authors' names and email addresses are noted on the cover sheets. If you think any of these papers need discussion at Assembly Executive, particularly if you disagree with a proposed resolution, you may ask that a piece of business be removed from *en bloc*. You must put that request to the Clerk, **[sarah.moore@urc.org.uk](mailto:sarah.moore@urc.org.uk)** by 12:00 on Friday 31 January. If six people ask to remove an item, it will be withdrawn from *en bloc* and added to our agenda.

If a serious difficulty, error, or changed circumstance is noticed in a paper currently scheduled for *en bloc*, the proposer may ask for it to be withdrawn from *en bloc*, or the Moderator may rule that the difficulty, error, or changed circumstance requires the paper to be withdrawn from *en bloc*. Such requests should be made to the Clerk as soon as possible. In using the *en bloc* method of decision-making, there is no wish to bury information or to avoid discussions which Assembly Executive ought to have.

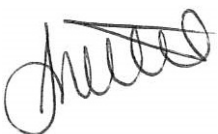
I need to remind you too that we rely on every Assembly Executive member to read the papers and take note of information to relay back to their Synods. We must all ensure the appropriate flow of information from Assembly Executive to the Synods.

Here are the papers the Moderator currently expects to take in *en bloc*:

- A1 – Reporting BC decisions since GA
- G1 – Pensions Committee Terms of Reference
- G2 – Pensions Update
- G3 – Pensions Process and Delegated Authority
- H1 – NSM Expenses Policy
- H3 – Revision of Section O Appendix D
- I1 – Mission Report
- J1 – Nominations
- Q1 – LBAC Report
- S1 – PVG Matrix
- S2 – Safeguarding Terms of Reference.

I look forward to seeing you in Swanwick next month.

Yours sincerely,



The Revd Jenny Mills  
Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)

# Assembly Executive

Monday 3 February to Wednesday 5 February 2024

## Agenda



### Monday 3 February

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12:00 to 13:00 Registration in reception

13:00 to 14:00 Lunch

#### Session one

14:00 to 15:30 Worship  
Welcome and introduction  
Minutes and matters arising  
Facilitation group

15:30 to 16:30 Check-in/access rooms  
Tea or coffee break

#### Session two

16:30 to 18:00 **H2: Ministries** – Special Category Pioneering Post  
**A3: Business Committee** – Ministerial Disciplinary Process Review

18:30 to 19:30 Dinner

#### Session three

19:45 to 20:30 **A4: Business Committee** – The Future of Governance  
(group discussions)

20:30 Evening prayer

### Tuesday 4 February

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8:00 to 9:00 Breakfast

#### Session four

9:15 to 11:00 Worship  
**AD1: Business Committee, E&L** – Resource Centres for Learning  
**A2: Business Committee** – GA Committee Structures and General Secretariat

11:00 to 11:30 Tea or coffee break

#### Session five

11:30 to 13:00 **BDFH1: C&YWC E&L Ministries WF&O** – Towards a Ministry of Children's and Youth Work

13:00 to 14:00 Lunch

**Session six****14:00 to 15:30****Mission Team presentation one** – Ukraine Appeal and Commitment for Life update**A5: Business Committee** – The Future of the General Assembly (group discussion)**15:30 to 16:00**

Tea and coffee break

**Session seven****16:00 to 18:00****A5: Business Committee** – The Future of the General Assembly (conclusion)

En Bloc :

A1	Reporting BC decisions since GA
G1	Pensions Committee Terms of Reference
G2	Pensions Update
G3	Pensions Process and Delegated Authority
H1	NSM Expenses Policy
H3	Revision of Section O Appendix D
I1	Mission Report
J1	Nominations
Q1	LBAC Report
S1	PVG Matrix
S2	Safeguarding Terms of Reference

**18:30 to 19:30**

Dinner

**Session eight****19:45 to 20:30****Mission Team presentation two: URC Apology to Jamaica****20:30**

Evening prayer

**Wednesday 5 February**

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**8:00 to 9:00**

Breakfast

**VACATE ROOMS AND RETURN KEY CARDS NO LATER THAN 9:30****Session nine****9:30 to 11:00**Morning prayer  
Remaindered business**11:00 to 11:30**

Tea and coffee break

**11:30 to 12:30**

Worship with Holy Communion

**12:30 to 13:30**

Lunch and departures

**13:30 to 15:00**

Meeting of Committee Convenors and Staff Secretaries (in Mulberry Hall)

# Groups

<p><b>A</b></p>	<p><b>Derbyshire 1</b></p> <p><b>Geoff Felton</b>      <i>Facilitator</i> <b>Karen Bell</b>        <i>Note taker</i></p> <p>Jo <b>Clare-Young</b> Helen <b>Everard</b> Sarah <b>Gower</b> Nick <b>Jones</b> Peter <b>Knowles</b> Kim <b>Plumpton</b> Steve <b>Powell</b> Steve <b>Summers</b> Jay <b>Tynan</b></p>	<p><b>B</b></p>	<p><b>Derbyshire 2</b></p> <p><b>David Greatorex</b>      <i>Facilitator</i> <b>Jan Adamson</b>        <i>Note taker</i></p> <p>Sally <b>Bateman</b> Philip <b>Brooks</b> Nneoma <b>Chima</b> Russell <b>Furley-Smith</b> Jamie <b>Kissack</b> Richard <b>Lewney</b> John <b>Samson</b> Samantha <b>Sheehan</b> Catriona <b>Wheeler</b></p>
<p><b>C</b></p>	<p><b>Derbyshire 3</b></p> <p><b>Steve Faber</b>        <i>Facilitator</i> <b>Sam Richards</b>      <i>Note taker</i></p> <p>David <b>Chapman</b> Willie <b>Duncan</b> Andrea <b>Heron</b> Michael <b>Hopkins</b> Victoria <b>James</b> Martin <b>Knight</b> Morag <b>McLintock*</b> Daniel <b>Raddings</b> Anne <b>Sardeson</b> Sally <b>Thomas</b></p>	<p><b>D</b></p>	<p><b>Derbyshire 4</b></p> <p><b>Geoffrey Clarke</b>      <i>Facilitator</i> <b>Sarah Lane Cowte</b>    <i>Note taker</i></p> <p>Bridget <b>Banks</b> Tim <b>Crossley</b> David <b>Downing</b> Elizabeth <b>Hall</b> Martin <b>Hayward</b> Julie <b>Kirby</b> Jenny <b>Mills</b> Robert <b>Pope</b> Mary <b>Thomas</b></p>
<p><b>E</b></p>	<p><b>Derbyshire 5</b></p> <p><b>Lythan Nevard</b>      <i>Facilitator</i> <b>Chris Atherton</b>     <i>Note taker</i></p> <p>Andy <b>Braunston*</b> Myles <b>Dunnett</b> Tessa <b>Henry-Robinson</b> Pippa <b>Hodgson</b> Tim <b>Hopley</b> Elaine <b>Hutchinson</b> Rachel <b>Leach</b> Douglas <b>Maxwell</b> Clive <b>Snashall</b></p>	<p><b>F</b></p>	<p><b>Derbyshire 6</b></p> <p><b>Lindsey Sanderson</b>    <i>Facilitator</i> <b>Trevor Jamieson</b>     <i>Note taker</i></p> <p>Richard <b>Gray</b> Roger <b>Jones</b> Megan <b>Price</b> Pam <b>Tolhurst</b> Rachel <b>Wakeman</b> Mike <b>Walsh</b></p>

<b>G</b>	<b>Derbyshire 7</b>  <b>Clare Downing</b> <i>Facilitator</i> <b>Dave Coaker</b> <i>Note taker</i>  Sharon <b>Barr</b> Andy <b>Middleton</b> Heather <b>Moore</b> Lesley <b>Mosely</b> Neil <b>Thorogood</b> Jane <b>Wade</b> George <b>Watt</b> Ruth <b>Wilson</b> Alan <b>Yates</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>Derbyshire 8</b>  <b>David Salsbury</b> <i>Facilitator</i> <b>Rita Griffiths</b> <i>Note taker</i>  Nicola <b>Furley-Smith</b> Vaughan <b>Griffiths</b> Susan <b>Henderson</b> Graham <b>Jennings</b> Fran <b>Kissack</b> Andrew <b>Mann-Ray</b> Romilly <b>Micklem</b> Roo <b>Stewart</b> Maya <b>Withall</b>

\* Minute Secretaries may not be able to join group discussions.

# Paper A1

## Report of decisions taken on behalf of General Assembly

### Business Committee

#### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	John Bradbury john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
<b>Action required</b>	For information.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None.</b>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To inform the Assembly Executive of decisions taken on behalf of the General Assembly since it last met.
<b>Main points</b>	
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	

#### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	

The terms of reference of the Business Committee require it to report to the next meeting of the General Assembly or the Assembly Executive any decisions it has taken on behalf of the General Assembly since it last met.

Such decisions were previously made on a custom and practice basis by the Officers of the General Assembly and were frequently not reported. It is a matter of good governance that the Business Committee now has this authority formally delegated to it, and that it reports on its use.

### **Adoption of a process for the term review of a Minister serving the General Assembly**

General Assembly in July 2024 took a decision not to remove termed appointments from ministers serving in General Assembly roles. This had the unintended effect of leaving us without a process for a term review. Given that some individuals were due a term review shortly after the Assembly (or it had been agreed such a review should happen

somewhat early) it was urgent to establish such a process. The adopted process is appended in Appendix 1. The intention is to review it in the light of the experience of the first few processes, then bring a revised process for adoption in the normal way by General Assembly or Assembly Executive (likely in 2026).

## **Adoption of a safeguarding policy for the work of the General Assembly and the Offices of the General Assembly**

It was realised, with some embarrassment, that whilst General Assembly adopts safeguarding processes for the whole church to adopt, we had not formally then adopted a safeguarding policy for the work of the General Assembly and the Offices of the General Assembly themselves. This clearly needed to be urgently rectified. The adopted policy is appended in Appendix 2 to this report.

## **Adoption of the Plan for Partnership**

Debate at General Assembly 2025 called for various amendments to the Plan for Partnership. In the light of that debate and consultation with ministers, the Plan has been updated. This needed to come into effect from the 1 January 2025, so the Business Committee adopted this on behalf of the General Assembly. Ministries is introducing a rolling programme of consultation and revision to the Plan, meaning that it should be able to be adopted in updated form by General Assembly each year.

## **Appointments to roles**

From time to time, it is necessary to make appointments to significant roles which the church requires to be filled. This happens when, for example, someone needs to withdraw from a role at short notice. The following appointments have been made:

**David Jones** as Convenor of the Assembly Commission of the Ministerial Disciplinary Process from 10 October, on a *pro tem* basis with a view to a new appointment being made as a renewed process is adopted. (David was Deputy Convenor. We thank Nigel Adkinson for his work as Convenor until this point).

**Ian Miller** was appointed to the Board of the Ministerial Pension Trust from Monday 16 December for four years. This was to fill an urgent vacancy on the Board. Ian is a retired pensions' professional and brings welcome expertise to the Board. A safer recruitment interview conversation was held with him by the Chair of the Board, Bridget Micklem, who was delighted to recommend him for appointment.

**Andy Braunston** was appointed to act from the 16 December as Secretary to the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline. The Assembly Standing Panel deal with disciplinary cases in their early stages. If a case is serious, it will progress to an Assembly Commission who deal with a case in its latter phase. Assembly Commissions have always had available to them a Secretary with experience of the process, to guide administrative matters and ensure the process is effectively operated. The ASPD have not had the benefit of this. Andy has served as training officer for the process, and on the recommendation of the Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group, he has been appointed to this new role of Secretary to the ASPD. He has been appointed to serve until the existing process is replaced by a renewed process. CDAG deemed the support needed by ASPDs in their work to be highly urgent, partly in the light of the sheer number of cases running at the moment. Andy will step back from serving as Secretary of the Appeals Commission in time, and will not serve as such for any case which would make him conflicted.



**John Bradbury** was appointed *pro tem* Convenor of the Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group whilst the convenor has stepped back from this role temporarily. This took effect from the 22 October following appointment by email correspondence. The General Secretary was the only existing member of CDAG whose role within the disciplinary process would not have left someone conflicted by becoming Convenor. It was deemed inadvisable to bring in a completely new person to this role on a temporary basis particularly with a complex review of the process underway that the General Secretary is involved with steering.

## Appendix one

### **360° Review of URC General Assembly posts at year five**

#### **Adopted by the Business Committee on behalf of the General Assembly 12 September 2024**

(The process will be used for processes initiated in 2024 and 2025, and then will be reviewed, and a revised process adopted by the General Assembly at that point).

**Purpose:** To review AA who has served in the role as XX for five years.

From General Assembly 2024, ministers in General Assembly appointed posts shall undertake a Ministerial Development Review as part of a suite of support and accountability tools for such ministers within the United Reformed Church. As office-holding members of the church, ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers are accountable through the church's various Councils for the satisfactory performance of their ministries. Through the Councils of the Church, discernment through the Holy Spirit is found regarding: accepting candidates for ministry, the nurture and support necessary for flourishing of church and office-holder, their deployment to particular ministries, the oversight necessary for healthy discipleship and for the circumstances when it is necessary to lay down the responsibilities of being an office-holder.

This support is built on the foundation of the covenant relationship that shapes ordained ministry within the United Reformed Church and its aim is to provide an opportunity for structured reflection on ministry within individual contexts.

It is therefore appropriate at year five in a seven year termed ministry to undertake a 360° Ministerial Development Review, creating an opportunity for AA to reflect on their own vocation, and for key URC post holders to reflect the role of the XX, to consider how they perceive AA is doing in the role by reflecting on how AA's style of leadership impacts on their ministry/work.

It is hoped that this process shall increase awareness both of the XX role and of how collectively we can more effectively support and deploy AA as part of the URC body whether or not AA continues in this role.

The process shall be reviewed in light of experience after two reviews.

#### **1. Outline of process for Synod Moderator**

- 1.1 Before a General Assembly Review Panel is appointed the General Secretary shall ascertain from the Synod Moderator concerned whether, if invited, they would wish to be considered for a further term of service. (This period would normally be for five years but in exceptional circumstances, such as imminent retirement, it may be adjusted either to shorten the term or to lengthen it slightly with the consent of the Assembly Review Panel the Moderator and the Synod Executive.) This consultation should take place in time for a General Assembly Review Panel to be formed, consider the matter and reach a conclusion no later than twelve months, and preferably eighteen, before the end of the current appointment.

- 1.2 The General Secretary shall talk through the process with the Synod Moderator and the Convenor of Synod Executive or their deputy where the Synod Moderator is the Convenor so that expectations are clear.
- 1.3 AA shall be invited to reflect on their five years (see 3 below).
- 1.4 A General Assembly Review Panel of three from outside the Synod from the URC Nominations Panel elected by General Assembly ensuring a balance of diversity across the entire panel. A member of the General Secretariat shall act as an independent, non-voting convenor and shall be responsible for the timetable.
- 1.5 The Broad List of people to be invited to reflect on the XX role and AA's impact in it via an electronic form. The Convenor of the Synod Executive or their deputy where the Synod Moderator is the Convenor shall supply details of those to be asked to submit views. It is noted that the list may vary depending on role but (4) gives examples of those who may be invited to participate.
- 1.6 The Google/Teams form shall be anonymous as far as is possible. The Review Panel shall collate and analyse responses. This analysis shall also be sent to AA.
- 1.7 The Review Panel to meet in person with AA to:
  - review the post using questions below in 2 (written response sent in advance)
  - to consider with AA the google form responses
  - to identify if there are proposed amendments to be made to AA's role description.
- 1.8 The Review Panel shall write a report and shall come to a view as to whether the Moderator be invited to serve a further term of service. The convenor shall make a recommendation to the Nominations Committee who shall bring a resolution to Assembly Executive or General Assembly no later than twelve months before the conclusion of the appointment.
- 1.9 The member of the General Secretariat shall communicate the recommendation both to the Moderator and also to the Synod via the Convenor of the Synod Executive or their deputy no less than 24 hours after the Review meeting in 1.7. The information to the Synod which gives the reasons for the Review Panel's recommendation should be in a form which might be published for the wider members of the Synod to receive.
- 1.10 Should it be recommended that the Moderator is not to be re-appointed, the General Secretary and the Convenor of the General Assembly Review Panel should take all necessary steps to ensure appropriate pastoral care for all concerned.
- 1.11 If either the Synod, or those appointed to act on its behalf (eg an Executive Committee), or the Moderator concerned wish to challenge the recommendation of the Review Panel, they must ask for the recommendation to be reviewed by the Business Committee within one month of its being made, and before it is considered by Assembly Executive or General Assembly.
- 1.12 The Review Panel's costs shall be borne by Assembly funds.

## 2. Outline of process for other General Assembly Appointed posts

- 2.1 Before a General Assembly Review Panel is appointed the General Secretary shall ascertain from AA whether they wish to be considered for a further term of service. This period would normally be for five years but in exceptional circumstances, such as imminent retirement, it may be adjusted either to shorten the term or to lengthen it slightly with the consent of the Assembly Review Panel and the General Secretariat. This consultation should take place in time for a General Assembly Review Panel to be formed, consider the matter and reach a conclusion no later than twelve months, and preferably eighteen, before the end of the current appointment.
- 2.2 The General Secretary shall talk through the process with AA so that expectations are clear.
- 2.3 AA shall be invited to reflect on their five years (see 3 below).
- 2.4 A Review Panel of three shall be appointed from the URC Nominations Panel elected by General Assembly ensuring a balance of diversity across the entire panel. A member of the General Secretariat shall act as an independent, non-voting convenor and shall be responsible for the timetable.
- 2.5 The Broad List of people to be invited to reflect on the XX role and AA's impact in it via Google/Teams form. AA's ministry support/line manager shall supply details of those to be asked to submit views. It is noted that the list may vary depending on role but (4) gives examples of those who may be invited to participate. It is noted that the list may vary depending on role but (5) gives examples of those who may be invited to participate.
- 2.6 The Google/Teams form shall be anonymous as far as is possible. The Review Panel shall collate and analyse responses. This analysis shall also be sent to AA.
- 2.7 The Review Panel to meet in person with AA to:
- review the post using questions below in 3 (written response send in advance)
  - to consider with AA the google form responses
  - to identify if there are proposed amendment to be made to AA's role description.
- 2.8 The Review Panel shall write a report and shall come to a view as to whether AA be invited to serve a further term of service. The convenor shall make a recommendation to the Nominations Committee who shall bring a resolution to Assembly Executive or General Assembly no later than twelve months before the conclusion of the appointment.
- 2.9 The member of the General Secretariat shall communicate the recommendation to AA no longer than 24 hours after the Review meeting in 2.7.
- 2.10 Should it be recommended that AA is not to be re-appointed, the General Secretary and the Convenor of the Assembly Review Panel should take all necessary steps to ensure appropriate pastoral care for all concerned.

- 2.11 If AA wishes to challenge the recommendation of the Review Panel, they must ask for the recommendation to be reviewed by the Business Committee within one month of its being made, and before it is considered by Assembly Executive or General Assembly.
- 2.12 The Review Panel's costs shall be borne by Assembly funds.

### **3. In person MDR with the Review Panel with AA reflecting on last five years**

AA to write responses which the Panel shall have in advance of meeting with AA in person. These should reflect the Marks of Ministry or Core Competencies.

Questions: In relation to each of the areas of the XX Role Description (see below) reflect on the past five years of your ministry; reflections should be specific.

- What has gone well?
  - What do you value about this element of your ministry?
  - What have you learnt?
  - What gifts and graces are you using, and which are lying unused?
  - What would you do differently?
  - What needs still to be addressed?
  - What insight does ordination offer in each area?
- 
- What has not gone so well?
  - What have you learnt?
  - What would you do differently?
  - What might you want to happen now to enhance or improve your current ministry?
- 
- Are any areas for the job/role description no longer relevant?
  - What is possible to delegate?
  - What does not belong in the XX role?
  - What shall your priorities be if reappointed?

### **4. Broad list of people to be invited to reflect on AA's role and AA's impact in it**

#### **Synod Moderators**

List to include:

- Synod Officers (ie Clerk and Treasurer)
- Synod Executive or equivalent (if only been in post one year, ask previous persons in role)
- Committee Convenors
- PA
- Office staff
- Ecumenical Partners (to be identified)
- All serving ministers (Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers)
- Eight other church leaders (Synod Executive or equivalent to supply names)
- Synod Moderators
- Members of the General Secretariat

- Appropriate young people.

## **Other GA Appointed posts**

List to include:

- Main committee the post identifies with
- Ministry Support or Line Manager
- PA
- Office staff
- Discipleship Team
- Church House Connective
- Other Teams (eg TDO+ Network)
- Ecumenical partners/external groups/areas of expertise
- The Business Committee.

## **General Secretary**

List to include:

- Synod Moderators
- Synod Clerks
- Committee Convenors
- Church House Connective
- PA
- Officers of Assembly
- Ecumenical Partners (to be identified)
- Networks: GEAR, Multi-Racial Network,
- The Business Committee.

In each case the Review Group is empowered to determine the final membership of those to be consulted in the 360 process.

## **5. Questions for Broad List**

1. Please read the XX's Job/Role Description. Responding through the form, please let us know which elements of the Job/Role Description have the greatest impact on the flourishing of:
  - a) The URC?
  - b) Your ministry/work?
2. Can you provide up to three areas where AA is performing particularly well. Where you can, please give specific examples which demonstrate AA's performance.
3. Can you provide up to three areas in which AA might be able to improve their performance. Where you can, please give specific examples which demonstrate AA's performance.
4. Is there anything you would like to add about AA's leadership style?
5. Is there anything you would add to or remove from this Job/Role Description?
6. We are inviting this Broad List to respond through the electronic form by...
7. After the review is complete, the responses shall be destroyed.

## Appendix two

### General Assembly and Offices of the General Assembly

#### Safeguarding policy

##### 1. Aims and purpose of this policy

The aim of this policy is to ensure that good practice in protecting people from abuse, harm or neglect is embedded in the culture and practice of the denominational level bodies and activities of the United Reformed Church (URC).

The policy should be read in line with the URC's Good Practice Guidance and resources which can be found here: [www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding/safeguarding-good-practice/](http://www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding/safeguarding-good-practice/)

##### 2. Who this policy applies to

As set out below, the policy directly applies to General Assembly and General Assembly staff. The policy applies to both the regular work of these bodies and any specific events or activities organised under their auspices. It may also be helpful for Synods and local churches as it helps to demonstrate the responsibilities of the denominational level bodies to both support and monitor safeguarding practice across the church.

###### General Assembly

General Assembly is the URC's highest decision-making body and meets once a year. Assembly Executive is the executive body which meets once a year to review and continue the work of General Assembly. In applying to the General Assembly, this policy also applies to the work of the Assembly Committees, Advisory Groups, sub-committees and any other activity carrying out the work of the General Assembly. General Assembly Committees under delegated authority carry out the specialist work of the General Assembly and this includes the Safeguarding Committee. General Assembly supports Synods and local churches by overseeing the development and implementation of best practice in safeguarding.

General Assembly 2021 passed Resolutions to make additions to the structure to clarify safeguarding responsibilities. These specified that the functions of General Assembly include:

- a) To appoint a Designated Safeguarding Lead.
- b) To have oversight of local churches and Synods, monitoring practice.
- c) To adopt a safeguarding policy statement and procedures for use throughout the whole United Reformed Church.
- d) To advise on all matters of safeguarding throughout the church.
- e) To adopt best safeguarding practice for all its own activities and events.
- f) To appoint a Designated Safeguarding Lead.
- g) To have oversight of local churches and Synods, monitoring practice.
- h) To adopt a safeguarding policy statement and procedures for use throughout the whole United Reformed Church.
- i) To advise on all matters of safeguarding throughout the church.
- j) To adopt best safeguarding practice for all its own activities and events.

## **The staff of the General Assembly**

This covers employees (including interns) of the URC including those based in Church House and those with contracts for remote, home-based or hybrid working.

All staff are safer recruited and as part of their induction are required to complete safeguarding training.

Information on how to report concerns will be displayed in public areas in Church House.

## **3. Statement of safeguarding principles**

*This statement was approved by General Assembly in 2021.*

The United Reformed Church (URC) is committed to safeguarding in every area of its life and ministry.

Safeguarding is the action taken to promote and protect the well-being and human rights of individuals. This means we will:

- do all we can to create and maintain a safe and caring environment for all people
- respond promptly and effectively to any form of abuse and neglect, including reporting abuse to statutory agencies as necessary
- seek to prevent abuse in any form from occurring.

We will seek to identify individuals who may pose a risk to others and take necessary actions to minimise risk whilst supporting these individuals in our communities when safe to do so.

The URC confirms that safeguarding is the responsibility of everyone: to prevent abuse and neglect of children, young people and adults; to act upon concerns of abuse; and to support the wellbeing of each person within all communities in which the Church is placed. Safeguarding is a requirement and a duty in all Councils of the Church. Safeguarding in the URC is supported with relevant policies, practice, guidance and training.

The Church acknowledges that the wellbeing of the child or adult who is experiencing or is at risk of experiencing abuse, harm and neglect is paramount, and it will always act in their best interests, in line with national legislation, relevant statutory guidelines and good practice guidance. The United Reformed Church believes that all people have the right to be and feel part of this community, regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. We will operate in line with the Human Rights Act 1989, the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Equality Act 2010.

## **Commitments**

The URC will adhere to the policy statement above by committing to:

- promote safe and healthy cultures in which good practice standards in safeguarding are updated and disseminated
- ensure everyone in a position of trust is carefully recruited/selected/appointed/elected and trained in safeguarding children and adults at risk
- respond promptly and appropriately to any safeguarding allegation or concern (including reporting any allegations to statutory agencies) including those who may pose a risk to children, young people or adults at risk



- care pastorally for all children and adults at risk, and all those who have experienced abuse in the past
- ensure that all those who pose a risk to children, young people or adults at risk, and those who are the subject of allegations, receive appropriate pastoral care and supervision
- exercise informed vigilance about risks in all forms of abuse and neglect
- work together with other denominations, statutory agencies and voluntary organisations.

## 4. Definitions

Children includes anyone aged under 18 years. The Children Act 2004 (section 11) places a duty on a range of organisations to have in place arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Details of the arrangements required are set out in Chapter 2 of 'Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children' ([bit.ly/4fVVyfu](https://www.bit.ly/4fVVyfu)) and this includes specific reference to the need for faith-based organisations to have procedures in place.

Adults at risk includes any adult of any age, who may be vulnerable due to a permanent or temporary illness or disability, or who have been made vulnerable by their circumstances which include domestic abuse and discrimination. There are some differences in the definitions used across the UK and Crown Dependencies but the common elements are that adults at risk:

- are aged 18 or over and,
- by reasons of mental or other disability, age, illness or other situation are permanently, or for the time being, unable to take care of themselves; and/or
- are unable to protect themselves against actual or potential abuse or neglect.

## 5. Duty of care and confidentiality

We have a duty of care to beneficiaries of the URC, either adults or children. We will maintain confidentiality except in circumstances where to do so would place the individual or another individual at risk of harm.

## 6. Promoting good safeguarding practice across the URC

*Good Practice 6* sets out the key responsibilities at denominational level in five core areas:

### Safer culture

- Have a safeguarding policy which is reviewed annually and updated when necessary
- Lead on the development and review of Safer Culture processes
- Manage the process for blemished disclosures
- DSL to provide an annual safeguarding report to General Assembly
- DSL to report to the URC Trust matters of a safeguarding nature.

### Safer activities

- Obtain legal advice where necessary on legal and regulatory requirements.

### Recognising and responding to concerns

- Provide additional advice in cases with particular complexity or high public profile

- Report serious cases related to ministers or the work of Assembly to the URC Trust who will notify the relevant charity regulator<sup>1</sup>.

## **Managing allegations, and people who may pose a risk**

- Provide additional advice in cases with particular complexity or high public profile
- DSL to lead/advise if a situation arises where the SSO has a conflict of interest
- The URC Trust will report to the relevant charity regulator if a case is related to the work of the Trust.

## **Supporting victims and survivors**

- Manage and develop the URC's practice with regard to ensuring the voices of those who have experienced abuse are heard within the church
- Incorporate the perspectives of those who have experienced abuse into the ongoing development of policy and training.

Activities carried out by the central safeguarding team in support of these responsibilities include:

- designing and providing training at national level
- case management advice for Synod Safeguarding Officers
- liaison with other denominations and faith-based organisations
- updating Good Practice guidance
- providing resources and templates for local churches and Synods.

## **7. Preventing abuse or harm**

Activities will be organised in accordance with URC good practice guidelines ([www.urch.org.uk/safeguarding/safeguarding-good-practice/](http://www.urch.org.uk/safeguarding/safeguarding-good-practice/)) so as to promote a safe environment and healthy relationships whilst minimising opportunities for harm and misunderstanding or false accusation. For each event, risk assessments will be carried out, appropriate consent forms will be used for activities with children and young people, appropriate records will be kept (see URC Record Keeping policy for further details), and adequate insurance will be in place for each event.

We are committed to safer recruitment and appointment of all paid staff and volunteers and will ensure that all relevant procedures are followed. Safeguarding training will be provided at the appropriate level required for different roles.

All members of the General Assembly, officer holders, paid staff and volunteers will agree to work within a Code of Conduct (see *Good Practice 6*, [www.urch.org.uk/safeguarding/safeguarding-good-practice/](http://www.urch.org.uk/safeguarding/safeguarding-good-practice/)) and understand that there may be action taken if this code is not followed, possibly involving suspension or termination of working/volunteering with us.

## **8. Responding to safeguarding concerns and allegations**

All concerns and allegations of abuse will be responded to appropriately, including referring to the Police and Social Care if necessary, either Adult or Children's.

We will co-operate with the Police, Children's and Adult's Services in any investigation, will follow multi agency decisions and will maintain confidentiality of any investigations to those directly involved.

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<sup>1</sup> Either the Charity Commission (for England & Wales), the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR), or the relevant regulatory bodies for the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

All concerns or allegations should be addressed to the URC Designated Safeguarding Lead:

Name: Sharon Barr

Email address: [sharon.barr@urc.org.uk](mailto:sharon.barr@urc.org.uk)

Contact phone number: 07776 178 246

If the DSL is unavailable, please contact [safeguarding@urc.org.uk](mailto:safeguarding@urc.org.uk) and a member of the safeguarding team will respond to the concern.

## **What are we protecting from?**

The definitions of abuse differ between children and adults. A copy of the definitions relating to children and adults can be found in *Good Practice 6*.

It is important to be aware of possible signs and symptoms of abuse. A list of such possible signs and symptoms in relation to children and in adults can be found in *Good Practice 6*. Some signs could be indicators of a number of different categories.

It is essential to note that these are only indicators of possible abuse. There may be other, innocent, reasons for any of these signs and/or behaviour. They will, however, be a guide to assist in assessing whether abuse of one form or another is a possible explanation for a child or adult's behaviour or appearance.

## **What to do if you notice indicators of possible abuse**

If indicators of possible abuse give cause for concern, then the worker should inform the person responsible for safeguarding at the event as soon as possible. This is often the leader in charge of an event. Alternatively inform the DSL directly. *Do not discuss with anybody else.*

## **What to do if there is a disclosure or allegation of abuse**

If a child or an adult makes a disclosure that they are being abused and/or an allegation of abuse against someone, it is important that the person being told:

- stays calm and listens carefully
- reassures them that they have done the right thing in telling you
- does not investigate or ask leading questions
- does not promise to keep secret what they have been told
- explains that they will need to tell someone else.

Inform the person responsible for safeguarding at the event as soon as possible. This is often the leader in charge of an event. Alternatively inform the DSL directly. *Do not discuss with anybody else.*

If a concern or allegation relates to the DSL, please contact the Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship).

## **Recording concerns**

Make a **written** record of the allegation, disclosure or incident and **sign and date** this record and pass this onto the DSL. Resource F1 ([www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding/safeguarding-good-practice/](http://www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding/safeguarding-good-practice/)) from *Good Practice 6* provides a template for recording concerns. Any such records will be stored securely on the URC case management system.

## **Procedure in the event of a concern**

If there is an immediate threat of harm, the police should be contacted.

Where it is judged that there is no immediate threat of harm, the following will occur:

- A confidential record will be made of the observations/conversation and the surrounding circumstances. Records will be kept securely on the URC case management system
- The DSL will consider whether the concern warrants a referral to statutory agencies
- The DSL will consult with the relevant Synod Safeguarding Officer(s) if the initial concern indicates that there may be a risk to others in the church
- The person about whom the allegation has been made must not be informed by anyone in the church if it is judged that to do so would place a child or adult at increased risk of further harm.

## **Managing allegations against staff or volunteers**

Chapter 5 of *Good Practice 6* provides further information on processes to follow when a worker (paid or volunteer) is alleged or known to have harmed children or adults.

The DSL will contact the Local Authority Designated Officer/Designated Officer (as appropriate depending on local terminology) or the Local Safeguarding Board for Wales. A decision will be taken about when to inform the member of staff or volunteer. The timing and method will be discussed and agreed with the LADO/DO/Board.

If the worker is involved in other areas of church life, the DSL will inform the relevant staff in the Synod to which that person belongs and advise on the implications for that person's involvement with children or adults at risk in the local church and in Synod activities. Information will be shared on a strictly 'need to know' basis.

In accordance with legal requirements, a referral will be made to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) or Disclosure Scotland if the church withdraws permission for an individual to engage in regulated activity/work OR would have done so had that individual not resigned, retired, been made redundant or been transferred to a position which did not involve regulated activity/work because the employer believes that the individual has engaged in relevant conduct or satisfied the harm test or has committed an offence that would lead to automatic inclusion on a barred list.

As a registered charity, the URC Trust is required to notify the relevant charity regulator of any safeguarding serious incidents, and may delegate this task to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

## **9. Complaints**

For any complaints on the handling of safeguarding matters, please follow the procedures set out in Section Q of the Manual: [www.urch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Q-Complaints-Procedure-Nov-2023.pdf](http://www.urch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Q-Complaints-Procedure-Nov-2023.pdf)

## **10. Review**

This policy should be reviewed and updated annually. It should also be updated at other times as required in the light of changes such as: amendments to URC Good Practice guidance; changes to statutory safeguarding requirements; changes to procedure arising from review of safeguarding cases.

Date of most recent review: .....

Date of next review: .....

Signed: .....

Name: .....

Role: .....

# Paper A2

## The future of the General Assembly Committee Structure, General Secretariat and the staff team of the Assembly Office

### Business Committee

#### Basic information

Contact name and email address	John Bradbury, General Secretary john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Discussion.
Draft resolution(s)	<p><b>Resolution 1</b></p> <p>1. Assembly Executive approves the formation of a Mission and Discipleship Committee in line with the content of Report A2 and instructs the Business Committee, after due consultation, to bring finalised Composition and terms of reference to the General Assembly in 2025.</p> <p><b>Resolution 2</b></p> <p>2. Assembly Executive adopts the formation of a Children’s and Youth Work Programme sub-committee of the new Mission and Discipleship Committee. The terms of reference and makeup of which is to be agreed by the existing Mission and Children’s and Youth Work Committees and the Youth Executive. The makeup and Terms of reference are to be formally adopted by the New Mission and Discipleship Committee at its first meeting.</p> <p><b>Resolution 3</b></p> <p>3. Assembly Executive adopts the formation of a new Ministries Committee in line with the content of Report A2 and instructs the Business Committee, after due consultation, to bring finalised Composition and Terms of Reference for adoption by General Assembly 2025.</p>

	<p><b>Resolution 4</b></p> <p><b>4. Assembly Executive instructs the Nominations Committee and the Youth Executive to bring names for the population of the new Ministries and Mission and Discipleship Committees to General Assembly 2025.</b></p> <p><b>Resolution 5</b></p> <p><b>5. Assembly Executive determines that the General Secretariat shall consist of the General Secretary, the Chief Operating Officer, the Deputy General Secretary and the Head of Governance as of the close of General Assembly 2025.</b></p>
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## Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Review of the changes to the GA Committee structure, the remit of the General Secretariat and staff team of the Assembly office.
<b>Main points</b>	
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Paper N2 General Assembly 2023.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	<p>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            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>

## Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	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.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	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 principle of integrating our work in this area and reducing the committee structure met wide approval, however. 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, *Conversations at the Crossroads*.
- 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. This role has been agreed by the Resources Committee and the Remuneration and been advertised.



- 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 and it would be hoped that would continue.

#### **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, 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 Committee
- 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 Reference 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.

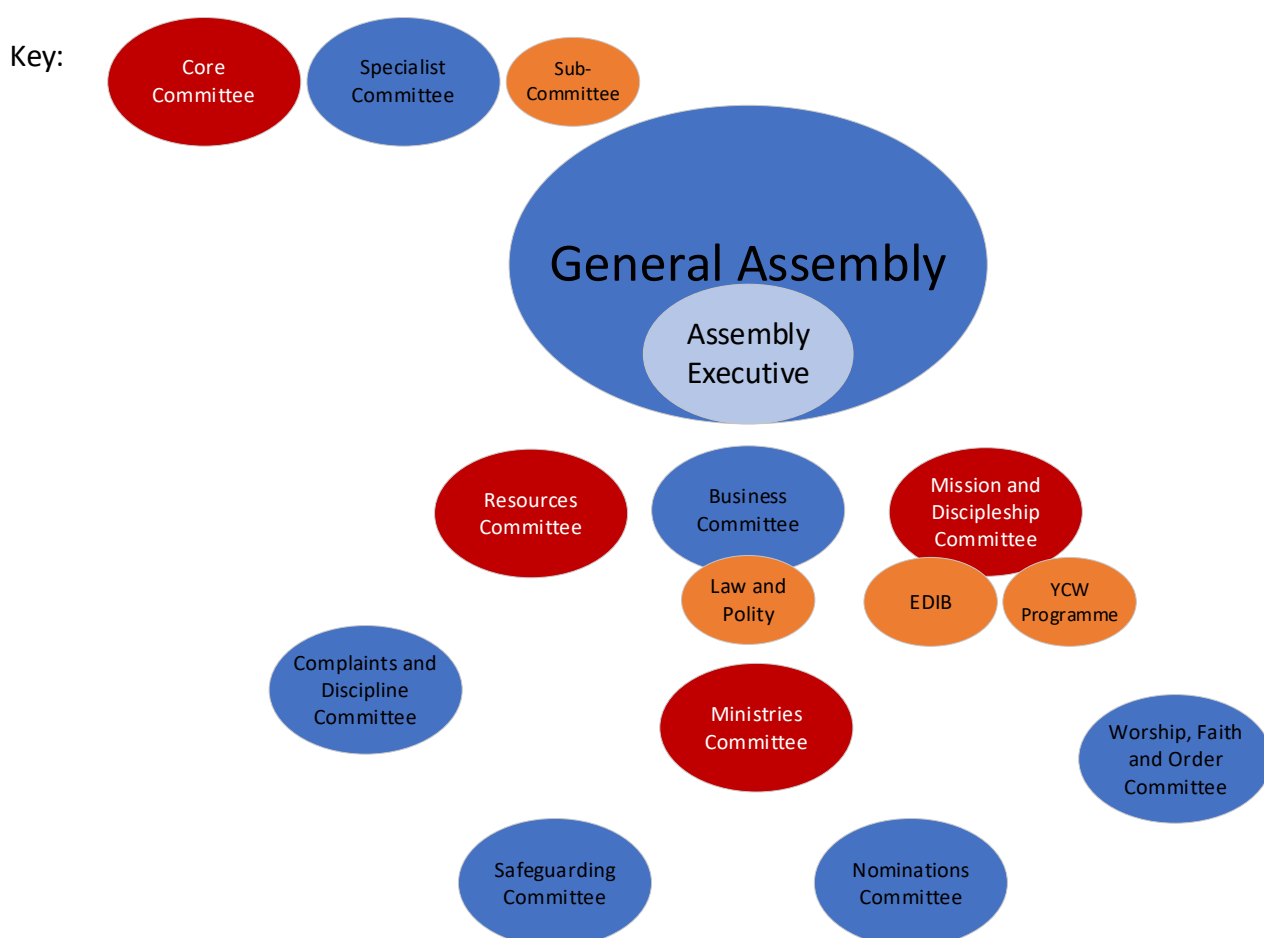
4.6 It is also proposed that the Law and Polity Reference Group become a sub-committee of Business Committee. The work of the Head of Legal and the Head of Governance, together with the Law and Polity Reference Group would all be conceived of as sitting under the Business Committee, with governance oversight of the whole work of the General Assembly, the primary point of reference within the General Secretariat being the General Secretary.

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.

4.9 A diagrammatic representation of the proposed new committee structure (showing core and specialist committees, as well as existing committees/advisory groups that would become sub-committees. It does not show all existing sub-committees and task groups, only those affected by the changes. For example, the Mission Committee currently also has a Legacies of Slavery and Net Zero task groups, a Commitment for Life sub-committee, and an Interfaith Enabling Group. It is not envisaged these are affected by the changes. As detailed terms of reference are drawn up it will be necessary to determine which sub-committees are established by the General Assembly, and which are task groups formed for a period by the authority of the committee.



## 5. The creation of a legal and governance department

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. This role is being brought ‘in-house,’ in the creation of a **Head of Legal Services** role which hopefully will be the case by the time Assembly Executive meets. 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 and theological 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. A **Head of Governance** role has therefore been agreed by the Resources and Remuneration Committees, and an appointment is being sought at the moment. They 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 – see paper X on Governance). 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):

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

<b>Governance Lead:</b>	Complaints and Discipline Committee Law and Polity Committee Safeguarding Committee Nominations Committee
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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, will serve as Secretary of 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 they 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

	<b>Business Committee</b>
<b>August 2024</b>	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.
<b>September to October 2024</b>	Wider consultation with committee convenors, committees and staff members.
<b>October 2024</b>	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).
<b>November 2024</b>	Development of proposals in the light of feedback from the consultation process.
<b>December 2024</b>	Consideration of final proposals by the Business Committee and preparation of a paper to take to Assembly Executive in February 2025.

### 9.2 Proposed next steps

<b>February 2025</b>	Assembly Executive to consider resolutions to effect changes to committee structure and instructing detailed work on Composition and Terms of Reference to be brought to General Assembly.
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	Assembly Executive to adopt changes to the General Secretariat membership.
<b>July 2025</b>	Final Terms of Reference adopted by General Assembly, appointments to new committees affirmed and the New Committee structure and General Secretariat structure comes into being (or a date is set in the period beyond the General Assembly).

# Paper A3

## Ministerial Disciplinary Process

### Business Committee

#### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	John Bradbury, The General Secretary john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
<b>Action required</b>	Decision.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<p><b>Resolution 6</b></p> <p>1. <b>Assembly Executive accepts the recommendations of the Morgan Report as the basis for the preparation of an enhanced Ministerial Disciplinary process.</b></p> <p><b>Resolution 7</b></p> <p>2. <b>Assembly Executive instructs the working group (comprising Sharon Barr (Designated Safeguarding Lead), John Bradbury (General Secretary), Nicola Furley Smith (Secretary for Ministries) Andy Middleton (Head of Legal Services) and Sarah Moore (Clerk)) to continue to work with Dr Morgan on the preparation of new rules and accompanying processes for a revised process.</b></p> <p><b>Resolution 8</b></p> <p>3. <b>Assembly Executive instructs the Business Committee, in consultation with the Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group, to enable work on the necessary structures and resources that will be necessary to implement a new process.</b></p> <p><b>Resolution 9</b></p> <p>4. <b>Assembly Executive considers the introduction of a revised process to be an urgent matter which should be proceeded with as swiftly as possible.</b></p>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To review the current process and compare with the regulatory boards and other denominations to assess best practice.
<b>Main points</b>	
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	The Executive Summary by Dr Ed Morgan, KC (appended).

<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	The Business Committee and The United Reformed Church Trust, Complaints and Disciplinary Advisory Group and Dr Ed Morgan, KC.
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## Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	None.

## Review of the Section O Ministerial Disciplinary Process

After 15 or so cases, the *Business Committee and the United Reformed Church Trust*, along with the *Complaints and Disciplinary Advisory Group* decided to review the Section O process. It commissioned Dr Ed Morgan KC to review the process and compare with a range of other denominations and regulatory boards to assess current best practice. Dr Morgan is an expert in employment and ecclesiastical legal cases and sits as a judge in the Catholic diocese of Salford and holds both a PhD and a doctorate in Canon Law. He has given the URC excellent assistance, and representation, in various cases over many years and knows us well.

Ed's professional practice includes working with the regulatory bodies of various professions and knows this area of law and practice very well indeed. He compared our regulatory system with the Church of England, the Catholic Church, the General Medical Council, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the Bar Standards Board, and the Care Quality Commission.

Assembly Executive is being provided with the Executive Summary of the Morgan Report, and also with this paper which sets out the key recommendations. It is a paper version of an on-line consultation tool developed by Andy Braunston to enable feedback to be received by interested parties. We are grateful to Andy for summarising the key elements of the report in a more accessible and contextualised fashion than the Executive Summary itself. The Executive Summary and recommendations from Ed are printed below this initial summary of key aspects of the report.

### Core standards of behaviour

The expectations that Ministers and CRCWs must adhere to are outlined in a number of places - their promises made at ordination/commissioning and at subsequent inductions (Schedules C and F of the Basis) a general standard outlined in Schedule E, as well as adherence to the Statement on the Nature, Faith, and Order of the URC (Schedule F) and the Guidelines on conduct and behaviour as well as the Marks for Ministry.

Morgan recommends that we clearly formulate in one place those behaviours which would trigger a disciplinary response, based on the documents noted above, so that it is clearer what is essential in effective and safe ministry.

### A duty to cooperate

There is no requirement in our disciplinary process at the moment for a minister to cooperate with it whereas such requirement is required in the Church of England and is implied in the Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church. The General Medical Council, Nursing and Midwifery Council and Bar Standards Board all require cooperation in their disciplinary processes from those they regulate.

Some of these bodies also require a duty to report possible acts of misconduct too. We currently don't have such a duty to disclose.

Morgan recommends adding a duty of disclosure and a duty of co-operation into our processes (with the caveat that there may be legal reasons driving non-engagement).

### **Jurisdiction**

Our current process is worded to imply that our jurisdiction is only concerned with a minister's behaviour when in office with us not about any pre-ordination or pre-transfer to the URC behaviour. Yet Morgan notes that other denominations have been interested in behaviour prior to joining that denomination.

The URC has had to deal with allegations of misconduct between issuing a Certificate of Eligibility and acceptance of a Call.

Morgan suggests drafting provisions outlining the URC's jurisdictional reach in our process including identifying matters where the URC is unable to exercise regulatory oversight.

Morgan suggests that the conduct in question must have arisen when the person implicated was in active ministry with us or otherwise discharging an official role, office or function within the URC.

### **Limitation period**

Whilst our processes are not governed by statute the principles of Common Law require regulatory matters to be progressed in a timely manner. Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights has meant that regulators have adopted rules which define the period where proceedings might be initiated, pursued, and appealed.

The Church of England has a limitation period (within a year of the alleged misconduct) but that can be waived if there were good reasons for the matter not to be brought within the time limit, where the matter concerns sexual activity with a child or vulnerable adult, or in a sexual matter where the President of Tribunals feels the matter should proceed.

In the Catholic Church, matters must normally be within the last three years, save for the most serious allegations which are reserved to a Vatican body. Offences against children have an extended limitation period of 20 years from the complainant's 18th birthday. However, there is power to depart from this rule on a case-by-case basis.

The General Medical Council has a limitation period of five years, which can be extended if in the public interest. Litigation has shown the importance of clarity around the definition of the limitation period itself and the public interest which might extend it.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council has no limitation period, but Morgan thinks this will not spare them from legal challenges.

The Bar Standards Board has no limitation period, neither does the Quality and Care Commission but the latter can bring criminal prosecutions and, if they do, have to comply with legal limits to bring a prosecution.

Morgan recommends we have a limitation period after alleged misconduct for a complaint to be made (with some exceptions in serious cases) and that in criminal cases the limitation period would start with the date of conviction.

### **Preliminary investigation**

Best practice separates out the investigation of an allegation from the initial assessment of whether or not to proceed further with a disciplinary process. This initial assessment is often called a 'triage' or 'screening' stage.

A decision not to proceed might be because the allegation has nothing to do with the professional standards required, that there is insufficient evidence to support the allegation, or that the concern has been addressed by other means and the underlying issue has been resolved.

The way such screening might be carried out should be fair, transparent, proportionate and accountable. Morgan suggests a range of changes to allow the screening stage to reflect best practice:

1. Greater clarification of the role of the Moderator who is currently part of the ASPD to avoid any sense of partiality or conflict of interest.
2. Suspension should be imposed for defined periods and/or subject to periodic formal review.
3. The minister concerned should be able to request a review of any suspension.
4. The Investigation Team should provide periodic updates on progress to allow transmission of additional material to the minister and to assist with reviews of any interim measures.
5. The ASPD should be given powers to intervene in the case of excessive delays and to be able to progress matters to a conclusion.
6. The ASPD needs greater clarity about when, how and by whom suspension decisions are made.
7. Remove Investigation Team power to decide whether to proceed or dismiss.
8. Reconsider role of ASPD within the initial investigatory process giving ASPD power to instruct Investigation Team to pursue additional lines of enquiry in response to matters raised by the Minister or the ASPD itself.
9. Further clarify existing ASPD powers to end a process.
10. Restrict safeguarding input to only those cases where there is a safeguarding concern.
11. Allow the minister concerned to see and make representations on any safeguarding advice.

12. Provide for a case to be reopened or reviewed in the light of additional evidence.

13. Review how a minister is helped to return to ministry after a matter is dropped.

### **Interim measures**

It is common across procedures of many professional bodies for 'interim measures' to be imposed by a panel specifically constituted for the purpose in order to manage issues that arise in a specific case from investigation up to hearing. These are neutral in effect and do not convey culpability.

Typical measures are a suspension from office. Such a suspension might be from all aspects of ministry or might be from some aspects only. In other processes there is normally some sort of a hearing to determine such interim measures which would be subject to review and time limited. There would normally be a right of the regulator (the church in this case) and the minister to make applications to an interim panel with regard to these measures.

Currently suspension (full or partial) is the only interim measure available in the URC and no hearing involving the parties takes place to assess whether these are necessary, so the minister's views are not widely heard on this matter.

Other interim measures such as supervision or conditions on exercising ministry might also be possible as well as suspension. There are a range of recommendations:

The creation of an Interim Orders Panel drawn from the Assembly Commission for Discipline.

1. The Interim Orders Panel should make all decisions on interim measures.
2. Rules should be drafted to reflect the interim measures do not involve any predetermination or finding of fact.
3. Interim measures should be of limited duration and subject to periodic review.
4. Consideration should be given to having a 'long stop' date beyond which interim measures can't be extended.
5. Provision should be made to extend interim measures at the time of the final hearing in relation to the findings of fact and the eventual imposition of any sanctions.
6. Guidance and training should be issued to the Interim Measures Panel.
7. Decisions by the Interim Measures Panel should, save for emergency or exceptional situations, be made at hearing where the Minister and the ASPD are represented.
8. If interim measures are imposed in an emergency or exceptional situation a hearing with the ASPD and Minister represented should happen within seven days.
9. Interim measures should include supervision, ministry with conditions and suspension (full or partial).



## **Formulation of allegations**

Morgan suggests precise formulation of allegations which are consistent with the evidence available. He also suggests limiting the Investigation Team to reporting on evidence not making findings of fact or assessing seriousness. There are a range of recommendations:

1. The Investigation to report upon evidence does not make conclusions about it.
2. The decision to refer to a Matter to the Assembly Commission should be a decision of the ASPD alone.
3. A referral should always have a clear schedule of allegations.
4. The schedule of allegations should be referred to the minister and responses from the minister should be considered before referral to the Assembly Commission.
5. Any application to amend the Schedule of Allegations should be made to the Assembly Commission at or before the final hearing.
6. Guidance and training should be given to all who exercise a role in this process.
7. The final drafting of Allegations should be undertaken by an independent person retained to represent the ASPD at the final hearing.

## **Discontinuance**

Any judicial process comes up against reasons why it might be proportionate to discontinue – evidential difficulties, non-cooperation of a witness, or where new evidence emerges and/or when a complainant does not wish to proceed. A regulatory process must engage with these developments in order to be fair.

Irrespective of evidential difficulties it is also incumbent on the Church to review the sustainability of any case it is bringing under Common Law and from the European Convention on Human Rights.

Many regulators, therefore, reserve to themselves the power to discontinue a case as and when procedural challenges arise. There are various recommendations:

1. The redrafting, in our process, of reasons why a matter might be discontinued.
2. The delegation of a decision to discontinue to the presenting officer or to the ASPD.
3. The ability of the minister to make representations about withdrawal of allegations.
4. The Assembly Commission's role to be limited to the final hearing and withdrawal/amendment of allegations

## **The Substantive Hearing**

Morgan suggests that we develop a set of rules for the Hearing which include the presumption of 'innocence', and rules on: the admissibility of evidence; granting of powers to proceed in the absence of the Minister; referral to a medical panel; recording of proceedings; express disclosure obligations on the Investigation Team; rights of

representation for presenting officer and minister, provision of legal advice via an assessor or legally qualified chair, rules on voting by the Commission, powers of the Commission when allegations are upheld and the right of appeal.

Some of these are already in our current system.

### **Procedural personnel**

Morgan suggests procedural fairness must be seen not presumed. He notes it is important to have clarity about roles and a separation of functions in order for any process to be seen as fair and impartial.

Morgan suggests having three distinct phases in the process - notification and investigation, 'interlocutory management' (ie an intermediate stage of hearings to decide procedural issues and rule on interim measures) and the final determination and beyond.

Further Morgan suggests one way of managing this is to contract the role of the IT, so it no longer makes judgements on seriousness, expansion of the ASPD to manage proceedings, the appointment of a presenting officer to 'prosecute' on behalf of the ASPD and either a legally qualified ACD chair or a legal assessor/clerk to assist. These are suggestions to underpin the principles outlined in the first and paragraphs above.

### **Sanction**

Morgan suggests that the URC publish guidance to Assembly Commissions about sanctions and about specific forms of behaviour considered incompatible with participation in ministry. Morgan notes the Church of England, the General Medical Council, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, and the Care Quality Commission have all published guidance on sanctions.

Morgan suggests, then, the URC develop and publish guidance on the sanctions that can be imposed following findings of fact, where the sanctions are seen as proportionate to the behaviour complained of.

### **Right of appeal**

Morgan suggests making the grounds of appeal clearer, consider if the Investigation Team/Presenter should retain a right to appeal and, if so, consider whether to limit their grounds to the proportionality of any sanction imposed, making provision for interim measures pending the determination of any appeal and defining more clearly the powers of the appeal panel – for example is it simply a review of the Assembly Commission or a new hearing.

### **Safeguarding**

Morgan notes that the protection of those who by virtue of age, infirmity, or other personal characteristics is not simply a legal obligation but a fundamental tenet of Christian teaching and practice. He holds that effective safeguarding should be 'ingrained in all aspects of ecclesial life and participation.'

He notes, however, that for confidence to be maintained in regulatory processes there needs to be clarity and transparency – particularly around the role of safeguarding.

Morgan outlines the complexities when safeguarding processes involve external referrals – to the Local Authority Designated Officer and/or the police.

Currently safeguarding advice is given to the ASPD and Assembly Commission but does not have to be disclosed to the Minister. Safeguarding advice must be given to the ASPD in every case – whether or not the concern is about a safeguarding issue. Morgan is concerned that this allows safeguarding to be weaponised and hid behind rather than being used as a tool in an open and transparent process.

Morgan recommends various proposals:

1. Drawing a clear distinction between allegations which are within the remit of safeguarding and those which aren't.
2. Any advice given from a safeguarding professional is treated as any other adduced evidence – in other words it should be presented to the Minister, and Commission, and is open to challenge and response.
3. Making clear that at any stage of the disciplinary processes a matter can still be referred into safeguarding processes alongside the disciplinary process.

### **Other matters the report notes**

- Other office holders should be included in the discipline process eg Elders, Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and Pioneers (note, those working with Ed Morgan KC on this report are very skeptical about this and wish to seek further advice from him. We believe that there is a fundamental difference between a fitness to practice process that is about someone's vocational status as a minister and their ability to exercise ministry at all, and the exercise of a voluntary role in a particular place. From initial further conversation with Ed, he is open to this distinction. We all note that structural aspects of an enhanced Section O process may be utilised within another process for office holders – for example investigation resources, or the expertise of those who make up commissions).
- Create a stronger code of conduct with guidance on behaviours that would initiate the disciplinary process.
- Expect the Colleges to uphold the expectations we place on ministers to students.
- Adapt the process for ministers not under our jurisdiction but in possession of a Certificate of Eligibility to come onto our Roll.

### **Appendix**

The URC Interim Report Executive Summary, by DR Edward Morgan, KC.

The United Reformed Church  
**Executive Summary**  
Interim Report 2  
July 2024  
[Revised Following Consultation on 12 August]

ED MORGAN KC  
PHD JCD FCIARB FRSA  
OuterTemple  
Chambers

## Executive Summary

1. This Review has involved a comparative analysis of the present procedural arrangements detailed in Section O (and accompanying appendices). For this purpose, each of the procedural stages has been examined and considered alongside six other comparator regimes. In each of those regimes, the registrant occupies a position of trust and, in the normal course of their operational duties, is permitted to work with a degree of autonomy and professional accountability. Whilst many will be employed by third parties (i.e. not their professional regulator) others are—in various ways—permitted or licensed to exercise their professional skills within atypical relationships which defy legal classification. This is particularly so of those comparators who participate within the life of a faith community or religious denomination.
2. Whilst there are differences between the comparators which have been selected, there are significant commonalities. In the view of the author, these provide a legitimate basis for reliable comparison and assessment. To paraphrase the language to be found in primary legislation, the reader may be satisfied that the comparators do not—for present purposes—occupy materially different circumstances.
3. It is with this in mind that a number of Recommendations are made. It should be emphasised that these are and remain recommendations. They are advanced in order that the present procedural scheme may be clarified without undermining either its character or provenance. The Church's disciplinary procedure is an expression of its witness. It attests to a commitment that the people of God should be governed, regulated, and held accountable in a manner which reflects not only its polity, but—as might be termed elsewhere—its ecclesiology or self-understanding.
4. A core element of this witness is a recognition that Church procedures should be at the service of justice. This is nothing more than rendering to others that which is due to them. In the words of Aquinas, laws (procedural or otherwise) ought to represent the ordinance of reason, directed for the common good.

5. The common good depends upon vigilance and an institutional resolve to do what is right, to protect all within the Church, but most especially, those who are for whatever reason ill-equipped to protect themselves. The realisation of this ambition is a continuing work. It is the hallmark of effective and authentic witness. Contrary to views expressed in some quarters external to The Church, the exercise of a review is not symptomatic of deficiency. It is the outworking of an institutional commitment to optimise resources at the service of The Church. In the words of the psalmist: “that the next generation might know that such is our God.” (ps.78)
6. The following are offered as recommendations for the enhancement of existing procedures. The rationale for each is to be found in the corresponding section of this Interim Report.

<b>Recommendation No</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Para No.</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
1	Standards of Behaviour	118	Reconsideration to the formulation of those matters which are considered have the potential to require or trigger regulatory response. Such an exercise is less directed to the tabulation of ‘index offences’ than the presentation of those recognised as being essential to effective and safe ministry or deployment within The Church
2	Duty of Cooperation	156	Consideration should be given the adoption of both a duty of disclosure on the one hand, and a duty of co-operation on the other.
3	Meaning of Complaint	192	Procedural rules and related guidance are amended to clearly communicate the need for an allegation of substance. It is also recommended that the present mandatory reference to Safeguarding is removed beyond the initial classification prior to the Moderator referral to the ASP.
4	Jurisdiction	231	Consideration should be given to the formulation of express provisions dealing with the jurisdictional reach of the ASP, Commission etc, including the identification of those matters in respect of which The Church is unable to exercise regulatory oversight.

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5	Limitation Period	252	The existing regime (and participant confidence within it) would likely be significantly enhanced if provision was made for a limitation period, with appropriate carve out for specific cases.
6	Preliminary Investigation	312	<p>Consideration is given to the following matters to enhance / clarify the existing regime:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the stage of initial investigation, the person implicated should be described in more neutral terms (e.g. Minister or Respondent). The vocabulary of accusation should be removed;</li> <li>• The status of the Moderator should be clarified and refined. Given the ecclesial relationship which justifies the Moderator’s involvement, the potential for compromise and/or conflict and issues of partiality, need to be addressed;</li> <li>• Suspension should be imposed for defined periods and/or subject to periodic review. This should include application for review by the person implicated;</li> <li>• An obligation upon the Investigation Team to provide periodic updates concerning the progress of the Investigation in order that a review of Interim Measures (see below) may be undertaken and/or the transmission of additional information to the person implicated;</li> <li>• A power of the ASP to intervene in the event of excessive delays or an ability to progress matters to a conclusion;</li> <li>• Clarification concerning when, how and by whom, the competence of the ASP is to be exercised relative to the decision to suspend;</li> <li>• Separation and clarification of the roles of the ASP and Investigation Team concerning interim decision making;</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The separation of the investigatory function of the Investigation Team and the decision-making process concerning the regulatory process (i.e. proceed or dismiss);</li> <li>• Reconsideration of the role and competence of the ASP within the initial investigatory process;</li> <li>• The conferral of an express power to the ASP to instruct the Investigation Team to pursue additional lines of inquiry in response to matter raised by the person implicated or the ASP itself;</li> <li>• The clarification of the powers enjoyed by the ASP under the Framework [5.3 (ii)] for the ASP to declare the process as at an end and the eventualities prompting exercise of this discretion and the matters intended to inform it;</li> <li>• The restriction of safeguarding input to those cases properly classified as raising a safeguarding concern and provision for the person implicated to be given the substance of that advice and ability to make representations upon it;</li> <li>• Provision for a case to be re-opened or reviewed in the light of additional evidence or other matters of significance; and</li> <li>• The recital of the measures to be adopted to aid the return to ministry in the event of the allegation being dismissed and/or assessed as undeserving of further response.</li> </ul>
7	Interim Measures	335	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An interim orders panel (drawn from the same cohort as other decision makers within the regulatory process) should be established;</li> <li>• It should be a matter for the interim panel to determine the interim measures if any, in a given case;</li> </ul>



		<p>336</p> <p>337</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rules should be adopted which confirm that the Interim Measures do not involve any predetermination or finding of fact, but are instead made for the one of the identified regulatory purposes;</li> <li>• Interim Measures orders should be of limited duration and—where imposed—subjected to periodic review;</li> <li>• Consideration should be given to providing a long-stop date beyond which interim measures cannot be continued;</li> <li>• Provision should be made within the Rules for the continuation of interim measures at the time of the final hearing (see below) and/or in relation to the period between a determination of findings of fact and the imposition of any sanction;</li> <li>• Guidance should be issued concerning the manner in which decisions re interim measures should be made, the criteria to be adopted and the alternatives available to interim measures panel;</li> <li>• Training should be given to those discharging the role of membership of an interim measures panel member. This may be achieved by way of induction;</li> <li>• Decisions upon interim measures should —save in the case of extreme urgency or other truly exceptional circumstances— be made at a hearing at which the ASP and the person implicated are represented. Similarly, where Interim Measures have been imposed by reason of exceptional circumstances, it should be the subject of a hearing for review of that decision within 7 days.</li> </ul> <p>The ASPD to enjoy jurisdiction of all interlocutory matters, including the imposition of interim measures.</p>
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			<p>The rules should provide that in the context of an interim measures hearing, there shall be no burden or standard of proof operating on either the ASP or the person implicated. Instead, the hearing is to be detailed as an occasion for the panel to consider the exercise of its own discretion upon the information available.</p>
8	Formulation of Charges	387	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Investigation Team’s function should be reduced to the reporting upon evidence. Any preliminary conclusions based upon such material should be a matter for the ASP;</li> <li>• The decision of referral to a regulatory panel (in this case the Assembly Commission) should be within the exclusive competence of the ASP;</li> <li>• Referral should be made by means of a schedule of charges or notice of allegations;</li> <li>• The Schedule of Charges should be the subject of notice to (and potential response from) the person implicated prior to the referral to the Assembly Commission;</li> <li>• Once the charges have been formulated, they should be referred to the Assembly Commission after necessary case management decisions (i.e. the interlocutory stages) have been undertaken by the ASP;</li> <li>• Any application for amendment of charges ought to be made to the Assembly Commission at or before the final hearing;</li> <li>• Guidance and additional training will be required for those who participate in these processes; and</li> <li>• The final formulation of charges/allegations should be undertaken by an independent person retained to represent the ASP at the final hearing.</li> </ul>

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9	Discontinuance	417	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The expansion of the grounds upon which withdrawal and/or discontinuance might be proposed;</li> <li>• The delegation of such a decision to the presenting officer or ASP and its withdrawal from the Assembly Commission save in limited circumstances;</li> <li>• The ability of the person implicated to make representations concerning the withdrawal of allegations and/or cessation of proceedings;</li> <li>• The Assembly Commission's role to be limited to the final hearing and the withdrawal/amendment of allegations at that time; and</li> <li>• The removal of the requirement to seek safeguarding advice at this stage of the process.</li> </ul>
10	Substantive Hearing	463	<p>The promulgation of Rules to address the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A reference to the presumption of innocence;</li> <li>• The granting of powers for the Assembly Commission to proceed in the absence of the person implicated;</li> <li>• The reception of evidence and its admissibility;</li> <li>• Submissions of no-case to answer;</li> <li>• The power of the Assembly Commission to refer the case for consideration under a different policy and/or commission independent medical or other evidence to assist in their understanding of the issues in the given case;</li> <li>• The recording of the proceedings;</li> <li>• Express disclosure obligations upon the Investigation Team;</li> <li>• Rights of representation for the presenting officer and/or the person implicated;</li> <li>• The provision of legal advice via an assessor and/or</li> </ul>

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			<p>appointment of a legally qualified chair;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The deliberative voting (if any) of the Assembly Commission;</li> <li>• The powers of the Assembly Commission in a case where the allegations are upheld; and</li> <li>• The right of appeal (i.e. all parties and/or person implicated alone).</li> </ul>
11	Procedural Personnel	479  480	<p>Consideration should be given to the promulgation of rules of procedure which separate the functions of the participations by reference to three discrete phases of the regulatory process: (i) notification and investigation; (ii) interlocutory management (including interim measures); and (iii) final determination and beyond.</p> <p>The contraction of the Investigation Team role, the expansion of the ASP management of proceedings and, at the determination stage, the involvement of a presenting officer and either a legally qualified chair of the Tribunal or the appointment of a legal assessor</p>
12	Determination	507	<p>Clarification of a number of matters relative to the terms of the Assembly’s determination. These include issues around immediate orders, the impact of any right of appeal, third party interests, circulation and wider regulatory purposes. The following being deserving of close consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whether the Assembly decision is to take immediate effect in relation to both determination and sanction;</li> <li>• The anonymisation or redaction of any aspect of the determination for the purposes of third-party protection;</li> <li>• The powers (if any) of the Assembly Commission to impose interim measures pending determination of any appeal;</li> <li>• The removal or cessation of previously imposed interim measures;</li> </ul>

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whether the views of any other person are to be sought on the issue of sanction and, if so, who; and</li> <li>• The sharing or publication of the determination to other church personnel having an ongoing regulatory responsibility.</li> </ul>
13	Sanction	532	Detailed sanctions guidance is issued for the benefit of participants and stakeholders. Such guidance would serve the additional purpose of a training aid for those who are required to make decisions.
14	Right of Appeal	559	<p>New Rules of Procedure to make provision for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarifying the grounds of appeal;</li> <li>• Insofar as a prosecutorial right of appeal is to be retained, restricting such right to matters of proportionality as to sanction;</li> <li>• Making provision for the imposition of interim measures pending determination of any appeal; and</li> <li>• Defining the powers of the appeal panel.</li> </ul>
15	Role of Safeguarding	570	A clear distinction should be drawn between those cases which are within the remit of safeguarding and those which are not. Similarly, insofar as the regulatory process is intended to draw upon safeguarding information or evidence, it should be presented and adduced as with any other forms of evidence; with the result that the person implicated is able to have sight of the material, any recommendations and the reasons for them, and afforded an opportunity to respond to them.
16	Consequences of Decision	574	<p>Rules of procedure should expressly provide for operational consequences of the determination, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The sharing of information with third parties and agencies;</li> </ul>

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The issue of statements of restoration where the allegations have not been upheld;</li><li>• Reference to the potential reporting of matters to the DBS; and</li><li>• Ongoing support for those affected.</li></ul>
17	Parallel Proceedings	579	In the interests of transparency, the interrelationship of internal processes with parallel proceedings (and the findings which they generate) should be addressed by revised procedural rules

**Ed Morgan KC**

July 2024

Revised following Consultation on 14 August 2024

# Paper A4

## The future of governance

### Business Committee

#### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	John Bradbury, The General Secretary <a href="mailto:john.bradbury@urc.org.uk">john.bradbury@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Decision.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Resolution 10</b>  <b>1. Assembly Executive welcomes the ongoing exploration of the United Reformed Church Trust company being replaced with a CIO and invites the Business Committee and the United Reformed Church Trust Company to continue further work leading in this direction.</b>  <b>Resolution 11</b>  <b>2. Assembly Executive welcomes the exploration of a re-formed Business Committee, whose members would be members of the General Assembly, becoming the Trustee body of a new CIO and invites the Business Committee and United Reformed Church Company to continue exploring this option.</b>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	A Consultation Paper on the United Reformed Church General Assembly and Governance.
<b>Main points</b>	
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	The Business Committee and URC Trust.

#### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	The potential for a more effective management of our financial risks.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	None. We are thankful for colleagues in the Methodist Church and the Church of Scotland for their time in talking us through the changes they have recently made to trustee arrangements, and what we might learn from their experiences.

## Background and introduction

*“The United Reformed Church declares that the Lord Jesus Christ, the only ruler and head of the Church, has therein appointed a government distinct from civil government and in things spiritual not subordinate thereto, and that civil authorities, being always subject to the rule of God, ought to respect the rights of conscience and of religious belief and to serve God's will of justice and peace for all humankind”.*<sup>1</sup>

At ordinations and inductions of Elders and Ministers, when the statement of *Nature, Faith and Order* of the United Reformed Church is used, this paragraph is the one that is commented upon frequently. It is dear to the hearts of many within the Church and is heard as being distinctive by our ecumenical counterparts. The predecessor traditions of the United Reformed Church find their origins in a Scottish National Church tradition which is markedly different from English Establishment and protects the freedoms of the Kirk from political interference (you will have noted that the first thing the King had to do upon accession is to promise to uphold the Presbyterian governance of the Kirk), and in English non-conformity and independency that sought to protect the life of the Church from interference from the state. A wariness about the freedom and independence of the church to govern its own affairs is intrinsic to who we are.

As we look to Church History, we see that twice in the twentieth century, the Reformed Tradition recognised a ‘*status confessionis*’, that something had the ‘status of confessional’ – ie that certain convictions or actions fell outside of what can legitimately be considered Christian. Firstly, in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s where the state restricted who could be ordained, making someone’s Jewish ‘race’ more significant than their baptism, which the confessing church, and its international allies, could not tolerate. Secondly, in apartheid in South Africa, where again, ‘race’ prevented the full inclusion of people within the Body of Christ, the church. Both state policies that the orthodox Christian church could not tolerate.

We are fortunate to have lived in the history of the URC in a largely tolerant society, where our freedom of religion (protected in Human Rights legislation) is upheld, and inappropriate interference in the practice of our faith not a reality we have to contend with. As we look across the globe, however, we see that there is considerable instability. Partner churches, even in other places in Europe, face political interference. At times, that is affected through mechanisms such as charity law.

At the same time as we fiercely protest our freedom from the state, we also confess that the state has a God given vocation to protect ‘justice and peace’. We frequently campaign for (or against) government legislation and look to government to uphold rights which we believe are rooted in God’s creative action. As a tradition, non-conformity has tended to campaign for workers’ rights, the full inclusion of all in democratic processes and the like. Thus, we also understand the regulation of charities as being intrinsic to the role of government. That charities should carry out the work that money is given for, that they should do so in a fashion that is prudent, and safe, and seeks the common good and offers public benefit, we would uphold. We benefit from the fact that our funds are charitable – the loss of ‘gift aid’ to the United Reformed Church would be a blow. The whole family of the United Reformed Church probably benefits from upwards of £1 Billion pounds of charitable funds if one were to include all denominational, Synod, and local church property and funds. With the rights that we receive through charitable funds come responsibilities. That we accept, and indeed,

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<sup>1</sup> United Reformed Church: *Basis of Union*, Schedule D, *A Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church*. Paragraph 8.



support and uphold. It is vital, being such an interrelated collection of large charities (the United Reformed Church Trust is in the top 1% of charities registered in England and Wales by income. This places us under a high level of scrutiny).

This leaves us holding a complex balance between the life of the Church independent of the state, which is supported by activity carried out with charitable funds which are, rightly, regulated by the state. Part of the way this is achieved is through making a distinction between the Church *per se*, and the charities which hold the funds of the Church and are responsible for the activities carried out with those funds. The United Reformed Church itself is not a charity, its activity is carried out with charitable funds and is charitable. This is not a neat or tidy distinction. It is one we share with some other churches (less the case with the Church of England because of its established position). We very much mirror the Roman Catholic position, where the Church is established by canon law, and is not a charity, and subject only to its own jurisdiction. Its work is funded by charitable funds, and the trustees of those charities (which map onto the authorities within a Diocese or Archdiocese) are responsible for the proper use of those funds and the activity carried out with them. Broadly speaking, for the United Reformed Church we are constituted by the *Basis of Union* and *Structure* of the United Reformed Church. Insofar as the General Assembly carries out these functions, and particular those relating to the content of the faith and order, worship and mission of the life of the church it does so as the Church. The administration of the finances of the church and ensuring activity carried out with those financial resources is in general terms compliant with the legal expectations upon us as carrying out charitable work, is ultimately something which the Trust body is accountable, and liable, for.

We are also a conciliar church – we believe that we discern the will of God better together than we can apart. We believe that the oversight of church life, whilst having a personal dimension, is primarily a conciliar act. We therefore come together as Church Meeting, Elders Meeting, Synod and General Assembly to discern the will of God. Traditionally Synods and the General Assembly are quite large meetings. This can sit in a difficult tension with the expectations of Charity Law. Charity law is in line with our convictions in the sense that trustee bodies are, effectively, councils – no one person has authority, and decisions are taken collectively. The responsibilities and liabilities upon trust bodies lead them to be considerably smaller than we might normally think of as a Council of the Church. This does lead to a tension that we need to continually manage creatively and carefully.

### **The current situation**

The United Reformed Church, not being a charity, is, in legal terms, an unincorporated association. As such, it does not have a 'legal personality' – it cannot itself own property, make contracts with other entities and so on. It can only act through its officers. Hence the United Reformed Church Act specifies that if anyone wishes to bring legal proceedings against the United Reformed Church it must do so through the persons of the Moderator of the General Assembly and the Clerk. The Officers of the Assembly, technically, contract on behalf of the Assembly. As an unincorporated organisation, the Church also technically has unlimited legal liability. With incorporation comes limited liability which can be an important protection. Ideally, we would wish as much protection from unlimited liability as possible, which means as much of our activity as possible being undertaken and controlled by an incorporated entity and done so visibly and obviously. The United Reformed Church Trust is an incorporated charitable company, and its activity receives the protection of limited liability.

It was the Charities Act in 2006 which first required churches to register with the charities commission. This caused some confusion at the time. Initially, the United Reformed Church was expecting that it would register itself as a charity. It was the Charity Commission itself which insisted that we were not a charity, but that our funds were charitable. The Charity Commission whilst wishing to ensure that we act prudently with charitable funds, and that our activities are safe, have no interest in policing our doctrine, worship or the order of church life (in terms of polity or orders of ministry). Indeed, these things are protected by human rights legislation, under which the Church has corporate rights to freedom of worship. We subsequently have come to agree with them on this point and seek to protect the distinction between the Church and the charities which hold its funds and carry out its activities.

In 2007 a Governing Document was adopted which would be the basis upon which the United Reformed Church Trust Company would become the charity trustee of the church's funds and activity. The process of this gaining recognition from the Charity Commission resulted in a clearer understanding all round of the church-charity distinction. The principles of that governing document were subsequently incorporated into the revised Memorandum and Articles of the Trust Company (at the point at which it became charitable, so it could hold the charitable funds of the church and become charity trustee – previously it had only held buildings and land on behalf of the church). Once the Memorandum and Articles were adopted (agreed by the General Assembly, and then adopted by the URCT) the governing document was then rescinded, as no longer relevant.

At the time, it is clear both from living memory, and documents before the General Assembly and Mission Council, that there was concern about the loss of sovereignty of the General Assembly over the life of the Church. This was mirrored in other church bodies at the time. There was, for example, considerable anxiety amongst the Religious Society of Friends (the Quakers) at the adoption of a Trustee body separate from the General Meeting. There is a tension over who has ultimate 'control'. Paper P2 of Mission Council in 2007 sets out well the understanding that has pertained in helpful terms. It is worth quoting in full:

*The role of a Trustee is to ensure that the charity acts in accordance with its purposes and sound principles; preserves the charity's assets and ensures it operates on a financially secure basis; assesses and responds appropriately to risks and opportunities. A Trustee is responsible for discharging various duties and exercises a number of discretions under general trust law and statute. A Charity Trustee is responsible in addition for ensuring compliance with the obligations under the Charities Act 1993. The Trustees also have a role in ensuring that the Church sets and seeks a credible vision. The role of a Trustee is not to formulate policy- that remains with General Assembly. But the 1 Trustees cannot carry into effect anything which is unlawful according to the law of England and Wales.*

*The Trustees have oversight of the administration and management - not the policy making – of the charity. They therefore exercise control over the affairs of the Church on behalf of General Assembly and accordingly make some executive decisions in furtherance of this function. The overall policy of the Church, its work and direction remain with General Assembly and between meetings with Mission Council.*

*Thus, it could be said that the Trustees give assurance to the Church that its affairs are being conducted in a law abiding and efficient manner in accordance with the policies agreed at General Assembly and Mission Council; that the necessary resources required are available: that risks are being managed; and that everything done is in accordance with the law and sound financial practice.*

This is an excellent ambition, and as an overarching vision of how Church-Charity relationships ought to function and is largely still an effective articulation of what we might wish to see. Some years on, the Charity Commission might speak more about the strategy of a charity. Trustees are responsible for ensuring that the charity is guided by appropriate strategic thinking, operationalised through appropriate policies, structures and staffing. This can be complex for ordinary membership charities, where the members have a say over the direction of the charity, but the trustees are responsible and ultimately must have discretion because they carry the liabilities. We might today wish to recognise that the ultimate discernment, under God, of the strategic direction of the Church rests with the General Assembly. Incarnating that, through policies, structures and staffing is perhaps where the Trustee must have a particular interest as those carrying the ultimate liabilities. We cannot expect individuals to, as trustees, carry liabilities when they don't have the authority to adopt, or not, the policies which manage the risks around those liabilities.

The 2007 paper then goes on to outline the relationship between the URC Trust and the General Assembly, but at this point becomes rather vague. It states: 'many of the Trustees will be members of General Assembly and Mission Council. This should ensure that the Trustees have a real understanding of matters that affect the well-being of the Church and are fully conversant with its policies'. It is worth noting that the Directors of the URCT are appointed by the General Assembly (along with ex officio members, such as the General Secretary and Treasurer). The paper also recognises the potential for conflict between the GA and the Trust, and that creative dialogue between the two would be needed to alleviate this risk. No process for that is set out.

Paper P2 also set out a sense of the annual rolling agenda of the URCT which shows it concentrating on finance, property and risk management.

The reality of the current situation is that what was faithfully put in place is now struggling to be adequate. There are a number of reasons for this:

- there is far greater emphasis of compliance, and far higher expectations of the Charity Commission on the compliance work of trustees.
- we believe an error was made at the time the arrangements were set up. The URCT as a charitable company may hold charitable funds. The funds of the General Assembly which it took over have never been registered as a charity in their own right. The URCT accounts for them as its own funds, which is not quite technically correct. This is all explained adequately in the introduction to the annual report, so no one is being misled, but we do need a pathway to a resolution of this issue.
- the Church continued to contract in its own name, in a way it technically cannot. This continues to be the case with regard to employment contracts. The decision to move these to the URC Trust has been taken, but not yet enacted. This is because this would change who the employer is in the eyes of the pensions, and whilst the Ministerial Pension scheme is heading towards buy-in and buy-out this is not

advisable. This paper leads in the direction of setting up a new trust body in the form of a CIO. To resolve this once that new body is in operation would be the most sensible route.

- The URCT is a company, and thus reports to companies' house and is required to abide by company law as well as reporting to the Charity Commission and responsible under Charity Law. Since the arrangements were set up CIOs (Charitable Incorporated Organisations) have become much more standard charitable vehicles, which bring limited liability through incorporation, but do not require adherence to companies' legislation. A CIO may be a simpler vehicle for the church's trust arrangements.
- The agenda of the URCT until very recently has not caught up with the wider compliance responsibilities it holds. For example, it is only since 2020/21 that safeguarding and compliance and been regularly on the agenda despite these being major areas of risk and liability. There are other major areas of risk which the Trust at the moment does not determine directly, or even have a detailed awareness of. That is also something which needs addressing. Guidance is being worked on for General Assembly Committees to ensure that there is effective consultation with the Trust when appropriate as work is being developed.
- There has been confusion over the years as to which areas of risk ought to be on the risk register of the church and which on the risk register of the Trust. The reality is that any risk the church holds, the trust do so as well in trustee terms. There are only charitable funds to meet financial risks, and the Trust is responsible to the Charity Commission for reputational risk management too.
- Whilst the Trust would carry liabilities for the activities of the General Assembly, there has been no agreed process which enables the Trust to scrutinize and contribute to the development of policies and processes that the Assembly might be invited to adopt making it difficult for the Trust to demonstrate it is taking its responsibilities seriously. The Trust as relied on overlap between membership of the GA and the URCT, but this kind of informal arrangement would be difficult to justify in the current compliance climate.
- The General Assembly has long struggled to be enabled to articulate priorities for the life of the Church, making it difficult for the Trust to meaningfully respond to those in the terms of budgeting.

### **A proposed way forward**

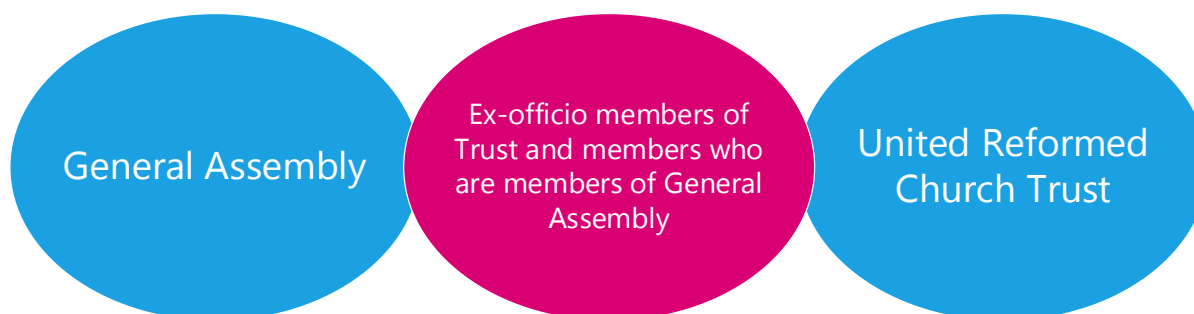
The United Reformed Church Trust believes that the future might be better served by the funds of the General Assembly and associated land and property being held in a CIO. This is also a topic that the Law and Polity Advisory Group has worked on. This would potentially achieve a number of benefits:

1. It would allow the funds of the General Assembly and associated charitable activity to be the charity itself, rather than a fund that the Trust Company holds. This would resolve the issue of the registration of the funds of the General Assembly.

2. It would mean that the CIO was only accountable to the Charity Commission, and no longer would need to report to Companies House, or act as a company.
3. Because the charitable purposes of the CIO would be precisely the funds charity of the General Assembly, it would allow a closer structural relationship between the General Assembly and its associated Charity.
4. It would maintain the benefits of incorporation and limited liability and indeed make it clearer that the activity of the church funded charitably, had the benefit of limited liability. Our present arrangements make it possible to argue that the activities of the General Assembly are the activities of an unincorporated association, making liabilities unlimited.
5. There is a risk – albeit limited, that Trusteeship could at present be determined to rest with the General Assembly because they have the direct control over the activities of the charity. This could potentially leave every member of the Assembly with a personal liability. This is an unlikely and extreme position, but nonetheless one that we should take all possible actions to limit. It would allow us to be clearer about the legal responsibility for the activity carried out with the funds of the charity being the responsibility of the CIO itself, not the General Assembly per se, thus better managing our risks.

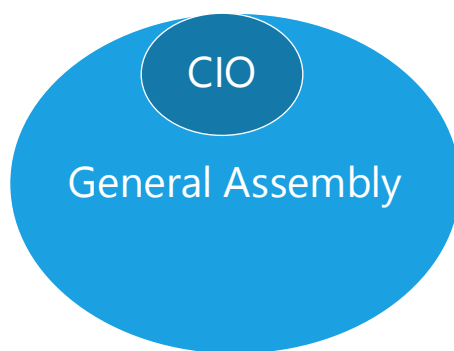
It might be helpful to imagine this pictorially.

The current relationship between the General Assembly and the United Reformed Church Trust might be represented like this:



The General Assembly and its Trust body are separate entities – they are linked by the membership, which spans both entities – but are fundamentally separate.

It would be possible, seemingly, with a CIO for there to be less ‘clear blue water’ between the General Assembly and the Trust body. The CIO trustees could effectively be a subset of the General Assembly (likely constituting its Officers and committee convenors or the like). This could be achieved either through drawing the membership of the CIO trustees from the General Assembly membership, or through making trustees of the CIO members of the Assembly (which may make it more possible to gain the skills and experience necessary in trustees). This model would look something like this:



Whilst there would still be the potential for the trustees to disagree with General Assembly, this is much less reduced, as they are a sub-set of the General Assembly. They would still have the legal obligation, were the Assembly to wish to do something which contravened the Trust or was not compliant in some way, to prevent charitable funds being used for such activities. That is a fundamental reality that whichever way around this is examined remains the case whilst the church is supported by charitable funds. It would much more closely meet the expectations of the Charity Commission that the Trustees are those with general day to day control over the operations of the charity. It would be wise to have determined a conflict resolution mechanism in advance, which could be used should the situation ever arise in which the General Assembly and the CIO Trustees had a difference of opinion over whether and Assembly decision could be enacted with charitable funds.

The suggestion is that the new CIO might be a re-formed version of the Business Committee. The Business Committee has the function of keeping an overview of the entire work of the General Assembly, ensuring it has strategic direction, managing its risk through spotting areas where work needs integrating, or issues need attending to that have fallen through the gaps of the committee structure. These are, in many ways, classic trustee responsibilities. The committee may need to be larger, and its composition altered to ensure it had the necessary gifts and graces, and independence from operational realities, to function effectively. One of the great benefits of the current formation of the Business Committee has been the integration of the Officers of the General Assembly with the General Secretariat, bringing together responsibility for the oversight of the business of the Assembly together with those who operationalise it. Also, key has been the presence of members appointed by the Assembly who fill neither category and bring some external and independent perspective because they are further removed from the day-to-day business. Were this group to become the trust body of a CIO, the COO and Deputy General Secretaries would likely need to be in attendance, not voting members (because of issues around staff exercising trustee responsibility). It would be possible, potentially, for the new Business Committee/CIO to be formed from the Officers of the General Assembly, the Convenors of the General Assembly Committees and additional members appointed by the Assembly to bring a more external view (but who would still, in likelihood, be members of the Assembly). This would more closely integrate the whole work of the Assembly, and more obviously align the authority and the responsibility in terms of liabilities and risk management.

Another ecumenical parallel might be helpful. The Methodist Church recently moved from the rather unwieldy position of the whole of the Conference being the Trustees of the Church, to the Methodist Council taking on this role (which is reduced in size from previously – it now has about 20 members). It has taken on the trustee responsibility for the Methodist Church. This replaces a body more the size of our Assembly Executive, and functions as the Executive of the Conference when it is not meeting. At the same

time, The Church of Scotland has a not dissimilar arrangement, with General Assembly Trustees who undertake the Trustee responsibility on behalf of the General Assembly. If we moved to a Trust body which was a sub-set of the Assembly, and had the responsibilities currently held by the Business Committee and the United Reformed Church Trust, we would be moving in a similar direction to that which ecumenical colleagues have found helpful.

### **A side note about Synods...**

It is worth noting, although not central to the precise concerns of this paper, that it is possible for the General Assembly to adopt a Trust structure of this nature in ways that for many Synods their current arrangements would not so easily allow. Most Synod Trust companies (though not all) carry out two key purposes. Firstly, holding property in Trust for the purposes of local churches, and secondly holding and managing the funds of the Synod. There is a potential conflict of interest in this arrangement because there are moments, when determining matters around the disposal of property and the direction of proceeds of sales, that there could be a conflict between the local church and the Synod. This is normally handled by ensuring there are sufficient Directors of the Trust company (Trustees) who are not members of the Synod structures, to ensure that there is appropriate ability to handle matters for local churches without an impossible conflict of interest arising. This would make it difficult for Synods structured in this way to adopt a CIO to carry out all the functions of the current arrangements. It would be perfectly possible to adopt a CIO, whose trustees might mirror, for example, the Executive of the Synod, to hold and manage the funds of the Synod. That would require a separate Trust company to hold local church property (some Synods effectively have an arrangement rather like this, although at the moment CIOs are not used as the charitable vehicle to hold Synod funds – although there may be benefits to that). The General Assembly, not having competing functions for the Trust company that bring inherent possibilities of conflicts of interest, is freer to adopt a structure such as that proposed here.

# Paper A5

## The future of the General Assembly and the Assembly Executive

### Business Committee

#### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	John Bradbury, The General Secretary <a href="mailto:john.bradbury@urc.org.uk">john.bradbury@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Discussion and decision.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Resolution 12</b> <b>1. Assembly Executive agrees that General Assembly 2025 should be invited to consider the size and pattern of meetings of the General Assembly.</b> <b>Resolution 13</b> <b>2. Assembly Executive invites the Business Committee to bring more detailed proposals to the General Assembly for consideration based on the following options: ... [to be developed from the context of our conversations within Assembly Executive].</b>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	A Consultation Paper on the future of the General Assembly and the Assembly Executive.
<b>Main points</b>	
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	This is to initiate a consultation process, rather than being the product of one.

#### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	None.



## Background

*It may help to read this paper in conjunction with Paper A4 on the future of governance, and to some extent the issues are related.*

In 2018 what had been Mission Council became the Assembly Executive, essentially filling a very similar function, but becoming a sub-set of the General Assembly and making its ability to act directly on behalf of the General Assembly clearer. Assembly moved from being once every two years to once every year, and the Assembly Executive meets once in person in between meetings of the Assembly, and once online in November to adopt the budget.

At the same time as we are needing to consider these questions of Governance and how we exercise charitable trusteeship (please see paper A4), the Business Committee believe it is also the right time to consider our structures in terms of the size and frequency of meeting of the General Assembly and the Assembly Executive. This is for a number of reasons:

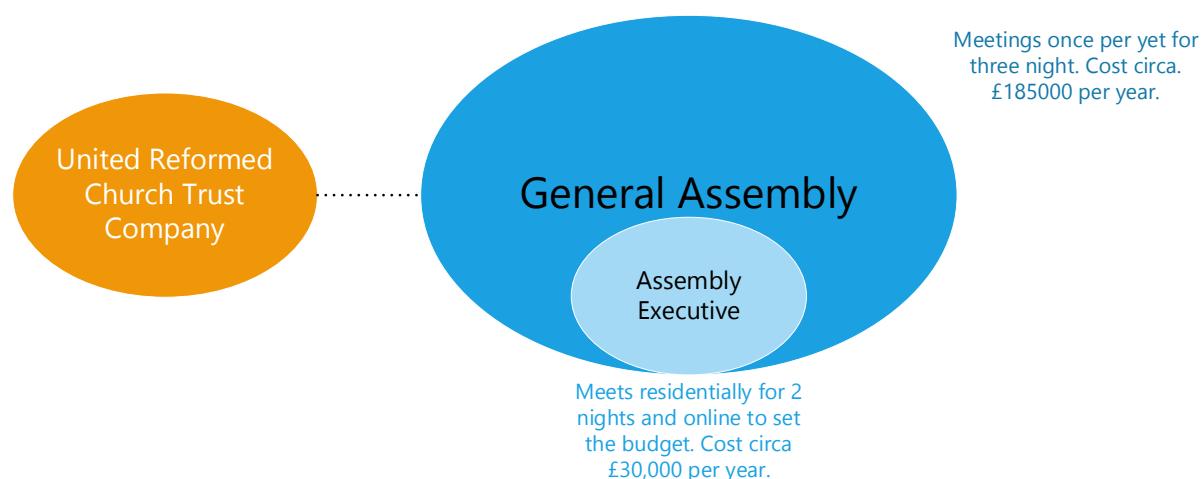
1. This was last considered by the General Assembly in 2018, and changes came into effect in 2020. We have now lived with those changes for some time.
2. The United Reformed Church continues to decline numerically. There is a danger that the General Assembly becomes disproportionately large for the size of church we actually are.
3. There is serious pressure on the budget of the General Assembly. Hospitality inflation has been running at very high levels in recent years, and the costs of Assembly and Assembly Executive have risen considerably. We expect to spend around £185,000 on General Assembly each year, and £30,000 on Assembly Executive. We expect these costs to continue to rise at a moment we need to make roughly 25% savings on the budget over a five-seven year period. The more we spend on meetings of the General Assembly, the less there is to spend on the work of the General Assembly (and to be realistic, the fewer potential redundancies we may be forced to make).
4. We have failed in our ambition to enable Assembly to work more creatively, particularly through meeting around tables. This is because our size precludes most venues that we could afford that would allow this.
5. It is noticed that General Assembly works best when its thinking about big picture questions of discernment. It provides a less effective space for the detailed scrutiny of policy and procedure.
6. We note that a number of Synods rarely fill all the spaces for members of the Assembly that are allocated to them.
7. It is very difficult in our current arrangements to handle conflicts of interest within the General Assembly itself. We were able to adopt a policy for the working of its committees, but not the Assembly itself. This needs resolution in some way.
8. We increasingly find the Hayes a difficult venue to work with in terms of administration prior to meetings.

9. The anticipated reduction in staff time necessary to service the General Assembly by moving to a single venue has been less than anticipated. A significant part of a full-time role was lost in anticipation of this, with the administration of the Assembly moving to the PA of the General Secretary. Such a significant proportion of the administration relates not so much to the venue, as to the members of the Assembly, that this has proved unrealistic. Additional administrative support has been necessary, whilst still leaving the General Secretary's PA role stretched. The true costs of Assembly, including staff time, are therefore considerably higher than reflected in the figures above.
10. There is a tension between the General Assembly discerning the overall strategic direction of the Assembly and its life, and the Assembly Executive adopting the budget (which is, in reality, the budget of the URC Trust as things stand). The discernment of vision, and the determination of the resources available to undertake our work are currently somewhat separated from one another.

It is also important that we do not lose sight of the reasons for the current arrangements and why we moved away from General Assembly every two years. That was because there was a tendency, whatever the technical position, to view Mission Council decisions to be of lesser authority to those of the General Assembly, even when it was acting entirely within its delegated authority. Whatever arrangement is found, needs to ensure that the authority of the decisions taken in the name of the General Assembly are always clear and unambiguous.

## Options for the future of the General Assembly

This diagram roughly represents the current arrangements of the General Assembly.



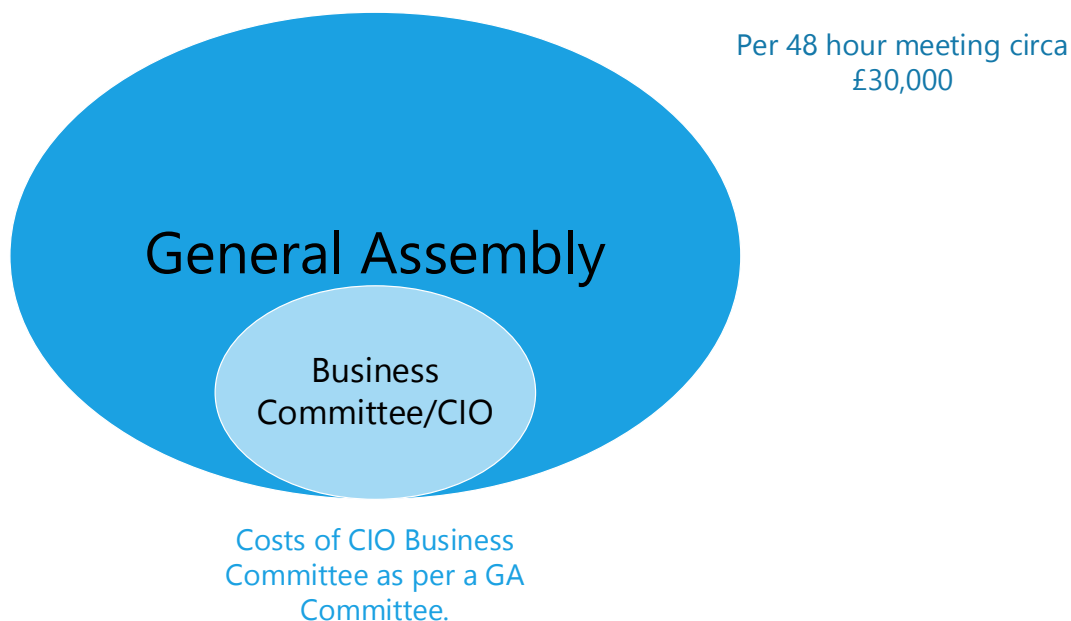
The relevant merits of this option are known, and the issues explored above. This diagram is primarily for comparison with those that follow.

## Option A

It would be possible for us to determine that a much smaller body serving as General Assembly might provide better scrutiny of detailed matters and be considerably more cost effective. It would allow for much closer integration of the Trustee responsibilities of a potential new CIO with the General Assembly and give a consistent place the authority

of the Assembly was always enacted from (rather than the slightly equivocal sense of the Assembly Executive).

This might be represented in this way:



Within option A there might be variations. Presuming that the size of the General Assembly was that roughly of the current Assembly Executive the pattern of meeting could be various:

1. One three-night meeting per year (estimated cost £45,000).
2. Two 48-hour meetings per year (estimated cost £60,000)
3. One 48-hour meeting per year (estimated cost £30,000) plus an online meeting(s).

Within the rough current size of the General Assembly, it would be possible to reconfigure the membership somewhat. For example, the proposed reduction of committees of the General Assembly would reduce the number of Committee Convenors. There is also a desire from the COO and Deputy General Secretaries to be in attendance, rather than full voting members (because of issues around perceived conflicts of interest). This might enable us to increase the number of under 26 representatives, and/or allow for representatives to be appointed in addition to Synod representatives to ensure diversity of representation. It would also envisage a significant reduction of international and ecumenical representatives to the General Assembly (and international representation has become more complex in the light of our net zero carbon ambitions).

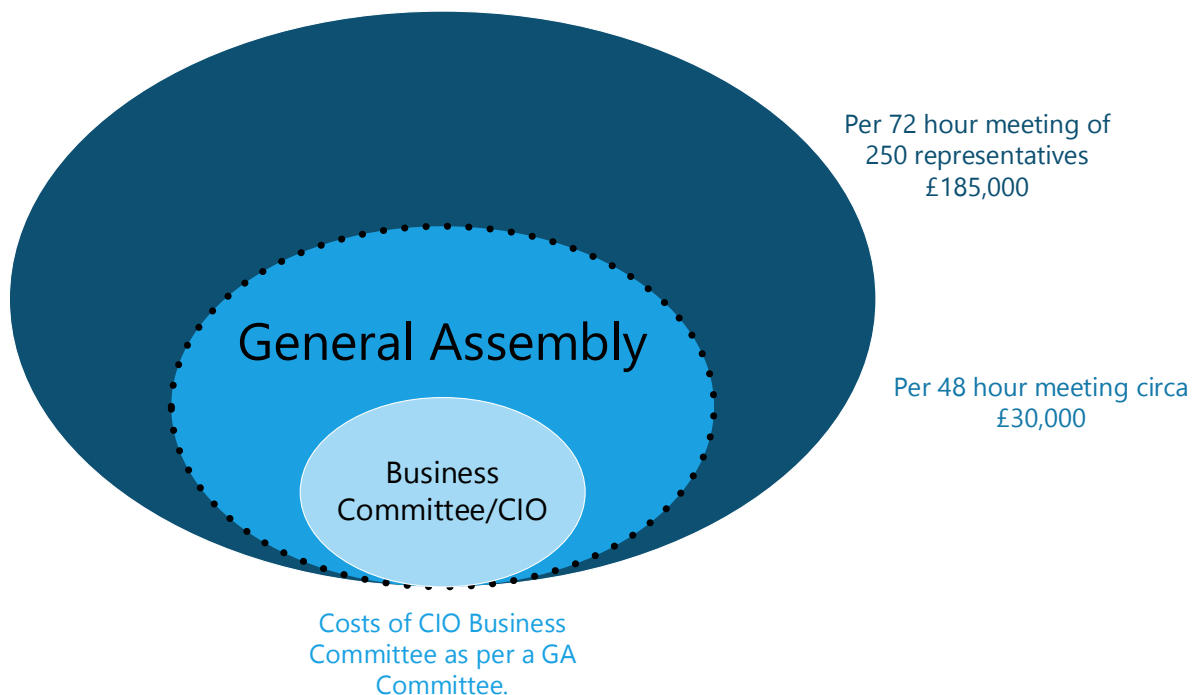
## Option B

It would be possible instead of reducing the size of the gathering that we think of as General Assembly, for it to meet considerably less frequently. This might have certain advantages. Whilst the precise frequency can be debated, if we determined, for the sake of an example, that it met every five years its function could become much more expressly the discernment, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the strategic direction and priorities of the Church for a five-year period. The revision of our committee

structures is in part premised on the reality that the only area where we have real and ongoing ability to determine the priorities of the work of the General Assembly itself (rather than the resource mechanics of running a large charitable organisation, or the provision of ministry for its exercise within local churches and Synods) is in what is envisaged as being the Mission and Discipleship department (please see paper A2). Whilst the Church is called to be the fullness of the body of Christ at all times, it cannot make everything a priority at all times. This would allow us to determine what our key priorities were for a five-year period, thus giving a clear strategic lead for the work to be done within that period.

We might express this as once every five years having an enlarged, extraordinary General Assembly. In the intervening years, the Assembly being roughly the size of the current Assembly Executive (in essence as above). It would be important, for the sake of good governance, that they were the same constitutional entity with the same powers, but once every five years was enlarged, and its agenda primarily concerned with big-picture discernment about the future direction and strategic priorities of the United Reformed Church.

This might be represented in the following way:



This would obviously incur significant extra cost every five years for a much larger gathering but would allow a moment of a larger scale gathering to celebrate our common life together as a church and discern together our key priorities for the coming period of time. It would also give a much clearer structure within which to enable the determination of priorities which would drive the life of the Assembly and allow the ongoing meetings of the Assembly and the CIO Trustees to ensure that resources are being used in the delivery of the determined priorities.

These options are not meant to be exhaustive but are meant to stimulate discussion and conversation within the meeting of the Assembly Executive. The resolutions attached to this report are meant to authorise and steer further work, not effect and adopt change immediately. It is important to note that any changes would be to the *Structure* and therefore require to be considered by Synods before they could take effect. Even if we

took a decision as quickly as General Assembly July 2025, it would not be possible to fully adopt the resolution until July 2026 and so no change would be possible until July 2027.

# Paper AD1

## Resource Centres for Learning

### Business Committee and Education and Learning Committee

#### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	John Bradbury (General Secretary) <b>john.bradbury@urc.org.uk</b> Mark Robinson (Business Committee Convenor) <b>mark.robinson@urc.org.uk</b> Pippa Hodgson (Education and Learning Committee Convenor) <b>pippa.hodgson147@gmail.com</b>
<b>Action required</b>	Discussion – resolutions may emerge from discussion but could only be to steer further work, as to effect specific changes would require consultation with those affected before any change was possible.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None.</b>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	The background to the Resource Centres for Learning (RCL) funding conversations and the issues around future funding.
<b>Main points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We have three RCLs offering learning to the URC.</li><li>• There is a requirement to reduce the Education and Learning (E&amp;L) budget and conversations have been ongoing for a number of years.</li><li>• The current funding model is not sustainable for the URC but also not sufficient to sustain the two English RCLs.</li><li>• It has not been possible to develop a suitable funding model because it has become clear that the issues around RCL funding involve governance, capital funding and denominational requirements too, which go beyond the remit of E&amp;L.</li></ul>
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Education and Learning Report General Assembly 2022 and 2024.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Education and Learning Committee Business Committee URC Treasurer

	Children and Youth and Ministries Committees and the Moderators Northern College, The Scottish College, Westminster College.
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## Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	If no change, continued pressure on URC budget.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	Future changes could affect ecumenical partnerships.

## 1. Introduction

We are in changing and challenging times as a mainstream Christian denomination in England, Scotland and Wales. As our numbers decline and people's attendance and engagement with church is changing, so too has the context in which we require our RCLs to train people for ministry, lay and ordained/commissioned, who are adaptive and reactive to God's Holy Spirit. In turn, it is the URC's responsibility to support those who train in all areas of their discipleship journeys as they grow and serve. Whilst the task of equipping disciples lies more locally, and through Synods, the RCLs have been, and continue to be, a rich resource in providing learning for the URC.

Numbers of those entering training for ordained/commissioned ministry (EM1) are far fewer than the number required for our 2006 RCL model of training. This is true across the denominations, and, like our ecumenical partners, we shall need to consider what is sustainable and, whether we diversify to other ways of training that are shorter and more flexible.

Of course, our RCLs do more than train EM1 students. We have already begun to outsource programmes, events and other training to our RCLs, for example our Assembly Accredited Lay Preaching course and Pastoral Supervisors training and we are looking to extend this to other E&L work such as Stepwise and oversight of the Learning Hub. In turn, where necessary, the RCLs have also needed to seek external sources of income beyond the URC to remain sustainable. The block grant we give annually is not only for the training of our students but is required to sustain the RCLs as well.

But we are simply spending more than we can afford.

The Education and Learning Committee (E&L) has been grappling with the issue of funding RCLs for about 6 years but funding is only part of the issue. It is not as simple as cutting our coat according to our cloth and putting all training whether lay, ordained/commissioned in one place. In 2022 the E&L report to General Assembly (GA) identified four areas for consideration regarding RCLs: funding, governance, requirements, and capital funding (see section 3.3). The interrelationships of the four areas above, and others, are complex and historical and are greater than E&L.

This paper outlines the journey that E&L has undertaken since 2020 regarding funding and explains where we now find ourselves, that is that the issue is not solely an E&L responsibility. E&L will need to work with others including Ministries

and Resources on denominational expectations. This paper seeks to summarise the current position to enable Assembly Executive to discuss the next stages. We believe God is still calling, equipping and inspiring people to serve his Church and we need to ensure that we continue to have educational spaces that enable growth and development, using resources already available to us to meet the learning needs of the URC.

## 2. Educational context

2.1. The United Reformed Church requires robust, sound theological education in the Reformed tradition to train and continually develop our ministers and lay leaders. We are a diverse denomination held together by the ethos and history of the United Reformed Church. As such, we need to ensure we can cater to a wide range of educational needs across a range of ministries, both lay and ordained.

### 2.2. History

From hundreds of academies during the 18th and 19th centuries, the availability of dissenting education is now restricted to a handful of institutions, including Northern College and Westminster College in England. From the beginning, following the 1662 Act of Uniformity (*full title: An Act for the Uniformity of Public Prayers and Administration of Sacraments, and other Rites and Ceremonies, and for establishing the Form of making, ordaining and consecrating Bishops, Priests and Deacons in the Church of England*), the academies provided an alternative education for both lay and ordained to a high academic standard. The ability of the URC to provide ordained and lay people who can pastor and preach to our congregations depends upon any training provided maintaining high standards and sitting within the Reformed tradition.

The picture in Scotland is different. The established church is Reformed and the universities continue to offer a broader range of opportunities in theological education.

Each of our colleges sits within this tradition but occupies its own space with a distinctive ethos and catering to the needs of different students. Any closure of colleges would, of necessity, make it much harder to provide training of a high academic standard to all those with diverse needs, who would wish to offer themselves for training.

It is the view of Education and Learning that should we lose any of our RCLs, our ability to raise theologians in our own tradition and in an environment of peer scrutiny, with assured quality is at significant risk.

### 2.3. Current state of theological education

Alongside ministerial formation, each of our English colleges provides ordinands with a comprehensive, inclusive, education to a high academic standard each validated through the University of Durham. Few English universities continue to offer the breadth of theological curriculum that the URC requires for its ministers. The University of Durham works with 18 Theological Education Institutions to provide Common Awards (Theology, Ministry and Mission). Within this scheme all our English ordinands are educated for ministry.



Whilst the Common Awards serve us well, the situation is not without risk. Should the Church of England withdraw from the arrangement, then the question arises as to the sustainability of the Current Awards scheme for Durham University and the consequent challenge of accrediting URC theological education. Equally, should the University of Durham withdraw from the arrangement, there are questions over the availability and quality of alternative validation. Reducing the number of URC affiliated colleges increases the risk even further.

The Scottish College achieves its high standard through academic study in Scottish universities alongside URC provided ministerial formation.

### 3. **RCL funding: the challenge and the complexity**

Historically, and in the E&L budget, the URCs central financial support to RCLs is linked to Education for Ministry 1 (EM1). Increasingly we require so much more from our RCLs who are now, and even more likely in the future, involved in the ongoing education, learning and development of ordained and lay ministries and lifelong learning for those in our denomination.

For the last six years Education and Learning have been trying to find a way to continue to offer the quality of education the URC requires. We have sought to keep dissenting theological education alive whilst understanding the changed financial climate and the pressure on budgets. Over the last twenty years the number of EM1 students has reduced but other formal and informal learning has been, and is being, developed. Each College provides a distinctiveness that suits the diverse needs of our learners and allows us to offer an inclusivity into the education we can access.

The rest of this section of the paper summarises the E&L journey.

#### 3.1 **E&L funding of RCLs**

The expenditure in the E&L budget remains the most significant cost to the URC after paying stipends. The E&L budget is from M&M funding and the interest from investments. Reducing expenditure in this area has been a focus for over six years.

The historical nature of how the URC funds the RCLs was summarised in the E&L GA 2022 report:

*E2 4.6.2 The way the RCLs are funded are different in all three cases. Northern College is given a block grant, Westminster College has some key roles funded and Scottish College has a mixture of the two. Not only does this inconsistency make it difficult to ensure fairness it also impairs budgetary control.*

The inconsistency mentioned was being addressed pre pandemic and continued afterwards with all Colleges now receiving a block grant. The remaining inconsistencies (see Appendix two) were further addressed for 2024/25 by agreeing an uplift for the grant to Northern College to align their funding with Westminster's as they have comparable numbers of EM1 students. However, as the pressure all URC budgets remains and, in order not to 'reduce' the RCL block grants whilst this process works through, the 5% 'cut' has been maintained for the year using money from investment (New College Fund). For many years, the

interest from this fund has contributed to the E&L budget. Inevitably by spending some of the capital the income received from the fund is reduced.

### 3.2 **Work in 2020**

Prior to the 2022 report, and mentioned within it, was the work in 2020 by a group involving E&L, the then incoming General Secretary, the three RCL Principals and one representative from each RCL Governing body. This group developed a document entitled '*Towards the future of the RCLs and Education and Learning Serving the United Reformed Church*'. The document did not progress beyond a draft (version 2.2) but captured a significant amount of work by the group. The paper clearly outlined the E&L journey from the 2005 General Assembly resolution '*a church committed to the life-long learning where there is integrated education and training offered to the whole people of God*'. The work developed a number of 'living' assumptions which have informed joint work since (Appendix one). It also proposed a model of 'One College on Two Sites' as a potential solution to reducing costs. This proposal sought to maintain the uniqueness which each institution offers to the URC both for EM1 but, as importantly, their offer into the wider education and learning within the URC. It also proposed a move of functions from Church House based committees to the 'new' combined English RCL. The paper and proposal were not supported by all three governing bodies, Westminster College felt unable to proceed, and so the proposal did not progress.

### 3.3 **Work in 2021 and 2022**

Following the halt of the 2020 proposal the RCLs, in discussions with E&L, were encouraged to become 'semi-independent' by looking for new avenues of income and broadening their 'offer'. With reducing M&M contributions it was evident that the URC could not continue to be the main income source for the RCLs.

### 3.4 **RCL funding model 2023 and 2024**

In 2023 a process was initiated to try and develop a new funding model to reduce expenditure. This model looked to establish a fixed grant and a variable grant system for the RCLs to cover all areas of activity for the URC. It became clear during this process that the block grant does not cover all costs of EM1 education and that some other courses were undercharged. In addition to the block grant the E&L budget pays for direct student costs such as accommodation and travel (see Appendix three).

The RCLs submitted detailed figures for the fixed and variable costs for training EM1 ministers across the different methods of delivery (eg full time, part time etc) and more widely for other RCL activity. This process relied heavily on the collaboration of, and partnership working between, E&L and the Treasurer and colleagues at the RCLs.

The work and proposed process was shared widely across URC Committees in January 2024 in a paper from E&L entitled '*Education and Learning Funding for the Resource Centres for Learning. Document for Discussion, January 2024*'. An extract of the proposal can be found at Appendix two. This paper detached the funding of 'buildings' from the costs of 'education provision' to try and find a comparison across the two English Colleges that could also be applied to The Scottish College which works in a different funding context for higher education. It hoped to be able to identify a 'per capita' cost (ie the cost for each course and

per student across ministerial and lay learning) and then some fixed costs associated with providing the learning.

3.5 The funding model process gave E&L a great insight into the costs associated with EM1 education most particularly, with considerable time and effort invested by the RCLs. After a difficulty in March 2023 the process was delayed for a while, following concerns raised by Westminster College Governors, the final figures were compiled. Even with the 'buildings' capital element removed, the figures were not comparable particularly relating to *'Infrastructure, building, running costs and management costs to deliver RCL focused activity (3.3)'* (ref Appendix three). It was agreed the process was not going to be helpful and a new way must be found to progress the funding issues. The exercise had been costly in terms of time and relationships.

3.6 During this modelling the potential for the New College Fund (Ministerial Training Fund) to be used to support the RCLs through any transition to being funding on a 'per capita' basis became part of the conversation with enquires being made during early 2023 about the restricted nature of the fund and if it could be used as seed funding. During the summer, a response was received, via the General Secretary and with the Finance team, that the Charity Commission Scheme governing the fund had been located, and it would appear to be within the restrictions of the fund to offer capital injection into the colleges, to act as seed funding. E&L were given permission to share this news and the fund total with the Governing Bodies of the RCLs. The New College Fund is designated for ministerial education. Whilst good governance is vital, we believe we must also invest in our denominational education (both lay and ordained) to support our future hopes.

### 3.7 **Business Committee May 2024**

Further work to find a way through the RCL Funding dilemma led to a paper to the Business Committee in May 2024 with a 'to be developed model'. The intent to use the fund as 'seed funding' was part of the E&L discussion paper with the Business Committee. There was no intention to use the entire fund, more to offer the RCLs some funding to enable them to get to a place where funding on a 'per capita' basis was possible. E&L hoped that this might enable all three RCLs to become more independent in order that the URC could continue to access the diversity of the education provided. It had been proposed that any transfer of monies from the fund, if approved, would be carefully monitored against agreed detailed proposals and 'outcomes' and be given in tranches over a number of years. As part of the discussions the Business Committee asked that E&L Committee address the four questions below to facilitate Assembly Executive addressing these questions:

1. Do we carry on as we are, knowing it is financially unsustainable?
2. Do we still need 3 RCLs or would we be better served with one RCL?
3. Should we outsource all training and just pay for the cost of EM1 training at one provider?
4. Do we go for the 'flourishing' option with seed funding?

- 3.8 The model proposed in May 2024 was that having enabled the RCLs to become sustainable with seed funding, a new RCL funding model would be realised that is properly costed. This model would hinge on the URC paying a realistic price for the education and learning that the denomination needs (eg full costs for EM1 students, AALP etc). RCLs would be given information about our training needs far enough in advance (minimum 18 months) in order to give stability. From this point on the E&L Budget would purchase on a 'per course/per student' (per capita) basis across the range of education and learning the URC requires. This has been an iterative process with E&L developing their understanding at the same time as the RCLs were grappling with a 'vague', if hopeful, brief.
- 3.9 **A move from Church House to the RCLs September 2024**  
Concurrently, following the resignation of Revd David Salsbury, one of the 2020 visions was realised to move 'learning provision' out of Church House to the RCLs. This was approved by the E&L Committee in September 2024. This will effectively 'convert' what was spent on salaries previously to ongoing expenditure to provide capacity within the RCLs to deliver and manage the lay provision. This is an ongoing cost and relates to lay discipleship development eg Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, Stepwise and other programmes.
- 3.10 **RCL responses to the Business Committee**  
As the RCLs developed their 'flourishing' models (June 2024 onwards), they also responded to the four questions put by the Business Committee. Complete RCL responses are available and they are summarised below.
- 3.10.1 **Northern College (NoCo) responded to each:**
1. Any cuts in funding would make their offer unsustainable (NoCo subsidise EM1 already by approximately £250,000 in 2024/5).
  2. The use of three RCLs is the best way to achieve lay and ordained training (initial and on-going).
    - a) No Co liked the one RCL on two sites option.
    - b) They are committed to working collaboratively with the other two RCLs.
  3. They offer a mix of lay/ordained, MWS/CRCW. This enriches training. This option risks an academic rather than confessional theology.
  4. They already have a 'flourishing plan'. They would like to see half the NCF used for seed funding for the three RCLs. The interest from the remaining half to fund denominational capacity in the RCLs.

## 3.10.2 Scottish College (ScoCo) responded to each:

1. The current funding model is sustainable for ScoCo. The past six years has consumed too much energy and inhibited planning.
2. Three RCLs is the best option. They are supportive of a single English RCL on two sites. They are committed to close collaboration between RCLs.
3. The URC needs 'in house' expertise. This is definitely a 'no'.
4. For ScoCo 'flourishing' can only be within the URC.

We do not believe that the United Reformed Church can thrive without 'in-house' expertise and provision in all areas of learning. While we delight in our ecumenical partnerships, our learning networks – RCLs, TDO+, E&L (in transition), Ministries, and Children and Youth – are vital places where we site our conversations and contextualisation. They are, we maintain, an indispensable part of the 'glue' that holds us together.

John McNeil Scott,  
Scottish College

## 3.10.3 Westminster College (WM) responded to each:

1. The funding model needs to change. Is theological education a priority for the URC? Having determined its priorities the URC must resource what it wants.
2.
  - a) Diversity is good. Because Scottish College context is different, at least two RCLs are needed.
  - b) Three RCLs are best. One RCL may be weaker than two. Mergers elsewhere, especially in North America, have often not been successful.
3. This model means losing the URC flavour of training, loss of expertise. The URC would lose curriculum input. There could be difficulties in having a URC input/tutor in provider institutions. Would mean loss of all non-EM1 training.
4. WM already uses its 'considerable asset base' to maximise available funds.

## 3.11 Education and Learning Committee November 2024

The E&L Committee received the 'Flourishing' papers which were presented and discussed. Complete papers are available, but in summary, to become more sustainable using seed funding:

- Westminster have shared the big picture and their strategic direction.
- Northern College have shared specific initiatives with specific costs as an offer to the denomination.
- Scottish College have shared that they do not have the same opportunities for 'semi-independence' and therefore require any seed funding to be a replacement of the block grant in interest.

The RCLs were not asked for detailed business cases at this point, more for their aspirations. Both the Westminster and Scottish Colleges papers proposed that they would wish for the seed funding to cover 50% (WM) or all (ScotCo) their 'current block grant' using the annual interest from that investment. The Northern College described seed funding for specific initiatives over five years to enable these initiatives to be self-sustaining.

It became clear during the E&L Committee meeting that the proposals and recommendations before the Committee were so linked with issues beyond its scope, that any decisions needed to be made elsewhere by a group wider than E&L alone. The Committee was content that all papers would be shared with the Business Committee for advice on how to proceed.

'Flourishing' has become an unhelpful term. In the context of this paper being written it means that the RCLs get themselves, with help from seed funding, in a position where the URC can be a valued friend and a major customer. That to do this they seek work elsewhere. For the two English colleges they now do have income beyond the URC, there is less opportunity for the Scottish College to do this. However, as all three colleges are expanding ecumenically this 'offer' might be seen as a gift of grace and an ecumenical gift in that its benefit will extend beyond the URC.

### **Current position regarding the 2022 key areas (see section 1)**

These remain, with activity across different departments:

- 3.12 Funding – with E&L with the work as described above.
- 3.13 There are different governance challenges in relationship, particularly, to Northern College and Westminster College. This is as a result of the culture of a previous era perhaps requiring less precision in terms of governance than our current context. They are all perfectly addressable, and there is good will in all directions to do so. The General Secretary has been in conversations with both Northern and Westminster Colleges about these issues. It is also the case that there is a certain amount of popular 'mythology' about the colleges and their governance arrangements which upon closer examination turns out not to be quite so simple.
  - 3.13.1 Northern College is an independent foundation whose charitable purposes are to provide Education and Learning for ministerial candidates, ministers and lay people from the United Reformed Church and the Congregational Federation. It may also provide theological education for students of other traditions as the governors see fit. The General Assembly of the United Reformed Church appoints five members of the Governing body who are the Trustees of the Charity (which is unincorporated). Northern College is in the process of a union with the Northern Baptist College and the Luther King House Educational Trust to form one college, with one governing body and one staff team in the non-conformist dissenting tradition. The adoption of a new Memorandum and Articles for the new college will require the continued appointment of United Reformed Church governors and trustees by the General Assembly. The charitable objectives will need to reflect education and learning for the United Reformed Church. The intention is that the new college will be set up as an incorporated charitable entity to attain the protection that incorporation offers.

- 3.13.2 The building occupied by the Northern College and its partner colleges, Luther King House, is owned in different proportions by various entities. The United Reformed Church Trust owns 16 % of the building (as Northern College itself owns a further 16%). Whilst the proportions of ownership are recorded, there has never been an agreement about the implications of this for the upkeep of the building or the implications that any capital investment in the building would have. It is intended to rectify this in the governance arrangements set up as the new college comes into being. The United Reformed Church Trust notes that it owns a stake in a building which has been maintained and had elements of capital improvement over decades to which it has not contributed, and recognises its moral responsibility to do so. It cannot commit to this in any form until proper governance arrangements are in place to protect any investment the Trust might make.
- 3.13.3 Westminster College has popularly been considered to be 'owned' by the United Reformed Church. The freehold of the building is held by the United Reformed Church Trust. It is, however, held for the charitable purposes of the college rather than simply owned outright as an asset. The freehold is also held with a significant covenant on the ground put in place by St John's College at the point the land was conveyed for the building of the college. The full implications of this are not entirely clear but are significant. The college itself is an older charitable entity whose objects are 'to educate and train young men [sic] for the Christian ministry'. It is not easy to trace with precision the trajectory of trusteeship, and the relationship between the trusteeship of the college as a discrete charitable entity, and the Presbyterian Church of England and then the United Reformed Church. There is a tension in the current situation which needs resolution. The members of the Board of Governors who are members of the United Reformed Church are the charitable trustees of the college, and carry the responsibilities and liabilities that follow and are accountable to the Charity Commission for their actions. As such, and under charity law, they must have control over the day to day life of the college, be able to determine its strategy and manage its risks. However, one of the functions of the General Assembly is to superintend the work of the Church's Colleges. Put simply, if the governing body carry the can, they must have the authority to take the decisions. For decades there has been a lack of clarity over the precise relationship and responsibilities between the college and the church, despite numerous attempts to bring greater clarity. There is now work ongoing which would, with the agreement of the General Assembly, amend the *Structure* of the United Reformed Church to make it clear the General Assembly appoints Governors/Trustees of the college, but that the full trustee responsibilities lie with the Governing body who must have the freedom and authority to exercise them in line with the liabilities they carry. The college is also exploring the possibility of becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, with an updated governing document, updating appropriately the charitable objectives. This process will hopefully bring greater clarity and limit the liabilities of the trustees and regularise the ability of the College to contract as a legal entity in its own right.
- 3.13.4 There is a lack of clarity around all three colleges, around many matters which have simply been handled on a 'custom and practice' basis. This not only includes full clarity around some funding issues, but also around the provision of services to the colleges by the church, be that obtaining visas and recognition through Certificates of Eligibility or Limited Service to ministers serving in the colleges, or the provision of support in running the finances of the college (in the

case of Westminster). There needs to be a clear memorandum of understanding or similar between the General Assembly, the United Reformed Church Trust, and the colleges to ensure that there is transparency over arrangements. Clarity and transparency over expectations everyone has around institutional relationship helps build and develop the trust necessary for close co-operative working.

### 3.14 **Denominational expectation from RCLs**

The GA E&L report from 2024, Paper D1, summarised the activity and close working between E&L, the RCLs and Ministries team regarding denominational requirements of the RCLs (see extract below). There is always more to do in this area but by working collaboratively much has been achieved.

*Paper D1 pages 122 and 132 onwards for detail.  
URC Requirements of EM1; a revised EM2 programme; changes to EM3 grant allowance process; closer working relationships with the Resource Centres for Learning including continuing conversations around funding, capital costs, governance, as well as establishing the College Connective (a space for the Principals working more closely with E and L and other teams); the refining of the AALP programme with Northern College and the You're Welcome course, alongside Ministries; more joined up conversations between the TDO+ Network and the RCLs; the Newbigin Hub for lay Pioneer training; the introduction of an E and L bi-monthly newsletter; one revised and one new Stepwise stream; more resources on the URC Learning Hub; and moves in progress to fulfil the 2006 commitment to the RCLs so that they are the places where education, learning and training opportunities are coordinated from (rather than via the Church House team).*

### 3.15 **Capital funding**

The upkeep/investment in the buildings of Westminster and Northern Colleges has been removed by E&L from the E&L discussions. Whilst Westminster College is held in Trust by the URC the denomination owns 16% of Luther King House. The URC investment in Westminster College is well known. There has not been a request from Luther King House for capital investment until recently, but it is acknowledged their facilities need improving. There is not an additional source of funding for 'buildings' and so any monies offered will need to come from the New College Fund. Currently the fund is approximately £14m.

## 4 **Business Committee December 2024**

4.1 E&L shared a paper with the Business Committee in December 2024 which outlined the work to date and the concerns. The Business Committee supported the proposal that the four areas of work be joined up and that a working group be established to include:

- The Resources Committee
- The General Secretariat
- Education and Learning
- Ministries.

It is proposed that this group would make a presentation to Assembly Executive in February 2025 with an opportunity for questions, discussion and guidance.



## Appendix one

*Extract from:*

### **Towards the future of the RCLs and Education and Learning Serving the United Reformed Church 2020.**

#### **Section 3.1 Working assumptions**

The Working Group has framed some working assumptions that underpin discussions and proposals as follows:

1. We remain committed to a Church alive in three nations.
2. We will retain a core competence of training in URC ethos, practice and theology.
3. We aim to enhance the resilience of our education and learning provision to enable increases in demand to be addressed efficiently and effectively.
4. We will continue to implement the 2006 GA goal of 'integrated provision of life long education and learning for the whole people of God'.
5. Where possible and practical, ministers and lay will be trained together.
6. Our focus is on the development of disciples in the URC, but we will not restrict access to people from other denominations, subject to financial considerations.
7. Our primary focus is 'front office delivery, not back office administration'.
8. We aim to reduce the complexities in managing and delivering education and learning.
9. We value the diversity within our denomination; unity not uniformity.
10. We aim to work with a blended approach to education and learning using both virtual and physical methods.
11. Governance is needed to support our aims, not define them.
12. Where practical, hold training events close to where those being trained live, to minimise trainees' time investment.
13. Where possible, hold training events in a location which minimises total travel for environmental reasons.

## Appendix two

*Extract from*

### Education and Learning Committee

#### Funding Proposal – Short, Medium and Long Term, May 2024

#### 1. What now?

There are some decisions to be made by the E&L Committee about what we do now in terms of:

- Financial support 2024-2025 for RCLs.
- Medium Term support
- Longer term: The 'to be developed' model for long term sustainability.

##### 1.1 Financial support 2024 to 2025 options

- Block grant as last year – this is a cut in 'real terms' but is not the 5% suggested cut on top. We may need to supplement the lack of cut by using capital from the New College Fund.
- As last year but with equity between Westminster College and Northern College (using capital from the New College fund). Scottish College, have a different model, they have indicated an increase in their rechargeable costs (2025) and these have been budgeted for.

*Additional information for Business Committee as requested by E&L so shared here:*

<i>College</i>	<i>No. EM1 students 2023</i>	<i>2022 Block Grant</i>
<i>Northern</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>£237,885</i>
<i>Westminster</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>£370,152</i>
<i>Scottish (different model)</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>£41,996</i>

##### 1.2 Medium term

It is proposed that a significant allocation of capital from the New College Fund is given in tranches over three years to the RCLs with clear conditions/outcomes and an understanding that if the conditions are not met/adhered to, the next tranche is not guaranteed. This is to protect the URC's investment under charity law, while still supporting RCLs. The seed funding should be of a sufficient level to flourish and enable the RCLs to get into a 'better' place.

During this time student support costs (including accommodation, travel etc) and grant funding would continue to be covered (albeit with minor changes).

It is hoped that the allocation would be equal for Northern and Westminster and negotiated for the Scottish College, reflecting the level of education provision and other funding.

The running costs and upkeep of buildings needs to sit outside this proposal. Building costs is a real and pressing issue for both Westminster College and The

Luther King Centre. This is a wider URC issue and should not be part of the work of the Education and Learning Committee and its budget.

### 1.3 The 'to be developed model'

Having enabled the RCLs to flourish, with seedbed funding, a new RCL funding model is realised that is properly costed, where the URC pays a realistic price for the education and learning that the URC needs (eg full costs for EM1 students, AALP etc). RCLs would be given information about our training needs with an 18 month projection, in order to give stability. At this point, the E&L Budget would be purchase, at a 'per course' cost, the range of education the URC requires.

## 2 Issues for decision by E&L Committee, 13 May 2024

- Does the long term vision (2.3) meet with your approval (ie we set up a process where the URC fully pays for what we need) having set the RCLs in a more positive situation?

*E&L Committee unanimously endorsed this proposal but asked any decision to consider growth in the wider learning required by the URC, rather than a focus on EM1.*

- Do you support using the New College Fund (2.2) to enable the RCLs to flourish acknowledging the risk and the mitigation?

*E&L Committee unanimously supported this proposal. The Committee understood that the final detail on 'what' and 'how much' sat with the Business and Finance Committees but made the recommendation that this is considered positively.*

- Which option in 2.1 do you support, or do you have an alternative?

*The question was asked about why there was a disparity in the current block grants? It was explained it was historical due to Westminster academic staffing costs being funded by the URC and a block grant going to Northern and Scottish Colleges, but the exact reason was not clear. The difference in current levels of URC RCL funding has only become more known widely during this process. E&L Committee wishes to recommend to Business Committee the second option of achieving equity of funding in 2025 between the two English Colleges (Northern College to receive the same as Westminster) and supporting the increased costs associated with more students in Scotland. This would be facilitated using the New College Fund.*

## 3 Recommendation

Education and Learning Committee asks Business Committee to consider their recommendations and give a 'steer' to E&L on the direction of work in time for proposals to go to General Assembly 2025.

## Appendix three

*Extract from*

### **Education and Learning Funding for the Resource Centres for Learning Document for Discussion, January 2024**

#### **Section 3**

##### **Costs**

As outlined in section 2, the current piece of work has looked to identify fixed and variable costs associated with each of the student types (section 4).

Variable costs are the cost associated with each student (section 3.1 for detail):

- The costs for the RCL to provide the education (currently covered by the block grant)
- Recoverable costs from E&L budget (currently cross charged or claimed directly as 'student expenses')
- Fixed costs are the costs incurred by the RCLs to be able to function to deliver RCL education and learning activity (section 3.2 for detail).
- Recognising that some annual E&L funding will in effect have been used to cover day-to-day maintenance, there has never been an understanding that major capital expenditure to develop or keep up-to-date college buildings is funded through the E&L budget. This has come from other sources, such as the wider church.

#### **3.1 Variable costs per student—the cost will vary depending on the student type (see below)**

##### **3.1.1 The costs for the RCL to provide the education**

- Registration/fee costs.
- Academic staff travel to support and assess students
- Student events, student reviews
- External speakers, supervisors, specialist expertise etc
- IT – licences relating to student numbers.

##### **3.1.2 Recoverable costs from E&L budget**

Accommodation costs. These vary between RCLs because of the structure of each college's courses and the facilities available.

- Westminster College accommodation costs for those full-time students who live in are charged for 28 week occupancy over three terms and include hospitality.
- Northern College students requiring full-time accommodation have their accommodation costs claimed through 'student allowances'.
- For Westminster and Northern non full-time student accommodation costs are recharged to E&L as rooms are occupied.
- Scottish College use a variety of venues for accommodation which are recharged to E&L as expended.

##### **Food**

- Northern College food costs are recharged to E&L
- Westminster College food costs are included in full/part board prices charged to E&L.

- Scottish College food costs are charged to E&L.

Student expenses/allowances – claimed by each student from E&L

- Subsistence if not included in above.
- Travel – commute costs and costs incurred on placement
- Books, personal IT etc.

### **Student grant and additional support**

Full-time stipendiary students are eligible to apply for a Student Grant through the Financial Assessment process. Additional support may include but not be limited to:

- Assessments as required
- Hardship support – additional support grant
- Individual costs to support individual students (Mental health assessments, counselling etc).

### **3.2 Fixed costs – the costs incurred by the RCLs to be able to function to deliver RCL focussed activity**

To include:

- Academic staff – salaries, stipends, pension, NI, housing (allowance), CPD costs
- Principal costs – stipend, salary, housing (allowance), CPD costs
- Academic staff – accommodation, meals etc
- Non-teaching staff – admin reception
- Academic charges – eg Cambridge Theological Federation, Luther King Centre, CRCW ESB inspections
- Professional subscriptions
- Running costs, office supplies, website, advertising, printing etc
- IT hardware, software licences, phones, Zoom
- Facility costs – insurances, compliance costs, licences (not IT) utilities, rates (% attributed to RCL activity)
- Catering, cleaning, security, caretaking/maintenance (% attributed to RCL activity).

### **3.3 Teaching space and office space**

- Westminster has their own resource in the college building
- Northern College are charged by Luther King House for:
  - Office space (fixed)
  - Teaching space (variable)
  - A block charge (minus reception)
  - Maintenance contract
  - Scottish College use a variety of venues including their own offices and teaching suite jointly owned with the National Synod of Scotland.

# Paper BDFH1

## Towards a new formal ministry for children's and youth work: direction of travel

Children's and Youth Work Committee,  
Education and Learning Committee,  
Ministries Committee, Worship, Faith and  
Order Committee

### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Samantha Sheehan (Convenor), Children's and Youth Work Committee <b>rev.s.sheehan@gmail.com</b> Pippa Hodgson (Convenor), Education and Learning Committee <b>pippahodgson147@gmail.com</b> Mary Thomas (Convenor), Ministries Committee <b>dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk</b> Robert Pope (Convenor), Worship, Faith and Order Committee <b>rpp20@westminster.cam.ac.uk</b>
<b>Action required</b>	Discussion.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Resolution 14</b>  <b>Assembly Executive confirms that the task group has met the brief of GA2023 resolution and instructs the task group to bring proposals for a new formal ministry of Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Workers to GA2025.</b>

### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To enable Assembly Executive to understand, refine and affirm the draft proposals for a new formal ministry, giving the task group feedback to enable them to complete their work for General Assembly 2025.
<b>Main points</b>	Outline of progress so far with draft Marks of Ministry, changes to the Basis of Union and underpinning rationale shared as appendices.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	B1 General Assembly 2023 Recognition of children's, youth and family ministry

	B1 Assembly Executive 2023 Towards a formal ministry for children’s, youth and/or family work B2 General Assembly 2024 CYWC Update
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	CYDO+ team Resource Centres for Learning.

## Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	To be discussed.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	Other denominations are also considering how to increase their ministry in this area.

1. At General Assembly 2023, resolution 13 stated that: **General Assembly is minded that there should be a formal ministry of URC Children’s, Youth and/or Family Minister and asks the Children’s and Youth Work Committee, the Ministries Committee and the Education and Learning Committee to consider what would be needed to introduce such a ministry and bring proposals to General Assembly 2024.** An update to General Assembly 2024 noted that much progress had been made and task group established to include Worship, Faith and Order and representatives of the Resource Centres for Learning in addition to the three committees indicated with the intention of being able to bring a final detailed proposal to General Assembly 2025.
2. The journey of consultation and discussion so far has affirmed the distinctiveness of this proposed new ministry, clarified that it is neither a sub-branch of the Ministry of Word and Sacraments (MW&S) nor Church Related Community Work (CRCW) but should occupy a unique position in relation to the church congregation and the wider community with a particular focus on children and young people and their wider context. The vision is to complement the existing authorised ministries of the United Reformed Church (URC) by acknowledging a ministry specifically among and with children and young people which focuses on their flourishing as human beings and their nurture as Christian disciples. This is perceived to be timely (for a denomination undergoing a Church Life Review and looking to the future) and a response to the signs of the times and the move of the Spirit within the URC. Appendix ONE ‘Towards a ministry of Children’s and Youth Workers a theology paper’ unpacks this. At a time when other denominations are pushing the recruitment and training of lay children’s and youth workers to be employed by local churches<sup>1</sup>, the URC would be unique in recognising a call to a formal ministry resourced denominationally for the whole church.
3. A name for this proposed new ministry has emerged within these discussions: Church Commissioned Children’s and Youth Workers. It is hoped that this name expresses the clear relation to the Church at local and denominational levels, clarifies that this is a new ministry in its own right, and clearly identifies the focus. It is anticipated that Church Commissioned Children’s and Youth Workers would be commissioned and appointed to a range of posts with a range of post titles that express the local or wider role (such as Church Children’s and Family Worker;

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<sup>1</sup>See [The 30k Project | The Church of England](#) and [The Baptist Union of Great Britain : Children's and youth ministry training](#)

Youth and Student Worker; Family Centre Chaplain; Children and Youth Evangelist) much as MW&S and CRCWs hold a wide variety of posts.

4. As a formal ministry within the URC, Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Workers would undergo parallel processes for the discernment of vocation, application, assessment conference, formation process at a URC Resource Centre for Learning through Common Awards<sup>2</sup> (alongside MsW&S and CRCWs following a similar pattern, incorporating placements, and to an equivalent level). Posts with appropriate support structures in place would be approved through Synods and declared as vacancies. Deployment and appointments would be approved in the same way as for MsW&S and CRCWs.
5. In order for these processes to happen a number of documents and policies will need to be approved. In the first instance we offer Appendix two the draft Marks of Ministry for Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Workers, and Appendix three the changes to the Basis of Union that would be needed. If Assembly Executive is content with the direction of travel then further work would be done to ensure other necessary policies which will flow from these are drafted for General Assembly 2025.
6. The question of how this new ministry, if approved, will be financed through formation and deployment remains to be addressed. It would be helpful if Assembly Executive could give a clear steer as to whether in principle this should be funded in the same way as MW&S and CRCW, or whether it should be by an alternative means, and if so, what this might look like.
7. Finally, Assembly Executive is asked to consider what opportunities this new formal ministry of Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Workers might offer to their local church or Synod context. The following four scenarios are offered to encourage this exercise of spiritual imagination:

**A** Imagine a child who is brought by their grandparent to a breakfast club hosted by a Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Worker and their volunteer team. The child feels welcomed and valued by the church community and asks to go again. The child gains confidence and decides to join a drama project preparing for a special church festival, encouraging the parents to come along to watch. Invited to join in an inclusive all-age holiday club provision, the child and their family begin to explore Bible stories and prayer activities. The child finds faith and a supportive intergenerational community, encouraging their family to become more involved with the local church where they are valued and able to participate. Meanwhile the CCCYW identifies a particular issue the child is facing and supports the family in engagement with school and other agencies. With the encouragement of the CCCYW and having become more open to listening to the voice of children, the congregation commits to praying and advocating for increased provision of support locally.

**B** Imagine a local church that struggles to engage with one or two children or young people. The church can see the potential for the development of its work

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<sup>2</sup> Both Northern College and Westminster College are already able to offer some of the specialist modules within Common Awards for children's and youth work through their wider networks as Luther King House and the Cambridge Theological Federation offer these for other denominations training pathways.



with children and young people, but lacks the expertise, resource, time and energy to develop a ministry program and its relationships with other groups and schools. In liaising with the Synod's CYDO or equivalent it becomes apparent that two or three other churches locally are grappling with the same kind of situation.

The churches prayerfully explore together the possibility of calling an individual to develop and grow their ministry amongst their children and young people. A profile is drawn up for the role and the support structures put in place. The vacancy is declared and an individual fully qualified in children and youth work and practical theology (as a CCCYW) responds to the call. They live in a manse made available by the synod, their expenses are met locally by the churches involved, their stipend is provided by the URC. This individual works with the churches, developing pieces of work, developing volunteer support, and, over the space of a couple of years, the children's and youth work blossoms – some families start attending the three churches, who begin to see some growth. They enable the congregation to reflect on how children and young people develop their faith and discipleship as they grow as an intergenerational community. The atmosphere changes as both the present and future prospects of the church now look completely different. Three of the original children are now exploring whether they are called to ministry in the United Reformed Church – either as ministers of Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers, or Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Workers.

**C** Imagine an individual who has been exploring what God is calling them to be and do in response to baptism promises. They have a sense that it may well be to full-time work amongst children and young people. They explore how they might respond to that call. They find one option that involves them self-funding a full-time degree-level qualification for three years, gaining some short-term experience at a residential Christian youth centre for the summer each year, in the hope to be able to secure a post for three or so years in a local church. They give up, sensing that it is just not possible to respond to God's call in that way and look for full-time employment in another place whilst offering to volunteer to help out at a youth group in a local church once a week. But then they're invited to an enquirer's conference by their Church Secretary and they hear that the United Reformed Church (URC) has recognised that some people are called to children and youth work in the same way that ministers of Word and Sacraments and CRCWs are called to their work and that there is the option to explore a call to children and youth work. If that call is determined, then the church will offer a formation route as an investment for the future, equip them and release them to fulfil what God is asking of them. They train at a URC Resource Centre for Learning which will provide a formation route tailored to their experience and their calling, they gain experience in placements along the way and four years later are commissioned into a role in a local church setting. Through the decades that follow, the United Reformed Church is blessed by their ministry in various posts in several synods and future church members, elders and ministers can point to the input this individual had in helping them be introduced and explore their faith as a child or young person.

**D** Imagine a group of churches, a region or an area of a particular synod wondering how to develop their life together. The ten churches look back to a time when each had its own thriving fellowship, ministry, mission and work, each led by their own minister of Word and Sacraments. Recently though they've been asked to consider how they might continue their mission and ministry – they'll only be able to have oversight from a single minister of Word and Sacraments. The group start

to see how with the elders and lay people, they will be able to maintain a sense of fellowship and pastoral care with a minister providing ministry of the Word and Sacraments amongst them. When they realised four of the churches were particularly keen to explore developing work within and among the local neighbourhoods and communities, they called a CRCW. Whilst this provided some opportunity there was still much more that the churches wished to explore, and they were aware that it was often the work with children and young people that got neglected amongst the pressure of making everything else work. So they then explored calling a Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Worker to help develop their work with children and young people. Slowly, a dynamic and energising team emerged of three individuals of equal status, specialised gifts and professionalism working together as a team ministry to inspire, lead and encourage the congregations in this area. Ideas, programs, ministry, work, outreach, evangelism, kingdom building, pastoral care emerged that used the best of the resources available alongside the vocation and call of the members of the churches.

8. Assembly Executive is invited to discuss the following ahead of considering the resolution (please share discussion notes with **sam.richards@urc.org.uk**):
  - a) Having read the paper and appendices, is this the correct direction of travel for developing this new ministry of Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Worker for the URC?
  - b) What opportunities could this new ministry offer in your context?
  - c) How should this new ministry be financed and what would be the implications for the denomination?

## Appendix one

### **Towards a ministry of Children's and Youth Workers**

The church exists to continue Christ's ministry in the world. The Basis of Union confirms that the whole people of God are called to this ministry through 'worship, prayer, proclamation of the Gospel, and Christian witness; by mutual and outgoing care and responsibility; and by obedient discipleship in the whole of daily life, according to the gifts and opportunities given to each one' (*Basis of Union* paragraph 19).

All Christian ministry is seen as participation in the ministry of Christ. 'The primary ministry is that of the risen Christ himself, and we are enabled to participate in it by the power of the Holy Spirit' (*God's Reign and Our Unity* 74 p.47). All ministries are inspired by the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Church to be this reconciling community for the glory of God and the salvation of humanity (Ephesians 4:11-13). The Holy Spirit bestows on the community diverse and complementary gifts. These are for the common good of the whole people and are manifested in acts of service within the community and to the world. 'All members are called to discover, with the help of the community, the gifts they have received and to use them for the building up of the church and the service of the world to which the church is sent' (*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* para 5 p.20).

All Christians, by their calling to be saints and their participation in the Body of Christ, witnessed by promises made at baptism and on becoming a church member, share in various ways in the one ministry of the whole body of Christ. However, 'minister' in this context designates someone who is given specific responsibilities within the life of the church. This is expressed in terms of the Word and Sacraments, or in terms of leadership, or in community engagement. All Christians are called to discipleship, and some whose discipleship involves a call to a specific ministry identified and recognised by the church as essential to its life and mission.

Ministry in its broadest sense is defined as the service to which the whole people of God is called, whether as individuals, as a local community, or as the universal church. Ministry or ministries can also denote the specific institutional forms which this service may take. However, within the United Reformed Church, ordained or commissioned ministry refers to persons who have received particular gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit or charisms, which are recognised by the church, which are nurtured through training, and which are confirmed when the church appoints someone for service by ordination or commissioning. The church needs an ordained or commissioned ministry to fulfil its mission, those who are publicly and continually responsible for pointing to its fundamental dependence on Jesus Christ and thereby provide a focus for its unity (*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* paragraph 8, page 21).

### **Ministry in the United Reformed Church**

Within the United Reformed Church there exist certain ministries, or offices, which are duly recognised, which help equip the whole church to continue Christ's ministry. To refer to every member of the church having a ministry to exercise or participating in the ministry of the whole people of God is not the same as to say that every member is a minister. Thus, the Basis of Union continues with 'For the equipment of his people for this total ministry the Lord Jesus Christ gives particular gifts for

particular ministries and calls some of his servants to exercise them in offices duly recognised within his church' (*Basis of Union* paragraph 20).

Thus, in the Reformed tradition, the church is made visible when the Word of God is proclaimed and heard, and the Sacraments (of baptism and the Lord's Supper) are celebrated. As a result, there is a Ministry of the Word and Sacraments.

Ministers of the Word and Sacraments 'conduct public worship... preach the Word and... administer the Sacraments... exercise pastoral care and oversight... give leadership to the church in its mission to the world' (*Basis of Union* paragraph 21). This ministry exists because of the conviction that 'the life of faith to which it is called is a gift of the Holy Spirit continually received in Word and Sacrament and in the common life of God's people' (*Basis of Union* paragraph 12, cf. 13). The minister of the Word and Sacraments is recognised by the local and wider church and is tasked with enabling the local church to understand its life, witness and mission in the context of the ministry of the whole people of God and as an expression of the one (holy catholic and apostolic) church that is called into being by, and belongs to, God. In the United Reformed Church, there is only one order of Ministry of the Word and Sacraments. Ministers might exercise their ministry in various ways: in a local pastorate, in special category ministries, in Synod or General Assembly posts, as Synod Moderators, as General Secretary. The Ministry of the Word and Sacraments is open to all who the church believes have been called to it, and they exercise this ministry alongside Elders. Eldership is also a public office in the church. Elders, meeting together in Council, are responsible for pastoral, spiritual and missionary leadership in the local church.

Alongside Ministers and Elders, the United Reformed Church also acknowledges two further ministries. Because of the importance of proclaiming the Word in the Reformed tradition, the church recognises the ministry of 'lay preachers'. 'Lay preachers', often identified by local reputation, have always played a significant role in the worship-life of the United Reformed Church and authorised training courses and Assembly accreditation has been provided for them.

The United Reformed Church also trains and commissions Church-Related Community Workers (CRCWs). Their focus is to act as a link between the church and the community, drawing the one into a full and fruitful relationship with the other. They are commissioned to make the Kingdom known through drawing the church into co-operative action with the community which enables God's will of peace and justice for the world, in some measure, to be actualized (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 22). The CRCW's role in the life of the URC is unique. While recognized as a particular ministry within the life of the church, the CRCW has no formal role or responsibility for worship (which is one point that links the other three 'particular ministries' of Minister, Elder, lay preacher and lay pioneer), even if many CRCWs lead worship regularly.

Although the Basis of Union identifies these four as formal ministries or offices in the Church, they should not be seen as the only 'ministries' that can be exercised in the Church. They exist in the wider context of Christ's ministry which continues through the whole Body of Christ ('people of God') and are orientated to enabling that wider ministry rather than fulfilling it on behalf of other members.

In each respect, particular offices are acknowledged in order to enable the ministry of the whole: 'to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.'

## **Why a separate ministry of Children's and Youth Workers?**

A ministry of youth workers within the United Reformed Church is not a new thing. As far back as 1976 General Assembly urged local churches to encourage more men and women to offer themselves for service as youth workers in church, statutory and voluntary youth organisations. Indeed, Assembly commended existing youth workers to take part in the URC Introductory Training Course or some other training programme relevant to their work within the Church in order to improve the quality of the Church's work amongst young people.

The Growing Up Report (1999) recognised that training should be provided for Youth and Children's Workers recognising their work as a distinctive and important ministry (MC January 2001, paper I). This ministry was seen as a welcome realisation of the fact that God gives different gifts to different people and that it is the church's responsibility to discern, develop and deploy those gifts.

However, these General Assembly resolutions did not result in a formal ministry, distinct from the those mentioned in the Basis of Union.

In 2023 General Assembly agreed that it was minded that there should be a formal ministry of URC Children's, Youth and/or Family Minister. If, as the URC states, Christ continues his ministry in the world through the whole people of God and calls some to exercise specific offices in the Church to assist the whole people of God to exercise that ministry, it may be inferred that this ministry cannot be done within the existing Ministry of the Word and Sacraments.

Some consideration, therefore, must be given to why we might have a formal ministry in the Church which only ministers to one section of it (children and youth) instead of seeing it as part of the Church's work that someone might undertake because of their baptismal/membership promises.

## **Children and young people matter**

All humanity is loved and valued by God. Genesis 1 affirms every person is created in God's own image to reflect God's nature and character. In Psalm 139, the writer ponders his first beginnings as an unborn child in the womb: 'For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.' Similarly, in Jeremiah God says, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.' (Jeremiah 1:5).

These insights from Scripture tell us that God is deeply and intimately involved in our growth and development before as well as after birth. From their earliest moments unborn children are subject to God's call to be and to become. They respond in precisely one way – they grow and develop. This tells us something very important. God's call to children is first to grow as human beings. Their growth in the womb and after birth is a response to a continued calling. God calls us to this human development in body, mind and spirit right throughout our lives, however long or

short, until at the end we are called out of life into God's eternal presence. Every child is precious before God and subject to exactly the same Call.

Jesus spent much of his time challenging the community in which he lived and moved. He dignified those who society rejected. He even placed a child in the centre to illustrate the nature of the kingdom of God (Matthew 18:3-5). The Christian community has often needed to be reminded that all of humanity needs to be valued for all are one in Christ (Galatians 3:28).

Children in the ancient near east were valued, not least to perpetuate the family line. The notion of 'childhood' was not even recognised in the ancient world where children were understood as members of a household and participants in the household economic system contributing as was appropriate for their age.<sup>1</sup> But they were also vulnerable, with mortality rates at 50%.<sup>2</sup>

In one particular episode recorded in the Gospels, Jesus laid hands on and blessed children being brought to him by their parents (Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17), about which there have been various theological and historical interpretations suggested over the years. For example, some scholars have argued that the disciples rebuked the parents because they thought Jesus was too busy for children or that children were unimportant, while others have suggested that the rebuke was directed towards a false belief by the parents that a magical touch from Jesus would give their children salvation. Regardless of the reason, Jesus did not want the children to be excluded from his ministry and blessing due to any misunderstanding of either parents or His disciples. Whatever the intentions of the parents may have been, they did regard both Jesus and their children as important. In ancient Israel, children were usually seen as a blessing from God (Psalm 127:3-5). The Mosaic Law also protected children, even those who were orphans (Exodus 22:22; Deuteronomy 14:29, 24:19-21, 26:12, 27:19). Indeed, Jesus blessing the children parallels Jacob (Israel) blessing his grandchildren, Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48:1-20). Further, Jesus knew that children were not perfect (Matthew 11:16-17).

Further the Talmud suggests that it was common tradition for parents to bring their children to the synagogue to have a blessing (Birkat Yeladim or priestly blessing) from the elders. Therefore, it should not be surprising, that parents in 1st century Judea would want Jesus to bless their children.

When Jesus suggests that whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it, he may have used it as an opportunity to state clearly that children were also included in the Kingdom of God by treating children as human beings created in the image of God who had as much worth as adults. The Gospels do not differentiate between adult and child. Just as Jesus healed many adults, casting out demons and bringing Lazarus back to life, the Gospels record Jesus healing children, casting out demons from children, and even one bringing a child back to life (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-42; John 4:46-54; Luke

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<sup>1</sup> K.Garroway Children in the Ancient Near Eastern Household p. 2014

<sup>2</sup> <https://theconversation.com/children-in-the-ancient-middle-east-were-valued-and-vulnerable-not-unlike-children-today-120490>

8:41-56 etc.). Note the children come from families of varying economic status and culture, demonstrating the value that Jesus placed on all children. Jesus' deliberate act of blessing children was a powerful sign and a political act about how his kingdom works.

Among the visions of the kingdom, God's presence is signified by children playing safely (Zephaniah 8:12). The Good Shepherd especially tends to the those with young, carefully carrying them close to his heart (Isaiah 40:11). On the day of Pentecost, the prophet Joel's words promising that God's spirit will particularly gift the young with prophecy and visions becomes a gift to the church (Acts 2:17). Jesus' exhortation is to minister to children and learn from them how to rediscover and embrace childlikeness as children of God, with a clear encouragement about the importance of actively nurturing the faith of children and young people rather than preventing them from hearing God's Call (Matthew 18:6). Children tell us important things about our own spiritual health. This is how we learn how to become children of God.

### **Children and young people matter in society**

Many in the Church still speak of the generation gap between children and young people and adults. However, this is not an accurate description of what is happening particularly as our society rapidly changes. Young people are growing up in a different world to that experienced by previous generations. The life experiences of young people in modern societies have changed significantly over the last two or three decades. Today's young people are of a different culture, not simply a different age. The primary frontier which needs to be crossed when engaging with young people is not so much a generation gap as a profound change in culture. In the past, it had been assumed that young people will 'grow out' of this phase and that when they do, they will 'become like us'. That attitude is no longer sustainable or wise. In society there has been a changing understanding of children and young people as individuals with their own rights and responsibilities. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out the rights that must be realised for children to develop to their full potential. One of the UNCRC's General Principles is that children have the right to participate – and to be listened to – in all decisions that affect them. Participation rights are linked to children's levels of maturity and apply accordingly. This is to support their development, but it also helps everyone achieve better-informed decisions. It strengthens society.

Medical science no longer treats children as mini adults but has developed paediatric care to nurture their physical and mental development. Growing understanding of the life-long impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) has renewed a focus on attending to the needs of the children amidst rising mental health, social and behavioural issues. This has been mirrored in the church by an understanding of children and young people as disciples in their own right<sup>3</sup> with particular gifts and needs, spirituality, ways of holding faith and God connection.

### **Children and young people matter in the URC**

The church seeks to receive the gifts of God through children and young people through their participation in the life of the Church. In 1984, General Assembly

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<sup>3</sup> Charter for Children, General Assembly 1990

declared that the voices of children and young people should be heard as a natural, rich God-given blessing to the Christian Church. It urged all churches to provide opportunity and training for children and young people to be actively involved in the planning and conducting of regular worship and to set aside at least one Sunday a year (such as the last Sunday of February) for services in which young people play a major part in the preparation and leadership of the worship. This was reinforced in General Assembly 1985 and by 1990 the Charter for Children in the Church was commended to Provinces, Districts and local churches.

In 2008, General Assembly welcomed the Vision for Youth and Children's Work across the United Reformed Church and commended it to local churches and Synods as a way of prioritising and shaping ministry with children and young people. Believing that young people flourish as human beings when they are entrusted with responsibility and leadership roles, the Church has made provision for reserved places for young people on the roll of General Assembly. Another example of this is at local level where young people have been elected to serve as Elders in their local church. Further, in 2022, General Assembly resolved afresh to ensure that all structures and councils of the church are consistently mindful of the voice of children and of the impact of their decisions on children and future generations. To enable this, all councils of the Church were encouraged to review how they are able to hear and respond to children.

General Assembly often urges, but the local church often cannot implement what they have been asked to do because of all the other demands on a church's time. With multi-church pastorates spread over wider geographical areas, the expectation that this ministry falls to the skills of a Minister of the Word and Sacraments is no longer feasible.

The URC sees children's and youth ministry as an essential priority for the church that is currently ageing for three reasons:

- Most people come to faith by the age of 18. It makes sense that the church should put an emphasis on engaging with people of that age group where big life choices about values are being made, and that means children and young people
- Children and young people are the fastest declining age group within the URC which means the URC is failing to engage with people at the time in their life when they are most receptive to finding faith for themselves. Jesus' call to join in the Missio Dei in Matthew 28 is as relevant today as it was then. Children and Young people are just as important to disciple as adults
- Since 1972 our church has been committed to supporting those who work with children and young people. This now leads to a recognition of the need for more specialised ministry to nurture the holistic well-being and spiritual flourishing of children and young people as well as nurturing congregations who care for them.

A new formal ministry needs to work towards every child and young person having a life-enhancing encounter with the Christian faith and the person of Jesus Christ. It needs to recognise and welcome the capacity of children and young people to transform the Church and the world. And it needs to provide support and development for all those working with children and young people. We recognise that



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God is calling people into this ministry who have skills in building a culture of intergenerational relationships who can help congregations to recognise children and young people as equal members of the Body of Christ.

Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Workers are the ideal bridge people to help congregations to embrace intergenerationality in our churches for the future of God's kingdom.

## Appendix two

### Marks of Ministry for Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Workers

A Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Worker in the United Reformed Church should be:

- **a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ:** caught up in the joy and wonder of God's will and work; seeking always to live a holy life in public and in private; sustained by their own rhythm of prayer, Bible reading and worship so that they might model and encourage such life-long patterns in others with integrity; open to learning discipleship from others of all ages.
- **a person of integrity and resilience:** self-aware and committed to their own lifelong learning (especially through the URC's provision for ministers); aware of their own limitations and thus willing to seek support; ready to deal with situations of conflict; balancing ministry's joys and pains with the fostering of right relationships with family and friends.
- **a contextual theologian:** delighting in Scripture, rooted in the Reformed tradition, able to communicate their own faith and its implications among children, young people and their families within and beyond congregations; encouraging all ages to discover how these rich resources inspire and sustain faithfulness.
- **an informal educator and play practitioner:** able to craft and facilitate holistic human development, healthy intergenerational relational dynamics and learning opportunities, enabling children's and young people's engagement through exploring, experiencing and expressing in safe, fun and open environments.
- **an enabler of participation and empowerment of children and young people:** striving to enable the Church and the world to hear and respond to the voice of children and young people, proactively involving them in decision making and action, enabling their gifts to be shared intergenerationally.
- **a nurturer of children's and young people's spirituality:** able to craft and lead worship that shows appreciation the resources of many traditions and styles yet unafraid to create and advocate new forms as appropriate; passionate and effective in breaking open God's Word with children and young people; ready and able to foster skills, techniques and experience so that they might lead worship and teach well.
- **an intergenerational community builder:** working to see people of all ages, across the generations, engaging, worshiping, learning, serving and growing in faith together as an expression of unity, reciprocity and mutuality in belonging, an opportunity for the gifts of all to be more fully utilised for the blessing of all.
- **a pastor:** sharing with others, especially Elders, in sustaining care; making time to walk in love alongside children, young people and their families; rejoicing and grieving with others through listening deeply and offering prayerful support; wise

in knowing their limits and boundaries when more specialised help is needed; reliably dealing with issues of safeguarding and confidentiality.

- **a leader and collaborator:** identifying, developing, and enabling leadership in others, particularly children and young people; capable of working in, and leading, teams through collaborative and shared leadership; aware of their own leadership style and open to learning with and from others, when necessary acknowledging their own mistakes and seeking restoration; committed and equipped to building up others in faith and witness so that the gifts and callings of all ages might flourish; demonstrating love for God's people.
- **a missionary and evangelist:** passionate about and active in sharing the love of God for the world; alive to the significance of contexts and cultures in shaping mission and creative in discovering missional opportunities; empowering and equipping children, young people and all God's people in mission to share the Gospel and live God's Kingdom of justice and peace to the full.
- **a public figure:** reliable and effective in representing the Church in ecumenical, community and wider settings; committed to and equipped in advocating for children and young people, speaking truth to power and challenging injustice and marginalisation wherever they may be found.
- **a committed participant in the councils of the Church:** responsive to God's call as gift and blessing to be lived out within the discipline and accountability of the denomination which trains, commissions and inducts them and the churches, communities and ministries within which they serve.
- **a reformer:** wise in the dynamics and challenges of change; bold yet humble in helping individuals and congregations to discern and respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit as new chapters open in the life of the Church and others close.

## Appendix three

BLUE TEXT – proposed amendments for all ministries

RED TEXT – proposed amendments for specifically for addition of Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Workers

### Schedule A paragraphs 19-24

#### Ministry in the United Reformed Church

19. The Lord Jesus Christ continues his ministry in and through the Church, the whole people of God called and committed to his service and equipped by him for it. This service is given by worship, prayer, proclamation of the Gospel, and Christian witness; by mutual and outgoing care and responsibility; and by obedient discipleship in the whole of daily life, according to the gifts and opportunities given to each one. The preparation and strengthening of its members for such ministry and discipleship shall always be a major concern of the United Reformed Church.
20. For the equipment of his people for this total ministry the Lord Jesus Christ gives particular gifts for particular ministries and calls some of his servants to exercise them in offices duly recognised within his Church. The United Reformed Church recognises that Christ gives himself to his Church through Word and Sacrament and through the total caring oversight by which his people grow in faith and love, the exercise of which oversight is the special concern of elders and Ministers. Those who enter on such ministries commit themselves to them for so long as God wills: the United Reformed Church having solemnly acknowledged their vocation and accepted their commitment shall appoint them **as committed disciples** to their particular ministry and give them authority to exercise it within the church, setting them apart with prayer that they shall be given all needful gifts and graces for its fulfilment, which solemn setting part shall in the case of Ministers and elders be termed ordination and in the case of Church Related Community Workers **and Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Workers** be termed commissioning. In the United Reformed Church all ministries within the life of the Church shall be open to both men and women. Appropriate affirmations of faith shall be made by those entering upon all ministries within the life of the Church.
21. Some are called to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments.<sup>1</sup> After approved preparation and training, they may be called to be Ministers of local churches, or missionaries overseas, or to some special and approved ministry, and are then ordained and inducted to their office. The ordination and induction of Ministers shall be in accordance with Schedules C and D. They are commissioned to conduct public worship, to preach the Word and to administer the Sacraments, to exercise pastoral care and oversight, and to give leadership to the church in its mission to the world. Their service may be

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<sup>1</sup>The totality of Ministers who fall within any of the categories defined within Schedule E, Paragraph 1 and are in good standing may be referred to as the Roll of Ministers. Ministers shall conduct their ministry according to the criteria set out in Schedule E.

stipendiary or non-stipendiary, and in the latter case the service is given within an area of a Synod, and in the context it has approved.

22. Some are called to the ministry of Church Related Community Work. After approved preparation and training, they may be called to be Church Related Community Workers in a post approved by the United Reformed church, commissioned to the office of Church Related Community Worker, and inducted to serve in a particular post for a designated period. This commissioning and induction shall be in accord with schedules D&F. Church Related Community Workers are commissioned to care for, to challenge, and to pray for the community, to discern with others, God's will, for the well-being of the community, and to endeavour to enable the church to live out its calling to proclaim with love and mercy through the working with others in both church and community for peace and justice in the world. Their service may be stipendiary or non- stipendiary, and in the latter case their service is given within the area of a Synod and in a context it has approved.
23. Some are called to the ministry of Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Work- After approved preparation and training, they may be called to be Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Workers in a post approved by the United Reformed Church, commissioned to the office of Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Worker and inducted to serve in a particular post for a designated period. This commissioning and induction shall be in accord with schedules D&G. Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Workers are commissioned to disciple, equip and nurture children and young people and their families both within and outwith the church in partnership with the congregation, to enable fresh perspectives and renewed participation, and to pray for the intergenerational life of the church , to discern with others God's will for the well-being of the church and locality, and to endeavour to enable the church to live out its calling to transform lives for effective service in the world. Their service may be stipendiary or non-stipendiary, and in the latter case their service is given within the area of a Synod and in a context it has approved.
24. Ministers of the Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers and Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Workers are called to serve by God and, as members of the church, live out their committed discipleship as office-holders, in which their membership, service to, support and relationship with the Church and community has never created, has never been intended to create, and does not create any contractual relations.
25. The church cares for and supports these office-holders, whether stipendiary or non-stipendiary, through careful training, loving nurture, and prayerful oversight. As office-holding members of the church, ministers of the Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers and Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Workers are accountable through the church's various Councils for the satisfactory performance of their ministries. Through the Councils of the Church, discernment through the Holy Spirit is found regarding: accepting candidates for ministry, the nurture and support necessary for flourishing of church and office-holder, their deployment to

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particular ministries, the oversight necessary for healthy discipleship and for the circumstances when it is necessary to lay down the responsibilities of being an office-holder.

# Paper G1

## URC Pensions Committee – revised Terms of Reference

### Resources Committee and Pensions Committee

#### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	The Revd John Piper <b>john.piper30@ntlworld.com</b> Vaughan Griffiths <b>deputy.treas@urc.org.uk</b>
<b>Action required</b>	Decision.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Resolution 15</b>  <b>Assembly Executive approves the revised Terms of Reference of the Pensions Committee.</b>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	The proposed revised Terms of Reference of the Pensions Committee bring them up to date and reflect the work that the Committee is now doing.
<b>Main points</b>	<p>The previous ToRs were presented to Mission Council 2020 for approval. That meeting was cancelled because of Covid-19. The ToRs were subsequently approved by officer action. Since then, the two URC defined benefit pension schemes have been closed to future accrual and a new URC defined contribution pension scheme has been introduced for both employees and office holders.</p> <p>The Pensions Committee is, therefore, now responsible for the oversight of three pension schemes and of some associated benefits now being provided directly by the Church replacing benefits previously provided via one of the pension schemes.</p> <p>The membership of the Pensions Committee also needs updating to reflect changes to roles and responsibilities.</p>
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Mission Council March 2020 Paper G2.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	

#### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	None.
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<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	None – the proposed changes reflect existing practice.
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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The URC now has three live pension schemes. The URC Ministers' Pension Fund (MPF) and the URC Final Salary Scheme (FSS) are defined benefit pension schemes that were closed to future accrual on 28 February 2023. The URC Pension Plan operated by the Aon Master Trust is a defined contribution pension scheme which became operational on 1 March 2023.
- 1.2 The members of the MPF are all office holders, either ministers or church related community workers. The members of the FSS are staff working under employment contracts (including some ministers) and some church related community workers. The new URC Pension Plan has separate sections for office holders and staff.
- 1.3 Since March 2023, some benefits are being provided directly by the Church, replacing benefits previously provided by one of the defined benefit schemes.
- 1.4 These developments have caused significant changes to, and increase in, the work of the Pensions Committee although its overall responsibilities are, essentially, unchanged.
- 1.5 Appended to this paper are the proposed revised Terms of Reference of the Pensions Committee and the current Terms of Reference which were approved in 2020 by Officer Action. Because the arrangement of the two documents is very different, presenting the new one as tracked changes of the old one is not helpful. The main changes are highlighted below.

## 2. Changes to membership

- 2.1 The Deputy General Secretary Administration and Resources is replaced by the Chief Operating Officer.
- 2.2 The Convenor of the Maintenance of the Ministry sub-committee is replaced by the Secretary for Ministries. The Secretary for Ministries used to attend part of the meetings of the Committee. It is felt more efficient for that person to be a full member of the Committee, which means that the M of M Convenor does not also need to be present.
- 2.3 The Pensions Officer acts as Secretary to the Committee. Previously, this was the Pensions Manager.
- 2.4 Otherwise, the membership is the same as before including the ability to co-opt up to three members of the Committee in addition to those appointed by Assembly.

## 3. No changes to accountability or to overall responsibilities

- 3.1 The URC clearly has a duty of care in relation to its office holders and staff and their pension arrangements. As a participating employer, the URC also has legal and regulatory responsibilities in relation to each of its three pension schemes.



Overall, the responsibility of the Pensions Committee is to oversee these legal and regulatory responsibilities.

- 3.2 The Pensions Committee operates as a sub-committee of the Resources Committee (previously of the Finance Committee). When necessary, the Pensions Committee will report to General Assembly or Assembly Executive through the Resources Committee.

#### **4. Changes to detailed responsibilities**

- 4.1 The proposed revised Terms of Reference have been drafted to reflect the different ways in which the three URC pension schemes are managed and, therefore, to recognise the different ways in which the Pensions Committee needs to relate to those responsible.
- 4.2 This format is very different from previously which is why it is not helpful to try to show the proposed new responsibilities as an amended version of the old ones.

#### **5. Changes to ways of conducting business**

- 5.1 The Pensions Committee now normally meets quarterly, either in person or on-line, with representatives of the bodies responsible for the operation of one or more of the pension schemes in attendance. If necessary, other meetings are arranged of some or all of the members and urgent decisions may be made electronically. The Committee will meet with others within and beyond the URC as and when necessary.

**Appendix 1: Proposed revised Terms of Reference of the Pensions Committee.**  
**Appendix 2: Current Terms of Reference of the Pensions Committee – MC March 2020.**

## Appendix one

### URC Pensions Committee – Proposed revised Terms of Reference

#### Membership

Committee	Pensions Committee.
Convenor	Appointed by General Assembly.
Secretary	Pensions Officer.
Ex Officio Members	The Treasurer or Deputy Treasurer of the URC; the Chief Operating Officer; the Convenor of the URC Investment Committee; the Secretary for Ministries.
General Assembly Appointed Members	The Convenor and two others.
Length of Term of General Assembly appointees	Four years, with the possibility of a further four years.
Co-opted members	Up to three co-opted members may be appointed by the Committee to add appropriate experience or expertise.
In Attendance when required (to cover their areas of expertise)	Chief Finance Officer.
Minute Secretary	PA to the Chief Operating Officer and the Chief Finance Officer.
Meeting Frequency	Quarterly and as necessary.
Subgroups/sub-committees	As necessary.
Quoracy	Three members.
Accountability and Reporting Duties	Accountable to the Resources Committee.
Terms of Reference Review	At least every four years.

#### Links between committees

The Convenor of the Pensions Committee is an ex-officio member of the Investment Committee and the Maintenance of the Ministry Committee and may be invited to join the board of the URC Ministers' Pensions Trust, which is the trustee of the Ministers' Pension Fund. This complements the roles of the ex-officio members of the Pensions Committee in facilitating good inter-committee communication.

The Pensions Committee will liaise with other URC officers and staff at Church House and in the Synods whenever appropriate.

#### Conducting business

Meetings of the Pensions Committee will normally be held quarterly. Representatives of the trustees/managers of the three live URC pension schemes will report to each of these meetings and will be invited to attend some of them.

Further meetings, possibly of some of the members of the Committee and possibly involving other colleagues, will be organised as and when necessary.

Between meetings, where possible progress will be made by electronic means including the taking of decisions when necessary, which will then be minuted at the next meeting of the Committee.

The Pensions Committee may seek external professional advice if it deems this to be necessary and with prior reference to the Chief Operating Officer in relation to any unbudgeted expenditure.

## **Overall responsibilities**

The URC clearly has a duty of care in relation to its office holders and staff and their pension arrangements. The URC also has legal and regulatory responsibilities in its role as the principal participating employer in each of the three pension schemes.

(For pensions purposes, 'employer' applies to office holders as well as staff.)

The overall responsibility of the Pensions Committee is to oversee these legal and regulatory responsibilities on behalf of the Church.

The Pensions Committee operates as a sub-committee of the Resources Committee. Any matters that need to go to General Assembly or Assembly Executive for decision will be referred to the Resources Committee and, if approved, will go to the appropriate body from that Committee.

## **Detailed responsibilities**

The Committee's responsibilities include:

- a) To provide expertise and advice to the URC in relation to all matters to do with the provision of pensions and related benefits for ministers, church related community workers and staff. In particular, to:
  1. advise the Resources Committee on the monetary requirements, needs and obligations of all the URC pension schemes;
  2. do the same in relation to benefits now provided directly by the Church rather than through one of the pension schemes (ill health benefits which may be paid in addition to any benefits paid by the defined benefit schemes and death in service benefits), and in relation to some benefits payable to office holders from charitable trusts.
  3. initiate or support the consideration by the Church and its officers of any changes to the nature of its pension provision to office holders and staff, including possible changes to the employer contribution rate(s) or the minimum member contribution rate(s);
  4. inform the Church of the nature and impact of any legal or regulatory changes on its pension arrangements.
- b) To act on behalf of the Church in dealings with the trustees, managers, and professional advisers of the Church's pension schemes, as well as with the relevant regulatory authorities. In particular, to:
  1. receive regular reports from and meet with representatives of those managing each of the Church's pension schemes.
  2. review the performance of the funds of each pension scheme and alert the Treasurer and Resources Committee of any serious concerns.

3. ensure that the asset managers supporting the URC pension schemes are aware of the current URC Investment Guidelines and that their approaches are as compliant with them as is practicable.
  4. monitor the service being provided to members by each of the pension schemes and raise concerns when necessary.
  5. be involved with the trustees and managers of the pension schemes, when requested, to provide them with information, and to take decisions with them regarding the operation of the schemes, including their investment strategies, and regarding individual cases.
  6. in the event of serious concerns about the performance of the trustees or managers of one of the pension schemes, discuss this with the Treasurer, Resources Committee, and other Assembly officers and decide on appropriate action.
  7. monitor the URC's internal pension administration and its role in administering the Ministers' Pension Fund on behalf of its trustees.
  8. ensure that the other participating employers in the Church pension schemes are properly and regularly informed and, where appropriate, involved in any decisions.
- c) To liaise with the Investment Committee and the Resources Committee to ensure that the Pensions Committee is aware of the up to date URC Investment Guidelines, the thinking behind them, and any proposals to change them.
- d) When necessary, to obtain independent professional advice and support to help the Committee make good decisions and offer sound advice to the Church.
- e) To make decisions with Church colleagues about particular cases (eg long term sickness and ill health early retirement), where the Church may wish to apply its discretionary powers.

## **Risk management**

The Committee will review the Risk Register as it relates to its key responsibilities, at least once each year but will add additional risks as and when these arise.

## **Desirable skills for General Assembly appointees**

1. All members need to be financially literate, and a good knowledge of pension matters is desirable – though not necessarily as practitioners.
2. The Convenor needs a good understanding of pensions, a willingness to keep up to date, and a willingness to commit a considerable amount of time to the role outside meetings. S/he does not have to be an actuary or similar, but a strong financial orientation is essential and some Board or trustee level experience is extremely desirable.
3. The Convenor, if appointed as a director of the URC Ministers' Pensions Trust, will also (in a personal capacity) offer experience and support to the Chair of the Trust Board.

## Appendix two

### Current Terms of Reference of URC Pensions Committee – MC March 2020

#### Terms of Reference

- a) To provide expertise and guidance to the URC in relation to all matters relating to the provision of pensions for ministers, CRCW's and staff. In particular, to
  - i) advise the Finance Committee on the monetary requirement, needs and obligations of both the schemes and in relation to the benefits and financial status of the various charitable funds connected to ministers;
  - ii) when requested, support the consideration of any changes to the level or nature of pension provision by the URC for General Assembly or Mission Council;
  - iii) inform the URC of the nature and impact of legal and regulatory changes affecting its pension arrangements;
- b) To act on the URC's behalf in dealings with the trustees of its pension schemes and with the professional advisers of the pension schemes. It may, where necessary, also respond to contact with the Pensions Regulator on behalf of the URC;
- c) To take decisions on behalf of the URC within the guidelines for delegation agreed with General Assembly or Mission Council;
- d) To liaise with the Investment Committee to ensure that the URC's view of suitable investment strategy is communicated to the trustees of the pension schemes;
- e) To monitor the services provided by external pension providers and the internal pensions administration of the URC Ministers' Pension Fund;
- f) To secure advice and support from external advisers as is necessary to provide clear guidance to the URC.

#### Membership

- a) Ex-officio members:
  - i) the Treasurer, or Deputy Treasurer, of the URC;
  - ii) the Convener of the Investment Committee;
  - iii) the Convener of the Maintenance of the Ministry sub-committee;
  - iv) the Deputy General Secretary Administration and Resources.
- b) A Convener of the Pensions Committee and two further members appointed by the General Assembly for four-year terms, renewable once;
- c) Up to three additional members co-opted by the Committee;
- d) Staff in attendance:
  - i) The Chief Finance Officer;
  - ii) The Pensions Manager, who acts as secretary;
  - iii) The Secretary for Ministries, who may attend for matters relating to the Ministers' Pension Fund.

## Links between Committees

The Pensions Committee convener sits ex-officio on the Maintenance of Ministry sub-committee, the Investment Committee and may be invited to join the board of the URC Ministers Pensions Trust. This complements the ex-officio members of the Pensions Committee in facilitating good inter-committee communication. When matters need referral for information or decision to Mission Council or General Assembly, these will be presented by the Treasurer or Deputy Treasurer under the auspices of the Finance Committee.

## Delegated authority

- a) The Ministers Pension Fund Rules place certain responsibilities upon the URC.
- b) The following are delegated to the Pensions Committee; all others will be referred by the Committee to Mission Council or General Assembly for decision:
  - i) Acceptability of suitable occupation (for ill-health rule purposes);
  - ii) Admission of a late joiner;
  - iii) Service credit for ill health pension purposes when engaged in ecumenical work;
  - iv) Participating bodies: Consent for new participating body (where we have decided to admit no more), contributions and expenses chargeable to participating bodies and various other actions;
  - v) Consent to the trustees providing an augmentation of benefit (in agreement with the Treasurer);
  - vi) Consent to the trustees making a benefit payment in excess of H M Revenue and Customs limits;
  - vii) Receive the trustee's recommendation re any deficit/surplus (this effectively includes agreement to contribution rate changes and deficit contributions) – but the resulting actions would be managed in liaison with the Treasurer.
- c) There are similar responsibilities in relation to the lay staff pension scheme. The Pensions Committee will seek to manage these matters but will refer any significant financial matters to the Treasurer and liaise with the Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources) where members' benefits are concerned.
- d) Some responsibilities fall to the employer as a result of legislation and the actions of the Pension Regulator. These may include liaison with the Regulator and the trustees over the strength of the 'employer covenant', the investment strategy and the level of risk undertaken, the agreement of contribution levels and a plan for any recovery payments. The Pensions Committee will seek to manage these matters on behalf of the URC, whilst recognising that all matters of significant financial consequence should be managed in liaison with the Treasurer.

## Desirable skills for General Assembly appointees

- a) All members should have a good knowledge of pensions, though not necessarily as practitioners;
- b) The Convener needs a comprehensive understanding of pensions, a willingness to keep up to date, and a willingness to contribute a considerable amount of time to the

role outside meetings. He/she does not necessarily need to be an actuary, but a strong financial orientation and Board level experience are necessary;

- c) If appointed as a member of the URC Ministers' Pensions Trust board, the Convener will be there in a personal capacity.

### **Method of working**

- 1) The Committee will normally meet twice each year;
- 2) Further meetings, perhaps of a subset of members, may be held to address any current and pressing matters;
- 3) Where possible, progress will be made between meetings by electronic means and agreement to matters of decision may also be made in this way.

# Paper G2

## Pensions update

### Resources Committee

#### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Vaughan Griffiths – Deputy Treasurer <a href="mailto:deputy.treas@urc.org.uk">deputy.treas@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	For information.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None.</b>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To report on actions taken and in progress on pensions matters.
<b>Main points</b>	See report below.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	

#### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	See report below.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	None.

## Ministers' Pension Fund (MPF)

### MPF triennial valuation

The MPF's advisors (AON) have finalised the formal three-year valuation (the fund position as at 1 January, 2024). The valuation was presented to the MPF Board by our actuaries in September, 2024.

The legal confirmation (the Schedule of Contributions) was signed off by all parties on 12 November, 2024.

As at 1 January 2024 the MPF was in surplus by an estimated £4.3 million. Market movements up to 12 November, 2024 are estimated by AON to have improved this situation somewhat further.



The immediate consequence, as confirmed by the Schedule of Contributions, is that:

- a) there are no further deficit contributions required – in particular we were not required to make the £3.5 m contribution that would otherwise have fallen due in December 2024, and
- b) the surplus in the fund means that no contributions to expenses (ie actuaries' fees and transaction costs etc) need to be made going forward – this saves a possible £400k per annum from future URC Trust budgets.

The agreement that no future deficit contributions are required means that the Ministers Pension Deficit Restricted Fund is no longer needed for its original purpose, but Synods have been approached with a request that the fund's purpose might be extended to also cover any additional costs associated with the Buy-Out. Synods' responses have been warm to this request. At the date of this report the proposal is that the Restricted Fund will remain in place until the financial position on Buy-Out is clearer, probably in late-2025. Synods will be regularly updated on progress.

## **MPF strategy towards de-risking and future Buy-Out**

As previously reported, the move to Buy-Out is a two-stage process:

1. Buy-In – where we choose a provider to take on the MPF investments as a block; here our achieved transition to a (mainly) gilts-based portfolio is very helpful, and
2. Buy-Out – where a provider (possibly the one who takes on the Buy-In) takes on the whole operation of the MPF for the long-term.

A Joint Working Group is working with our advisors (Lane, Clark & Peacock) to decide on a preferred partner by early 2025. Assuming a decision can be made about the preferred partner it remains our view that the Buy-In should then be completed in Q1 or Q2 of 2025. If that goes well, the Buy-Out may be achieved by the end of 2025.

The JWG is very conscious of the need for careful communication.

## **Staff DB scheme – The Pensions Trust (TPT)**

The TPT defined benefit pension scheme was closed to accrual on 28 February, 2023 and remains close to being fully funded. The Pensions Committee is in ongoing discussion about a de-risking strategy, but there is a technical problem which will prevent moving to Buy-Out quickly; this is currently estimated to be achievable in 2026 at the earliest.

## **Pensions Committee**

As previously reported, the Pensions Committee has been reconstituted with Revd Dr Janet Tollington as Chair.

The Pensions Committee now reports to the Resources Committee.

The Pensions Committee acts as the representative of the Church in dealing with pension providers who are:

- The Ministers' Pension Fund (MPF) – now closed to future accrual
- Staff Salary Scheme (run by TPT) – now closed to future accrual
- AON Master Trust – the provider of the new defined contribution scheme.

### **Professional advice in relations to pensions**

As previously reported, a scheme for providing pension advice to members at a discounted rate has been agreed with Origen, a partner of AON.

*Vaughan Griffiths – Deputy Treasurer*  
*13 December 2024*

# Paper G3

## Decision making in pension ‘Buy In/Buy Out’ process Resources Committee

### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Victoria James victoria.james@urc.org.uk
<b>Action required</b>	To be noted.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Resolution 16</b>  <b>On matters relating to the closed Ministers’ Pension Fund, Assembly Executive notes that if the process for ‘buy in and buy out’ of the Pension Fund requires decisions from the Church which cannot be taken to either Assembly Executive or General Assembly for reasons of timing, then the Business Committee will exercise the authority delegated to it in its Terms of Reference to make urgent decisions on behalf of the Church. Such decisions would be taken on the recommendation of the Pensions Committee (through the Resources Committee).</b>

### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To be fully transparent in the governance and decision-making process in relation to the ‘buy in’ and ‘buy out’ process, Pension Committee want to highlight that the Business Committee’s delegated authority will be exercised if necessary to meet decision timeframes in order to minimise the risk to the Church.
<b>Main points</b>	On the recommendation of the Pension Committee, Resources Committee will ask Business Committee to make urgent decisions in relation to the pension ‘buy in’ and ‘buy out’ process if they cannot wait to be taken at either General Assembly or Assembly Executive.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Papers N1 and N2a General Assembly 2023, specifically resolution 53 Paper A1 General Assembly 2024.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Pension Committee on whose recommendation the resolution is brought Business Committee Chair of Ministers’ Pension Trust.

## Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	Failure to make timely decisions within the pension buy in and buy out process risks increased costs to the Church both in meeting the costs of the closed scheme but also meeting increased requirements set by the Pension Regulator.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	

Following the decision by the Church to close the Ministers' Pension Fund to further accrual on 28 February 2023, a journey has begun that will lead to buy-in of the scheme by an Insurance company, followed by buy-out (which transfers the responsibility for paying pensions to the Insurance company) and a 'wind-up' of the scheme completely. This journey needs to be completed by mid-2026, otherwise the Church will be required by the Pensions Regulator to set up a complex and costly system known as a Pensions Dashboard, as well as continuing to pay significant annual costs to manage the scheme.

In order to achieve this goal, there will, of course, be various decisions which rest solely with the Trustee; but there will be several steps along the way where a decision has to be made by the Church, rather than the Trustee. It is impossible to know when each decision will be needed but it is highly improbable that the dates will coincide with meetings of General Assembly or Assembly Executive. In some instances, it is also likely that a rapid decision will be needed, which is hard to achieve through the time scales of normal conciliar processes.

The Joint Working Group, Pensions Committee and the MPF Trustee Directors are all working in close collaboration; and legal advice is being obtained by both parties (URC and Trustee). All agree on the priority to ensure that members' benefits are safeguarded and on the importance of good communication with members about the implications for them at each stage of this whole process.

# Paper H1

## NSM Expenses Policy

### Ministries Committee

#### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Mary Thomas <b>dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk</b> Nicola Furley-Smith <b>nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk</b>
<b>Action required</b>	Decision.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Resolution 17</b> <b>Assembly Executive adopts the NSM Expenses Policy.</b>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	General Assembly 2024 asked for a Plan for Partnership for Remuneration for NSMs. NSMs are not remunerated but receive expenses. This paper sets out clearly what those expenses are.
<b>Main points</b>	The policy clarifies: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. reimbursement for travel</li><li>2. expenses for travel as outlined by HMRC</li><li>3. general expenses</li><li>4. expenses for pastoral supervision.</li></ol>
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Paper H2 Assembly Executive 2023.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Synod Moderators.

#### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	None.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	None.

### NSM Expenses Policy

#### 1. Finance

By definition, non-stipendiary ministers are not paid any kind of stipend or other remuneration by the Church. Nevertheless, non-stipendiary ministers are entitled to expect full reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses as set out in the Plan for Partnership in Ministerial Remuneration (Revised 2025) paragraphs 6.3.4, 6.3.4.1, 6.3.4.4, 6.3.5; 6.4.

- 1.1 For clarity:
- 1.1.1 A car shall not normally be provided by a pastorate to a non-stipendiary minister.
  - 1.1.2 The minister shall not be provided with a fixed car allowance.
  - 1.1.3 Housing or a housing allowance are not normally paid to a non-stipendiary minister. However, where there is a manse available, and the non-stipendiary minister wishes to use it, there is no reason why this should not be arranged. Such an arrangement, however, should include a lease or licence, entered into by the Trustee on the advice of a solicitor, and a commercial rent would be payable.
  - 1.1.4 Where it is the custom of a local church to offer a gift to a visiting worship leader in addition to travelling expenses, such a gift should also be offered to a non-stipendiary minister. The amount is shown in the Plan for Partnership in Ministerial Remuneration Appendix 1, currently £40.

## 2. Travel

The costs of travel on church business shall be met as follows (PfP 6.3.4).

- 2.1. Car: where a minister provides a car, the financial arrangements shall be agreed with the Synod, the local church and the minister and shall be stated in the Terms of Settlement. The MoM sub-committee shall distribute annually the maximum rates of reimbursement for mileage undertaken on church business, which must not be exceeded (see Appendix A) (PFP 6.3.4.1).
- 2.2. HMRC mileage rates are:
- |             |                    |     |
|-------------|--------------------|-----|
| Car         | Up to 10,000 miles | 45p |
|             | Over 10,000 miles  | 25p |
| Bicycle     |                    | 20p |
| Motorcycles |                    | 24p |
- 2.3. Other travel: the cost of travel on church business by public transport shall be reimbursed by the local church or other appropriate body.

## 3. Expenses

The local church or other appropriate body shall reimburse the minister for the cost of postage, telephone, broadband internet connection, stationery and any other expenses necessarily incurred on church business. This may well include expenses relating to the use of a computer and in some instances the provision of a computer. The reimbursement of expenses will be on the basis of actual cost incurred, and not by a predetermined lump sum (PFP 6.3.5).

## 4. Pastoral supervision

As agreed at Mission Council 2020, pastorates (and Synods where there is a Synod role) are strongly encouraged to pay towards the costs of their minister's pastoral supervision, normally 50%. Remaining costs will be met by Assembly funds. Where local pastorates feel they have the resources to bear the whole cost of supervision, they are encouraged to do so. Any pastorates which face particular challenges in meeting the cost may make a further request for funding from the denomination through their Synod.

The local pastorate may claim back the denominational contribution on an annual basis, normally in December of each year.

# Paper H2

## Special Category Pioneering Posts

### Ministries Committee

#### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Mary Thomas <b>dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk</b> Nicola Furley-Smith <b>nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk</b>
<b>Action required</b>	Decision.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Resolution 18</b> <b>Assembly Executive adopts the criteria and process for the 13 new pioneering posts agreed at Assembly Executive 2023.</b>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Assembly Executive 2023 agreed Paper H2 which affirmed the change in emphasis from Special Category ministry posts to creating thirteen new pioneering posts (one per Synod). The paper defines the criteria for a pioneering post and the process by which these are granted by the Accreditations sub-committee.
<b>Main points</b>	The paper defines: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. what a special category pioneer is</li><li>2. models of pioneering</li><li>3. the criteria for special category pioneering</li><li>4. guidance on the discernment process for whether a minister has the capacity for pioneer ministry</li><li>5. the process for application which follows the current SCM process.</li></ol>
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Paper H2 Assembly Executive 2023.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Synod Moderators.

#### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	None.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	None.



## 1. What is a Special Category Pioneer?

### Dissent from business as usual

As a denomination, the United Reformed Church needs to constantly remind itself that it is not the church of God that has a mission in the world but the God of mission which has a church in the world. Pioneering is a big part of the God's mission to be a growing church for all people in all places. It is an opportunity for the URC to partner with God and others towards a more just and inclusive society.

Pioneers are people called by God. This is a vocation. Pioneers have a gift for seeing, for imagination, dreaming, inspired not just by what could be but also by a sense of holy discontent, at the way the church is fulfilling its mission and purpose. In particular, this call and gift is exercised among those not currently engaged in the church.

- Pioneers dissent from business as usual
- Pioneers see differently – a possibility, an idea, a way that things could be better or new or different
- Pioneers make something happen out of what they see
- It's a gift, a call, a way of being in the world. They can't help it – it's who they are
- Not everyone is a pioneer. But we need pioneers because without them we'll just get stuck with the way things are
- Pioneers make a way where there is no way
- Pioneers have a gift of not fitting in
- The world is broken in so many ways. But another world is possible.

## 2. Models of Pioneering

Pioneers, and pioneering, look different in different contexts. CMS have developed the pioneer spectrum which locates four different kinds of pioneers on a scale of 'cultural distance' from the culture of the Pioneer's 'home' church. Pioneer model 1 and 2 below tend to start with church in one form or another. Pioneer Models 3 and 4 take cross-cultural steps abandoning the model of institutional church and start with listening and from listening begin to make connections between the host culture and the gospel.

- **Pioneer Model 1 Church Replicators:** those Pioneers who are really good at starting churches on the basis of a model that has worked elsewhere, normally their sending church. Some creative adaptation may be needed. But essentially these are churches replicated from other churches;
- **Pioneer Model 2 Pioneer Adaptors:** those who excel at adapting the way church is often done so that it can engage more effectively with a new context or culture. Often, they start with church but maybe connect with café culture to become café church or all ages to become messy church;
- **Pioneer Model 3 Pioneer Innovators:** Model 3a are those whose ministry ventures into a host context, for example a new housing estate or an urban centre and allow the gospel response to shape the new ecclesial community; and Model 3b those whose ministry ventures into the edges of post-modern culture, exploring spirituality alongside fellow spiritual seekers or nomads.
- **Pioneer Model 4 Pioneer Activists:** those who operate outside the institutional church seeking to align community, network or industry with the values of the Kingdom. These are 'fresh start' pioneers who enjoy starting with a blank canvas.

They have been released from the expectations of traditional pastoral ministry or chaplaincy to minister in places where the church is not present.

Ministries recognizes the value of Models 1 and 2, but the new pioneer posts should be aligned to Models 3 and 4. Applications should be written with this in mind.

### 3. Criteria for Special Category Pioneering

- 3.1 Ministries recognises that the criteria for accepting an application need to be flexible.
- 3.2 Applications should come from the Synod and have been endorsed by the Synod Ministries Committee or equivalent. They should include:
  - 3.2.1 **Context.** A description of the geographical area and context in which this ministry is to be exercised; the reasons that leads to this application and what are the theological assumptions lying behind them. Not all pioneers are the same. Nor should they be. There are common threads to their ministry; creativity, initiating things, building teams and so on. But it's the context that is key.
  - 3.2.2 **Central conviction.** A description of the overall mission and ministry of the post as well as the theological assumptions lying behind this in no more than 50 words.
  - 3.2.3 **Relationship to the URC.** Show how this ministry relates to the overall ministry policy and mission policy of the Synod; give evidence of listening to the story of the place and community. When a Synod is seeking to create a new Christian community, the application needs to evidence that there has been a listening exercise – to the local communities, to God, to the wider church, to the story of a place and community. It is then that what they hear should begin to give birth to a vision for how the gospel can be faithfully expressed in this new place.
  - 3.2.4 **Please supply a role description.**
  - 3.2.5 **Please supply a person specification.**
  - 3.2.6 **Budget.** Supply a budget. Ministries recognises that the application may not yet be a fully formed vision, with a seven-year strategy and an itemised budget. Ministries budget will support the stipend, but other funding will need to come from Synod or other resources. Pioneering is comfortable with emergence, with seeking to follow the Spirit, and allowing dialogue between the gospel and a community to shape the ministry. The Synod needs to feel comfortable that their budget may change as the ministry progresses.
  - 3.2.7 **Synod Pioneer Advocate.** Synod shall need to think prior to the application who in the Synod will be the Synod Pioneering Advocate. Advocacy is part of the pioneer vocabulary. Pioneers need supervisors or in the case of the URC a Pioneer Advocate, to advocate for them and their work at the next level of responsibility. An advocate needs to be someone with an understanding of the principles of pioneering which most will not have although they will understand the local

context. If Pioneers have to expend energy on advocating for themselves, it will reduce the energy and attention they will be able to give in mission. Therefore, the URC is aware of its need to redefine the role of advocacy as less steering and more seeking to support and resource Pioneers through the influencing of Synod and denominational structures. Support for the Pioneer is crucial.

The Pioneer Advocate should be named in the application and in place when the pioneer begins their ministry.

3.2.8 **Outside of deployment quotas.** The 13 pioneering posts will be outside any deployment quotas; they are in addition to ordained ministry being exercised by the vast majority of ministers in local pastorates. They represent an attempt by the church to recognise its missionary task to create new Christian communities on the 'frontiers'. They are set aside only for the purposes of deployment. It is important that this post is seen as part of the Synod's mission strategy, and the application should indicate how this is so.

3.2.9 **Length of post.** The post is for a seven-year term in the first instance. This may be extended for a second five-year term only.

#### 4. Marks of Ministry for Pioneering

A Pioneer post-holder will need to be:

- **a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ:** caught up in the joy and wonder of God's will and work; seeking always to live a holy life in public and in private; sustained by their own rhythm of prayer, Bible reading and worship; open to journeying as a disciple with others.
- **a person of accountability:** committed to serving as a pioneer within the conciliar oversight of the church; willing to engage in systems of support and mentoring for Special Category Pioneers; willing to engage in mandatory training including safeguarding; ready to collaborate with others for the mission of God.
- **a pioneer:** understand and be involved in the praxis of planting fresh expressions of church, unafraid to take risks in developing enterprising forms of mission; capable of learning from success and failure; able to disciple and nurture the faith of others in fresh expressions/pioneering contexts.
- **a communicator:** passionate and effective in breaking open God's Word in preaching; to be relevant in the world whilst retaining their prophetic edge to equip God's people in their mission and discipleship to share the Gospel and to live God's Kingdom of justice and peace to the full.
- **a lifelong learner:** self-aware and committed to lifelong learning reflecting and re-examining the message they communicate; aware of their own strengths, gifts and limitations and thus willing to seek support when and where necessary; making use of the URC provision for on-going training for lay pioneers.
- **a contextual theologian:** delighting in Scripture rooted in the Reformed tradition; able to communicate their own faith and its implications; able to encourage others to discover how these rich resources inspire and sustain faithfulness.

- **a public figure:** reliable and effective in representing the Church in preaching and/or service leading.
- **a reformer:** able to help congregations to discern and respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit as new chapters open in the life of the Church and others close.

### 5. Discerning whether a minister is a pioneer

The Pioneer Criteria are to be used for the discernment of whether a minister has the capacity for pioneer ministry in the United Reformed Church. Some of the criteria are about assessing a minister's potential and recognise that that potential may only be fully realised after training and during the ministry. The recognition of that potential is sufficient to allow a minister to be recommended as a pioneer.

However, some of the criteria call for 'demonstrable' ability and, as such, there has to be clear evidence at the point of interview that a candidate fulfils these criteria if they are to be recommended as a pioneer. These demonstrable abilities are so essential that they need to be clearly and evidently in place at the point of interview.

- **How they have responded to God's calling to be a pioneer.** Evidence of this will be drawn from a track record of 'firsts' and initiatives in having started something new. Evidence of this will be drawn from a candidate's experience of:
  - starting a new project or group by identifying and responding effectively to key opportunities for mission
  - working creatively in non-traditional ways to develop an innovative approach to practices of missional imagination
  - reflecting on situations, learning from them and make appropriate changes for the future.
- **A willingness to take risks and show courageous faith.** Evidence of this will be drawn from:
  - being a self-starter with a willingness to build from nothing
  - taking appropriate risks and be prepared to exercise step by step experimentation
  - negotiating disappointment well and learn from mistakes to improve further action.
- **An ability to communicate the faith effectively to those outside the church.** Evidence for this will be drawn from:
  - walking with others in their own spirituality and faith development
  - demonstrating how they have communicated the Christian faith to those outside the Church naturally, sensitively and effectively
  - demonstrating an understanding of the interaction between gospel and culture
  - demonstrating how they have helped in form individuals as missional disciples of Jesus.

- **An ability to work collaboratively in creating and working with a team.**  
Evidence of this may be drawn from:
  - developing vision with others for a new project
  - releasing and equipping others for pioneering ministry
  - helping people to share responsibility for the growth and success of the fresh expression.
- **Well-developed abilities to handle complexity and initiate change.** Evidence of this may be drawn from:
  - an ability to live with uncertainty
  - the use of adaptive practices appropriately in a particular context
  - motivating others to engage with change
  - deal well with conflict
  - shift priorities and emphasis during various stages of development of a project they have been involved with.
- **A clear vision of the place of their envisaged ministry within the wider URC's response to God's mission to the world.** Evidence of this may be drawn from:
  - an ability to understand and be committed to the URC as a 'mixed economy' Church
  - a commitment to the reshaping of the Church for mission.
- Personal qualities required
  - **A demonstrable maturity and robustness to face the demands of pioneering mission and minister:**
    - Demonstrate an established robust, discipline of personal prayer, worship and study which can sustain them in pioneering situations
    - Adapt their spiritual practices creatively to reflect and engage with their pioneering context
    - Have the patience to wait for and identify God's timing
    - Be able to help new disciples grow in their faith. Attend to the movement of the Holy Spirit in particular mission situations.
  - **The ability to learn and reflect theologically as a pioneer:**
    - To interpret the Bible in the midst of contextual mission
    - To understand how missional ministry is shaped by culture and context
    - Understand contemporary cultures and the practice of planting fresh expressions of church within them.

## 6. The process for application

- 6.1 All applications from the Synod (which is ultimately responsible for securing the funding of the post, should come to the Accreditation sub-committee.

- 6.2 The Synod will be invited to do a presentation to the ASC at its next available meeting, normally on Zoom.
- 6.3 If successful the post may be advertised on the Synod Moderator's List in the usual way.
- 6.4 It should be noted that any successful application for a post should first be offered to stipendiary ministers on the URC roll. A request for it to be opened up to ministers from sister churches (ie a member of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council, the Council for World Mission or the World Communion of Reformed Churches) or lay people will normally not be considered unless it has been advertised for a URC minister for six months and no one suitable has been found;
- 6.5 In order to evaluate the mission of the post the Accreditations sub-committee will conduct regular reviews:
- a) an initial review after six months in post conducted by the ASC
  - b) a mini review after 24 months conducted by the ASC
  - c) after 5.5 years of the post, the Synod will be asked to create a small first-term Review Group whose task will be to undertake a major review of the post in all aspects of its life. The Review Group should be independent of the post and will be supplied with a list of relevant questions to ask. They will meet a wide range of people connected with the post and project and after deliberation, will recommend either a second term of accreditation, or not. While this may seem a little premature, if the post is not to continue, personnel, funding and other matters will need to be taken care of from the beginning of the seventh year.
  - d) annual reports from the Pioneer Advocate agreed by the post holder will be sent to the Ministries PA in December of each year.
  - e) If a second Term is accredited, further reviews and an end-of-term report will be expected.
- 6.6 Posts are for seven years in the first instance, with the possibility for a five year extension.

## 7. The role of the Pioneer Advocate

Local pioneer advocates are key people for the future of the church. They are the person who is committed to equality between the traditional and new expressions of Church where previously the weight of status and resources is still heavily tipped in favour of inherited structures. What does local pioneer advocacy look like in practice? A Pioneer advocate is:

- committed to be in good relationship with the pioneer minister and traditional church and its denominational structures
- seeks to support and resource the pioneer minister through the influencing of Synod structures
- supports the work of the pioneer acting in a supervisory capacity on behalf of the Synod whilst being the bridge between the pioneer and the Synod
- understands the principles of pioneering
- has some knowledge of the local context.

# Paper H3

## Revision to Appendix D of the Process for dealing with cases of discipline involving ministers of the Word and Sacraments or Church-Related Community Workers (Section O of the Manual) – Moderator’s Recorded Warning

Ministries Committee

### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Nicola Furley-Smith <a href="mailto:nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk">nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Assembly Executive adopts the changes in wording to Appendix D of the Process for dealing with cases of discipline involving Ministers of the Word and Sacraments or Church-Related Community Workers (Section O of The Manual) – Moderator’s Recorded Warning.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None.</b>

### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	This is a tidying up exercise. The paper and process was agreed in en bloc at Assembly Executive November 2024. Ministries has been asked to make it clear that it is working within the URC Data Privacy Policy in regards to who has access to minister files.
<b>Main points</b>	The addition is in blue text.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Appendix D Assembly Executive.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	

### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	None.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	None.

### Appendix D Moderator's recorded warning

1. If a concern which comes to the notice of a Synod Moderator or the Assembly Representative for Discipline is not considered by that person to amount to an allegation of misconduct within the meaning of the paragraph two of the Framework, the Moderator or Assembly Representative for Discipline may speak to the minister concerned, giving such advice and pastoral support as seems appropriate. This is a pastoral and not a disciplinary step.
2. Such advice may, however, include a warning that repeated allegations in the same field may have to be treated as disciplinary. Such a warning is pastoral and is not disciplinary in nature.
3. Both the conversation with either the Synod Moderator or the Assembly Representative for Discipline and the issue of such a warning is to be recorded on the Minister's file to which only the Synod Moderator and those who need to have access [in accordance with the URC Data Privacy Policy](#) shall have access. Should misconduct on the part of that minister later to be alleged, of a nature to which the recorded warning is relevant, the Synod Moderator or Assembly Representative for Discipline may inform the Investigation Team that a pastoral conversation took place, a warning was issued, and the reasons for it. The giving of such factual information will not disqualify a Synod Moderator or Assembly Representative for Discipline from exercising their role on the Assembly Standing Panel on Discipline.
4. As a pastoral step no formal procedure is required before the issue of a Moderators warning, nor need to be proceeded by any proof or admission in respect of the matters involved. This means that the facts on which the warning was issued remain unproven at the time when they are reported to the investigation team. It lies in the Team's discretion whether or not to make the existence of a Moderators warning part of the case, and if it does so the accused minister will be free to dispute either the alleged facts underlying the warning or to present their own view of their seriousness.



# Paper I1

## Report to Assembly Executive 2025

### Mission Committee

#### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor, Mission Committee <b>slanecawte@gmail.com</b> Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary (Mission) <b>philip.brooks@urc.org.uk</b>
<b>Action required</b>	For information and to formally receive and commend the report from the third quinquennial of the Roman Catholic/URC Dialogue Group.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Resolution 19</b>  <b>Assembly Executive receives <i>Journeying Together</i>, the Roman Catholic/United Reformed Church Dialogue Group resource, give thanks to those who have produced this practical document and commends it for use by Synods, local churches and ecumenical partners.</b>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	This report provides an update on the work of the Mission Committee and Mission Team since General Assembly 2024.
<b>Main points</b>	The report covers the areas for which Mission Committee is responsible, namely: Evangelism, Ecumenical Relations, Interfaith Relations, Commitment for Life, Global and Intercultural Ministries, Legacies of Slavery, Racial Justice, Fresh Expressions, Community Engagement, Public Issues, Greenbelt, Net Zero Task Group.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Papers I1, I2, I3, I4 General Assembly 2024 Book of Reports Resolutions 240-249, Record of Assembly 2024.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Within the context of the ongoing work of Mission Team and Mission Committee.

#### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	All the work in this report is contained within current budgets.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	The overwhelming majority of the work outlined in this report is external, detailing significant activity in building and maintaining ecumenical relationships within the UK and globally.

## 1. Evangelism

### 1.1 Conversations at the Crossroads: towards new Christian Communities A Gathering of URC Mission and Discipleship Animators

In January 2025 a gathering of 100 URC 'animators' will be taking place, organised by the Church House Mission and Discipleship teams. The first wave of invitations went to the Synod networks of Mission Enablers, Training Officers, Children's and Youth Workers, CRCWs, Special Category Ministers and principals and staff of the Resource Centres for Learning. In addition, invitations have also gone to Moderators, ordained and lay people in pioneering roles and ecumenical guests.

'Conversations' will be a unique time of collaboration and encouragement. It will be an opportunity to respond to the challenges contained in the Theos Report, in the context of the Church Life Review. Building on the decision of the 2024 Assembly Executive to set aside 13 new pioneering posts to establish new worshipping and discipling Christian communities, as well as the 2024 General Assembly Resolution to 'develop presence and engagement with people experiencing poverty and marginalisation', this could well be a seminal moment as we work towards a truly outward looking URC.

### 1.2 Mission Enablers Network

The network met online in the autumn as an additional meeting ahead of the 'Conversations' gathering. Members of the network continue to draw support, encouragement and inspiration from one another, despite their roles looking quite different.

### 1.3 Webinars

Two 'FaithTalk', everyday evangelism in the URC, webinars were held in 2024. These were provided as a relaxed forum to encourage people to share stories around their faith. The planning group represents a broad spectrum of the Church. The webinars will continue in 2025.

### 1.4 Webpage

The URC has a dedicated evangelism page which is now live on the website and is updated regularly: [www.urch.org.uk/your-faith/evangelism-in-the-urch/](http://www.urch.org.uk/your-faith/evangelism-in-the-urch/)

### 1.5 Fresh Expressions

In August 2024 we said goodbye to Linda Rayner, the URC's long-serving Fresh Expressions Co-ordinator. We give thanks for Linda's many years of service and for the expertise which she brought to the denomination. In line with the need to reduce the central budget the Fresh Expressions post will not be replaced and Linda's duties have been shared amongst the Mission and Discipleship teams.

## 2. Interfaith

### 2.1 Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territory (IOPT)

#### Gaza resolutions update

The Mission Committee report on Gaza was thoroughly debated by General Assembly. Its members passed all the resolutions with a few useful, technical amendments.

A summary of all resolutions on IOPT from the 2016, 2019, 2021 and 2024 General Assemblies is available, as is a short FAQs that may be useful for those who may be

asked questions on the URC's thinking on and approach to IOPT. These can be requested by emailing [interfaith@urc.org.uk](mailto:interfaith@urc.org.uk).

## Deepening local Interfaith relations

The 2024 Gaza Resolutions (41 and 42) focussed on deepening local interfaith relations. There is a question on how the URC can best encourage local members, congregations, and Synods to reach out in solidarity and friendship to other faith groups. Work is being carried out on a simple programme of encouragement with ideas on how to reach out, such as *#BeMyFriend*. This programme is in an early phase of design and will encourage deepened interfaith friendships.

## Raising awareness of IOPT issues

The 2024 Resolution 44 encouraged learning and building deeper awareness on a range of issues including antisemitism, Balfour and Christian Zionism. A programme of online learning (IOPT IN FOCUS) is being rolled out after consultation with various stakeholders. There is a view that this programme should ideally be linked in some way to worship. The URC's online congregation, yoURChurch ([www.yourchurch.uk](http://www.yourchurch.uk)) appears to be both well placed and interested in supporting a wider programme of education. Speakers who have thus far agreed to lead sessions include Charlotte Marshall (Sabeel-Kairos), the Revd Philip Woods (PCUSA) and Dr Atif Imtiaz (University of Bradford).

## Ecumenical Roundtable on the impact on Inter Faith Relations of the Gaza-Israel War

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) organised the ecumenical Roundtable on this challenging topic which took place at the end of July 2024. Speakers Phil Rosenberg of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and Ibrahim Mogra, Imam and former Deputy General Secretary of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) expressed anxiety about appearing in a predominantly Christian forum, but both were deeply complimentary of proceedings.

For Muslims, the war takes up enormous emotional space, leaving little for other important issues like the cost-of-living crisis and the climate emergency. Phil Rosenberg spoke about how the massive spike in antisemitism began immediately after 7 October, which for Jews in the UK speaks to the deeply rooted antisemitism here.

CTBI Deputy General Secretary (and URC minister), Peter Colwell has commented that the roundtable was one of the most nerve-wracking events he had ever organised. But he was pleased with the honesty, candour, and sensitivity of both speakers, as well as the contributions from the audience.

Nicola Brady, General Secretary of CTBI drew on her experiences in Northern Ireland about the importance of avoiding labels like 'terrorist', which tend to shut down conversation and routes to understanding different perspectives.



The Gaza-Israel catastrophe has proved challenging for UK interfaith relations. The conflict has played a significant role in stoking Islamophobia, which most observers suggest has played into the anti-refugee rioting. Arguably the worst moment was the attempt to burn down a hotel housing refugees. We had reports of church members not driving through potentially affected riot zones for safety concerns. We have heard of enormous pressure on prison chaplains, who are expected to be 'experts' in dealing with a vast array of complex socio-political issues, with prisons being a microcosm of the problems in wider society.

The Islamophobia resource being developed by CTBI (following on from the antisemitism resource) had stalled a little but is now back on track – we look forward to its publication in the near future.

Muslim commentators are grateful that CTBI is able to raise these difficult issues in an interfaith context and are hopeful for the new resource which CTBI has resumed working on. This speaks to the value that the churches have among other faiths in the UK.

### **The Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ)**

Nathan Eddy, Co-Director of CCJ and URC minister, has spoken at several events on antisemitism and has recommended a study of the resources offered by the Communities Security Trust (CST): <https://cst.org.uk/research/cst-publications?> The Inter Faith Fund has been generous in its support of the CCJ in their work to improve awareness on antisemitism in the UK.

Nathan Eddy, has been asked to write a prayer and reflection on behalf of the URC, taking seriously the way many Israelis view 7 October as its own, unique event which, as already outlined, has affected many Jews living in the UK. Nathan Eddy has been elected to the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) Council, representing the URC. Now that John Bradbury has finished his term, CPCE will find Nathan's experience in Jewish-Christian relations particularly helpful.

### **Quakers accept the term 'Apartheid'**

The Middle East Programme Manager for the Quakers in Britain has outlined the outcome of a three-month discernment process via 'Meetings for Sufferings' by which the Quakers have come to an agreement to name the situation in occupied Palestine (OPT) as 'apartheid'.

The process was not easy given the widely divergent views not only on the situation but also on the core role of the Quakers either as 'prophet' or 'reconciler'. They discerned that the Quakers had a moral and spiritual obligation to speak truth to power, and that by refusing to heed the call by Palestinians Christians along with the findings of the International Court of Justice, advisory opinion would be deemed a failure to accurately describe the legal situation as it pertains to the occupied territory.

The URC has thus far not taken the step of naming the situation in the OPT as 'apartheid'.

### **International developments**

In November 2024, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants citing alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, former defence minister Yoav Gallant and Hamas commander Mohammed Deif. The following month Amnesty International accused the Israeli Government of

committing genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza war. The human rights group said its conclusion was based on 'dehumanising and genocidal statements' by Israeli officials, digital images and witness testimony and must serve as 'a wake-up call' to the international community. Israel strongly denies the accusations.

In the wake of the worsening situation in the region, the lack of progress towards a peaceful settlement and the continuing unwillingness of the Israeli Government to abide by international law, the following resolutions passed at the 2024 General Assembly have taken on even more significance. They are summarised below:

Resolution 39 – **General Assembly calls for an immediate, permanent ceasefire** between Hamas and the Israeli Defence Force, and for the immediate de-escalation of hostilities regionally.

Resolution 40 – **General Assembly calls on the UK Government...to cease arms sales** to Israel and to monitor existing embargoes on arms sales to nations...supporting Hamas militarily.

Resolution 45 – In the wake of continuing and worsening breaches of international law...**General Assembly requests URC Trusts to avoid knowingly investing in Israeli registered companies** until Israel once again abides by international law.

## 2.2 Inter Faith Network (IFN)

The loss of the IFN is being felt keenly, especially at this fraught time for interfaith relations. The board still needs to attend to various issues, such as the final accounts and the problematic Wikipedia page.

The board has asked Angela Rayner, Deputy Prime Minister, for an idea of what the government's direction will be and has received no response yet. However, the issue of a replacement for IFN was raised at ChurchWorks, which the URC has just joined and where Steve Summers represents the URC. Encouragingly, it is on the agenda for the new government.

Harriet Crabtree (former Executive Director of IFN) has voluntarily offered to finalise details, and Interfaith Week plans are underway.

Phil Champagne from the Freedom and Belief Forum has asked that CTBI's Churches' Forum for inter-religious relations (CFIRR) be represented among a wider group that is asking what might replace the IFN. Concern has been expressed that all four nations be represented.

The plight of Christians in Nigeria is of concern, and also those in Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria. There is also concern over how artificial intelligence might impact freedom of religion.

## 2.3 Upcoming Churches Forum for Inter-religious Relations (CFIRR)

The 2025 in-person gathering will be held in Belfast, where there are ongoing conversations between the Northern Ireland interfaith forum and the Dublin interfaith forum. There is useful cross border sharing, with joint events on topics such as training, health, education, policing, racism and religiously motivated hate-crime, but with two historically very different contexts. CFIRR will meet at

Duncairn, North Belfast, which was an area of deprivation and Presbyterian in a predominantly Nationalist area and is now an arts and crafts centre.

## 3. Commitment for Life

### 3.1 Lay Preachers' Event at Luther King House

In the 2023 Annual Church Returns Questionnaire, Commitment for Life (CFL) asked congregations to indicate whether they would be likely to host a CFL service of worship. CFL received hundreds of affirmative replies. This interest in CFL was most heartening, but did pose a significant logistical challenge. CFL has very little capacity within the team to lead services of worship, yet we know that face-to-face contact on a Sunday morning in the context of worship is critical for the ongoing sustainability of CFL. How were we to address this (most gratifying) demand?

The idea was put forward that we engage with Education and Learning, who then suggested we approach Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher students and graduates. We ran with this idea, and in partnership with Luther King House created a *CFL Lay Preachers' Training Event* for September 2024. The event was, we are happy to report, over-subscribed. Our small team's programme was underpinned by the respected theologian and Northern College Tutor, the Revd Dr Graham Adams. It focussed on creatively 'leaning into' the preaching interests and strengths of participants. The Revd Dr Ana Gobledale offered invaluable input. The event was unanimously praised by lay preachers who attended. Commitment for Life has already invited the trained lay preachers to lead CFL services. Another training event will be held for lay preachers in 2025.

### 3.2 Gaza Appeal

CLF has been supporting Palestinians through its Christian Aid partners, raising over £20,000 through its Gaza Appeal and adding to this amount by giving £50,000 from reserves for this vital, life-saving work. Our efforts have been strengthened by the resolutions taken by General Assembly in 2024, and we thank Mission Committee for its principled stand, rooted in international humanitarian law.

The URC is partnering with the Methodist Church to launch the Gaza and Lebanon Justice Appeal (see QR code). Our URC church partner the National Evangelical Church in Syria and Lebanon will be part beneficiaries of this appeal. The Revd Joseph Kassab sends regular updates on how the conflicts are affecting the Christian communities in the region.



At the time of writing the ceasefire in Lebanon has been broken over 60 times by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF). Over 780 people have been killed on the West Bank since October 2023. All the while, the situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate. The policies of the Israeli Government lead inexorably to unbearably awful living conditions for Palestinians in Gaza. Children are being killed at a horrifying average rate of 30 per day. The former head of the IDF, Minister Moshe Ya'alon describes the situation as 'ethnic cleansing' and has been informed by commanders on the ground that Israeli troops are committing war crimes. The Church's calls to successive UK governments to demand an immediate ceasefire have not been backed up by significant government curbs on the sale of UK-manufactured weapons and weapon components, nor the

cessation of RAF reconnaissance flights out of Cyprus in support of the IDF. During Advent the URC backed a petition organised by Embrace the Middle East calling on the UK Government to suspend all arms sales to Israel.

### 3.3 **Wessex Big Day Out**

We are grateful to the Wessex Synod for their invitation to CFL to share in their Big Day Out. The video can be watched here: <https://youtu.be/xxneTkTEFpQ>

### 3.4 **Mersey Does Mercy event for Commitment for Life**

We are also grateful to Mersey Synod for hosting CFL for a special event focussed on our global justice work.

### 3.5 **Legacies of the Transatlantic Slave Trade**

CFL is working with Global and Intercultural Ministries to determine how best CFL might work in support of the church's reparations commitments. It seems one option may be for CFL to take on an additional partner region for a determined period. For example, CFL may partner with the Churches' Reparations Action Forum (CRAF) in Jamaica for a period of four years in which time a quarter of the funds that are normally shared through Christian Aid are used to support the work of CRAF.

Assuming total CFL donations (conservatively speaking) of £200,000 per annum (pa), a total of £150,000 would go to Christian Aid. Shared across four global partners (rather than the current three), this would mean each global partner would receive £37,500 pa for a period of four years, assuming no significant drop in donations. We would work with CRAF to direct to specific projects that fit with the ethos of CFL. The hope is that the additional focus might encourage more engagement with CFL.

These plans and figures are for discussion and illustrative purposes only and may be subject to change.

### 3.6 **Myanmar Appeal**

The URC has a long and close relationship with the Presbyterian Church in Myanmar (PCM): <https://urc.org.uk/who-we-are/what-we-do/global-and-intercultural-ministries/global-partnerships/>. We are represented on the PCM Partners Roundtable, a gathering of global churches and CWM, offering prayer and practical support and solidarity with the Church, particularly since the military coup in February 2021. The PCM's response to the subsequent crises has been deeply moving: offering shelter for thousands of displaced people; establishing informal medical centres and primary schools in local churches; and offering pastoral care to young men fleeing conscription.

In August 2024 we launched an appeal for the PCM to our local churches, which we made by email to Secretaries. We were not able to use social media and the website due to the potential dangers this could pose to the Church in Myanmar. We have been delighted by the response of our churches: more than 50 churches have contributed a total of over £16,000. This amount will be matched by a historic fund, ringfenced for the Church in SE Asia.

## 3.7 Ukraine Appeal

Following a resolution from the East Midlands Synod to the 2023 General Assembly, Mission Committee was asked to investigate how the URC might offer support for Ukrainian refugees in Ukraine. Mission Committee agreed to work with our URC ecumenical partner churches in Hungary and the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine. Our partners are heavily invested in



providing aid for Ukrainian refugee projects. With strong support from John Bradbury, based on his work with the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe, it was agreed that the URC Programme Officer for Global Justice & Partnerships, Kevin Snyman, would visit Hungary and Ukraine. The purpose of the trip was to build our ecumenical relationships, specifically in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine, and to bring back stories and media assets that could be used to share an appeal for URC support. The film of the visit can be found here: [https://youtu.be/IK9s\\_v4ebPU?si=G9YYixklmHKKYnME](https://youtu.be/IK9s_v4ebPU?si=G9YYixklmHKKYnME) and we ask that you share it along with the affiliated donations page.



## 3.8 Finance

The CFL Reference Group agreed to allowing a percentage of the URC portion of income (12%) to go towards the costs of paying the Programme Officer, which at the 2023 rate amounts to around £6,200 pa. This news was received with appreciation by those tasked with reducing Assembly expenditure given the constraints on income increasingly felt by the denomination. An application has been approved to increase the CFL Administrative Assistant's hours by half a day per week to cope with the increased demand for CFL resourcing and services.

Taken in the round the income for CFL along with its additional appeals is holding up well. We are moving to a new phase for CFL which will incorporate new ways of global justice engagement with the denomination which includes targeted appeals such as the ones for Gaza, Myanmar and Ukraine. This should raise the profile of CFL and more importantly its ability to have an impact with partner countries.

## 3.9 Remote working

From November 2024 the CFL Programme Officer is no longer based at Church House but working remotely. Having a Church House staff member located in Northern Synod presents opportunities for new engagement not only for CFL, but also for Interfaith and other Church House staff activities and engagement.

## 4. Ecumenical

**4.1 The Roman Catholic/URC Dialogue Group** is coming to the end of its third quinquennial. The theme of the last years has been 'Journeying Together', with the group making several visits to look at ecumenism in local contexts: in Milton Keynes, in Cumbria, in Cardiff and in Edinburgh, as well as journeying online together during the Covid-19 pandemic. Instead of a conventional report, the group has put together a practical Resource Pack for local RC and URC churches looking to working more closely together, as a small group resource and to encourage other activity. The group is planning this stage's final journey together to Rome, where the resource will be received by the RC Dicastery for the



Promotion of Christian Unity and by officers of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

Assembly Executive is asked to receive the Resource Pack and commend it to Synods, local churches and ecumenical partners in the resolution accompanying this Mission Committee report. The Resource Pack can be accessed here:

**<https://urc.org.uk/who-we-are/what-we-do/ecumenical-relationships/interdenominational-dialogue/>**.

- 4.2 URC Ecumenical Officers (EOs)** met together in person at Churches Together in England's (CTE) 'All Ecumenical Representatives Conference' in September. This was a valuable time for encouragement and support. We also gather once a year online. We encourage Synods to ensure that vacancies are filled promptly, and that paid roles are considered where possible. There is a huge range in the effectiveness of our EOs according to the time they have available for the role. Mission and Ministries will be meeting in January to consider the next three applications for ecumenical posts.
- 4.3 Methodist/URC Liaison Group**  
In November, this group had its first in-person meeting in several years. We were hosted by the Lutheran Church in Great Britain where we received a warm welcome. The main focus of discussion was around supporting ministers and regional leaders in better understanding of one another's traditions and structures. As part of supporting better working relationships at a local level, the Group has looked at the differences between elders and stewards, as well as considering how URC 'call' and Methodist 'stationing' operate in practice.
- 4.4 Christian Council for Unity (Church of England)**  
We continue to be represented on this group, which offers valuable insight into the Church of England's ecumenical working. The bilateral URC/Church of England Contact Group is still awaiting the appointment of a Bishop and so has not met for several years now.
- 4.5 Churches Together in England (CTE)**  
The URC's Evangelism and Ecumenical Officer, Lindsey Brown is on the planning group for the annual Learning to be Missionary Disciples conference in November. The 2024 event was a very broad and inspiring gathering, on the theme of 'Beyond the Familiar'. Two members of URC Youth attended. Lindsey also continues to be active on the CTE 'Living with Diversity group' (working on better ways for CTE members to work together with difference) and took part in a presentation on the group's journey so far at CTE Enabling Group. This will be repeated at CTE Forum in March 2025. She is part of the team for the New Ecumenical Officers training in January and continues to be active in CTE Group for Evangelisation.
- 4.6 National Ecumenical Officers** from the Church of England, the Methodist Church and the Baptist Union, who have a close involvement with LEPs, continue to meet regularly to discuss individual and broader issues that have been brought to them, identifying patterns and offering support.

## 4.7 European ecumenism

The URC has recently withdrawn from the Council of European Churches (CEC). The reason was partly budgetary but also reflects the view of the URC and other UK ecumenical partners that CEC is less relevant to our wider ecumenical work. We remain committed to our relationships with churches in Europe through the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE). As already covered in this report, URC minister, Nathan Eddy was elected to CPCE Council, following the end of John Bradbury's term as a member of the CPCE Council and CPCE Executive President. We continue to engage with the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) Europe, attending their annual conferences. We have strong links with the Evangelical Church of the Palatinate (Pfalz) and are developing closer connections, in conjunction with Wessex Synod, with the United Protestant Church of France, including establishing a three-way Friendship group. Deputy General Secretary (Mission), Philip Brooks attended the Pfalz Synod in November 2024. The Moderator of General Assembly, Tim Meadows, attended the 400<sup>th</sup> Synod of the Waldensian Church in Italy in August 2024. Susan Durber continues to serve as World Council of Churches (WCC) President, Europe and Sarah Moore is an active member of WCC Central Council.

## 5. Public issues

### 5.1 Assisted dying

The Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill [affecting England and Wales] rightly attracted much media coverage in October and November. We endeavoured to represent the position of URC in the public square, while recognising that within the URC were people seeking to deepen their understanding through resources and conversation. We received communications from URC members, ministers and moderators about the issue, which expressed a range of views, concerns and uncertainty or sought guidance, and we tried to reflect this sensitively in our wider communication.

It was clear from the outset that this was a deeply emotive and complex issue, worthy of great care and nuance, although this in itself caused some frustration for a few members who wished us to be more forthright.

We worked with public issues colleagues from the Methodist Church, the Baptist Union, the Church of Scotland (the Scottish Parliament also has assisted dying on its agenda), the Church of England, the Church in Wales, Cytûn and the Salvation Army to explore the issue and practical details.

On the URC website, we shared information from various sources, including the URC's own work in 2007 and material prepared by the Methodist Church and Church of Scotland, with whom we often work ecumenically through the Joint Public Issues Team. We encouraged individuals and congregations to explore these documents and videos, and to consider writing to their MP about the issue.

Some denominational representatives and leaders of other faiths signed an open letter, organised by the Church of England, which was strongly against the Assisted Dying Bill. We chose not to sign this: although in principle it was broadly in line with the URC General Assembly's resolution on assisted dying (2007). This is because we were concerned that the letter lacked the nuance and spirit of that work.

We released a response, [www.urc.org.uk/terminally-ill-adults-bill/](http://www.urc.org.uk/terminally-ill-adults-bill/), which explained some of the impact of the vote in the UK Parliament on 30 November. This restated the URC's 2007 General Assembly resolution, while urging MPs to exercise diligence and thorough scrutiny in subsequent committee stages, debates and voting. The Worship, Faith and Order Committee will begin work on the potential impact for the URC, should the Bill eventually come into law.

## 5.2 Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT)

The JPIT work plan for 2024-2025 includes preparing for a justice conference in June 2025. At time of writing, the venue has yet to be confirmed, but we hope to be in Leeds, to facilitate a large in-person gathering of justice seekers for a day of workshops, conversation and inspiration.

Our Campaigns and Church Engagement Officer (CCEO), Nathan Maguire, decided to return to local church ministry in early January. We hope a new CCEO will be in post very soon, to continue Nathan's excellent work in many areas, including an overhaul of the JPIT website, [www.jpit.uk](http://www.jpit.uk) to promote wider engagement and making the large range of resources on the website more accessible to a growing number of users.

Another of our priorities for 2024-2025 is growing youth and young adult engagement and the provision of relevant materials. Working alongside our URC Youth Moderator and Youth Moderator Elect, plus our attendance at the "Junction '25" young adults' event in January and URC Youth Assembly in March, are essential parts of this process of listening and empowering.

The Constituency Action Network (CAN) was launched in September 2024. Several JPIT staff members are supporting local churches in Scotland, Wales and England in praying for and developing a meaningful relationship with their MP that will positively influence decisions at national level that impact on neighbourhoods, the UK and the world. We currently have about a dozen URC congregations involved and would like to double this number in the next few months. More information may be found at [www.jpit.uk/can](http://www.jpit.uk/can).

## 5.3 Churches' Commission for Migration in Europe (CCME) conference

John East from the Darwen Asylum-seeker and Refugee Enterprise travelled by train to Frankfurt in early December to join the CCME conference. As our URC representative, he joined Simeon Mitchell, who was there on behalf of the Methodist Church of Great Britain. The aim of the conference was to explore how churches can speak into the policy of 'offshoring' (offshore processing) of asylum seekers in some countries of continental Europe. The group reflected on the experience of UK churches and other organisations who had been campaigning around the Rwanda Bill and its potential impact. John also shared his experience of local churches welcoming refugees and was introduced to a large-scale welcoming programme run by the Church in Frankfurt.



## 6. Community engagement

Samara Andrews (Administrator, Community Engagement and Public Issues) and Steve Summers (Head of Community Engagement) moved roles from the Discipleship team to join the Mission team and Joint Public Issue Team in June 2024.

Key responsibilities and areas of work have included:

- producing two editions of the Church and Community Engagement Newsletter, packed full of information, resources and means of encouragement to enable churches and disciples to be even more present and engaged within their local neighbourhood and with communities as an expression of God's love and mission.
- being Co-Secretary to the Accreditations sub-committee, overseeing and enabling Church Related Community Work (CRCW), Special Category Ministry and pioneer visits, reviews and applications in Chester, Oxford, Northampton, Lincoln, Sunderland, Leicester, Swansea, Huddersfield, Dovercourt, Coventry and Manchester. Plus, supporting CRCWs and CRCW ministry.
- working alongside colleagues to co-organise the URC at Greenbelt programme, Church Buildings and Mission webinars, Constituency Action Network, Mapping new Christian Communities, the Conversations at the Crossroads event, Rural Ministry network, Liminal ministry and chaplaincy and the Dreams & realities: *In the Thick of It 2* event, 15-16 May 2025 to facilitate conversations between people with lived experience of different marginal contexts.
- responding to General Assembly 2024 Resolution 53 that requests that Synods, Assembly Committees and Task Groups consider the implications of the North Western Synod report, 'A Church with people at the margins' and working alongside the Church Life Steering Group to review the feasibility of establishing a Community Enabling Fund.
- becoming a panel member of the Legacy Fund, Mission Enabling Fund and Community Project Awards.
- URC representation with organisations such as ChurchWorks, the National Estates Churches Network, Faith in Affordable Housing and the Churches Together in England Urban Mission Forum.

## 7. Greenbelt

Preparations for 2025 are well under way. An advertisement for volunteers is now live on the *URC website*.

As in 2022, 2023, and 2024, we will be running a family café called yoURCafe as an excellent 'shop window' into aspects of the mission and discipleship of the URC. We will retain familiar elements such as a creative arts installation in our tent, assembled from a nationwide call for submissions from URC members. We are planning a special hybrid Sunday service in partnership with yoURChurch, the URC's online congregation.

There will be innovation, as we add some world cuisines on our menu, thanks to the culinary skills of volunteers from Lodge Road URC, and we will have a significant collaboration with another Greenbelt partner organisation that specialises in the alleviation of poverty. This necessitates another great change for 2025: we will yet again be enlarging our tent.

## **8. Caring for creation**

### **8.1 Net zero synod reporting**

Responding to the General Assembly (2024) resolution 36, which asked each Synod to give an annual report on its progress in reducing its carbon footprint, we have been working on a reporting template for each Synod to use.

The initial draft was suggested by the Net Zero Task Group, and further consultation with Synod Moderators, clerks, property officers and the Green Apostles network has led to the production of a reporting template to be updated and submitted by 31 March each year.

The report includes a request to share good news stories from the synod: good practice, events and successes that can be shared nationally to help inspire and encourage further action to reduce the URC's carbon footprint.

### **8.2 Climate change – youth rights and wellbeing**

Staff at the World Council of Churches have drawn our attention to a growing number of 'test cases' in courts, where fossil fuel company bosses are facing litigation for the physical and/or psychological harm being caused to particular groups (including children and young people) because of climate change.

As a Church that deeply cares for creation, has made brave and pioneering decisions around divesting from fossil fuels and highly values children and young people, we are listening to and learning more about this new and hugely difficult method of seeking to influence change in large, powerful industries.

### **8.3 Preparing for climate disruption**

While continuing to reduce our carbon footprint as part of creation care, we are also mindful that areas of the world are already severely affected by extremes in weather and a shifting climate, including flooding in the UK.

We are at an early stage of exploring how we can learn from our Global partners how they are responding to severe challenges, including how local churches have been leading the way in the provision of food sources, healthcare and education in difficult environments. A goal of this work would be to build resilience and preparedness in our communities as a missional activity alongside other ways of tackling climate change.

## **9. Global and Intercultural Ministries (GIM)**

### **9.1 Legacies of Slavery (LoS)**

#### **Anti-racism training**

Anthony Reddie delivered the final session of centrally organised anti-racism training at the end of July before we paused to take stock.

Members of the GIM team are working to ascertain how many more centrally organised sessions might be needed to cover the initially mandated groups/individuals. They are also exploring strategies for *who* might deliver the training, and *how*, and will work on putting together a 'crib-sheet' to support potential trainers.

The GIM Secretary, Karen Campbell has met with the Synod Moderators to discuss the need to hand the training on. The GIM Administrator is updating the database so that synods can see who has received the training, and who is still outstanding.

## **Finances**

This was identified as a major concern as the LoS task group was continuing its mandated work, but without any clear budget being earmarked to support the emerging proposals. General Assembly approved a proposal from Finance to create a LoS Fund, to be started with a central contribution, and with all synods being encouraged to contribute as they feel able. The aim is to establish a fund of at least £1m. Communications are now ongoing between the Mission Committee, URC Finance and the Synod Moderators/Trust Officers to start the process by which Synods can decide how they wish to contribute.

## **Regional Repairing Justice Proposals**

The sub-group has met three times since General Assembly, clarifying the proposals to develop/support mentoring of young Black men in (up to) four locations with significant links to transatlantic slavery in Northern England, Southern England, Scotland and Wales. Thought is being given about how to identify the locations, how the related mentoring posts can be managed and overseen, the potential relationship between the posts and the URC, and the role that external partners might play in the development of the projects. The new funding proposals outlined above may play a significant part in determining how this work proceeds.

## **Global Repairing Justice Proposals**

Again, this area of work is awaiting clarity regarding the amount of funding which might ultimately be available. That said, the URC has already expressed interest in supporting the development of New Free Villages in Jamaica. In addition, Gordon Cowans (Churches' Reparations Action Forum – CRAF), Lisa Adjei (Sankofa Collective), and the GIM Secretary have had further conversations about initiating a 'positive identity and belonging' project focused on Jamaica and the UK initially, then drawing in participants from Africa (possibly Ghana) once the relevant contacts are established. As covered earlier in this report, Commitment for Life is also looking to see how it might support CRAF.

## **The Ecumenical Jamaica Pilgrimage**

We have received two short films documenting the pilgrimage which took place in April 2024 and included the URC, Church of Scotland, Scottish Episcopal Church, and Christian Aid. One film specifically relates to the delivery of the *URC Apology* by GA Moderator, the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson; the other documents the *Pilgrimage* more generally. Both films capture the impactful way in which the URC apology and commitment to mutual journeying have been received.

## **Ecumenical Working**

The GIM Secretary continues to serve on the Methodist Church's Reparations Group and contribute to conversations both in the UK and globally.

## **9.2 Global Work – Partners in Mission**

The Revd Melanie Smith and the Revd Mark Meatcher returned from Fiji in July 2024. We are thankful that both have taken up new positions in West Midlands Synod. Thanks are due to the Revd Paul Whittle and the Revd George Watt for their support in enabling this transition.

We continue to face challenges regarding the two remaining Partner in Mission (PiM) relationships, and these are a priority for the GIM Secretary.

We are delighted that the Revd John McNeil Scott has taken on the convenorship of the Management Group pertaining to PiM Yufen Chen (Thames North). John embodies a long history with the Taiwanese Fellowship in London with/through whom Yufen does much of her work. We anticipate that his insights will be invaluable.

### 9.3 Global Work – Council for World Mission (CWM)

**The CWM Assembly** took place from 12-19 June in South Africa, with URC delegates Karen Campbell (GIM Secretary); Lindsey Brown (Evangelism and Ecumenical Officer, formerly a trustee of CWM); the Revd Tim Meadows (then Moderator-Elect of URC General Assembly); and Zeerak Shahbaz (Youth Delegate).

The Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson (then Moderator of URC General Assembly) was also present and invited to preach for the main act of public worship, broadcast globally. Heather Moore (Moderator of URC Youth Assembly) was part of the international team of young people serving as stewards.

The Assembly was immediately preceded by:

#### **CWM Annual Members' Meeting (AMM)**

Karen Campbell was the URC representative. The AMM oversees the business of CWM – a space for input and feedback from the member churches.

#### **Women's Pre-Assembly**

Karen Campbell was a thematic speaker on the theme of 'Gender Justice'.

#### **The Onesimus Project Core Group**

Following her input at the AMM and Assembly, the GIM Secretary has been invited to serve on the Onesimus Project Core Group, 2024-2028. The Onesimus Project is a broadening of the original CWM 'Legacies of Slavery Project' to cover four themes: Legacies of Slavery; Modern Day Slavery; Education for Liberation; and Transformative Ecumenism.

#### **CWM's 'A New Face' Programme**

This saw a delegation of women from around the globe gather in the UK to explore issues relating to 'Women & Leadership', hosted by the URC at various points. The URC input included a meeting with women holding varied leadership positions in the Church (including Church House personnel and the Thames North Synod Clerk); worship, lunch and conversations hosted by High Cross URC, Tottenham, drawing in women from Upper Clapton URC; and the opportunity to meet with Tessa Henry-Robinson, Immediate-Past Moderator of URC General Assembly. Many thanks to all who were involved in organising/hosting.

### 9.4 Global Work – Global Partnerships

#### **The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK)**

A new partnership with the PROK became official with the signing of an MOU on 26 June 2024. The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith has agreed to act as the URC's

main point of contact with both the PROK and other URC contacts and partners in Korea.

## **Global Partnerships Review**

GIM has begun a review of all existing URC global partnerships – including those overseen by Assembly staff, and those being maintained by synods. The aim is to get a clearer picture of which relationships are ‘live’, which might warrant greater energy, and discern how to support the relationships more meaningfully.

## **Global Subscriptions**

The URC is a member of various global ecumenical bodies, including the Council for World Mission (CWM), World Council of Churches (WCC), and World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), demonstrating our commitment both through practical engagement and financial contributions. In light of the URC’s budgetary constraints, we have reviewed our commitments, advising various bodies of a reduction in our financial contributions even while managing to create a small amount of slack to support new missional relationships, creating an overall 10 per cent saving in ecumenical subscriptions. Our commitment to global partnerships remains undiminished.

### **9.5. URC General Assembly 2024**

GIM Secretary, Karen Campbell, served as Chaplain to the Moderator of GA alongside the Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo. Karen and Stephen were keen to ensure that GA worship and Bible studies tied in with the ongoing URC priorities of Legacies of Slavery and Anti-Racism. This commitment included:

- Inviting Bible Studies led by the Revd Dr Gordon Cowans (Churches’ Reparations Action Forum [Jamaica]); the Revd Dr Michael Jagessar (former GIM Secretary; former CWM Mission Secretary [Caribbean and Europe]); and Dr Lisa Adjei (Christian Aid; founder of Sankofa Collective).
- Drawing on the musical talents of David Williams, black musician and URC member
- Commissioning artwork by young, black artist, Tariq Westcarr, who grew up in the URC.

Feedback from General Assembly has been overwhelmingly positive.



# Paper J1

## Report to Assembly Executive February 2025

### Nominations Committee

#### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Victoria Blunt, Convenor, Nominations Committee <b>victoria.blunt@urc.org.uk</b> Jenny Mills, Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship) <b>jenny.mills@urc.org.uk</b>
<b>Action required</b>	Decision.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Resolution 20</b>  <b>Assembly Executive appoints committee members and representatives as set out in paragraph 4.1 of this Report.</b>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To note changes to Nominations Committee and structure, procedures to be implemented prior to General Assembly 2025 and to appoint members of various committees and groups and external appointments.
<b>Main points</b>	As above.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	N/A.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Consultation with staff and officers of General Assembly, select committees and groups where appointments are required.

#### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	None.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	None.

## **1. Formation of a new Nominations Committee**

- 1.1 A new iteration of the Nominations Committee has been formed following decisions made at the General Assembly of 2023 as part of the Church Life Review.
- 1.2 The committee members were sought through the principles of safer recruitment: adverts were published, outline job descriptions were produced, conversations were held with potential candidates and references were sought.
- 1.3 This had led to the committee being made up of the following members: Victoria Blunt (convenor), Debs Brooks, Lisa McAvoy, Laura Everard and Andrew Mudharara. Jenny Mills is the Deputy General Secretary appointed to serve the committee and administrative support is being provided by Carole Sired.

## **2. The brief of the committee**

- 2.1 The approach of the committee acknowledges the breadth of skills and understanding within the URC and seeks to utilise those talents that may have previously gone undiscovered. The aim is to engender a more inclusive culture within the framework of safer recruitment.
- 2.2 The Nominations Committee will delegate more responsibility to the wider church committees; whilst overseeing the broader process of appointing new candidates to each of the General Assembly committees.
- 2.3 The brief is to support candidates, panels and all related subcommittees to discern the call to serve. The committee will ensure due process is followed beginning with role descriptions, advertising vacant positions, through to the appointment of each new volunteer committee member.

## **3. Development of new recruitment processes**

- 3.1 At the time of submission of this report, the Nominations Committee has met twice. A draft pack has been produced, which outlines the processes that need to be followed by committees in order to appoint new members using safer recruitment processes and also contains exemplar documents such as adverts, job descriptions and letters to candidates.
- 3.2 The Children and Youth Work Committee has agreed to review and trial the draft pack and provide feedback on it to the Nominations Committee.
- 3.3 The aim is to publish the final pack to all committees in the Spring.
- 3.4 The Nominations Committee produced a video and an infographic introducing the new committee ready for circulation in December 2024. They worked on a 'Frequently Asked Questions' document to answer potential questions that committees and/or individuals may have before the sharing of the final pack. In addition to this, a webinar was set for January 2025 to outline the new appointment process, open to all committee convenors and secretaries and anyone who expressed a wish to attend.
- 3.5 Over time, the Nominations Committee plans to work on guidance on recruiting under-18s as committee members and information about GDPR and the retention of documents surrounding recruitment.

## 4. Appointments

4.1 Since its formation, the new Nominations Committee has overseen the following appointments:

- Jennifer Mills-Knutsen as Chair of Governors at Westminster College
- Ian Miller as Church Appointed Trustee Director of the URC Ministers' Pensions Trust. This has been agreed by the Business Committee as it would be advantageous to keep the current Board members together to see the buyout project through
- Extension of Vaughan Griffiths' term as Director of the URC Ministers' Pensions Trust beyond his term as Deputy Treasurer. This extension involves Mr Griffiths fulfilling one of the ex-officio roles.

4.2 The above appointments are brought to Assembly Executive for approval.

4.3 A full list of names of those appointed to committees and other roles will be brought to the July 2025 General Assembly.

# Paper Q1

## Synod Listed Building Advisory Committees

### Listed Buildings Advisory Group

#### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Geoff Milnes, Secretary LBAG <b>gsmilnes@aol.com</b>
<b>Action required</b>	None other than to note the comments.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None.</b>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To advice Assembly Executive of the increasing difficulties in staffing Synod LBACs and the implications for use of Ecclesiastical Exemption.
<b>Main points</b>	As above.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	None.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Synod LBAC Convenors and members.

#### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	None immediate but the possibility of having to employ, and pay for, external consultants is very real in some Synods.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	Convenor of LBAG is having ongoing consultations with the Baptist and Methodists.

"The Listed Buildings Advisory Group [LBAG] wishes to draw the attention of the Assembly Executive to an increasing difficulty in recruiting members to Listed Building Advisory Committees [LBACs] in some, but not all, Synods.

There is a shortage of volunteers who are willing to serve and who have suitable skills and knowledge to underpin the work of the LBAC.

The LBAG has discussed a scheme in which better-resourced Synods lend help to those which are worse off. It has also discussed a 'flying squad' approach on which specific situations within Synods are addressed by a small group recruited directly by the LBAG. Discussions have been held with the Methodist Church and the Baptist Union to research the sharing of resources in such an enterprise, but it is hard to make much progress because of the different organisational models that apply within those denominations.

Currently, the LBAG is in discussion regarding the possibility of running a pilot project within the Yorkshire and Northern Synods to try out some new possibilities.

# Paper S1

## URC roles eligible for a criminal record check – protecting vulnerable groups

### Safeguarding Committee

#### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Sharon Barr <b>sharon.barr@urc.org.uk</b> Roger Jones <b>rjones@urcsouthern.org.uk</b>
<b>Action required</b>	For information only.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None.</b>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Due to the change in PVG's requirements brought in by the Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020, the DBS/PVG Matrix agreed at Assembly Executive 2023 (Paper T1) has been separated out with the DBS requirements staying the same and the PVG requirements now meeting the new legislative changes which come into force in April 2025.
<b>Main points</b>	The new PVG matrix ensures as a denomination we are meeting the legislative requirements of the Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Mission Council: November 2018 – Paper R3 General Assembly: July 2021 – Paper T6 Assembly Executive: February 2024 – Paper T1.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Disclosure Scotland Synod of Scotland Executive Synod of Scotland Pastoral Committee Safeguarding Committee Secretary for Ministries Data Analyst and Administrator for Ministries.

#### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	None anticipated.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	None anticipated.

## Introduction

The Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2000 has introduced a number of changes to the system of obtaining a criminal record check in Scotland. These changes are being implemented from April 2025. The matrix below, which sets out the appropriate type of criminal record check for roles within the National Synod of Scotland of the United Reformed Church, has been prepared as a result of direct consultation with Disclosure Scotland in readiness for the changes which will come into force in April 2025<sup>1</sup>

From April 2025 it will be mandatory for all people undertaking regulated work with children and protected adults to be members of the Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) scheme.

From April 2026 membership will only be for a period of five years and members will need to reapply for membership if they continue to undertake regulated roles. Currently there is no charge for membership for volunteers but the Scottish Government is consulting on introducing charges for volunteers.

The new legislation also requires all charity trustees to be members of the PVG scheme if the charity undertakes regulated work with children or protected adults regardless of whether the individual engages directly in regulated roles.

It remains the case, that with the exception of charity trustees, a person cannot be a member of the PVG scheme unless they are directly undertaking a regulated role as defined by the legislation. Types of work covered by PVG: [mygov.scot](https://mygov.scot). Regulated role guidance is being prepared by Disclosure Scotland; information about how to access this information will be available from the Synod and Ministries Offices.

In the new legislation there are two levels of disclosure. Level 1 replaces the 'Basic' Disclosure, Level 2 means membership of the PVG Scheme is required. The new terminology is used in the matrix.

Where an individual carries out a number of roles within a local church and these roles require different levels of criminal record check then the check applied for should be the highest level of check required.

There is currently no minimum age for applying for PVG membership.

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<sup>1</sup> Implementing the Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020 - Disclosure Scotland

Role	Type of criminal record check	New and five year renewals to be actioned by
<b>Ministers</b>		
Ministers, stipendiary/NSM and Church Related Community Workers – Active	Level 2 Disclosure (Membership of PVG scheme)	Ministries Office
Ministers, stipendiary/NSM and Church Related Community Workers – Retired Active	Level 2 Disclosure (Membership of PVG scheme) if undertaking regulated work, otherwise Level 1 (Basic) Disclosure	Ministries Office
Ministers, stipendiary/NSM and Church Related Community Workers – Non Active	No check	Ministries Office
Ministers of other denominations employed by the URC	Level 2 Disclosure (Membership of the PVG scheme)	Ministries Office
Special Category Ministry posts	Level 2 Disclosure (Membership of PVG scheme) if undertaking regulated work, otherwise Level 1 (Basic) Disclosure	Ministries Office
Ministers and CRCWs in training	Level 2 Disclosure (Membership of the PVG scheme)	Ministries Office
Synod-appointed lay pastors, local leaders and interim ministers	Level 2 Disclosure (Membership of the PVG scheme)	Ministries Office
<b>Preachers and worship leaders</b>		
People who preach regularly (four times per year or more)	Level 1 (Basic) Disclosure	Local Church
URC Synod (Locally Recognised) Lay Preachers (including those in training)	Level 1 (Basic) Disclosure	Synod
URC Locally Recognised worship leaders (including in those training)	Level 1 (Basic) Disclosure	Synod
URC Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers (including those in training)	Level 1 (Basic) Disclosure	Ministries Office



Role	Type of criminal record check	New and five year renewals to be actioned by
<b>Trustees and Elders</b>		
Elders as local church trustees of a registered charity providing regulated activities for children or protected adults	Level 2 Disclosure (Membership of the PVG scheme)	Local church
Authorised Elders/Serving Elders/Deacons who are not trustees and who do not directly carry out regulated work with children or protected adults	Level 1 (Basic) Disclosure	Local Church
Synod of Scotland trustees	Level 2 Disclosure (Membership of the PVG scheme)	Synod
United Reformed Church Trust Trustees resident in Scotland	Level 1 (Basic) Disclosure	Ministries Office
<b>Safeguarding roles</b>		
Church Safeguarding Co-ordinators, Lead/Primary Contact and Deputy/Joint	Level 1 (Basic) Disclosure	Local church
Synod Safeguarding Officer or other safeguarding professionals	Level 1 (Basic) Disclosure unless they participate directly in regulated work or have line management responsibility for those undertaking regulated work in which case Level 2 Disclosure (membership of PVG scheme)	Synod
<b>Roles working with children</b>		
Children's and youth workers (voluntary or paid), stewards, drivers, doing regulated work with children and young people	Level 2 Disclosure (membership of PVG scheme)	Local Church
Children's and youth workers (voluntary or paid), stewards, drivers, in roles not involving regulated work	Level 1 (Basic) Disclosure	Local Church
Children and Youth Development Officer	Level 2 Disclosure (membership of the PVG scheme)	Ministries Office

Role	Type of criminal record check	New and five year renewals to be actioned by
General Assembly /Church House staff resident in Scotland who undertake regulated work with children	Level 2 Disclosure (membership of PVG scheme)	Ministries Office
<b>Roles with Protected Adults</b>		
Protected Adult workers (voluntary or paid), Elders and pastoral and personal care visitors where the role includes direct feeding, physical care, or driving to medical or social care appointments	Level 2 Disclosure (membership of PVG scheme)	Local Church
Protected Adult workers (voluntary or paid). Elders and pastoral carers without personal care	Level 1 (Basic) Disclosure	Local church
General Assembly /Church House staff resident in Scotland who undertake regulated work with Protected Adults	Level 2 Disclosure (membership of PVG scheme)	Ministries Office
<b>Administrative/financial/practical roles</b>		
Church Administrators (or equivalent working from a church office)	Level 1 (Basic) Disclosure	Local church
Church treasurer or equivalent	Level 1 (Basic) Disclosure	Local church
Building caretakers, cleaners or equivalent	Level 1 (Basic) Disclosure	Local church
Synod Treasurer/Synod Finance Officer or equivalent	Level 1(Basic) Disclosure	Synod
Synod Administrator/PA/office Manager/Admin Assistant or equivalent whose role involves safeguarding administration	Level 1 (Basic) disclosure	Synod

# Paper S2

## Terms of Reference – Safeguarding Committee

### Safeguarding Committee

#### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Sharon Barr <b>sharon.barr@urc.org.uk</b> Roger Jones <b>rjones@urcsouthern.org.uk</b>
<b>Action required</b>	Decision.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Resolution 21</b>  <b>General Assembly approves the amendments to the membership of the Safeguarding Committee from:</b> <b>Up to two representatives nominated by the URC advocated survivors group</b> <b>to</b> <b>Up to two representatives nominated either because they have lived experience as a survivor, or because they are a youth member (18-25).</b>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Agree an amendment to the membership of the Safeguarding Committee.
<b>Main points</b>	General Assembly 2021 agreed the Terms of Reference for the Safeguarding committee (Paper T3) which included membership of 'Up to two representatives nominated by the URC advocated survivors group'; this membership role has been difficult to appoint to and the current committee would like to amend the membership to include instead 'Up to two representatives nominated either because they have lived experience as a survivor, or because they are a youth member (18-25)' which the group then feels will make it easier to be nominated to as it gives a further reach than the original wording.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	General Assembly: July 2021 – Paper T3.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Safeguarding Committee.

#### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	None anticipated.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	None anticipated.