

Book of Reports 2025



The
**United
Reformed
Church**





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Online papers: www.bit.ly/generalassemblypapers

Dear friends,

This General Assembly feels as though it is caught-up somewhere between the now and the not yet. A liminal moment, a moment of possibility and change, and yet at the same time, not yet our extraordinary Assembly when we shall gather again in November. The act of following which is discipleship is rarely one of standing still. We are always between the now and the not yet.

I write after Easter, and yet before Pentecost. The resurrection is real. New life has burst forth. And yet disciples are still huddled in an upper room, the Spirit is still awaited, and the evangelism to which the church will be called is not yet quite underway. I write, after the resurrection, the coming of the Spirit and the ascension – and yet the Realm of God has not yet fully dawned. We're called to be expectant, waiting, people – ready for the moment God will break into history, transforming the whole of creation.

Something exciting is beginning to stir in the lives of churches. The statistics, for the first time, begin to reveal that change is upon us. Younger people are exploring church in ways that in my generation we simply did not (by and large... those of us who did were real oddities...). We hear of new people emerging into congregations. We hear the beginnings of the stirring of something. And yet... at the same time we will mark the closing of many churches at this Assembly, and we know that many more will follow. New life breaks, unevenly, fragilely, into being, as much of the old is still passing away.

In the life of the United Reformed Church, we know that we are in the midst of change. Changes in committee structures. Changes in staffing structures. The final home straight of the pieces of work the Church Life Review has been commissioned to undertake. We know change is necessary. But leaving the old behind can be difficult – as we ensure we carry the treasure of the gospel with us, handed on faithfully by those who went before.

Let us not forget, some of the first reactions to the resurrection were fear, running away, doubt and disbelief. We remember too that resurrection comes with commissioning. The women to proclaim. Peter to tend and feed. The disciples to go tell. As we begin to catch the glimpses of resurrection, what will we fear and doubt? What will our commission be?

As we gather at Swanwick in a few weeks time, our agenda won't be quite so packed as sometimes (famous last words!). I pray that we can take some time, to worship, to pray, to be fed, and to wait upon God – such that we too might experience that resurrection new life, we too might here Christ's commission to us, and we too might await upon the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to respond in faith.

Yours in Christ,

John Bradbury (General Secretary)

**The United Reformed Church
Minutes of Assembly Executive meeting
Held via Zoom
Tuesday 26 November 2024**

Present

The Revd Tim Meadows Moderator
The Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, Immediate Past Moderator
Ms Catriona Wheeler, Moderator-Elect, Chair of Trust

The Revd Dr John Bradbury, GS	The Revd Philip Brooks, DGS Mission
The Revd Jenny Mills, DGS Discipleship	Mr Alan Yates, Treasurer
Mrs Victoria James, Chief Operating Officer	
Mr Vaughan Griffiths, Deputy Treasurer	

Committee Convenors

The Revd Samantha Sheehan, Children's and Youth Work
The Revd Dr Michael Hopkins, Resources
Ms Pippa Hodgson, Education and Learning
The Revd Jo Clare-Young, Equalities
The Revd Dr Robert Pope, Worship, Faith, and Order
The Revd Mary Thomas, Ministries
Ms Sarah Lane Cawte, Mission
Mrs Victoria Blunt, Nominations
The Revd Roger Jones, Safeguarding

URC Youth

Miss Heather Moore URC Youth Moderator
Miss Maya Withall, URC Youth Moderator Elect
Miss Jadan Turner, URC Youth

Synod Representatives

Northern

The Revds Kim Plumpton and Sally Bateman, Mr Willie Duncan, The Revd Dr Trevor Jamison

North Western

The Revd Clare Downing, Ms Elizabeth Hall, Mr Tim Hopley, The Revd Mike Walsh

Mersey

The Revd Geoff Felton, The Revd Ruth Wilson, Ms Rita Griffiths, The Revd Dr Nick Jones

Yorkshire

The Revd Jamie Kissack, Mr Tim Crossley, The Revd Fran Kissack, Mr Daniel Raddings

East Midlands

The Revd Geoffrey Clarke, Mr David Greatorex, Dr Graham Jennings, The Revd Jane Wade

Assembly Executive

West Midlands

The Revd Steve Faber, The Revd Elaine Hutchinson, Mr Steve Powell, Mrs Rachel Wakeman

Eastern

The Revds Lythan Nevard and Dave Coaker, Mr Richard Lewney,

South Western

The Revd David Downing, Mrs Rachel Leach, The Revds Richard Gray and Neil Thorogood

Wessex

Miss Karen Bell, The Revd Helen Everard, The Revd Dr Romilly Micklem, Mr Clive Snashall

Thames North

The Revd George Watt, Ms Nneoma Chima, Mr Peter Knowles, The Revd Sally Thomas

Southern

The Revds Bridget Banks and Russell Furley-Smith, Miss Pam Tolhurst, The Revd Martin Knight

Wales

The Revd David Salsbury, Mr Chris Atherton, The Revd Julie Kirby, Ms Megan Price

Scotland

The Revds Lindsey Sanderson, Jan Adamson, and Susan Henderson, Mr Douglas Maxwell

In Attendance

The Revd Andy Braunston,	Minutes Secretary, Minister for Digital Worship,
Ms Andrea Heron, Chaplain,	The Revd Andrew Mann-Ray, Chaplain,
Ms Morag McLintock, Law and Polity	Mr Andy Middleton, Legal Adviser,
Mr Andy Jackson, Communications,	Mrs Ann-Marie Nye, Communications Officer,
Dr Steve Tomkins, Reform,	Mr Laurence Wareing, Reform,
Mr John Samson, Finance,	The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith, Ministries,
Dr Sam Richards, Children & Youth Work,	Mrs Sharon Barr, Safeguarding,
Mr Myles Dunnett, Church Life Review,	Mr Steve Summers, Community Engagement,
Mr Roo Stewart, Public Issues	The Revd Dr Lesley Moseley, E&L Transitional Lead,

Ecumenical Observers

The Revd Dr David Chapman, Methodist Church

Apologies

The Revd Sarah Moore, Clerk	The Revd Mark Henry Robinson, Business Committee
The Revd Anne Sardeson, Eastern Synod	The Revd Sarah Gower Church of England

Observers

The Revd Martin Hayward, Southern Synod Clerk	Ms Laura Taylor, Technical Support
Ms Izumi Nishizono, Admin Support	

1. Worship

The Moderator, The Revd Tim Meadows took the chair and invited the chaplain, Ms Heron, to lead the Executive in worship.

2. En Bloc Business

The Moderator invited Dr Bradbury, General Secretary, to move the one En Bloc Resolution, R1. The Moderator invited Executive to vote by means of an online poll. The resolution passed unanimously.

3. Resources Committee

The Moderator invited The Revd Dr Michael Hopkins, Convenor of the Resources Committee to move the resolutions in Paper G1. Dr Hopkins introduced the Treasurer, Mr Alan Yates.

Mr Yates, introduced papers G1 and G2 and noted some errors and late changes to the figures. The correct budgeted figure for 2024 is a net expenditure of £857,937. This will be corrected in the paper online.

The Revd Dr Romilly Micklem asked about the arrangements for the, now closed, URC defined benefit pension scheme. Mr Yates explained this was, in essence, the purchase of an insurance policy to cover all future pension costs in the closed scheme. The most recent valuation showed the fund to be in surplus. In response to a further question from Dr Micklem, Mr Yates noted that a thanks to Synods for their contributions had not yet been sent. In response to a question from Mr Steve Powell, Mr Yates was unable to predict what next year's savings might be. Mr Yates was also not able to predict what the 2027 budget might contain.

In discussion Dr Micklem suggested that the projection of the M&M budget remaining stable for the next few years is not realistic. Mr David Greateorex noted that local church pledges for M&M in his synod were down. In response Mr Yates noted there is always a risk in making projections. He also noted he had acknowledged before that the M&M process is broken and the URC needs to explore different ways to fund ministry.

The Moderator invited Executive to vote by means of an online poll. The Budget for 2025 was unanimously agreed.

The Moderator invited Assembly to note, via means of an electronic poll, the target figures for 2026 and 2027. Assembly unanimously noted these.

4. Business Committee Appendix to Budget

The Moderator invited Dr Bradbury to briefly address Executive about this paper. Dr Bradbury presented the paper for information purposes. There was no discussion.

The Moderator closed the meeting with the Grace.

THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
MINUTE OF ASSEMBLY EXECUTIVE MEETING
HELD AT THE HAYES CONFERENCE CENTRE,
SWANWICK MONDAY 3 - WEDNESDAY 5 FEBRUARY 2025

Present

The Moderator, The Revd Tim Meadows
The Moderator-Elect, Ms Catriona Wheeler
The Clerk, The Revd Sarah Moore

The General Secretary, The Revd Dr John Bradbury
The Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship), The Revd Jenny Mills
The Deputy General Secretary (Mission), The Revd Philip Brooks
The Chief Operating Officer, Mrs Victoria James
The Treasurer, Mr Alan Yates
The Deputy Treasurer, Mr Vaughan Griffiths

Assembly Standing Committee Convenors

Business	The Revd Mark Robinson
Children's and Youth Work	The Revd Samantha Sheehan
Resources	The Revd Dr Michael Hopkins
Education and Learning	Ms Pippa Hodgson
Equalities	The Revd Jo Clare-Young
Worship, Faith and Order	The Revd Dr Robert Pope
Ministries	The Revd Mary Thomas
Mission	Ms Sarah Lane Cawte
Safeguarding	The Revd Roger Jones

URC Youth

The Moderator, Miss Heather Moore | The Moderator-Elect, Miss Maya Withall | Miss Jay Tynan

Synod Representatives

Northern,	The Revds Kim Plumpton , Sally Bateman , Dr Trevor Jamison , Mr Willie Duncan
North Western,	The Revds Clare Downing and Mike Walsh, Ms Elizabeth Hall , Mr Tim Hopley
Mersey,	The Revds Geoff Felton , Ruth Wilson, Nick Jones Ms Rita Griffiths
Yorkshire,	The Revds Jamie and Fran Kissack, Mr Tim Crossley, Mr Daniel Raddings
East Midlands,	The Revds Geoffrey Clark & Jane Wade, Mr David Greatorex, Dr Graham Jennings ,
West Midlands,	The Revd Steve Faber, Mr Steve Powell
Eastern,	The Revds Lythan Nevard, Dave Coaker & Anne Sardeson, Mr Richard Lewney
South Western,	The Revds David Downing, Richard Gray & Neil Thorogood, Mrs Rachel Leach
Wessex,	Miss Karen Bell, Mr Clive Snashall, The Revds Helen Everard & Dr Romilly Micklem
Thames North,	The Revds George Watt & Sally Thomas, Ms Nneoma Chima, Mr Peter Knowles,
Southern,	The Revds Bridget Banks, Martin Knight , & Russell Furley-Smith
Wales,	The Revd Dave Salisbury, Mr Chris Atherton, Ms Megan Price
Scotland,	The Revds Lindsey Sanderson, Jan Adamson, Susan Henderson, Mr Douglas Maxwell

Ecumenical Representatives

The Revd Sarah Gower. Church of England | The Revd Dr David Chapman. Methodist Church.

In attendance

Minutes Secretaries, The Revd Andy Braunston | Ms Morag M McLintock
 Finance, Mr John Samson
 Secretary for Ministries, The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith
 Law and Polity, Ms Morag M McLintock,
 Minister for Digital Worship, The Revd Andy Braunston
 Education & Learning Transitional Lead, The Revd Dr Lesley Moseley
 Children & Youth Work, Dr Sam Richards
 Legal Adviser, Mr Andy Middleton
 Designated Safeguarding Lead, Mrs Sharon Barr
 Communications, Mr Andy Jackson
 Church Life Review, Mr Myles Dunnett
 Communications Officer, Mrs Ann-Marie Nye
 Community Engagement, Mr Steve Summers
 Reform, Dr Steve Tomkins, Mr Laurence Wareing
 Public Issues, Mr Roo Stewart
 Moderator's Chaplains: Ms Andrea Heron | The Revd Andrew Mann-Ray

Observers

Admin Support, Ms Izumi Nishizono | The Revd Dr Alex Clare-Young

Apologies

The Immediate Past Moderator, The Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, Martin Hayward, Observer
 The Revd Elaine Huthchinson, West Midlands Synod, The Revd Julie Kirkby, The National Synod of Wales,
 Miss Pam Tolhurst, Southern Synod, Rachel Wakeman, West Midlands Synod

Monday 3 February 2025

Session 1

1 Welcome and Introductions

The Moderator's chaplains led the Executive in worship.

The Convenor of the Business Committee, the Revd Mark Robinson, introduced the platform party and provided some notices.

The Moderator, the Revd Tim Meadows, reminded the Executive of the process for this meeting and welcomed all to it.

2 Minutes and matters arising

The Clerk moved the adoption of the minutes of the Assembly Executive Meeting held at The Hayes, Swanwick on 9 to 11 February 2024 and the Assembly Executive Budget Meeting held via Zoom on 26th November 2024.

Assembly executive agreed the aforementioned minutes

The Revd Dr Romilly Micklem sought an update regarding the concern noted at Executive's meeting in November 2024 about the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of the Ministries and Mission system. The

Assembly Executive

General Secretary, the Treasurer Mr Alan Yates and the Convenor of the Resources Committee, the Revd Dr Michael Hopkins provided an assurance that the issue is being actively discussed in a number of committees and would consult appropriately. These discussions may lead to a paper for future discussion at General Assembly/Assembly Executive.

3 Facilitation Group

The Clerk moved the resolution

Assembly Executive appoints The Revd Jan Adamson, Chris Atherton, Sarah Lane Cawte, Nneoma Chima, The Revd Russell Furley-Smith, Richard Lewney, The Revd Kim Plumptre, and The Revd Mike Walsh to serve as a pool of members of any Facilitation Groups needed at this meeting.

Assembly executive agreed resolution unanimously

4 Churches Mutual Credit Union

The Treasurer gave a presentation and update on 10 years of the Credit Union.

5 Mission Team Presentation One

Ukraine Appeal-Commitment for Life

The Deputy General Secretary for Mission, the Revd Philip Brookes, introduced a video from Ukraine about the work of the Transcarpathian Reformed Church. The Convenor of Commitment for Life Reference Group, Mr Richard Lewney, requested Executive encourage their Synods and Churches to support this one-off Ukraine Appeal to support the work of the Transcarpathian Reformed Church.

6 Review of post of Synod Moderator-East Midlands

The General Secretary moved the following resolution

Acting on behalf of the General Assembly, Assembly Executive reappoints the Revd Geoffrey Clarke to serve as Moderator of the East Midlands Synod from 1 May 2027 to 31 July 2029.

Assembly executive unanimously agreed the resolution

7 Paper H2: Ministries-Special Category Pioneering Post

The Convenor of the Ministries Committee, the Revd Mary Thomas, sought to withdraw paper **H2-Pioneering-Criteria.pdf** and advised that further work and consultation required to be undertaken. It is hoped that a further paper will be brought to General Assembly 2025.

Assembly executive unanimously agreed the removal of the paper

Session 2

8 Paper A3: Business Committee - Ministerial Disciplinary Process Review

The General Secretary and acting Convenor of CDAG, the Revd Dr John Bradbury, presented paper **A3-Ministerial-Disciplinary-Process.pdf** and moved the resolutions within.

After introducing the paper Dr Bradbury invited the Moderator to ask if there were questions for clarification.

The Revd Sally Thomas asked if there was a duty to disclose by the church to ministers being investigated who often must wait a long time for details. Dr Bradbury said that timing has improved with the move to using an external company to investigate. However, when a matter is referred to the police or the local authority this can lead to significant delays and that is not within the power of the Church to resolve.

Steve Powell asked where the authority would lie in the new process and why the renewal was urgent. He also mentioned he didn't understand what "enabling work" means in Resolution 8. Dr Bradbury clarified that the Business Committee would oversee the renewal process. Stating that the matter is urgent, if Assembly Executive agree, would enable the Business Committee to approve the process and then, later, invite Assembly or Assembly Executive to approve that action after the fact.

The Revd Dr Romilly Micklem asked for the definition of ASPD. Dr Bradbury clarified this was the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline, the triage stage of the process which decides if a matter needs to be investigated, and after investigation whether allegations should be referred to the Hearing Stage or if a Caution would suffice for matters which are admitted.

The Moderator invited Assembly Executive to discuss the resolutions in small groups around tables.

The Revd Lythan Nevard commented that either one knows a lot about the process or nothing at all! She felt this had been the case for some time and more time needed to be given to explaining the process. She felt, too, that Assembly or Assembly Executive should be responsible for the process and not the Business Committee to do this. Dr Bradbury felt that Ms Nevard was entirely right about knowing the process. He would not resist the matter remaining with Assembly/Assembly Executive but did hold matters are urgent as some of the drafting and ways the process operates can be more complex than it needs to be.

Chris Atherton wondered if Resolution 7 should be expanded to include lay roles. Dr Bradbury noted that the Discipline of Officer Holders policy exists and needs to be reviewed.

The Revd Steve Faber supported the comments from Ms Nevard. He felt that this matter needs not to be remitted to the Business Committee but the revised Section O needs to be looked at by the full Assembly or Assembly Executive. Dr Bradbury noted the Business Committee made decisions in between General Assembly and Assembly Executive and have formal authority for this from Assembly. He noted that, in the past, such decisions were made by Assembly Officers but this authority had been merely custom and practice.

Catriona Wheeler wondered if the small group overseeing this work needs to be expanded. Dr Bradbury noted he is open to appointing a lay person to the small group overseeing the review.

The Revd Dr Romilly Micklem wondered how a duty to cooperate can be enforced on officer holders. Dr Bradbury noted that there are any number of things Ministers are required to do by General Assembly that aren't in their Terms of Settlement. He also noted that ministers are quite entitled not to comment until matters are at the Hearing Stage but there will be a need to have a careful definition of a duty to disclose.

Ms Morag McLintock wondered if Assembly Executive could be recalled via video conferencing to discuss a revised Section O process if matters were urgent. Dr Bradbury said this would be possible.

The Revd Dr Trevor Jamison asked if Assembly Executive could be reminded of the composition of the Business Committee. Dr Bradbury noted the Business Committee noted that the Officers of General Assembly: Moderator, Immediate Past Moderator, Moderator Elect, Clerk, Assistant Clerk, and Treasurer along with the four members of the General Secretariat and two members appointed by General Assembly to assure diversity; at the moment these are Reuben Watt and Darnette Whitby Reid.

The Revd Martin Knight wondered if there are general themes in cases which might indicate burnout, mental health issues, or other issues which might indicate issues around deployment. Dr Bradbury noted that there has been an informal evaluation of cases as they finish. Some of these emerge from the collective trauma of the pandemic where, because of that trauma, either the complainant has initiated a complaint that might not lead anywhere or where a minister has conducted themselves in ways that are influenced by that trauma.

He further noted the presence of employed safeguarding staff in every Synod and the changing culture around safeguarding means the church is treating behaviour more robustly when people have been harmed. He also felt that the revised process made a significant change early on by sharing the responsibility for initiating a process to three people not just leaving that with the Synod Moderator.

The Moderator tested the mind of Assembly Executive about moving to the decision making stage. Assembly indicated its warmth.

The Revd Steve Faber felt it would be helpful to note that the Business Committee should act when there is an emergency but not when matters are simply urgent.

Resolution 6

1. Assembly Executive accepts the recommendations of the Morgan Report as the basis for the preparation of an enhanced Ministerial Disciplinary process.

Agreed

Resolution 7

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.

Agreed

Resolution 8

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.

The Revd Dr Romilly Micklem moved to change the second “necessary” in Resolution 8 to “prerequisite”. Many members indicated they were in agreement. Dr Bradbury agreed to accept this amendment, members agreed, and the amended resolution read:

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 a prerequisite to implement a new process.

Agreed

Resolution 9

Assembly Executive considers the introduction of a revised process to be an urgent matter which should be proceeded with as swiftly as possible.

Dr Bradbury asked Assembly Executive about Resolution 9. Members indicated they were cool towards remitting the authority to the Business Committee. Members were very warm to recalling Assembly Executive to discuss a revised Section O process. Given this, Dr Bradbury sought Assembly Executive's permission to withdraw Resolution 9. Members agreed.

9 Paper A2: Business Committee-GA Committee Structures and General Secretariat

The General Secretary presented paper [A2-GA-Committee-and-Staffing-Structures.pdf](#) and moved the resolutions within

The Revd Jo Clare Young questioned the position of the Equalities Committee (to be renamed Equalities, Inclusion, Diversity and Belonging Committee) in the proposed new structure whether the committee would have a budget and how it would bring resolutions to Assembly (would it require Mission and Discipleship Committee to agree to it and bring it to GA) The General Secretary highlighted that discussions with the Resources Committee re a budget for EIDB would require to take place. It would be a matter for the two committees to discuss and establish. Ms Megan Price questioned if the use of the name "Ministries Committee" would cause confusion with the old "Ministries Committee."

The General Secretary didn't believe it would cause confusion.
Ms Rita Griffiths questioned the place of lay discipleship in the new Committee structure.
The General Secretary highlighted the need to work together in local churches, synods and at Assembly level to help form lay discipleship.

The Revd Claire Downing questioned whether the DGS role would be open to lay and ordained persons? She also questioned what message the proposed structural make up the theological or governance split would send out. She further asked if the role of the General Secretariat is defined.
The General Secretary highlighted that the current rules would not change but that there is a need to review all posts in Church House. He argued that the message of the areas are intertwined and parity amongst them is required in today's society. Dr Bradbury noted that the terms of reference for both the Moderators' Meeting and the General Secretariat should be reviewed.

The Revd George Watt requested an undertaking that there would be clarification of the role of the General Secretariat. The General Secretary provided the assurance requested.

The Revd Fran Kissonock stated that she did not believe it was appropriate for the Head of Governance to be a member of the General Secretariat. She is of the view that all members of the General Secretariat should be members of the URC.

The General Secretary indicated he was not concerned, given the role of the General Secretariat, for the requirements of all to be members of the URC and that he believed that the Head of Governance required to be a member in order to ensure that all areas of the URC's work is

addressing and embodying Governance concerns and to ensure the URC's compliance at this time in the Church's work.

Further consideration of A2 and the resolutions contained therein within it were remaindered.

Session 3

The Moderator invited the Chaplain, Ms Andrea Heron, to open the session in prayer.

10 Paper A4 : Business Committee-The Future of Governance

The Moderator asked Dr Bradbury to introduce paper [A4-Future-of-Governance.pdf](#)

The Moderator invited Assembly Executive members to ask questions.

The Revd Lindsey Sanderson recognised that the URC raises funds and spends those funds over three nations and inquired whether it would be necessary to set up a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organization (SCIO) as well as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).

The Legal Advisor, Mr Andrew Middleton, advised that it was possible to register an England and Wales CIO with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR).

The Revd Dr Romilly Micklem stated that irrespective of what mechanisms were utilised, the Trustees would be liable if they failed to discharge their responsibilities correctly. He also asked if a CIO needed to elect its trustees, how could it ensure that the Business Committee would be elected.

The Legal Advisor advised that the election of trustees would depend on the stipulation in the relevant provisions of the CIO constitution and that it was not unusual for e.g. a body of people to be appointed as trustees. He confirmed that trustees must discharge their duties without negligence.

The Revd Geoff Felton questioned whether a CIO had any implications for the Isle of Man and Dr Hopkins enquired if these would have implications for Jersey and Guernsey.

The Legal Advisor said there was no difficulty with the Isle of Man but was unaware of the implications re the Channel Islands and that this matter would require further research.

The Revd Lythan Nevard wondered if the changeover of Assembly Moderators would cause problems in being trustees of the CIO.

Dr Bradbury intimated the trusteeship would need to be different from the current membership of the Business Committee – not least because employees of a charity should not be trustees of a charity.

Mr Chris Atherton emphasised that it was important to establish the correct type of CIO to ensure that the members of the CIO are coterminous with General Assembly.

The Legal Advisor explained that there were two types of CIO-Foundation and Association. He advised that a Foundation Model has a body of trustees only who are responsible for the oversight and finances of an organization whereas an Association model has trustees and members with the members appointing the trustees. They differ in terms of input and inclusivity. He advised that the difficulty with the Association model meant that there is a requirement to organize

members meetings etc. Ultimately whichever model is chosen it is imperative that the funds are used for the charitable purposes of the CIO.

The Revd Russell Furley-Smith warned against using acronyms in papers as it is very confusing. He further asked about the implications for local churches.

Dr Bradbury noted that some local churches have registered their funds as Charitable Incorporated Organisation and it may be an avenue that larger churches, with employees and riskier projects would wish to explore.

The Revd Clare Downing asked if the Business Committee as Trustees of the CIO will become overstretched if it has to undertake the current workload.

Dr Bradbury responded that the current trends in charity governance is that Trustees are expected to set strategy and goals in much the same way that the Business Committee already works.

Further consideration of A4 and the resolutions contained therein within it were remaindered.

The Chaplains led Assembly Executive in a time of reflection and prayer. The meeting adjourned thereafter.

Tuesday 4 February 2025

Session 4

The Revd Andrew Mann-Ray led the Executive in worship.

11 Paper AD1: Business Committee, E&L-Resource Centres for Learning

The Revd Dr Michael Hopkins, Convenor of the Resources Committee presented [AD1-Resource-Centres-for-Learning-FINAL-AE-Feb-2025.pdf](#) with Victoria James, Chief Operating Officer and Pippa Hodgson, Convenor of Education and Learning.

The Moderator invited members to ask questions for clarification.

The Revd Bridget Banks asked if any thought had been given to asking Synods to financially support their students.

Dr Hopkins welcomed any offers of extra money from Synods into the Assembly Budget! However, he noted that Synods are often asked to give to wider work but that Synod money is often endowment money and spending that capital reduces revenue.

The Revd Dr Romilly Micklem noted that budget overspend is a recurring theme and any solution will crash and burn unless the church gets a handle on its budget. He further commented if the church has a variable income and fixed costs this story will only end one way and we need to align our costs in line with that variable income.

Dr Hopkins noted that the Resources Committee last week had agreed a robust policy on budget overspend and agreed with Dr Micklem's comments about fixed costs and variable income.

Peter Knowles wondered if there had been any assessment of the wider impact of the wider work of the RCLs beyond Education for Ministry 1. He also asked about what feedback had been given from the RCLs on the proposed directions of travel.

Ms Hodgson commented that other forms of ministry outwith EM1 is flourishing often running alongside EM1 training. The reason for focusing on EM1 is historically this is the purpose of the block grants. Ms Hodgson referred Assembly Executive to the extra papers where the thoughts of the RCLs are noted.

Richard Lewney asked for details of how much more the English Colleges would need to raise in order to deal with the over capacity of spaces in the Colleges.

Ms Hodgson noted that the colleges have more spaces than are currently being used. She noted the fixed and variable costs of the RCLs differ. She wants to move to a fixed cost per student but noted the Business Committee felt the Assembly Executive needed to comment before moving in any particular direction.

The Revd Geoff Felton thanked those who had put the report together and asked if consultation beyond the URC around lay and ministerial training and asked if we have considered blending

learning approaches such as the St Mellitus College approach in the Church of England. He also asked about if it was possible to train overseas ministers in the UK given the number of overseas ministers who wish to work with us.

Ms Hodgson noted consultation has happened beyond the URC; Northern and Westminster have a number of international students. She felt there is a strong need to preserve a URC distinctive ethos and this might be lost if we trained ecumenically.

The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith noted some negotiations with partner international denominations who wished to partner via the General Assembly rather than directly with an RCL.

Dr Bradbury noted the centralising tendency within Methodism about training is being reviewed as they have found unintended consequences in their last reform. He noted the Anglican model of training, from his own observation, leads to instability for colleges as the money follows the students.

The Revd David Salisbury asked about seed funding / £14million in the New College Fund and what the impact on the RCLs would be if that capital was spent.

Dr Hopkins noted that the New College Fund is a restricted fund endowment from the proceeds of a college sold in 1977. It generates £400,000 per year to be used on education purposes only. He confirmed that if we spent the capital then income would reduce.

The Revd Sal Bateman sees our situation as one of opportunity not scarcity. She noted we are waiting for the results of the Church Life Review which may have implications for the ministry the church wishes to provide. She also feels we are ignoring in this discussion of whole of life training needs in the URC and that we should review this, externally, before we decide on future funding of the RCLs.

The Revd Neil Thorogood, noting he was, for 15 years, a tutor and then principal of Westminster. He felt that all three of the RCLs are a blessing not a burden and that we are dealing with a very complex situation. He is not sure that we will ever get to a point which is static. There is a dynamism in how we do education for learning and there needs to be a dynamism in financial provision as we are in partnership with a range of other providers which are also constantly changing. Any change we make must honour and hold the treasure within our tradition and within our RCLs. He noted the Anglican model that he watched unfold in Cambridge was the law of the jungle where every college was pitted against each other, and he warned against that model for us as it would undermine who we are as a denomination. He warned this might follow a model of pay per student. Of course, the RCLs follow the will of General Assembly but there needs to be a two way conversation so the RCLs influence the thinking of General Assembly.

Ms Hodgson noted that conversation thus far had been focused on finance and it would be good to be an expansionist frame of mind than we have been.

The Revd Dr Romilly Micklem felt the investment strategy for the New College fund needed to be examined as it wasn't generating enough. He felt we had been in a static position regarding Colleges and we had navigated College closure before.

Dr Hopkins has asked the same question about strategy and is awaiting an answer.

The Revd Steve Faber could not see a way around a dog eat dog world if we maintain three colleges with fewer numbers of students coming forward, even if that unhealthy internal market is moderated by the Assessment Board deciding which College ordinands attend. He noted that we had heard that each RCL offers a different experience but that General Assembly should determine what those experiences are. He further suggested cohorts needed to be large enough to give good experiences.

The Revd Geoff Felton wanted to assert there are good things to learn from the Anglican Church and reaffirmed the experience of St Mellitus and Hope University in Liverpool and sees the advantages in a blended online model.

Dr Bradbury reflected the discussion thus far. He concurred with the comments from Dr Hopkins about asking Synods to pay more. He noted that every Synod is engaged in education and learning through Training and Development Officers and wonders if we should have the type of external review that Ms Bateman mentioned. He wonders about time and the immediate pressure on the budget.

The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith highlighted that EM1 training is primarily about ministerial formation rather than simply following courses.

Dr Hopkins pointed out that the longer we take to decide the more money we spend.

Alan Yates commented that the two suggestions in the paper are mutually exclusive but doesn't wish to delay a financial change. He felt this whole area is not about cost reduction but about priorities. He noted that if Education and Learning reduce their expenditure it releases money for other areas of the church's life.

The Revd Anne Sardeson was struck by the issues caused by delaying a decision but is also concerned about not delaying and making the wrong decision. She'd prefer us to take longer to make a better decision.

Peter Knowles endorses the idea of spending a little more time to review.

The Moderator remaindered this business until later in the meeting. Assembly Executive broke for coffee.

Session 5

11 Paper BDFH1: Children & Youth Work Committee | Education & Learning | Ministries | Worship, Faith & Order - Towards a Ministry of Children's and Youth Work

The Revd Samantha Sheehan and Ms Pippa Hodgson introduced the paper [BDFH1-Towards-a-new-formal-ministry-for-childrens-and-youth-work.pdf](#).

Executive broke into small discussion groups to discuss the following questions

- 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

Groups emailed the content of their discussions into the group for consideration. Assurance was provided that the feedback will be carefully considered in moving this matter forward.

Executive then discussed Resolution 14.

The Revd Lytham Nevard asked if this post be open for non-stipendiary candidates.

The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith advised it would be open for non-stipendiary ministry.

The Revd Dr Trevor Jamieson asked if the ministry, would include the need to preside at Sacraments.

The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith advised this was not envisaged to be part of the role.

Karen Bell asked if the training should be focussed on those already in youth and children's work roles.

The Revd Samantha Sheehan reminded Executive that exploration into this matter was due to General Assembly 2023 resolutions and was envisaged to be a new form of Ministry.

The Revd Jane Wade questioned why, given this is envisaged to be an intergenerational role, the word "family" was not included in the title?

The Revd Sheenan advised that the role was very much to involve family work.

The Revd Steve Faber asked if this was a stipendiary ministry or a salaried /employed ministry.

The Revd Samantha Sheehan explained this would be a stipendiary ministry.

The Revd David Salsbury if there was a way into this ministry through a Certificate of Eligibility and, if so, what gifts and graces would be looked for.

The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith remarked that Eligibility Certificates for ministries other than Word and Sacrament can be very difficult to map onto our requirements. She felt this would be a piece of work that could be done but would be complex.

The Revd Dr Romilly Micklem asked about funding for this new ministry in relation to the Church Life Fund review and that we are running down parallel tracks and not demonstrating joined up thinking.

The General Secretary advised that this was not linked to The Church Life Review and was a separate track about recognising a formally recognised Commissioned Ministries rather than employed lay people to run in parallel with other Ministries.

The Revd Sally Bateman moved that Resolution 14 be not put. The Revd Dr Micklem seconded this idea. At Dr Bradbury's suggestion Ms Bateman withdrew her resolution meantime to allow for further discussion and to facilitate Executive providing a required steer re what next.

The Revd Mike Walsh wondered if a salaried post was better to allow more people to be appointed and paid for by local churches.

Assembly Executive

The Revd Sheehan undertook to reflect further on what the pattern of ministry might look like.

The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith pointed out that salaried posts are employees not office holders.

Daniel Raddings sought clarification that Resolution 14 was to facilitate moving this matter forward and discouraged further delays.

The Revd Geoff Felton believed this matter was highly inspirational and that General Assembly needed a concrete proposal to discuss. He requested partnership working moving this forward especially in relation to enable suitable numbers of applicants to any post created.

Steve Powell noted the resolution was in two parts and the task group can't have met the brief until it brings proposals to Assembly. He felt that the issues of deployment which remain to be addressed need to be addressed and feels that the feedback from earlier discussions needs to be reflected upon. He moved to delete the wording from "confirms" to instructs."

Dr Hopkins was concerned that feedback sent in by email undermines our discernment task as it is not possible to know the groups said so it's not possible to engage fully in discernment.

He further noted as Convenor of Resources that this new ministry will need to be paid for and there is no proposal for to fund this.

The Revd David Salsbury fed back that his group were unsure how this ministry sat alongside the other ministries already established within the URC along with lay employed roles within churches and synods. The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith referred Mr Salsbury to the papers which highlighted the connection with other ministries.

The Revd Samantha Sheehan indicated the Task Group wished to withdraw the Resolution, in order to allow them to reflect on the conversations and feedback from this Executive and consider what could and should be presented to General Assembly.

Executive consented to the Resolution 14 being withdrawn by majority. Concern was expressed that there did not appear to be general warmth to the proposal of this new form of stipendiary Ministry amongst Executive at this time. The Revd Samantha Sheehan assured Executive that the matter, with all feedback and comments etc, would be carefully considered before the matter is brought to General Assembly.

Resolution 14

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.

withdrawn

The Executive broke for lunch.

Session 6

12 The Moderator took the chair and Executive returned to **Paper A2: Business Committee-GA Committee Structures and General Secretariat**

Resolution 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.

Agreed

Resolution 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 are to be agreed by the existing Mission and Discipleship Department 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.

Dr Bradbury proposed an amended resolution (as above) which was accepted by Executive.

Dr Hopkins highlighted that an associated piece of work to reformulate Standing Orders to ensure enough time is allowed for this new Committees to report and bring business to Assembly.

Dr Bradbury assured Executive this work would happen.

The Revd David Salsbury noted other Committees are changing their remit and have not been included in resolutions and asked if there was a reason for this.

Dr Bradbury noted this was a mistake!

The Resolution was agreed unanimously

Resolution 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 July 2025

The Resolution was agreed unanimously

Resolution 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 July 2025.

Heather Moore sought clarification re whether the "bringing of names" would be in addition to the defined roles already on those committees. Dr Bradbury confirmed that this would be covered by the Terms of Reference.

The Resolution was agreed unanimously

Resolution 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 July 2025.

The Revd Russell Furley-Smith questioned whether there should be a review/end date for this proposed composition.

Dr Bradbury urged caution re this and indicated that flexibility was desired at this juncture but confirmed that this would be a matter that would be kept under review.

Vaughan Griffiths questioned the inclusion of the role of Head of Governance whereas we don't currently have one and if there should be a substitute offered.

Dr Bradbury undertook to come back to Assembly in July should recruitment for this role fail.

The Revd Martin Knight highlighted that he was not entirely convinced that the title General Secretariat is appropriate as it sounds a little like a Soviet institution and seems more distant than is intended. Dr Bradbury indicated his agreement but wondered what the alternative should be.

The Revd Sally Bateman wondered if the Head of Governance should be a role in attendance at the General Secretariat rather than a member.

Dr Bradbury indicated this idea had been considered but wanted to have an equality of membership within this group.

The Revd Steve Faber wondered if there should be a power of co-option in the case of vacancies. Dr Bradbury noted this could be dealt with in the Terms of Reference which are being developed.

The Revd Dr Romilly Micklem doesn't accept there is an employment law issue as this is simply a Committee not a post.

Victoria James noted that her role description includes being a member of the General Secretariat which gives her the required authority in Church House. She felt the same authority needed to be with the Head of Governance post.

The Revd Clare Downing pointed out that the only person in the General Secretariat who had to be a Minister of Word and Sacrament is the General Secretary. Dr Hopkins understands the employment point raised by the General Secretary but holds this is a conflict with the idea that this structure is flexible. He, therefore, asks for clarity if this measure is meant to be permanent or not.

Dr Bradbury noted that in existing job descriptions and contracts this is permanent but that to effect change would require HR processes. The job advert for Head of Governance has included the likelihood of the post holder being a member of the General Secretariat. By "flexible", Dr Bradbury has meant a 4-5 year timescale.

Chris Atherton noted a danger in the discussion of not trusting our secular employees.

The Revd Fran Kissack feels profoundly uncomfortable about the creation of a wider General Secretariat when the Terms of Reference for the body are not clear if the body is charged, primarily with giving theological leadership to the URC.

Executive indicated to the Moderator that they were not ready to move to a decision and wished discussion to continue.

The Revd Dr Romilly Micklem agreed with Ms Kissack in that Executive was being asked to put the cart before the horse and that Terms of Reference needed to be developed first. Dr Bradbury agreed that Dr Micklem was correct but that the Councils of the Church had set this cart before horse situation up in the first place noting it illustrates the need for the Head of Governance to be part of the General Secretariat.

The Revd Lythan Nevard wanted more work to be done to consider why the Head of Governance needed to be within the General Secretariat.

Dr Bradbury agreed there needed to be more clarity but that it's not easy to start from where we are given the previous decisions of the Councils of the Church in the past.

The Revd Sally Thomas indicated her agreement with Dr Micklem.

Dr Bradbury wished to firmly resist a strict division between the theological and spiritual from the governance and operational parts of church life. He felt all four of these are key parts of our life together and should be held in a type of incarnational tension.

Willie Duncan noted the need to do the right thing and that, in our current climate, doing the right thing involves ensuring the Head of Governance is within the senior leadership of the church.

Karen Bell encouraged Executive to trust the recruitment process to appoint the right person of faith for this essential role. She questioned how "seasonable" the need for good governance would actually be given many of their areas of work are long term/permanent matters. Karen indicated her support for the Head of Governance to be part of the General Secretariat.

The Revd Clare Downing felt that Executive might be more comfortable the July Assembly was presented with both the Terms of Reference for the General Secretariat alongside the posts that should serve within it.

Dr Bradbury understood the logic of this comment he would prefer it if Executive would agree both the composition of the General Secretariat now but approve Terms of Reference at the July Assembly.

The Revd George Watt wondered about co-opting the Head of Governance until the Terms of Reference were agreed.

Dr Bradbury asked the Moderator to send the Resolution to a facilitation group. The Moderator agreed to ask Jan Adamson and Sarah Lane Cawte to convene a Facilitation Group.

13 Paper A5: Business Committee - the Future of the General Assembly

The General Secretary presented the paper [A5-Future-of-General-Assembly.pdf](#)

Executive broke into discussion groups to explore papers A4 and A5 and the questions contained therein.

Session 7

14 Paper [R1-CDAG-Section-O-Changes.pdf](#) Amendments to Section O

The Revd Andy Braunston introduced the paper and explained. There were no questions or points for discussion (not even from The Revd Dr Romilly Micklem)

The General Secretary moved the Resolution

Assembly Executive amends the Manual's Section O framework and appendices as outlined in this paper

The Resolution was agreed unanimously

15 En Bloc Business

The General Secretary moved the following papers and the resolutions contained within

Paper A1 Reporting BC decisions since GA [A1-Business-Committee-Report.pdf](#)

Paper G1 Pensions Committee Terms of Reference [G1-Pensions-Committee-Terms-of-Reference.pdf](#)

Paper G2 Pensions Update [G2-Pension-Update.pdf](#)

Paper G3:Pensions Process and Delegated Authority [G3-Pensions-Process-and-Delegated-Authority.pdf](#)

Paper H1: NSM Expenses Policy [H1-NSM-Expenses-Policy.pdf](#)

Paper H3: Revision of Section O Appendix D [H3-Revision-of-Section-O-Appendix-D-Moderators-Mandated-Warning.pdf](#)

Paper I1 Mission Report [I1-Mission-Report.pdf](#)

Paper J1 Nominations: [J1-Nominations-Report.pdf](#)

Paper Q1 LBAC report [Q1-LBAG-Report.pdf](#)

Paper S1 PVG Matrix [S1-PVG-Matrix.pdf](#)

Paper S2 Safeguarding Committee Terms of Reference [S2-Safeguarding-Committee-Terms-of-Reference.pdf](#)

Assembly Executive accepted the papers and resolutions unanimously and therefore agreed the following resolutions:

Resolution 15

Assembly Executive approves the revised Terms of Reference of the Pensions Committee

Resolution 16

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)

Resolution 17

Assembly Executive adopts the NSM Expenses Policy

Resolution 19

Assembly Executive receives Journeying Together, 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.

Resolution 20

Assembly Executive appoints committee members and representatives as set out in paragraph 4.1 of this Report ([J1-Nominations-Report.pdf](#))

Resolution 21

General Assembly approves the amendments to the membership of the Safeguarding Committee from: Up to two representatives nominated by the URC advocated survivors group to Up to two representatives nominated either because they have lived experience as a survivor, or because they are a youth member (18-25)

16 Paper A4

Executive returned to **Paper A4: Business Committee-GA Committee Structures and General Secretariat**

The General Secretary moved Resolution 10

The Revd Lythan Nevard asked to discuss the resolutions together as they are interlinked.

Dr Bradbury welcomed more general discussion and was open to both being discussed together.

Ms Nevard felt that the current Business Committee was quite small and was mixed of employees and URC office holders and wondered if that meant they could be trustees.

The Rev Dr David Chapman (Methodist Church) shared the experience of the Methodist Church re this form of governance and encouraged the URC to adopt it. He wondered if it is possible to separate the spiritual leadership of the church from the secular.

Dr Bradbury noted that the URC has been looking at how the Methodist Church has done this and noted that we are looking at a charitable law process which does not easily map onto our spiritual understanding of Church. He agreed with Dr Chapman in that governance is also about culture; he saw the need to adopt a governance model which is congruent with our ecclesiastical culture yet, at the same time, our culture has not dealt strongly enough with governance. Dr Bradbury highlighted the journey to this point highlighting that the URC Trust in the past (partly due to how it was set up) has been too detached from General Assembly which raised concern and that the Business Committee was an amalgam of the Assembly Arrangements Committee and the Mission Council Advisory Group (MCAG). He emphasised that we require to form a body with oversight of all matters and a solid wide working understanding of the work of GA.

Steve Powell recognised that the objectives could be met through either a CIO or a Company and asked for more information regarding the pros and cons (cost wise) of the current regime and that of a CIO.

Dr Bradbury felt that it would be possible to go with either route but that it would be better to go via the CIO route so we were only accountable to the Charity Commission and not Companies House too. The Legal Advisor further advised that benefits of creating a CIO as a legal entity include that it can hold land/funds/property, register the funds of GA and act as an employer which is contrary to the abilities of the current URC Trus. A CIO would enable neater, active and more meaningful governance, better utilising the active GA experiences, skillset and knowledge of its Trustees in a more positive way than the status quo.

Graham Jennings asked for more details of the roles of the people who would make up the Business Committee to ensure skill set me role requirements.

Resolution 10

Assembly Executive welcomes the ongoing exploration of the United Reformed Church Trust Company being replaced with a Charitable Incorporated Organisation and invites the Business Committee and the United Reformed Church Trust Company to continue further work leading in this direction.

This was agreed.

Resolution 11

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 Trust Company to continue exploring this option.

Steve Powell queried what the overlap would be between the trustee and Assembly function. Dr Bradbury noted that this paper has been evolving and explained how the two members of the current Business Committee who are not members of Assembly ex officio are very helpful. Dr Bradbury asked Executive's permission to withdraw Resolution 11 given that the authority to do the work is in Resolution 10.

The Moderator asked if Executive agreed with the withdrawal of Resolution 11; Executive agreed.

17 Paper A5 continued [A5-Future-of-General-Assembly.pdf](#)

Executive returned to Paper A5

Karen Bell reported that her discussion group preferred option A to B with some tweaks

The Revd Clare Downing noted her group had wondered how changes to General Assembly would fit in with other aspects of the church particularly with regard to how matters might be brought to Assembly.

Dr Bradbury didn't think there would be a change in how business gets to Assembly – though its committees or through Synods.

The Revd Geoff Felton noted his group battled with the decision making and pastoral and relational aspects of Assembly. They wondered about the feasibility of a 5 year term for GA Moderator. Dr Bradbury noted the unified way in which we attend to pastoral and relationship aspects alongside the governance of the church; he asked what we are willing to sacrifice that we can't do well.

Dr Bradbury asked to test Executive's mind about an Assembly every five years. Executive was icily cold to the idea. He noted that we need to be more proactive in looking at embodying diversity in our Assembly composition and noted ways in which other bodies do this.

The Revd Lindsey Sanderson noted that her group was warmer to the idea of a 5 year Assembly schedule. Her group saw it as an opportunity to use the consensus decision making process properly through discussion, discernment, Bible Study and worship the agenda of the Church emerges from General Assembly.

Dr Bradbury found the steers from Mrs Sanderson about the way we do business very helpful indeed. He wondered if we could find different modes of working for different types of business where consensus decision making could come into its own.

The Revd Sally Thomas reported in her group that a new model was needed but it wasn't sure what. She commented that the resolution only offered two possibilities and that we needed more creative options. Dr Bradbury felt the resolutions were as broad as possible. The ideas in the paper were discussion starters not either/or options.

The Revd Dr Michael Hopkins noted the status quo is financially unsustainable. He noted the Assembly size in the 1970s compared to URC membership the size of Assembly should be about the current size of Executive. He suggested that having an Assembly and Executive is not necessary and we could, like the Church of England General Synod, meet more than once a year. Dr Bradbury noted that meeting around tables is a much better way of working but that this would require a smaller body. He was very warm to the idea of a smaller body of people meeting more frequently.

The Revd David Salsbury affirmed Dr Hopkins' remarks. He noted that preparation helps participation and that a longer preparation time is needed and giving better summaries at the start of papers. Dr Bradbury thanked Mr Salsbury for his helpful comments on participation.

Catriona Wheeler asked which General Assembly in 2025 was referred to in the resolutions. Dr Bradbury noted he meant July 2025.

The Revd Samantha Sheehan reminded Executive that the URC has actively committed to hearing the voices of children and young people at all levels of governance and is mindful how this will play into our discussions about governance. She also encouraged Executive to safeguard the minimum of two young people per synod.

Dr Bradbury noted that if we were reducing the number of Synod representatives this would mean there would not be 2 youth representatives per Synod but noted there are other ways of increasing the number of young people sent from Youth Assembly or Executive.

The Revd Sally Bateman wondered if there should be different reps for Assembly if it met twice a year. She also wondered about changing the times of meetings to enhance the participation of young people and to consider the ease of reporting and work.

Dr Bradbury noted her points needed to be given active consideration.

Jay Tynan craved more detail (and assurance) re how the representation of young people and children could be preserved and enshrined into future Assembly level gatherings.

The Revd Lythan Nevard noted that in her group indicated that Assembly needed to be an occasion of celebration and appreciation for the ecumenical partners present at Assembly. She commended the way of working at this Executive where discussion has led to matters being withdrawn and we should not see that as failure but as an example of greater discernment.

Dr Bradbury supported these comments.

Megan Price noted the difficulties and variances in being able to identify youth representatives for Youth Executive and General Assembly.

Dr Bradbury noted that we need to become more creative in how we recruit people to come to Youth Executive and General Assembly.

Victoria James hoped it would be possible to get to a point where General Assembly is able to set strategic priorities for any given period and this should feed into discernment about timing and frequency. The Revd Jenny Mills affirmed this.

Dr Bradbury noted that we are not always very good at using Assembly as a place to focus on priorities and strategy.

The Revd Fran Kissack urged us not to lose sight of our conciliar nature as we think about relative size of Assembly and Executive.

Resolution 12 Assembly Executive agrees that General Assembly 2025 should be invited to consider the size and pattern of meetings of the General Assembly.

This was agreed unanimously.

Dr Bradbury asked Executive's permission to withdraw Resolution 13 confirming that discussions held at Executive have been heard and will assist with the framing of future work.

Executive unanimously agreed to Resolution 13 being withdrawn.

Resolution 13

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]

After prayer the Executive adjourned for dinner.

Session 8

18 Mission Team presentation two

URC Apology to Jamaica

Executive watched a short film about the ecumenical pilgrimage to Jamaica about the legacies of slavery (available on the URC YouTube channel)

Dr Stephen Tomkins conducted a conversation with The Revd Geoff Felton and The Revd Dr Tessa Henry Robinson in writing about their experience of the pilgrimage, the apology given, the need for it and what next.

The Chaplains led Assembly Executive in a time of reflection and prayer. The meeting adjourned thereafter.

Wednesday 5 February 2025

Session 9

The Moderator invited his chaplains to lead the Executive in worship.

The Moderator invited the Revd Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary (Mission) to address the Assembly about the new Roman Catholic / URC Dialogue resource which had recently been published. Mr Brooks commended the resource to Assembly. (**Paper I1 Mission Report** [I1-Mission-Report.pdf](#))

19 Paper A2

Executive returned to discuss Paper A2. The Facilitation Group introduced an amended Resolution 5 with two new clauses:

Resolution 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.

Assembly Executive requests the Business Committee to bring terms of reference the General Secretariat to General Assembly July 2025

Assembly Executive requests the Resources and Ministries Committees to determine, by July 2025, whether for future appointments the post of Deputy General Secretary for Mission and Discipleship should be restricted to members of the URC or ministers of the URC.

After questions for clarification had been answered, concern expressed about the process, timeline of actions and the role of Head of Governance in the grouping and following some discussion, this resolution was agreed. Assurances were given that the name “General Secretariat” will also be thought about and reviewed and that if agreed, the Terms of Reference will be implemented immediately.

20 AD1 Resource Centres for Learning

Executive returned to discussing paper AD1. [AD1-Resource-Centres-for-Learning-FINAL-AE-Feb-2025.pdf](#)

The Moderator invited The Revd Dr Hopkins, Convenor of the Resources Committee and the Revd Jenny Mills, Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship) to introduce Resolutions X and Y.

Dr Hopkins apologised for not including, in his previous remarks, further funding to the Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs) which include further capital funding from the New College Fund and resources given in kind.

Ms Mills noted that these resolutions were offered with the caveat that the conversations around the issues of governance and capital funding will continue, being facilitated by the Resources and the Education and Learning Committees. Ms Mills noted that the two resolutions were ambitious but the urgency of the situation, which has already taken a long time to resolve, coupled with the fact that the church cannot continue to spend money in the way we have done mean that action is needed. She noted, however, that whilst Executive understood the urgency a preferred option for moving forward was not offered. She noted there was a warmth towards understanding the contemporary learning needs of the URC including both lay learning and ministerial formation. She also thought that there was also a desire to be brave and consider some of the issues around smaller cohorts, excess capacity, and the current RCL provision.

The Moderator invited questions.

The Revd Neil Thorogood noted that this was a lot of work to do in a short period of time.

Ms Mills noted this was a challenging timespan. It was felt that Resolution X could be worked on

fairly quickly as the RCLs will need to know by September 2025 what their funding will be for the year ahead, whilst Resolution Y would need a 48-hour residential conference.

The Revd Sally Bateman was warm to the resolutions but noted they don't take into account the working of the Church Life Review process and asked why the deadline could not be for Executive 2026.

Ms Mills noted the Church Life Review is not charged with reviewing ministry and the outcome of these Resolutions would feed into the Church Life Review process.

The Revd Dr Romilly Micklem affirmed that this is an urgent task.

Ms Mills thanked Dr Micklem for his comments.

Elizabeth Hall urged Executive to carry these resolutions so that the RCLs can plan with knowledge of their funding especially around the care of staff if they had to enter into a redundancy situation.

Ms Mills thanked Ms Hall for her comments.

The Revd Samantha Sheehan asked that Children and Youth are involved in discussions around Resolution Y.

Ms Mills assured Ms Sheehan that Children and Youth will be involved.

The Revd Russell Furley-Smith asked that those charged with this work will be allowed to manage their workload well.

Ms Mills and Dr Bradbury assured Mr Furley-Smith that this would happen and the work is to be done in a challenging timeframe. Dr Bradbury clarified that Executive needs to manage its expectation of what other work will be possible given this piece of work will be pressing and that the pressure on the budget, and on the RCLs is unmanageable and so clarity is needed but there will be consequences as some other areas of work may well slip.

Resolution X was agreed unanimously.

Resolution X Assembly Executive instructs the Education and Learning and Business Committee Working Group to bring back to July General Assembly 2025 proposals for addressing the excess capacity and associated costs in our formation of accredited and recognised ministries.

Discussion continued about Resolution Y.

The Revd Steve Faber urged consideration around the importance of a training cohort and wished to give a steer to the working group to reduce the number of RCLs so that cohorts are larger.

Dr Hopkins noted that Mr Faber's comments were an obvious implication of the resolution and that this will be considered in the discussion. Ms Hodgson affirmed that the point had been heard.

Resolution Y

Assembly Executive instructs the Education and Learning and Business Committee Working Group to design and implement a review of the learning needs of the denomination, with facilitation and external support, and to bring back a needs analysis to July General Assembly 2025.

Resolution Y was agreed unanimously

21 Paper A6 Assistant Clerk [Mission Council 2021](#)

The Revd Philip Brooks moved the resolution:

Resolution Z

Acting on behalf of the General Assembly, Assembly Executive appoints the Revd Dr Alex Clare-Young to serve as Assistant Clerk of the General Assembly from the close of this meeting to the close of the meeting of the General Assembly in 2029.

Executive unanimously passed the resolution with thanks.

Executive concluded with Worship and Communion

Standing Orders for the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church

1. The agenda of the Assembly

- 1.1 At its meetings the Assembly shall consider reports and draft motions prepared by its committees which include the Assembly Executive or by Synods, and motions and amendments of which due notice has been given submitted by individual members of the Assembly.

2. In-person, virtual, and hybrid meetings

- 2.1 A meeting may be in-person, virtual, or hybrid. The boundaries between these descriptions are not always clear. A generally in-person meeting may have a minority of members joining the meeting by virtual means. A virtual meeting may have some participants gathered together in one place. In any event, what is always strictly essential is that all participants, both in-person and virtual, can fully see and hear each other in all directions, and that the Moderator is totally confident that participants are able to see and hear each other effectively. The Moderator must also be content and comfortable that they can manage full and proper participation from all participants in the meeting.

3. Records of meetings

- 3.1 Any streaming and/or recording of meetings, including subtitles or captions, does not replace the formal minutes of the meeting and is not a record of the decisions made. Formal minutes shall continue to be maintained and retained.
- 3.2 Meetings should not normally be recorded, in order to comply fully with both safeguarding and data privacy policies.

4. Operating procedure

- 4.1 Meetings will commence when the Moderator opens the meeting, within the requirements set out in the Rules of Procedure.
- 4.2 At the start of any meeting the Moderator shall make reasonable efforts to confirm that any members attending virtually can see and hear, and be seen and heard. The meeting shall not start until the Moderator is so satisfied.
- 4.3 Where available, participants joining a meeting virtually should normally use video as well as audio. Where video is not available, or it is not safe for the attendee to use video, then audio only may be used.
- 4.4 The Meeting will finish when the Moderator formally closes the meeting.
- 4.5 All microphones should be set to mute at the start of the meeting, apart from the Moderator and any necessary technical staff. Microphones should only be unmuted when a participant is speaking.
- 4.6 The Moderator has absolute discretion to pause or adjourn the meeting at any time, and to remove any attendees from the meeting if their conduct falls short of the standards expected in church.

Standing Orders

- 4.7 In all but the smallest meetings, it is helpful if the Moderator is not also the online host. The host may be a staff member(s) or volunteer(s) who are not a member of the meeting in the same way that such people may assist with stewarding meetings.
- 4.8 In any event, no technical failure shall invalidate any decisions made.

5. Attendance

- 5.1 All meetings are required to meet any previously agreed quorum, where such a quorum has been specified.

6. Interpretation of Standing Orders

- 6.1 Where the Moderator is required to interpret any Standing Orders they shall take advice from the Clerk before making a ruling. The Moderator's decision in all cases shall be final.

7. Presentation of business

- 7.1 All reports of committees, together with the draft motions arising therefrom, shall be delivered to the General Secretary by a date to be determined, so that they may be circulated to members in time for consideration before the date of the Assembly meeting.
- 7.2 A Synod may deliver to the General Secretary not less than twelve weeks before the commencement of the meeting of the Assembly notice in writing of a motion for consideration at the Assembly. This notice shall include the names of those appointed to propose and second the motion at the Assembly.
- 7.3 A local church wishing to put forward a motion for consideration by the General Assembly shall submit the motion to its Synod for consideration and, if the Synod so decides, transmission to the Assembly, at such time as will enable the Synod to comply with Standing Order 7.2 above.
- 7.4 A member of the Assembly may deliver to the General Secretary not less than 21 days before the date of the meeting of the Assembly a notice in writing of a motion (which notice must include the name of a seconder) to be included in the Assembly agenda. If the subject matter of such a notice of motion appears to the General Secretary to be an infringement of the rights of a Synod through which the matter could properly have been raised, the General Secretary shall inform the member accordingly and bring the matter before the Business Committee which shall advise the Assembly as to the procedure to be followed.
- 7.5 Proposals for amendments to the Basis and Structure of the URC, which may be made by the Assembly Executive or a committee of the General Assembly or a Synod, shall be in the hands of the General Secretary not later than 12 weeks before the opening of the Assembly. The General Secretary, in addition to the normal advice to members of the Assembly, shall, as quickly as possible, inform all Synod Clerks of the proposed amendment.
- 7.6 It shall not be in order at any time to move a motion or amendment which:
- 7.6.1 contravenes any part of the Basis of Union, or
 - 7.6.2 involves the Church in expenditure without prior consideration by the appropriate committee, or
 - 7.6.3 pre-empts discussion of a matter to be considered later in the agenda, or

- 7.6.4 amends or reverses a decision reached by the Assembly at its preceding two meetings unless the Moderator, Clerk and General Secretary together decide that changed circumstances or new evidence justify earlier reconsideration of the matter, or
- 7.6.5 is not related to the report of a committee and has not been the subject of 21 days' notice under Standing Order 7.4, or
- 7.6.6 simply reaffirms existing work.

The decision of the Moderator (in the case of 7.6.1, 7.6.2, 7.6.3, 7.6.5, and 7.6.6) and of the Moderator with the Clerk and the General Secretary (in the case of 7.6.4) on the application of this Standing Order shall be final.

- 7.7 In advance of the meeting, the General Secretary shall, in consultation with the Moderator and Clerk, prepare a proposal for a Facilitation Group for that meeting, for appointment at the beginning of the meeting. Some or all of the members of the Facilitation Group may be called upon by the Moderator at any time to help the Assembly reach a mind upon a question. The Assembly may add or remove members of the Facilitation Group at any time. The Facilitation Group may consult with whoever they deem it appropriate. Draft revised wording of motions should be checked by the Clerk, and by the Legal Advisor where appropriate, before being proposed to the Assembly.

8. En bloc business

- 8.1 The Moderator, Clerk, and General Secretary shall together decide which items of business shall be taken en bloc. Placing business in the en bloc category does not imply anything about the importance of any item of business, merely that those planning the meeting think that it may be possible to agree the business without discussion. Any members wishing to have items removed from en bloc business should notify the Clerk by a stated time in advance of the meeting. If six or more members have so notified, then the business shall be added to the agenda of the meeting, otherwise en bloc business shall be voted upon without any discussion.

9. Business requiring discussion

- 9.1 It is not possible to use full Consensus Decision-Making during many meetings, since Consensus Decision-Making relies upon the Moderator being able to sense the mood of the meeting, and the members also being able to sense that and trust the Moderator, which requires senses not always available in online meetings or meetings with online participants. However, all meetings should still be conducted in the spirit and ethos of seeking consensus.
- 9.2 To ensure that all meetings always operate to the same procedure, noting the blurred boundaries referred to in Standing Order 2, all meetings will use the information session and the discussion session from Consensus Decision-Making, and then take a vote for the actual decision-making.
- 9.3 All decisions shall be made by vote, using the procedure set out in Standing Order 10. The Moderator, Clerk, and General Secretary shall together decide in advance which items of business require a simple majority, and which require a two thirds majority, using the principle that routine formal decisions such as agreeing the minutes of the previous meeting might reasonably be taken on a simple majority, whereas matters of policy require a greater level of support than a simple majority. This Standing Order does not override any other provision for a specific majority set out elsewhere in the Standing Orders, particularly procedural motions.

10. Information and discussion sessions

- 10.1 The first stage is the information session. During the information session, members of Assembly may ask questions only to seek clarification or further information.
- 10.2 Once the Moderator decides that the information session has ended, the Assembly moves into the discussion session, in which the substance of the matter may be discussed.
- 10.2.1 The methods used may include prayer, buzz groups, group discussions, speeches to the whole Assembly, time for thinking during a break, etc. The Moderator may invite Assembly to indicate opinions by the use of coloured cards at this stage or electronic equivalent, and shall ensure that the full ranges of voices are given opportunity to contribute.
- 10.2.2 Minor changes of wording may be agreed as the discussion proceeds. If a proposed change is, in the opinion of the Moderator upon the advice of the Clerk, a major change, then a proposer and seconder are required and it is an amendment.
- 10.3 When the Moderator senses that the Assembly may be ready to reach a decision, the Moderator shall state that Assembly is moving into the decision session.

11. Decision session

- 11.1 All decisions shall preferably be made by vote. Those participating virtually should normally use any built in voting mechanism in the software. In a very small meeting, where the Moderator can see everyone at once, it may be possible to resolve this informally.
- 11.2 Voting on any motion whose effect is to alter, add to, modify or supersede the Basis, the Structure and any other form or expression of the polity and doctrinal formulations of the United Reformed Church, is governed by paragraph 3(1) and (2) of the Structure.

12. Business and procedural motions

- 12.1 If notice has been given of two or more motions on the same subject, or two or more amendments to the same motion, these shall be taken in the order decided by the Moderator on the advice of the Clerk.
- 12.2 A report presented to the Assembly by a committee or Synod, under Standing Order 7.1, shall be received for debate, unless notice has been duly given under Standing Order 7.4 of a motion to **refer back** to that committee or Synod the whole or part of the report and its attached motion(s). Such a motion for reference back shall be debated and voted upon before the relevant report is itself debated. To carry such a motion **two-thirds** of the votes cast must be given in its favour. When a report has been received for debate, and before any motions consequent upon it are proposed, any member may speak to a matter arising from the report which is not the subject of a motion.
- 12.3 During the meeting of the Assembly and on the report of a committee, notice (including the names of proposer and seconder) shall be given to the Clerk of any new motions which arise from the material of the report, and of any amendments which affect the substance of motions already presented. During the course of the

debate a new motion or amendment may be stated orally without supporting speech in order to ascertain whether a member is willing to second it.

- 12.4 No motion or amendment shall be spoken to by its proposer, debated, or put to the Assembly unless it is known that there is a seconder. The only exceptions to this are motions presented on behalf of a committee, of which printed notice has been given, and the procedural motions in Standing Orders 12.12, 12.13, and 12.14. The procedural motions in Standing Orders 12.12, 12.13, and 12.14 may be moved and spoken to without the proposer having first obtained and announced the consent of a seconder. They must, however, be seconded before being put to the vote, and precedence as between the procedural motions is determined by the fact that after one of them is before the Assembly no other motion can be moved until that one has been dealt with.
- 12.5 A seconder may second without speaking and, by declaring the intention of doing so, reserve the right of speaking until a later period in the debate.
- 12.6 An amendment shall be either to omit words or to insert words or to do both, but no amendment shall be in order which has the effect of introducing an irrelevant proposal or of negating the motion. The Moderator may rule that a proposed amendment should be treated as an alternative motion or as a further motion.
- 12.7 If an amendment is carried, the motion as amended shall take the place of the original motion and shall become the substantive motion upon which any further amendment may be moved. If an amendment is rejected, a further amendment with a different outcome may be moved.
- 12.8 An amendment which has been moved and seconded shall be disposed of before any further amendment may be moved, but notice may be given of intention to move a further amendment should the one before the Assembly be rejected.
- 12.9 The mover may, with the concurrence of the seconder and the consent of the Assembly, alter the motion or amendment proposed.
- 12.10 A motion or amendment may be withdrawn by the proposer with the concurrence of the seconder and the consent of the Assembly. Any such consent shall be signified without discussion. It shall not be in order for any member to speak upon it after the proposer has asked permission to withdraw unless such permission shall have been refused.
- 12.11 Alternative (but not directly negative) motions may be moved and seconded in competition with a motion before the Assembly. It shall be for the Moderator, on the advice of the Clerk, to rule when motions shall be considered as alternatives under the Terms of this Standing Order.
 - 12.11.1 When such draft alternative motions have been received by the General Secretary, the Moderators may ask the General Secretary to convene a meeting (in-person or virtual) of the proposers, to ascertain if it may be possible to agree on a single draft motion to put before the Assembly, or to clarify the areas of disagreement.
 - 12.11.2 If the Assembly has alternative motions before it, each proposer shall be given the opportunity to present their motion in an order decided by the Moderator.
 - 12.11.3 After any amendments duly moved under Standing Order 12 have been dealt with and debate on the alternative motions has ended, the movers shall reply to the debate in reverse order to that in which they spoke initially. The

first vote shall be a vote in favour of each of the motions, put in the order in which they were proposed, the result not being announced for one until it is announced for all. If any of them obtains a majority of those voting, it becomes the sole motion before the Assembly. If none of them does so, the motion having the fewest votes is discarded. Should the lowest two be equal, the Moderator gives a casting vote. The voting process is repeated until one motion achieves a majority of those voting.

12.11.4 Once a sole motion remains, further discussion is permissible and votes for and against that motion shall be taken in the normal way.

12.12 In the course of the business any member may move that the question under consideration **be not put**. This motion takes precedence over every motion before the Assembly. As soon as the member has given reasons for proposing it and it has been seconded and the proposer of the motion or amendment under consideration has been allowed opportunity to comment on the reasons put forward, the vote upon it shall be taken, unless it appears to the Moderator that an unfair use is being made of this rule. To carry this motion, **two-thirds** of the votes cast must be given in its favour. Should the motion be carried, the business shall immediately end and the Assembly shall proceed to the next business.

12.13 In the course of any discussion, any member may move that the question **be now put**. This is sometimes described as “the closure motion”. If the Moderator senses that there is a wish or need to close a debate, the Moderator may ask whether any member wishes so to move; the Moderator may not simply declare a debate closed. Provided that it appears to the Moderator that the motion is a fair use of this rule, the vote shall be taken upon it immediately it has been seconded. When an amendment is under discussion, this motion shall apply only to that amendment. To carry this motion, **two-thirds** of the votes cast must be given in its favour. The mover of the original motion or amendment, as the case may be, retains the right of reply before the vote is taken on the motion or amendment.

12.14 During the course of a debate on a motion any member may move that decision on this motion be **deferred to the next Assembly**. This rule does not apply to debates on amendments since the Assembly needs to decide the final form of a motion before it can responsibly vote on deferral. The motion then takes precedence over other business. As soon as the member has given reasons for proposing it and it has been seconded and the proposer of the motion under consideration has been allowed opportunity to comment on the reasons put forward, the vote upon it shall be taken, unless it appears to the Moderator that an unfair use is being made of this rule or that deferral would have the effect of annulling the motion. To carry this motion, **two-thirds** of the votes cast must be given in its favour. At the discretion of the Moderator, the General Secretary may be instructed by a further motion, duly seconded, to refer the matter for consideration by other councils and/or by one or more committees of the Assembly. The General Secretary shall provide for the deferred motion to be presented again at the next Meeting of the General Assembly.

13. Timing of speeches and of other business

13.1 Save by prior agreement of the Business Committee, speeches made in the presentation of reports concerning past work of Assembly committees which are to be open to question, comment or discussion shall not exceed five minutes.

13.2 The Assembly may meet in parallel sessions or breakout rooms to consider the past work of Assembly committees for questions and comments. Any draft motions arising therefrom must be dealt with in a plenary session of the Assembly.

- 13.3 Save by the prior agreement of the Business Committee, speeches made in support of the motions from any Assembly committee, including the Assembly Executive, or from any Synod, shall not exceed five minutes per resolution, and in aggregate not exceed 15 minutes (e.g. a committee with four motions may not exceed 15 minutes), unless a longer period be recommended by the Business Committee or determined by the Moderator.
- 13.4 Each subsequent speaker in any debate shall be allowed five minutes unless the Moderator shall determine otherwise; it shall, in particular, be open to the Moderator to determine that all speeches in a debate or from a particular point in a debate shall be of not more than a different specified number of minutes.
- 13.5 When a speech is made on behalf of a committee, it shall be so stated. Otherwise a speaker shall begin by giving name and accreditation to the Assembly.
- 13.6 Secretaries of committees and members of staff who are not members of Assembly may speak on the report of a committee for which they have responsibility at the request of the Convenor concerned. They may speak on other reports with the consent of the Moderator. Staff should not normally seek permission from the Moderator to speak outside their area of responsibility.
- 13.7 In each debate, no one shall address the Assembly more than once without the permission of the Moderator, except that at the close of each debate the proposer of the motion or the amendment, as the case may be, shall have the right to reply, but must strictly confine the reply to answering previous speakers and must not introduce new matters. Such reply shall close the debate on the motion or the amendment.
- 13.8 The foregoing Standing Order (13.7) shall not prevent the asking or answering of a question which arises from the matter before the Assembly or from a speech made in the debate upon it.
- 13.9 An invited speaker, whether speaking to a draft motion or not, may address the Assembly for such period of time as may be agreed by the Business Committee.

14. Questions

- 14.1 A member may, if two days' notice in writing has been given to the General Secretary, ask the Moderator or the Convenor of any committee any question on any matter relating to the business of the Assembly to which no reference is made in any report before the Assembly.
- 14.2 A member may, when given opportunity by the Moderator, ask the presenter of any report before the Assembly a question seeking additional information or explanation relating to matters contained within the report.
- 14.3 Questions asked under Standing Order 14 shall be put and answered without discussion.

15. Points of order, personal explanations, dissent

- 15.1 A member shall have the right to call attention to a point of order, and immediately on this being done any other member addressing the Assembly shall cease speaking until the Moderator has determined the question of order. The decision on any point of order rests entirely with the Moderator. Any member calling to order unnecessarily is liable to censure of the Assembly.

Standing Orders

- 15.2 A member feeling that some material part of a former speech by such member at the same meeting has been misunderstood or is being grossly misinterpreted by a later speaker may request the Moderator's permission to make a personal explanation. If the Moderator so permits, a member so rising shall be entitled to be heard forthwith.
- 15.3 The right to record in the minutes a dissent from any decision of the Assembly shall only be granted to a member by the Moderator if the reason stated, either verbally at the time or later in writing, appears to the Moderator to fall within the provisions of paragraph 10 of the Basis of Union.
- 15.4 The decision of the Moderator on a point of order, or on the admissibility of a personal explanation, or on the right to have a dissent recorded, shall not be open to discussion.

16. Admission of the public and closed sessions

- 16.1 Only those who are members of the meeting, staff members in attendance, or invited guests may join a meeting. However, a meeting in open session may allow guests or be shown as a live stream.
- 16.2 A closed session is one in which the business is highly sensitive. Only members of Assembly, the Legal Adviser, and any technical staff required to enable Assembly to function may be present. Neither content nor process may be divulged to non-members, save specific information authorised by the Moderator in consultation with the Clerk and the Legal Adviser. No social media in any form may be used during a closed session, nor to report upon such closed session. Any live streaming must be switched off. Minutes will be taken, but these will be held *in retentis* by the Clerk, and shall not be made available to non-members.
- 16.3 A closed session may be called for at any time in any decision-making mode, and voted upon by the Assembly, requiring a simple majority. This motion takes precedence over every motion before the Assembly. As soon as the member has given reasons for proposing it and it has been seconded, and the proposer of the motion or amendment under consideration has been allowed opportunity to comment on the reasons put forward, the vote upon it shall be taken, unless it appears to the Moderator that an unfair use is being made of this rule. Should the motion be carried the business shall immediately pause while non-members leave the meeting.
- 16.4 If a matter is known to be highly sensitive in advance, then the Assembly Officers, consulting the Legal Adviser if necessary, may announce in advance that a certain piece of business will be conducted in a closed session giving their reasons.
- 16.5 Members of Assembly who leave during a closed session may not be re- admitted.

17. Communications during the course of debate

- 17.1 The primary responsibility of members is to attend to the business and participate in the decision making. Those present must refrain both from posting on social media sites during business sessions and from commenting upon partially completed business. It is the responsibility of the communications committee's staff to make official announcements. This restriction is only in place when in session; those attending are free to join in the online debates during breaks and after the close of business in respect of business that the Assembly has completed. Everything written and shared on social media sites at any time is the sole responsibility of the author, and is subject to the same defamation laws as any other form of written communication.

18. Record of the Assembly

- 18.1 A record of attendance at the meetings of the Assembly shall be kept in such a manner as the Business Committee may determine.
- 18.2 The draft minutes of each day's proceedings shall be made available in an appropriate form normally on the following day. They shall, after any necessary correction, be approved at the opening of a subsequent session. Concerning the minutes of the closing day of the Assembly the Clerk shall submit a motion approving their insertion in the full minutes of the Assembly after review and any necessary correction by the Officers of the Assembly. Before such a motion is voted upon, any member may ask to have read out the written minute on any particular item.
- 18.3 A signed copy of the minutes shall be preserved in the custody of the General Secretary as the official record of the Assembly's proceedings.
- 18.4 As soon as possible after the Assembly meeting ends, the substance of the minutes together with any other relevant papers shall be published as a "Record of Assembly" and a copy sent to every member of the Assembly, each Synod and local church.

19. Suspension and amendment of Standing Orders

- 19.1 In any case of urgency or upon proposal of a motion of which due notice has been given, any one or more of the Standing Orders may be suspended at any meeting, provided that three-fourths of the members of the Assembly present and voting shall so decide.
- 19.2 Motions to amend the Standing Orders shall be referred to the Clerk of the Assembly for report before being voted on by the Assembly (or, in case of urgency, by the Assembly Executive). The Clerk of the Assembly may from time to time suggest amendments.

Person responsible for editing document: *Clerk of the General Assembly*
 Date of last revision: *August 2022*

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Synod Moderators' report

Moderators' Meeting

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Geoffrey Clarke mod@urc5.org.uk
Action required	Discussion.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The report is offered to General Assembly and to local churches to encourage us to be a people 'full of grace' and to challenge us to be counter-cultural in practising grace and gratitude in a context of the famine of grace.
Main points	<p>As a Church we give thanks for the grace glimpsed and experienced through faith in Christ.</p> <p>As local churches and individuals we are vessels of grace but we can conclude that there is a 'famine of grace' in the world around us, with abuse and contempt being the more dominant presence.</p> <p>We are called to rejoice in what God's grace enables among us and to embody that grace in how we treat one another, encouraging and practising gratitude.</p>
Previous relevant documents	Previous Synod Moderators' reports.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	Ecumenical partners are welcome to engage with the report.

Welcome to the 2025 Moderators' report

For this year we are taking grace as our theme.

- Grace is both elementary and amazing: elementary in that it is such a key word for us, as followers of Jesus, that we risk taking it for granted to the point of not noticing it; yet also amazing in that it is undeserved, ever new and surprising. As the Statement Concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church puts it:

*The life of faith to which we are called is the Spirit's gift,
continually received through the Word and Sacraments
and our Christian life together.*

To which we respond:

*We acknowledge the gift and answer the call,
giving thanks for the means of grace.*

2. As disciples of Jesus, we are both recipients of grace and bearers of grace. When Mary enters her house, Elizabeth's child leaps in her womb and she is filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41, 44). Mary's presence, as *Theotokos* (God-bearer), is such that in their encounter Elizabeth catches a glimpse of grace. She knows herself to be in the presence of grace. She addresses Mary and says, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb' (Luke 1:42). Elizabeth's words have been immortalised in the ancient prayer, 'Hail Mary', treasured by many of our sisters and brothers across the world. Members of General Assembly may be surprised to see it quoted in a Synod Moderators' report, but the phrase 'full of grace', bestowed on Mary, is one, it could be suggested, that could be used to describe the Church and each member of it: we are the company of those who are full of grace. Just as Elizabeth caught a glimpse of grace through her encounter with Mary so, too, there is potential for us to experience God's grace every time we come together as those who are full of grace.

3. It is one of the privileges of our role as Moderators to visit the many local churches in our respective Synods. The purpose of our visits can be varied – to lead worship and preach; to preside at services of induction, ordination or commissioning; to come alongside ministers, elders and members to discern the way ahead for ministry and mission; or to respond pastorally in times of joy and challenge. In each, we treasure the privilege of being a bearer of grace; and in each place we recognise the potential for the presence of grace through our encounters and through our shared commitment to discern the mind of Christ through conversation. Each local church is distinct, yet each are vessels full of grace. Here are some examples:
 - In Hinckley, grace has been embodied in a church working in partnership with the charity, Hope into Action, to enable a homeless person to become a tenant.
 - Morningside United Church (MUC) is the host church for the Romanian Orthodox congregation in Edinburgh. Last year there was a major celebration for the Orthodox community and so rather than them gathering for worship on a Sunday afternoon as usual, the congregation of MUC offered the Orthodox community the use of the whole building for the day and then they went to worship at Christchurch Scottish Episcopal Church across the road as well as taking part in the Orthodox celebrations.
 - As Eastern Synod moves, as a Synod, into Mission Partnerships – a new way of working together – grace has been glimpsed when churches have said, 'when a new minister comes the needs of church 'X' are more urgent than ours so we happy to allow them more of the minister's time.'
 - An article in the church magazine at Hadleigh, by the Church Secretary, expressing thankfulness for how people have come together in a time of vacancy and have hope for a future which might be different from that which they might have envisaged (especially as they had a minister to themselves before) and that they approach the vacancy with glad hearts.

4. It is all too easy to conclude that grace is in short supply in the world at large. Some have spoken of 'the famine of grace'. There is no shortage of instances, on a daily basis, of people reacting to one another with abuse and contempt – both in tone and in their choice of vocabulary – and belittling those with whom they disagree or take issue. Social media can be testimony to the famine of grace.
5. Church ought, by contrast, to be different. It ought to be full of grace. No church can claim to be perfect – not least because every church is made up of ordinary, fallible human beings. We do not always get it right when it comes to answering the call of God and responding faithfully. Whilst we might wish it were otherwise, despite being full of grace, sometimes how we react to one another displays a distinct lack of grace. This might be seen, for example, in how we treat one another in our meetings and address one another in writing: just two common examples of how easily we fall from grace back into sinful behaviour and attitudes. Synod Moderators are also fallible human beings and are among those who witness, or have to address, poor behaviour and conduct. Often it can be a lack of grace that has exacerbated a situation. Nobody expects everyone to agree on everything or to live in perfect harmony. But how we react and respond to conflict and disagreement is part of our witness as those who are full of grace.
6. So how and when are we – as individuals and as churches – known as those who are full of grace? One suggestion, seen in Elizabeth's Holy Spirit-filled joy through her encounter with Mary, is through a shared joy in what God is doing in our lives. God has made possible, in their lives, more than they could have imagined or hoped for. Both Mary and Elizabeth discern God at work in the life of the other. Church at its best is a people who discern God at work in and through one another's lives – accomplishing in and through us what we might have concluded impossible.

The apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:22-23 calls the church to celebrate and recognise the grace shown through the less honourable parts of the body, not just the presentable parts. How often do we recognise and celebrate grace in the other?

*Surprised by grace, these mothers hold
Within themselves the secret fierce
Of God's true power to love his world;
All wrong to heal, pretence to pierce. ⁽¹⁾*

7. Gratitude is another powerful antidote to the famine of grace. It is a very natural human tendency to complain when things are not as we feel they should be or when we feel we have not received the service we deserve. By contrast we may not as readily articulate appreciation and gratitude when we have positive and enriching experiences. As those full of grace that is undeserved, we ought to be able to cultivate and encourage expressions and gestures of gratitude – going the extra mile to show appreciation and thanksgiving. Gratitude blesses recipients and transforms those bestowing it. It is the privilege of being Moderators that we see thankfulness being lived out, whether in the presentation of the Lundie Award to a young person or a certificate of thanks for many years of active service in ministry to a retired or still-serving minister. Each of the 13 Moderators would like to express our gratitude and thanks to the many hundreds of individuals who make the Synods what they are. Thank you.

*Suffused with grace, their meeting glows
With radiance as Christ moves to earth.
His welcomed presence strengthens, grows
And changes she who gives him birth.¹*

8. Ultimately, those who are full of grace acknowledge that it is all about God. The boundless generosity and mercy of God are our focus. Elizabeth and Mary discern God at work in one another's lives. Mary responds with her song of praise – magnifying the One who has done great things for her: 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my Spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.' (Luke 1:46-48a).

*'Be born in us today' we've said
At every Christmas Eve and Day.
To cradle grace in heart and head:
Infused with grace, for grace we pray.*

*By this new grace reborn, may we
Become his ministers of worth,
Our being, purpose, clear to see:
Diffusing grace, share Christ on earth.¹*

9. We delight in serving those who are full of grace and encourage the United Reformed Church in playing its part in diffusing grace sharing the full spectrum of God's love and light in the communities which we are called to serve.

Personalia

This year we have seen the arrival of the Revd David Downing as the Moderator of South Western Synod. This is an appointment that completes the Moderators' Meeting for the first time in a long while. We give thanks for David's answer to the call upon him and we pray he may exhibit both grace and joy as he continues to serve God and the Synod in the south west.

Questions for discussion

1. Where and in whom did we most recently catch a glimpse of grace, and did we remember to give thanks for that grace observed?
2. What opportunities are there in our local church for discerning God at work in one another's lives?
3. How is gratitude encouraged and practised in the regular life of our local church?
4. To what extent do we diffuse grace in the context of a famine of grace?

¹ Rosemary Field, hymn written for the ordination of Simon Cross, August 2024. Suggested tune: Tallis's Canon. Copyright and permission for wider use: rosemaryfield@rmfield.co.uk

Paper A1

Terms of Reference for the Faith in Action Committee (Discipleship and Mission)

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Mark Robinson, Convenor mark.robinson@urc.org.uk John Bradbury, General Secretary john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 1 General Assembly adopts the terms of reference for the Faith in Action Committee (Discipleship and Mission) as contained in Paper A1 of the July 2025 General Assembly. Resolution 2 General Assembly delegates authority to take any necessary urgent decisions on behalf of the Faith in Action Committee to the three previous Committee Convenors (Children's and Youth Work, Education and Learning and Mission) along with the DGS (FiA), supported by the new Faith in Action staff team, until the new Faith in Action Committee is established in late autumn 2025.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Terms of Reference for the Faith in Action Committee.
Main points	Terms of Reference.
Previous relevant documents	Paper A2, The future of the General Assembly Committee Structure, General Secretariat and the staff team of the Assembly Office, Resolution 1, February 2025 Assembly Executive; Paper B2 URC Committees and online meeting, Resolutions 10-12, July 2021 General Assembly.
Consultation has taken place with...	The Mission Committee, the Education and Learning Committee, the Children's and Youth Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	The impact of combining Discipleship and Mission will result in net cost savings.
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External (eg ecumenical)	None.
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Introduction

The February 2025 Assembly Executive mandated the Business Committee to draw up terms of reference and composition for the formation of a 'Mission and Discipleship' joint committee. The proposal in this paper is that this should be called the 'Faith in Action' Committee working to the Terms of Reference provided in this paper.

The Faith in Action Committee Terms of Reference

Convenor and Deputy Convenor	Appointed by General Assembly following the nominations safer recruitment process (to be included in the numbers below in committee make-up).
Members	<p>Appointed by General Assembly following the nominations safer recruitment process, constituted as below:</p> <p>The Deputy General Secretary (Faith in Action)</p> <p>Members:</p> <p>Four with a missional focus Two with a Children and Youth/Intergenerational focus Two with a lay learning/Education and Learning focus Two youth representatives</p> <p>To cover the transitional period (up to two years), the existing convenors of the committees (see below) which have now combined into the new Faith in Action Committee will be included in the numbers above:</p> <p>Mission Committee Education and Learning Committee Children's and Youth Committee.</p>
In attendance (according to agenda)	Relevant staff members The DGS Ministries.
Length of term	Four years renewable once.
Minute Secretary	PA to the Deputy General Secretary (Faith in Action).
Accountability and reporting duties	To General Assembly.
Frequency of meetings	Three times a year, twice online and once in person plus annual Forum with connected networks.
Terms of Reference review	Four years or more frequently if required.

Responsibilities

The Faith in Action Committee supports the United Reformed Church's outreach in terms of evangelism and witness; public issues; community engagement; pioneering; ecumenical and interfaith relations; intergenerational worship; global and intercultural ministries; racial justice and legacies of slavery; as well as ministry among children, young people and young adults, intentionally listening to their voices; net zero advocacy; lay learning; and world justice through the URC's Commitment for Life programme. The role of the committee is to support and guide the Faith in Action staff team in implementing the work agreed by Assembly through the Mission Strategy created to reflect the focus areas vital to the life of the URC.

The Faith in Action team supports and enables the URC to live out the Gospel in society, helping people to develop in faith as they learn and grow, finding new ways of being church and becoming more faithful disciples. They work alongside people in the Synods and local churches on resourcing and enabling the whole people of God. As part of this work, the team also oversees the networks in the Synods who are responsible for work with children and young people, mission, and education and learning: Children and Youth Development Officers+ Team (CYDO+), Training and Development Officer+ team (TDO+), Mission Enablers Network (MEN).

Structure

The February 2025 Assembly Executive Paper A2 distinguished between committees of the URC which have a broad and overarching programmatic concern for the life of the church and supporting the resourcing of this and described them as 'Core Committees'. These are distinct from those committees 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 Faith in Action Committee is a Core or Programme Committee with sub-committees it shall determine from time to time in response to the strategic priorities set by the General Assembly. Initially, they will following specialist sub-committees reporting to it with the staff member allocated to work with each committee shown in brackets:

- Children's and Youth Work Programme Enabling Group (tba)
- Interfaith Enabling Group (tba)
- Commitment for Life Reference Group (tba)
- Net Zero Task Group (tba)
- Legacies of Slavery Task Group (tba)
- Equalities, Inclusion, Diversity and Belonging Committee (Deputy General Secretary (Faith in Action)).

Each committee member will be connected to a sub-committee, liaising with the staff member and acting as a link person to seek items for the meetings and ensure reporting processes are effective.

The committee will be a focussed, strategic committee that meets three times a year, twice online and once in person. Meeting times to be arranged with the committee once created, aware of Resolutions 10-12 from General Assembly 2021 encouraging meetings with online access and out of normal working hours.

It is important the membership of the committee reflects the diversity of the URC. In order to enable the committee's work to really affect the life of the URC, members

should have an active interest in their area of focus, both in their local church and Synod, and have a desire to see the URC grow in faith and size.

Summary notes will be produced from each meeting and sent to Synods to keep them informed of the work of the Faith in Action Committee, and creating a direct link for responses and ideas to feed in from the Synods.

Once a year, the committee will come together with the networks connected to the Faith and Action department (CYDO+ team, TDO+ team, MEN). This Forum will be for a shared meeting to ensure two-way communication between the committee, the Faith in Action team and the Synods. Each Forum meeting will have a specific theme connected to the URC's current priorities. This Forum will also offer the opportunity for the committee and the networks to meet separately as well as together.

Relationship with the wider denomination

The committee's role is to encourage positive relationships between local churches, Synods and resource the wider denomination.

The annual Forum with the connected networks will allow for the sharing of the work of the Faith in Action team, and hearing ideas and work growing from the local congregations and Synods, challenging Synods and local churches to respond and engage with Assembly programmes and areas of development

Delegated authority

The General Assembly delegates its authority to the Faith in Action Committee to take any necessary decisions on its behalf to further the day-to-day work of the Assembly in relationship to the following functions of the Assembly:

- iii to conduct and foster the ecumenical relationships of the United Reformed Church;
- iv. to support and share in the missionary work of the Church at home and abroad.

Links with the wider church

The committee ensures that the URC is represented on relevant ecumenical, national and international umbrella bodies. It nominates appropriate individuals to serve with these organisations, receives their reports and discerns next steps. It also oversees the membership budget to cover subscriptions.

External relations

The committee has a prophetic role in developing the denomination's advocacy in the public sphere, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

Inclusion

The committee has a co-ordinating role in ensuring that the work of its sub-committees draws together all areas of inclusion, such as legacies of slavery, anti-racism, intergenerational worship.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is at the heart of all our activities as a church. A member of the Faith in Action Committee will be responsible for ensuring that safeguarding is on the agenda for the committee and its work.

Risk management

The Faith in Action Committee will review the Risk Register as it relates to its key responsibilities, at least once per year but will add additional risks as and when they arise.

Interim arrangements

We are seeking delegated authority to the previous convenors of predecessor committees and the staff team to take any necessary decisions before the new committee is formed. This would be in order to respond to any situations or issues that arise post-GA but prior to the new FiA Committee being appointed, in order to ensure continuity of the work of the Faith in Action team.

Paper A2

Terms of Reference for the Ministries Committee and its sub-committees

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd John Bradbury john.bradbury@urc.org.uk The Revd Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 3 General Assembly adopts the Terms of Reference for the new Ministries Committee and its sub-committees. Resolution 4 General Assembly delegates authority to take any necessary urgent decisions on behalf of the Ministries Committee to the two previous Committee Convenors (Education and Learning and Ministries) along with the DGS (Ministries), until the new Ministries Committee is established in late autumn 2025.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Under the new structure of the Offices of the General Assembly, the Terms of Reference agreed at GA 2024 have been updated to reflect the remit of the new committee.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	A5 Terms of Reference for Ministries Committee GA 2024.
Consultation has taken place with...	N/A

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

Committee	Ministries.
Convenor	Appointed by General Assembly following the nominations safer recruitment process (to be included in the numbers below in committee makeup).
Secretary	The Deputy General Secretary (Ministries).
Members	<p>Five members with experience of the ministries and a range of learning and serving opportunities across the church, including eldership, lay preaching, training and development, children and youth (four lay and one ordained);</p> <p>A Synod Moderator;</p> <p>Convenor of the Accreditations sub-committee;</p> <p>Convenor of the Assessment Board;</p> <p>An RCL Principal representing College Connective;</p> <p>A URC Youth representative;</p> <p>A representative from the successor to the Transitional Forum (or its successor: Ministries and Learning Forum);</p> <p>Head of Ministries Learning and Development.</p>
In attendance when required (to cover their areas of expertise)	<p>Convenor of MoM sub-committee;</p> <p>Convenor of Retired Minister' Housing sub-committee (or its successor);</p> <p>Relevant staff members.</p>
Length of term	Initial terms of four years which may be extended for a further term.
Minute Secretary	PA to the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries).
Frequency of meetings	Five times per year (36 hours). January, April, June, September, November (four online and one in person).
Subgroups/sub-committees	The committee has the authority to create sub-committees from time to time to forward its work. Where those sub-committees carry out delegated tasks from the functions of the General Assembly, the Assembly itself shall delegate them through adopting terms of reference or resolution. Otherwise, the committee shall determine the

	structure of its sub-committees as necessary. As of Assembly July 2025, the sub-committees are: Assessment Board; Accreditations (CRCW and SCM) sub-committee; Maintenance of the Ministries sub-committee; Retired Ministers' Housing sub-committee; Ministries and Learning Forum; Lay Preaching Advocates Network.
Accountability and reporting duties	General Assembly.
Terms of Reference review	Every four years.

The committee is responsible for the formally accredited ministries of the Church, as determined by the General Assembly from time to time. Currently, they are Ministry of the Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Work, Assembly Accredited Lay Preaching, Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers and Eldership. Through its main committee and sub-committees, it is concerned with facilitating the ministry of the whole people of God in the United Reformed Church through working to promote the policies of the church; advocating ministry in its widest sense; supporting ministry in its varied forms; facilitating the formation, training and learning for accredited ministries of the church.

The committee is intentionally committed to taking seriously the place of safeguarding, equality, diversity and inclusion, Net Zero and being an anti-racist church in all we discuss and decide and listening to all voices.

Responsibilities

The Ministries Committee carries the General Assembly's responsibility and care for the formally accredited ministries of the United Reformed Church, currently: Ministry of Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Work, Assembly Accredited Lay Preaching, Locally Recognised Worship Leading, Pioneering both lay and special category, and Eldership.

This responsibility includes all life long learning for the accredited ministries of the church named above, including funding and other educational elements.

1. The committee, along with Synods, has concern for the well-being of Ministers of the Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers, Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, Locally Recognised Worship Leaders, Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers, Special Category Pioneers and Elders, including supervision where appropriate, appraisal, self-evaluation and counselling.
2. The committee has concern for those in chaplaincies in industry, healthcare, higher and further education, prisons and in the armed forces and 'special category' ministry and how their service relates to the URC through the councils of the church.
3. It has a number of interlinked and interdependent areas, and works closely with the Faith in Action Committee, the CYDO+ team, the Synod Training and Development+ Network, the College Connective and the Transitional Forum (Ministries and Learning Forum).

Business Committee

4. The committee has oversight of the Ministries budget.
5. The committee has oversight of the Assessment Board and all relevant sub-committees.
6. The committee's particular responsibilities are:
 - 6.1 Advocacy, recruitment, selection and training of candidates for Ministry of the Word and Sacraments (MWS) and Church Related Community Worker (CRCWs) in co-operation with the Synods.
 - 6.2 Relations with Resources Centres for Learning, Synods and external bodies which train MWS and CRCWs, both stipendiary and non stipendiary, Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, Locally Recognised Worship Leaders, Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers, Special Category Pioneers and Elders on behalf of the URC.
 - 6.3 Oversight along with Synods of the EM2 and EM3 processes, policies and funding.
 - 6.4 Development and revision of policies and processes to support the ministries of the church.
 - 6.5 Development and revision of policies and processes to support the ministries of the church.
 - 6.6 Development and revision of policies and processes and management of the statistics related to deployment.
 - 6.7 Development of new ministries to support the life and mission of the church.
 - 6.8 Oversight of lifelong learning for the accredited ministries of the church ensuring they are accessible, inclusive, integrated and involve cooperation and collaboration across the whole denomination; it has delegated authority from General Assembly under functions v vi vii as laid down in the *Structure* of the United Reformed Church in *The Manual*.
 - 6.9 Work with other committees to ensure best practice in relation to Ministries of the church.
 - 6.10 Work with the other departments to ensure best practice in relation to Ministries of the church.
 - 6.11 Any other pieces of work deemed necessary by the church.

Assessment board

The Assessment Board has delegated authority from General Assembly for assessing candidates for ministry under function xxix of the General Assembly. As such, it has its own Appeals Process. The functions of the Assessment Board are to:

1. Oversee the candidating process for Ministry of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers on behalf of the United Reformed Church.

2. Oversee Assessment Conferences each year, normally in March and November.
3. Hear any appeals to the Assessment Conference discernment decisions using the Assessment Board Appeals Process.
4. Oversee Education for Ministry Phase 1 training on behalf of the URC.
5. Hear concerns from the RCLs concerning students and, where necessary, implements the Amber Light Policy Stage 2 process to make decisions about the continuation of training for students.
6. Instigate any Occupational Health Assessments for students in EM as advised by the RCL.
7. Administer Assessment Board Training to which all new assessors must attend before they can begin as an assessor including ASD awareness training.
8. Continually review processes to ensure best practice at all stages of candidating including Synod and Assessment Conferences, advising Synods of changes to the process as necessary.
9. Advise Ministries of the accreditation of students in training through the Accreditation (CRCW and SCM) sub-committee.
10. Oversee the annual meeting with Candidating Secretaries or equivalent and the Annual assessor training in October.
11. Any other matters as may, from time to time, be allocated by the Ministries Committee.

It meets as the Assessment Conferences in March and November and for the AGM in September. Its function is overseen by the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries) and it reports to Ministries Committee.

Accreditations sub-committee

The Accreditations sub-committee has delegated authority from General Assembly for the consideration and management of Certificates of Eligibility under function xxi and xxiii of the General Assembly. The functions of the Accreditations sub-committee are to oversee:

1. The approval and subsequent monitoring of CRCW projects.
2. The approval and subsequent monitoring of SCM projects.
3. The approval and subsequent monitoring of new pioneering projects.
4. The consideration and management of Certificates of Eligibility.
5. The consideration and management of Certificates for Limited Service.
6. The maintenance of the Roll of Ministers and Roll of Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers.

7. Any other matters as may, from time to time, be allocated by the Ministries Committee.

It meets five times per year. It reports to Ministries Committee.

Maintenance of the Ministries sub-committee

Advises on the level of stipend and ministers' conditions of service through the 'Plan for Partnership'. It is also concerned for pensions through the Pensions Executive.

The functions of the sub-committee are to:

1. Advise on, and recommend the annual revisions to the stipend to, the Resources Committee using the agreed formula: the average of the Consumer Price Index for the latest month available (September) and the Average Weekly Earnings increase over the latest three months (June-August), for regular pay.
2. Advise on, and recommend the annual revisions to associated allowances for ministers to Resources Committee.
3. Recommend amendments to ministerial conditions of service, The Plan for Partnership, in the light of experience, legislation and recommendations from the office of the General Assembly staff.
4. Resolve questions where the circumstances do not exactly fit the Plan for Partnership, or where it may be appropriate to make an exception.
5. Oversight of the Plan for Partnership in Ministerial remuneration, ensuring it is kept up to date.
6. Oversight of the NSM Expenses Policy, ensuring it is kept up to date.
7. Make decisions about the stipends of ministers who have been unable to work for some time through ill health.
8. Receive reports on pension matters and ill health retirements, made to each meeting by the Pensions Convenor to keep members up to date.
9. Any other matters as may, from time to time, be allocated by the Ministries Committee.

The committee meets twice a year, normally in April and September, but may conduct urgent business via email. It reports to Ministries Committee.

Retired Ministers' Housing sub-committee

The functions of the Retired Ministers' Housing sub-committee are to:

1. Be the point of liaison between Ministries and RMHS on behalf of the URC and tenants, ensuring that all eligible member are adequately housed and supported in retirement.
2. Raise matters with the RMHS directors in relation to the needs of retired ministers and/or spouses.
3. Be responsible for gathering data for projecting future housing requirements for RMHS (URC Minister's Data Privacy Policy 2019).

4. Determine each applicant's eligibility for RMHS housing provision.
5. Promote good practice amongst ministers in making provision for retirement, including: a seminar ten years before the expected date of retirement and pre-retirement course.
6. Seek additional funding support from URC Synods and Synod Trust companies through URC General Assembly resolutions.
7. Appeal for donations and legacies from URC local churches and church members, through appeals based on resolutions to the URC General Assembly.
8. Appeal for RMHS Volunteer Overseers from the URC membership through General Assembly or Synod meetings.
9. Undertake anything else General Assembly instructs it to do.

It meets three times a year, normally two weeks before the RMHS Board meets. It reports to Ministries Committee.

Ministries and Learning sub-committee (formerly the Transitional Forum)

It is made up of the three RCL Principals, a TDO+ rep, a CYDO+ rep to be nominated by the respective networks and have some experience of education as trainer, the DGS (Faith in Action) and the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries). The functions of the forum are to:

1. Be a place of oversight and coordination for the technical, policy, governance and finance decisions and actions for the education/learning work undertaken by the RCLs on behalf of the General Assembly.
2. Receive an agenda from the College Connective.

It meets once an academic term. It reports to both the Ministries Committee and the Faith in Action Committee. Others may be invited to join the group as need for specific expertise or knowledge arises.

College Connective

In 2024, it was decided that some of its responsibilities of E&L would be devolved primarily to the RCLs who, together with the Ministries and Faith in Action Committees, would have oversight and co-ordination for the technical, policy, governance and finance decisions and actions for the education and learning work transferred to them. This would be known as the Transitional Forum. It would meet termly.

At the same time, it was recognized that there needed to be a two way point of communication which would allow for needs and priorities of the RCLs to inform into URC church structures through the Transitional Forum (Ministries and Learning sub-committee).

The Transitional Forum (Ministries and Learning sub-committee) would therefore receive its agenda from the College Connective, an informal body made up of the three principals of the RCLs and the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries).

Business Committee

After General Assembly 2025, the Transitional Forum will be known as the Ministries and Learning Forum and would inform the work of both Ministries and Faith in Action Committees. Its functions are to:

1. Provide, co-ordinate and inspire the direction of the work of the Transitional Forum and its successor in relation to the education and learning work devolved to it by the URC.
2. Co-ordinate the RCLs EM2 provision on a three year rotation.
3. Oversight of developments in education for ministry.
4. Mutual support.

It reports to both the Ministries and Faith in Action Committees through the Forum, including budgetary issues. It meets three times per year (termly), including a 24 hours residential.

Lay Preaching Advocates Network

The functions of the sub-committee are to:

1. Be responsible for the advocacy of Assembly Accredited Lay Preaching and Locally Recognised Worship Leading within the United Reformed Church.
2. Support those who lead worship in the United Reformed Church.
3. Promote the recognition and value of lay preachers/worship leaders and encourage others to answer the call to this ministry whenever and wherever possible.
4. Raise issues and concerns in relation to Lay Preaching and Worship Leading to the Ministries Committee.
5. Act as a reference point on procedures and good practice.
6. Encourage and enable the production or updating of guidelines where appropriate.
7. Arrange an annual Consultation for Synod Advocates in cooperation with the Ministries Office.
8. Encourage and enable networking between Synod Advocates.

It meets twice a year in January and June, including the annual retreat/gathering of the Assembly Accredited Lay Preaching Advocates. It reports to Ministries Committee once a year.

Other work

Continuing Studies Fund

Its function is to:

1. Allocate grants of up to £500 for accredited learning.

Its business is conducted by the Officers of the Ministries Committee and a representative of the Resources Committee. It meets once a year.

Student Finance Panel

Its function is to:

1. Consider EM1 finance.

Its business is conducted by the Officers of the Ministries Committee and a representative of the Resources Committee. It meets once a year.

Risk management

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

Conducting business

Additional meetings can be scheduled, with reasonable notice, if business requires it. Decisions can be taken via email with the same rules of quoracy applying. Such decisions will be recorded by the Convenor/Secretary and noted at the next meeting with updates on progress as needed. Expertise from outside its membership can be utilised for projects and instruct task groups from beyond its membership to develop specific pieces of work.

Interim arrangements

General Assembly is asked to authorise the previous Committee Convenors, along with the DGS Ministries, to take any urgent decisions necessary between the end of General Assembly and the formation of the new committee in the autumn, to ensure necessary continuity of work.

Paper A3

Changes to the Committee Structure

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd John Bradbury john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 5 General Assembly resolves that from the close of General Assembly 2025 the Equalities Committee will become the Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging sub-committee of the Faith in Action Committee.</p> <p>Resolution 6 General Assembly resolves that from the close of General Assembly 2025 the Faith and Order Advisory Group will become a sub-committee of the Business Committee and be known as the Faith and Order Reference Group.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This is to tidy up two bits of decision making related to Paper A2 of Assembly Executive 2025.
Main points	To rename two committees and make them sub-committees.
Previous relevant documents	Paper A2 – Assembly Executive 2025.
Consultation has taken place with...	Equalities Committee, Faith and Order Advisory Group, Mission Committee, Relevant staff of the Assembly Office.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	

It was pointed out from the floor at Assembly Executive in February that two recommendations as part of a wider committee restructure, were not subject to resolution. This was a simple mistake, and it was agreed we'd draft two resolutions during Assembly Executive to remedy this – and then forgot! We therefore bring these two resolutions to complete the restructure that was set out in A2 at Assembly Executive and debated there.

Overall, we are trying to reduce the number of direct committees of the General Assembly, and ensure that areas of work have coherent oversight of a wide-ranging nature, to make it easier to co-ordinate work, and ensure that dots are joined up. To that end, we are proposing that the Equalities Committee sit under the new Faith in Action Committee. This is because we see Equalities as central and foundational to our mission and our discipleship. It is not a question of ticking boxes, or of compliance or governance – but a fundamental witness to our faith. We also recognise that an expanded name is helpful, and thus propose that the sub-committee be known as the Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging sub-committee.

The Law and Polity Advisory Group used to be an advisory group of Mission Council. Since the demise of Mission Council, it has been floating somewhat free! It is proposed it become a sub-committee of the Business Committee, as that is the place where governance issues primarily reside. It is also proposed that it become the Faith and Order Reference Group. Technically, as a group with a number of practicing lawyers on it, it cannot offer formal ‘advice’ in the legal sense, as individuals are not indemnified to do so. It is a forum for pooling expertise, and one to which matters primarily are referred, rather than initiating work (as set out in its terms of reference). Therefore, it is proposed that it become a reference group – so that the name cannot give rise to any misunderstanding that it offers formal legal advice.

Paper A4

The future of General Assembly and Assembly Executive

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd John Bradbury john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>If during a period of consensus process working on the issues, Assembly is minded to adopt one of the models proposed, then the following resolution would be put:</p> <p>Resolution 7 General Assembly instructs the Business Committee to bring back proposed amendments to the Structure of the United Reformed Church which would enable the Assembly Executive to adopt changes to the General Assembly and Assembly Executive as proposed in model X.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To facilitate more effective discernment of the vocation, vision and strategy of the United Reformed Church through a more effective General Assembly, ensuring effective governance and compliance with the appropriate legislative frameworks.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Assembly Executive February 2025 Papers A4 and A5.
Consultation has taken place with...	The Assembly Executive in February 2025.

Summary of impact

Financial	A significant reduction in the expenditure on the General Assembly.
External (eg ecumenical)	Would see a reduction in the numbers of ecumenical and international members of Assembly and Assembly Executive, in line with a total reduction in the size of the Assembly.

Background

Assembly Executive in February 2025 had a fairly open and wide-ranging discussion about the future size and shape of the General Assembly. It passed a resolution asking that proposals be brought to General Assembly July 2025 to consider the size and pattern of the Assembly. It also considered a separate paper about governance, and moving towards the funds of the General Assembly being registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. This would take on the functions of the existing Trust company but become more closely aligned in membership with the Assembly itself. It asked for further work on this. This paper primarily concerns the work on the size of the General Assembly, but does so in a way that would enable, rather than make more difficult, the move towards the Trustees of a CIO responsible for the funds and charitable activity of the United Reformed Church being formed largely from a small sub-set of the General Assembly.

To stimulate discussion and discernment, two broad approaches were put to the Assembly Executive. Firstly, to reduce the size of the Assembly to roughly that of the Assembly Executive (the basic building blocks of which are four representatives per Synod). This would then have had an executive formed of something akin to the Business Committee which could in time become the trustees of a CIO. The second option was to significantly reduce the frequency of the General Assembly (to every five years), Assembly becoming the place we discerned the priorities and strategy of the Church for a five year period, a smaller meeting of the Assembly (more like the Assembly Executive) then meeting once or twice a year.

These options were discussed in groups, and each group was invited to feed back. Whilst no overall consensus emerged as to a favoured option, there were certain key themes which were clear.

- There was widespread acknowledgement that we cannot maintain the current size and expenditure of the Assembly and its Executive, although no clear picture emerged of a favoured size.
- There was a desire to see a focus on more effective meeting formats, which would necessitate a smaller sized so that Assembly could always meet around tables.
- There was a desire for the Assembly to primarily concern itself with the discernment of the 'big picture' of the life of the United Reformed Church and not be as concerned with the details of governance and policies.
- There was almost universal agreement that Assembly meeting every five years would be unhelpful, although some recognition that larger gatherings of the wider community of the United Reformed Church were appreciated and could be good spaces for creative thinking. We have not pursued this option given the feedback – though it does perhaps cause us to think what other 'large event' options might be welcomed throughout the church.
- There was a very keen desire to keep strong youth representation in any new arrangement.
- There was concern that a significant reduction in the number of Synod representatives (the paper had suggested the possibility of moving to the Assembly becoming the size of the current Assembly Executive, meaning there would be four per Synod) might potentially widen the perceived 'gap' between the Synods and the Assembly.
- There was strong agreement for the need for good governance, and a warmth to exploring a CIO trustee model which was much more closely related to the General Assembly than the current Trust arrangements.

Business Committee

- There was concern that in having formalised the ability of the Business Committee to act on behalf of the Assembly in an emergency (a role originally fulfilled by the Officers, but only in custom and practice, not formal delegation) we were in danger of being perceived to have created an executive of the executive, and that this would be better avoided.

Out of the discussion at Assembly Executive one concrete suggestion was made which the Business Committee found helpful: that a significantly reduced Assembly meeting twice a year for 48 hours each time (rather than once per year for 72 hours). This would then also replace the current Assembly Executive. This has become Option B in this paper.

What this paper does is present two options for consideration and works through in detail what the membership might look like. If Assembly is minded to adopt one of these models (potentially amended in the course of discussion), Assembly would then be invited to instruct that detailed proposals for the necessary constitutional amendments be prepared, and brought back to a meeting of the Assembly Executive for adoption.

The current make-up of the General Assembly and the Assembly Executive

It is helpful to remind ourselves of the current makeup of the General Assembly and Assembly Executive. What is indicated below is the makeup before recent, and proposed, changes to the committee structure as that makes for a more helpful comparison.

Synod Representatives	208
(16 from each Synod, two being Youth Representatives)	
Officers of the General Assembly	5
Standing Committee Convenors	10
RCL staff and students	6
Trust Company Convenor	1
International Representatives	5
Military Chaplains	1
Immediate Past Moderators	1
College of Past Moderators	4
URC Youth	3
Ecumenical Representatives	5
Council for World Mission	1
GA staff	3
(currently the Deputy General Secretaries and the COO)	
Total	253

This represents a total spend on the General Assembly of around £130,000 pa – for a 72 hour Assembly where we have sole use of the Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick. This is rising fast, as hospitality inflation remains high.

The Current Assembly Executive is made up as follows:

Synod Representatives	52
(Four per Synod, including Synod Moderators)	
Officers of the GA	5
Committee Convenors	10
Trust Convenor	1
URC Youth	3

Ecumenical	2
Moderator Elect	1
GA staff	3
Total	76

The current cost of an Assembly Executive meeting for 48 hours is roughly £25,000 – again, rising fast because of hospitality inflation.

General principles

It is important to hold before ourselves that the primary task of the General Assembly is discernment. We wait upon God, as we worship, engage with scripture, and are encountered by the Holy Spirit. We are discerning how we believe the General Assembly most faithfully fulfils the functions it has, as set down in the *Structure* of the United Reformed Church. Whilst the Assembly is also a moment of connectedness of the communities which make up the United Reformed Church, its task is primarily a theological one, not a social one.

Taking this overall principle in mind, some key principles emerge from the consultation at Assembly Executive, in no particular order:

- Broad representation from across the United Reformed Church.
- Representation which reflects our diversity, and our commitment to diversity.
- Discernment in which the voice of young people is clearly heard.
- To be joined in discernment and decision making by international and ecumenical members of Assembly.
- A need to be financially prudent in a moment when it is necessary to ‘right-size’ what we spend on central operations, over and against what we spend supporting local ministry.
- The ability to engage with one another constructively and well, which requires the ability to meet with space to engage in groups as well as in plenary – around tables is ideal for good consultative working.
- To prioritise the high-level discernment of the vocation of the life of the United Reformed Church at any one time, over the nitty-gritty of operationalising our priorities in policies and budgets.

We believe that the two options we place before the Assembly for consideration respond to these broad principles, the balance of which of the principles is more dominant shifts somewhat in each case, but we believe both embody something of all of them. A further general principle is that each option shows where a CIO Trustee body might sit in relationship to the Councils of the Church. This is not something we are being asked to determine in detail at the moment, but something we must keep in mind given the continued exploration of forming a CIO to hold the funds of the Assembly and be responsible for its charitable activities.

Option A – A somewhat reduced size of Assembly with a significantly smaller Executive body.

This option would propose an Assembly which would meet once a year, for 72 hours. Its composition would be:

Synod Representatives	104
(Eight from each Synod, one being youth representatives)	
Officers of the General Assembly	5
Standing Committee Convenors	6

Business Committee

RCL staff and students	2
Trust Company Convenor	1
International and Ecumenical Representatives	4
Chaplains	1
Moderator Elect	1
College of Past Moderators	2
URC Youth	2
Diversity Representatives	5
Total	133

Notes:

- It is anticipated that the College Connective would determine one staff member and one student to represent the RCLs as a whole.
- We have already been reducing the number of international members who need to use long-haul travel because of our net-zero commitments. This brings together the categories of international and ecumenical and allows for four members to be nominated by the Faith in Action Committee. It would allow for CWM representation to be within this, when appropriate.
- It is suggested that the Ministries Committee nominate one chaplain working in a secular context, rather than this always being a military chaplain, as at present. We have far fewer military chaplains than we have had and the voice of chaplaincy from various contexts would enrich our discernment together.
- It is anticipated that with the overall reduction in the size of Assembly, it is appropriate to reduce the representation of former Moderators of Assembly to two. It would be important to recognise, particularly regarding parallel sessions, the right of the Assembly to appoint someone who is not a current or former Moderator of the Assembly from among its membership, to Moderate a parallel session.
- It is anticipated that the current encouragement of the General Assembly to Synods to send one representative who is a member of an ethnically minoritised community to the Assembly, would continue. However, recognising that some Synods, given the demographic makeup of their congregations, struggle with this it introduces a category of diversity representation. This role would be nominated by the Faith and Action Committee each year to bring better diversity of overall representation, once Synods have nominated their representatives. It would be anticipated that such representatives then relate directly to the Synod they are in in terms of preparatory meetings and reporting back, so they are fully integrated into Synod representation.
- The anticipated cost of an Assembly this size would be around £55,000.

A much smaller Executive body would be appointed from the membership of the General Assembly. It is envisaged that this would meet once per year for an in-person 48-hour meeting and otherwise conduct its business via videoconferencing. It would replace the existing Business Committee. It is anticipated that its role would be to ensure good governance, and the adoption of appropriate policies which give effect to the strategic decisions, which would still be the responsibility of the Assembly. It would be able to take decisions on behalf of the Assembly when required, between meetings of the Assembly. It would assist the Assembly to discern well, set priorities and determine strategy – but those functions would remain core to the life of the Assembly.

The Executive would be for detailed, ‘nitty-gritty’ outworking of determining policies and procedures. In time, it could become the Trustee body of the CIO that had responsibility for the funds of the Assembly and its charitable activities.

The anticipated makeup of the Assembly Executive would be:

Synod Representatives	13
The Convenors of the three core Programme Committees	3
The Convenor of the Safeguarding Committee	1
Officers of the General Assembly	5
Deputy Treasurer	1
Assistant Clerk	1
Youth Representatives	2
Total	25

Notes:

- It is anticipated that a very careful process would be needed to determine the Synod representatives. For example, Synods could each be asked to nominate a number of ministers and elders. They might be asked to consider particular skills-sets in doing so. The Nominations Committee might then be asked to put together a slate of Synod representatives which included three or four Synod Moderators (who could be nominated by the Moderators meeting) and then an appropriately balanced slate of other Synod nominees from those nominated to ensure appropriate balance of Elder/Minister, gender and ethnic diversity. This would be to model how many international ecumenical organisations might appoint a council: nominations are sought, a Nominations Committee draws together a slate of names to be nominated that ensure appropriate balance and diversity, and the Assembly is then asked to appoint that slate. Such a process (or some variant therefore) would ensure each Synod had a representative, the Executive had the skills set necessary, and that the body was appropriately diverse.
- Other Committee Convenors might be invited to attend where it was helpful to their business.
- It is suggested the Convenor of the Safeguarding Committee is always in attendance in the same way that a trust body needs a trustee with designated responsibility for safeguarding matter (and partly thinking ahead if this entity were to become a trust body).
- The COO and Deputy General Secretaries would be in attendance, but not voting members.
- It is of note that this model would correspond roughly in size and function to the new Connexional Council that the Methodist Church has set up to serve as, in effect, the Executive of the Conference, with responsibility for governance matters and the ongoing work of the Conference throughout the year. It could be extremely helpful in future ecumenical working to have parallel bodies who could work jointly when helpful.
- We would need to give consideration as to whether Synods were asked to nominate people who could serve a term rather longer than a year – meaning those people would have to be GA representatives for the length of term they served. This would give some continuity to the work of the Executive.
- The anticipated cost of a 48 hour in-person meeting would be around £8,000.

Evaluating Option A

We believe that option A has some real strengths, and some potential weaknesses. The strength is in the very clear demarcation of the high-level discernment that the broader body of the General Assembly is asked to take, about the vocation, vision and strategy of the United Reformed Church and the work of the General Assembly. It would make clearer that General Assembly was to take that broad, strategic overview,

and the detailed outworking of the adopting of policies and processes would take place in the Executive.

It also has the strength that the General Assembly is a larger body in comparison to Option B.

A real strength is the size of the Assembly Executive, which is still representative of the church as a whole, but of a size that it can do real detailed scrutiny work of policies and procedures. It is also of a size to be able to horizon scan and determine most helpfully how to enable to General Assembly to fulfil its function of discernment at the highest level.

A possible weakness may emerge if decisions of the Executive are questioned and taken issue with, because they don't have the final authority of the General Assembly itself. This can be the case with the existing Executive, and in future there will need to be careful consideration given as to how the Trustees of the Assembly and the Assembly itself might resolve any potential dispute that could arise. We believe this to be manageable, and that the strengths of this model outweigh the weaknesses. The total cost of the option would be roughly £63,000. This is a saving of around £92,000 per year on the existing arrangements (which total around £155,000 a year).

Option B – A General Assembly that is slightly larger than the existing Assembly Executive, which would fulfil the functions of the current General Assembly and Assembly Executive.

This option would see a very significantly reduced General Assembly, which would meet twice a year in place of the existing Assembly and Assembly Executive. It would have an executive, which was an evolution of the current Business Committee, and would take on the responsibilities of the Business Committee.

The Assembly makeup would be:	
Synod Representatives (Six from each Synod, one being a Youth Representative)	78
Officers of the General Assembly	5
Standing Committee Convenors	6
Trust Company Convenor	1
International and Ecumenical Representatives	3
Moderator Elect	1
College of Past Moderators	1
URC Youth	2
Diversity Representatives	3
Total	99

Notes:

- Please read this makeup in part in the light of the notes above, which are not repeated for the sake of brevity.
- There is no direct representation of the RCLs – it would be understood that they relate to the work of the Ministries Committee and through its convenor their concerns would have representation.
- There is no direct representation of military (or any other) chaplains. All ministers are members of Synods and can be nominated to attend on behalf of their Synod.
- The cost of two 48-hour meetings of the General Assembly per year would cost approximately £60,000

A much smaller Executive body would be formed from an evolved version of the current Business Committee and would have a very similar role and remit to the current Business Committee. Its makeup would be:

The Convenors of the three core Programme Committees	3
Officers of the General Assembly	5
Assistant Clerk	1
Diversity Representatives	2
Total	11

Notes:

- Currently, the members of the General Secretariat are full members of the Business Committee. Their presence is vital for its good functioning. However, they will no longer be full members of the General Assembly and should not be full members of its executive body. The General Secretary would remain a full member as an Officer of the General Assembly, but the COO and Deputy General Secretaries would be in attendance.
- The diversity representatives would need to be members of the General Assembly for the period of time they were serving, which may require Synods to be willing to nominate them for a period of three-four years as Synod Representatives.
- This brings the convenors of the three key programme committees of the General Assembly into the Executive. Currently the committees are represented through the General Secretariat. However, the streamlined committee structure, and the advent of three core programme committees for the work of the Assembly, make it advisable for those convenors to be part of the Executive to ensure a joined-up and strategic approach to the agenda and work of the Assembly as a whole.
- This would in effect be cost neutral because the Business Committee already meets once a year residentially for 24 hours.

Evaluating Option B

We believe Option B also has many strengths, and some weaknesses.

This model would avoid potential issues over decisions of the Executive being seen as having a lesser status to decisions of the General Assembly. The Assembly would meet twice a year and concern itself both with high-level strategy and the adoption of policies and procedures.

The Assembly, being somewhat smaller than in Option A, has the benefit of being better able to function in scrutinising detail. However, there is greater danger that it will get stuck in matters of detail and not be as concerned with discerning the big-picture issues of the life of the church and the world in discerning the vocation, vision and work of the United Reformed Church, at any one point in time.

The experience of the current Assembly Executive is that whilst it is smaller than the Assembly, one often hears from a wider range of voices. Hopefully some of that benefit would arise here, too. However, it is less broadly representative of the church as a whole because of the reduced number of Synod Representatives.

The total cost of this option would be around £60,000 per year giving a saving of around £95,000 per year.

Conclusions

We offer both these options to the General Assembly to aid our discussion and discernment. We believe that both have considerable merit and meet the general principles we have discerned through the conversations at Assembly Executive. There is almost no difference in cost between the models (which came as an unintended surprise). We believe that action is necessary – it is not tenable for Assembly to continue at its current size and still hold the respect of the wider church. Otherwise, there is a danger that the ‘centre’ of the church takes an ever-greater proportion of the resource of the church as a whole when resources are needed most pressingly at the front line of mission and ministry in the local church. Equally, at a moment that the budget decisions of the Assembly Executive have meant a very significant staffing restructure in the Offices of the General Assembly, and played their part in the need to review our RCL provision, it is not tenable for the General Assembly to not look to significantly reduce its expenditure on itself.

We commend these options to you, and hope that in our discernment together we will find a way forward which enables the General Assembly to carry out its vital function in our life together as the United Reformed Church, in a way fit for the middle of the 21st century, and that also uses our resources wisely. Whichever approach we take, there will be matters of detail which still need resolving. Therefore, we are not asking General Assembly to formally adopt changes at this Assembly, but rather to adopt an approach and ask for appropriate constitutional changes to be drafted. It is anticipated that these could be adopted at Assembly Executive in 2026, Synods asked to consider them in Spring Synod meetings, and then be finally adopted at General Assembly 2026 for implementation from General Assembly 2027.

Paper A5

Terms of Reference and composition and name of the General Secretariat

The Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd John Bradbury, General Secretary john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 8 General Assembly resolves that the General Secretariat shall be known as the Senior Leadership Team.</p> <p>Resolution 9 General Assembly resolves that the role of Secretary of Ministries become henceforth Deputy General Secretary for Ministries.</p> <p>Resolution 10 General Assembly resolves that the Senior Leadership Team shall consist of the General Secretary, the Chief Operating Officer, the Deputy General Secretary (Faith in Action) and the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries) as of the close of the July 2025 General Assembly.</p> <p>Resolution 11 General Assembly adopts the revised terms of reference for the General Secretariat as contained in Paper A5 of the July 2025 General Assembly.</p> <p>Resolution 12 General Assembly delegates the responsibility for determining the make-up of the General Secretariat to the Resources Committee, to ensure that it is an integral and joined-up part of any future developments in the staffing structure of the Offices of the General Assembly.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Terms of Reference for the General Secretariat.
Main points	Revised Terms of Reference.
Previous relevant documents	Paper A2, The future of the General Assembly Committee Structure, General Secretariat and the staff team of the

	Assembly Office, Resolution 5, February 2025 Assembly Executive Paper E, Review of the General Secretariat within Church House, October 2012 Mission Council Paper B1, Human Resources Advisory Group (HRAG) Review of General Secretariat, May 2013 Mission Council.
Consultation has taken place with...	The Resources Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	This report and resolution responds to the staffing restructure and associated cost savings requested by the Resources Committee.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

Introduction

The February 2025 Assembly Executive considered the make-up of the General Secretariat in the context of staff retirements and the Church Life Review. After a lengthy debate and the work of an Assembly facilitation group, a resolution was passed stating: ‘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’.

Since that resolution was passed, two significant factors have brought about a change in the direction of travel relating to the envisaged constitution of the General Secretariat.

What has changed?

Firstly, attempts to recruit a Head of Governance, who would also meet the requirements of being a member of the General Secretariat, have proved fruitless after two rounds of advertising. This suggests that a revised role definition is required, on the basis of a more technical job description and one which would not involve being a member of the General Secretariat. In effect, this means removing the Genuine Occupational Requirement to be a practicing Christian. The Senior Leadership Team is very much fulfilling its function as a living out of a vital faith, so it is inappropriate to have someone in this space who is not a person of faith. It is also envisaged that this role will be time-limited to assist the denomination overcome the significant changes involved in implementing the Church Life Review and dealing with a complex backlog of governance issues. After which, it is envisaged that (following other changes in the Job Description) Governance will become part of the COO role.

Secondly, the Resources Committee instigated a complete staffing restructure review. This is necessary following changes to the committee structure agreed by Assembly Executive, and a pressing need to update the operational structure within the offices of the General Assembly to meet the contemporary needs of the life of the United Reformed Church. This also follows ongoing concerns about progress in reducing the denomination’s budget deficit.

The February 2025 Assembly Executive also requested that: ‘the name ‘General Secretariat’ will also be thought about and reviewed’. There was a desire for a more intelligible and straight forward term to be used. The proposal is that it be known as the ‘Senior Leadership Team’. It is important to understand that this is leadership exercised in a conciliar context, which is made clear in the terms of reference.

It is worth noting that over a decade ago in 2013, Mission Council noted that the General Secretariat should not be too involved in the day-to-day running of the URC and ‘thereby unable to provide the longer term ‘denominational leadership’ that is required’.

Structure of the General Secretariat

The February 2025 Assembly Executive Paper A2 distinguished between committees of the URC which have a broad and overarching programmatic concern for the life of the church and supporting the resourcing of this and described them as ‘Core Committees’. These are distinct from those committees 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 three Core or Programme Committees are the Ministries Committee, the Faith in Action Committee, and the Resources Committee. These three account for the overwhelming majority of the denomination’s activity and budget. The General Secretariat reflects the senior staff and ministers who support the work of those three Core or Programme committees. The new committees have direct input from either the Chief Operating Officer or one of the Deputy General Secretaries, as below:

- The Resources Committee – Chief Operating Officer
- The Faith in Action Committee (Discipleship and Mission) – Deputy General Secretary (Faith in Action)
- The Ministries Committee – Deputy General Secretary (Ministries).

There is a staff team relating to the work of the three committees and their associated sub-committees. The Chief Operating Officer and Deputy General Secretaries each oversee a staff team, with line management responsibilities for the senior staff members in their teams. Line management responsibilities will be agreed by the members of the General Secretariat.

The General Secretary line manages the Chief Operating Officer and provides ministerial support to the Deputy General Secretaries. The General Secretary is an ex officio member of all the Assembly’s standing committees and has specific responsibility for the Business Committee.

In addition to the three Core Committees, members of the General Secretariat have an oversight role for the specialist committees. These include:

- The Complaints and Discipline Committee
- The Nominations Committee
- The Safeguarding Committee
- The Law and Polity Reference Group
- The Worship, Faith and Order Committee.

Allocation of oversight duties for the specialist committees are decided within the General Secretariat and may change according to circumstance.

The General Secretariat therefore comprises those people who, together, bring to the Senior Leadership Team oversight of the work of each of the core programme committees, and all of the specialist committees. It therefore has an overview of the work of the whole General Assembly.

There was also concern expressed at Assembly Executive that it would be possible for the General Secretariat to end up with three members who were not members of the United Reformed Church, and that this could be problematic for our identity and ethos. The Deputy General Secretary for Ministries, being an evolution of the role of the Secretary for Ministries, is a role that Assembly has determined must be filled by a Minister of Word and Sacraments of the United Reformed Church. This is also the case for the role of the General Secretary. This means that there must always be two of the members of the Senior Leadership Team who are URC ministers to ensure that its work is infused by the theological and ecclesiological convictions of the Church. It also means that there is always a minister within the General Secretariat who can deputise for the General Secretary in any aspects of the role that are explicitly ministerial.

It should also be noted that other people will be invited to be in attendance from time to time, to ensure the most effective working of the Senior Leadership Team. This is particularly the case for the Head of Governance, who will normally be in attendance, but not a fully member of the Senior Leadership Team.

The process of conducting the staffing structure review has also flagged up an issue which needs resolving. The determination of the staffing structure is delegated to the Resources Committee. However, by custom and practice members of the General Secretariat have previously been appointed such by the General Assembly. This has caused some difficulty, because one cannot coherently review a staffing structure without being able to review at the same time, the whole structure. The resolutions to change the shape of the General Secretariat arise specifically from that review. We believe that it makes sense, given the inseparability of the shape of the Senior Leadership Team from the shape of the staffing structure as a whole, that its makeup should henceforth be delegated to the Resources Committee. We would envisage and substantial changes to the Terms of Reference to be agreed by the General Assembly or Assembly Executive, and the Resources Committee to determine the makeup with due regard to those terms of reference, and whatever the current staffing structure is from time to time.

The Senior Leadership Team Terms of Reference

Staff Team of the Assembly Office	The Senior Leadership Team.
Members	Appointed by General Assembly: General Secretary Chief Operating Officer Deputy General Secretary for Faith in Action Deputy General Secretary for Ministries.
In attendance (as required)	Head of Governance Chief Finance Officer Programme Manager, Church Life Review Other staff members of the Assembly Office, as appropriate.

Length of term	Seven years (for members of the General Secretariat who are on plan for partnership). Lay members of the General Secretariat will be subject to normal employment law terms.
Minute Secretary	PA to the General Secretary.
Accountability and reporting duties	To General Assembly, Assembly Executive and the Business Committee.
Terms of Reference review	Four years or more frequently if required.

Overview of the role of the Senior Leadership Team

The Senior Leadership Team is responsible for the day-to-day leadership and oversight of Assembly Committees and their support structures, including the staff employed in the work of the Offices of the Assembly. The remit of the General Secretariat will encompass theological, strategic and operational factors, under the authority of General Assembly and supported by the Business Committee.

Leadership in a Conciliar Church

In exercising its authority, the General Secretariat recognises that, in a conciliar church, authority resides collectively in the Councils of the Church, Leadership when exercised in the context of any of the Councils of the Church is viewed as a spiritual gift meant to support and enable these councils in their deliberation and decision-making.

Effective personal leadership, rooted in theological and spiritual insight, serves to:

- Guide councils in engaging scripture and theology
- Help understand the church's current context, opportunities and broader creation
- Provide insight and expertise to inspire vision and discernment
- Foster inclusive and diverse participation across generations, cultures, and differing perspectives and cultures
- Support those with differing views in the process of finding ways forward together, through respect, compromise, and agreement
- Ensure the decisions of councils are effectively enacted
- Link work within, across, and between councils through fostering meaningful relationships
- Ensure transparent and responsible stewardship of all resources.

Leadership empowers church councils to exercise their authority faithfully and wisely.

Specific responsibilities of the Senior Leadership Team

In the context of leadership within a conciliar church as articulated above, the specific functions of the Senior Leadership Team will be:

- To ensure an overview of the work of the General Assembly and all its committees, enabling the Business Committee to exercise its function of oversight of the whole business of the General Assembly
- To ensure that work across the three core programme committees of the General Assembly is co-ordinated effectively
- To operationalise the budget process, advising the Resources Committee on appropriate budgeting decisions based upon the strategic priorities of the General Assembly and the current needs of the work of the Assembly

Business Committee

- To operationalise the management of the staffing of the Offices of the General Assembly and to advise the Resources Committee on appropriate staffing structures
- To ensure effective relationships between the Offices of the General Assembly and Synods
- To represent the United Reformed Church in the public square and ecumenically
- To take any necessary urgent decisions about short-term staffing requirements to meet pressing situations as they might arise
- To ensure that, along with the leadership of the Designated Safeguarding Lead and the Safeguarding Committee, safeguarding is embedded into the whole life of the work of the General Assembly
- To ensure that risk is appropriately managed on behalf of the General Assembly, working with the URC Trust as necessary
- To take any other necessary actions to ensure the effective operation and well-being of the work of the General Assembly required.

Paper ADH1

Assessing education and learning need in the United Reformed Church

Business Committee, Education and Learning Committee, and Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Myles Dunnett, Programme Manager (CLR) myles.dunnett@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 13 Assembly endorses the findings and themes from the Education and Learning Consultation, and instructs the working group and others to enact the outcomes listed in section four. Assembly instructs Business Committee, Faith in Action Committee, and Ministries Committee to report back to General Assembly 2026 with an update on progress.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This paper responds to Resolution Y from Assembly Executive in February 2025 by setting out the education and learning needs of the denomination.
Main points	<p>In response to Resolution Y from Assembly Executive (February 2025), an Education and Learning Consultation was held at High Leigh in Hoddesdon (April 2025). This paper sets out the following key findings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Themes emerging from the consultation: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The role of the URC's identity Culture and leadership Current E&L offering Design and delivery Learning needs of different groups Future of E&L provision. Outcomes from the consultation: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Denominational development, local delivery Rationalisation of the portfolio Gaps in provision Evaluation Governance.
Previous relevant documents	Paper D1, General Assembly 2024, Appendix One (EM1 URC Requirements from RCLs)

	Paper AD1, Assembly Executive Feb 2025 Resolution Y, Assembly Executive Feb 2025.
Consultation has taken place with...	E&L Working Group (representative of Business Committee, Ministries Committee, Education and Learning Committee, Resources Committee) Attendees at the Education and Learning Consultation (representatives from Synods, RCLs, Newbigin Pioneering Hub, and Assembly).

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

1. Background

- 1.1. This paper follows Paper AD1 from Assembly Executive in February 2025, brought jointly by Education and Learning Committee and Business Committee.
- 1.2. Paper AD1 did not formally propose any resolutions, but there was a clear sense of purpose in the discussion, and an acknowledgment that the current situation is unsustainable, that discussion about future arrangements has been going on for too long, that the pressure on the budget is considerable, and that change is needed sooner rather than later. Two resolutions, X and Y, emerged from the discussion at Assembly Executive, and were accepted unanimously.
- 1.3. This paper is written in direct response to Resolution Y, which states:
Assembly Executive instructs the Education and Learning and Business Committee Working Group to design and implement a review of the learning needs of the denomination, with facilitation and external support, and to bring back a needs analysis to July General Assembly 2025.
- 1.4. This paper is brought before Assembly jointly by Business Committee, Education and Learning Committee, and Ministries Committee, with input from Resources Committee through the working group.
- 1.5. A working group was formed to respond to Resolutions X and Y, consisting of the Revd Dr John Bradbury (General Secretary), the Revd Nicola Furley-Smith (Secretary for Ministries), Ms Pippa Hodgson (Convenor of the Education and Learning Committee), the Revd Michael Hopkins (Convenor of the Resources Committee), Ms Victoria James (COO), the Revd Jenny Mills (Deputy General Secretary Discipleship), and Mr Alan Yates (Treasurer). Mr Myles Dunnett (Programme Manager, Church Life Review) also attended meetings of the working group following the Education and Learning Consultation, to provide support and ‘external’ input.
- 1.6. This paper should be read in conjunction with Paper ADH2, which responds to Resolution X from Assembly Executive in February 2025 and relates to ‘proposals for addressing the excess capacity and associated costs in our formation of accredited and recognised ministries’.

- 1.7. This paper deals primarily with learnings from the consultation, and outlines the education and learning needs of the whole denomination.

2. Education and Learning consultation details

- 2.1. An Education and Learning Consultation took place on 29-30 April at High Leigh in Hoddesdon. The consultation was facilitated by Ms Victoria James (COO) and the Revd Dr Andrea Russell (Warden, Gladstone's Library). The purpose of the consultation was to consider the education and learning needs of the whole United Reformed Church in a holistic and strategic way.
- 2.2. There were more than 70 attendees, representing Synods (including Moderators and Training and Development Officers), General Assembly, Newbigin Pioneering Hub, leaders and educators from Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs), and others.
- 2.3. The consultation was immediately followed by a 24-hour meeting of the working group, who analysed the themes and refined them into a set of actionable outcomes in response to Resolution Y.
- 2.4. The aims of the consultation were to:
- Map current learning and development needs
 - Challenge ourselves on effectiveness and any gaps
 - Explore future needs and approaches to delivery
 - Examine what an effective cohort size is.
- 2.5. The consultation opened with words from John 21:15-17: 'Feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep'. These words encouraged attendees to reflect on the deep theological, pastoral, and missional imperative behind education and learning provision.

3. Themes emerging from the consultation

- 3.1. Ms Victoria James and the Revd Dr Andrea Russell led a series of rich and creative conversations, enabling exploration of the URC's education and learning provision at a local, regional, and denominational level. This section outlines the high-level themes which emerged from the consultation.
- 3.2. **Committing to a safe space for discernment**
At the outset of the consultation, those present were invited to commit to hold a safe space for difficult conversations. Attendees agreed the following core values: trust, confidentiality, honesty, and clarity. In this session, several helpful tensions were surfaced, which are discussed in section 4.2. Participants agreed a series of principles for the conversations, including respecting everyone's voice, thinking about the needs of others, encouraging bravery and compassion, honouring confidentiality, and being creative. Setting these principles out from the beginning meant the consultation was both highly productive and conducted in a way which ensured the safety of all participants.
- 3.3. **Education and Learning informed by the URC's identity**
Attendees were asked to think about the URC's identity in relation to how it shapes and informs the denomination's approach to education and learning. It is critical for training to simultaneously nurture the URC's Reformed, non-conformist roots, whilst also responding to emergent change, becoming a

portfolio that inclusively meets the requirements of life and faith in the 21st Century. Key findings include:

- Strong calls for learning that is accessible, contextual, and Spirit-led
- The importance of helping those in the church grow in confidence to share their faith through discipleship
- Affirmation of the priesthood of all believers and the importance of equipping everyone to serve, not just ordained leaders or particular groups
- A commitment to lifelong learning and an enhanced understanding of the role of discipleship as a communal quality of Church
- The centrality of the URC's Reformed and reforming identity in evolving its education and learning portfolio
- Appreciation for the URC's theological diversity, and commitment to training which encourages open and honest dialogue
- The ways in which the URC's polity shapes its identity and how this should influence the governance, development, and delivery of education and learning.

The URC's identity as inclusive, dissenting, ecumenical, and collaborative were seen as key to defining the nature of its education and learning. The conversations reaffirmed a deep love for the URC's roots, demonstrated a commitment to inclusivity and nimbleness, and centred on a vision of a Church where education and learning is available to everyone.

3.4. **Culture and leadership**

One key question was 'what culture do we need to support education and learning?' Answers centred on a culture that is formational, rooted in values yet adaptive, open but purposeful, innovative, and inclusive. These attributes are not just strategic, but based on deep discernment of where God is leading the Church. The emphasis was clearly on building a culture that is dynamic, Spirit-led, and fit for the future.

Conversations about culture led on to a discussion about what leadership looks like within the URC's conciliar polity; it is frequently leaders who have the most influence on an organisation's culture. One of the most commonly cited leadership styles was *visionary*, implying a need for leaders who can see ahead and guide people through uncertainty. Paired with this, there is a need for leaders who are *relational* – collaborative and emotionally intelligent. Leaders also need to be spiritually discerning – creative, prayerful, and biblically literate. There is clearly a call for a style of leadership that is rooted in scripture, discerning in action, and committed to developing others. An initial attempt to define some of the key responsibilities of leadership in a conciliar church is outlined in section 4.5 below.

3.5. **Better understanding the current education and learning offering**

All thirteen Synods, three RCLs, the Newbigin Pioneering Hub, and the Offices of General Assembly gave brief presentations outlining their current education and learning provision. The diversity of current provision was notable, as were the extensive examples of duplication of effort. There is clearly a very considerable amount of delivery taking place across the councils of the church. There is a substantial diversity and scale to the current offering, with an associated optimism and hope related to the perceived impact of training interventions and efforts to equip the whole people of God. Despite this, there is concern that the

offering is outdated in places. In terms of breadth, there is a degree of consistency, albeit with widespread idiosyncrasies, but there are notable gaps which are discussed in section 3.10 and 4.5.

Several Synods acknowledged the blessings of partnerships between Synods and networks, but there remains problematic levels of overlap, duplication, and repetition. There are widespread opportunities for enhanced cooperation and collaboration. Synods related that there is widespread usage of Stepwise and Leading Your Church in Growth (LYCiG). Notable too were the unique and robust contribution of RCLs and exciting work on pioneering.

3.6. **Design and delivery**

A session exploring the dynamics of designing, delivering, and assessing training programmes within the church helped define the role each group – namely Synods, RCLs, the Pioneering Hub, and the offices of General Assembly – might play. Key themes of empowerment, accountability, and adaptation to local contexts emerged throughout the discussion.

Who designs?

Attendees were asked to consider which communities of interest should be involved in the design and development of training. Key findings were that:

- Co-creation is central to the design of training programs, and should involve, where appropriate, RCLs, Synods (particularly TDOs and CYDOs), local churches, and the Newbigin Pioneering Hub
- Design is not a one-off process – learning material should be continuously reviewed and adapted as contexts change and in response to learner feedback
- The convening and coordination power of RCLs, drawing from both internal and external expertise, is seen as a helpful way to bring different groups together to co-create
- A collaborative approach may include workshopping, trialling, and co-design with ecumenical partners and other organisations or experts
- Empowerment and accountability are key to the co-creative process.

Who delivers?

Attendees were asked to consider the appropriate delivery method for training, with an emphasis on ensuring that learners can access high quality teaching. Key findings were that:

- Delivery depends on context and the type of training, and delivery may occur within any council of the church
- Delivery should be of a high quality, with efforts to ensure the deliverers have been trained
- RCLs play a key role in delivering training, but not exclusively
- Accredited courses are delivered by RCLs and Synod trainers, and can include mixed modes, like e-learning and peer-to-peer sharing
- A focus on quality and intergenerationality ensures that local leaders, ecumenical partners, and specialist trainers are equipped to provide inspirational and context-specific training
- Training should not be one-size-fits-all – a diverse mix of methods and a hybrid approach will best meet the needs of the learning community.

What is the role of RCLs and the Newbiggin Pioneering Hub?

Key observations about the role of RCLs and the Pioneering Hub were that:

- They help maintain high standards of education due to their expertise
- They play an important role in spiritual renewal and ecumenical partnerships
- They ensure that training is not reductive, with a focus on specialist training and quality assurance
- A collaborative approach ensures that training is responsive to needs and can be delivered locally while maintaining high standards.

3.7. Ecological and societal challenges: a call to action

The Church is faced with a growing number of challenges, particularly deepening societal divisions and ecological breakdown. These multiple and worsening crises challenge all Christian churches, and the URC is called to respond and lead faithfully. As a denomination, we need to equip leaders to address these challenges, and this should be included in future training design.

3.8. Learning needs of groups across the URC

Across the two days, a key topic of discussion was the learning needs of various groups in the URC. It was notable that this question was initially a challenge to attendees: this was the first time a group like this had been brought together to collectively reflect on big education and learning questions in a strategic way. The focus of the conversations was on supporting discipleship, enhancing leadership, and helping people to effectively fulfil specific roles, ensuring that all members, whether ordained or lay, are equipped for mission and ministry. Every member of the URC has a ministry, and they must be equipped to fulfil their role in the church and the world. There are therefore certain training needs which apply across all roles, including safeguarding, compliance, racial justice, equality, inclusion, and discipleship.

Role-specific training needs

Training should be tailored to the specific needs of different roles within the URC. A non-exhaustive list of role-specific training needs follows, outlining some of the most commonly identified needs for each group:

Ministers and Church-Related Community Workers (CRCWs):

Education for Ministry, team ministry and teamwork, pastoral skills, conflict and crisis management, time management, and ongoing development (spiritual resilience, cross-cultural competence, and ecumenical/interfaith collaboration).

Children and Youth Development Officers (CYDOs): Specialised safeguarding and compliance, communication skills, intergenerational awareness, project management, Mental Health First Aid, community development, and ongoing pastoral supervision.

Training and Development Officers (TDOs): Induction training, facilitation training, and best practice in development of learning material.

Mission Enablers Network: Forming pastorates, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and conflict resolution.

Elders: Induction process, understanding of role as a spiritual vocation, practical skills for Eldership, URC ecclesiology, governance, safeguarding, team

leadership, basic scripture and theology, employment law, facilitation skills, pastoral skills, and conflict and crisis management.

Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers: scripture and theology, cultural awareness, public speaking, spiritual formation, and mentoring.

Worship leaders: scripture and theology, communication and presentation skills, and elements of worship.

Pastoral care: specialised safeguarding and compliance, intergenerational communication, confidentiality, dementia awareness, death and dying, and listening skills.

Church Secretaries: computer skills and digital literacy, practical skills (budgeting), communication skills, conflict and crisis resolution, governance, teamwork, URC ecclesiology, legal responsibilities, safer recruitment, employment, and grant applications.

Treasurers: legal obligations, basic accountancy, computer skills, administration, budgeting, employment law, Gift Aid, regulations, insurance, property, lettings, and grant applications.

Those working with seniors: issues faced by elderly people (dementia, isolation, health, mobility), chaplaincy, preparation for retirement, and faith development.

New Christians and seekers: foundational learning opportunities with discipleship at the core, scriptural and theological foundations, and vocational exploration.

Potential for mandatory training

There was a discussion about whether certain roles should have an associated requirement for mandatory training. Whilst there was a desire to assure those in certain roles have the skills they need, there were concerns about the consequences of taking this approach. Particular roles in question include Elders, Treasurers, and line managers. The RCLs may have a role to play in the delivery of any future mandatory training. A firm view about requirement for mandatory training for specific roles was not arrived at. This is referred for future exploration.

3.9. Looking to the future: education and learning provision in five years' time

Towards the end of the consultation, focus shifted to envisioning what education and learning provision might look like in five years' time, as well as the barriers that might thwart the vision. Attendees produced posters displaying an ideal future provision. Key themes across many of the posters were flourishing, core training with specialisations, a holistic provision for the whole people of God, enhanced provision for underserved groups like Elders, a continued focus on priorities like anti-racism and inclusion, the centrality of discipleship formation, and equipping for leadership in an uncertain world. Some of the most commonly identified barriers to this vision were a lack of focus, confidence, and imagination, fear of failure, limited resources and capacity, and resistance to change.

3.10. Conclusion on overall consultation themes

There is a broad spectrum of education and learning activity and varying levels of engagement across the councils of the church, reflecting the diversity and complexity of current provision. The offering is wide but not always deep, with clearly identifiable training gaps for key roles. Questions remain about the impact of interventions, with very limited data available to make a coherent assessment. In some cases, there is good training which is not widely used, making communication a key challenge. Likewise, an effort to make the education portfolio an offering for the whole people of God will require comprehensive and collaborative engagement with multiple communities of interest.

Many things are working well. Strong partnerships between Synods are to be nurtured and encouraged; safeguarding provision in particular stands out as a denominational success story and a model for future learning. People are undoubtedly being equipped for mission and ministry in many contexts, often in innovative and impactful ways. There is an appetite for robust resources which can be adapted and delivered locally. Programmes like Stepwise and LYCiG are widely in use and are appreciated by many. As is often the case in the URC, there is a clear and commendable effort to cover a huge range of needs with limited resources.

Given the limited resources, there is an imperative to reduce duplication. Even in areas that are bearing fruit, like Stepwise and LYCiG, there is significant overlap. Given the URC's polity and the importance of local need, some degree of duplication is inevitable. However, coordination of resources, effort, and material would allow greater focus on underserved areas and enhancement of existing delivery. This is particularly true in the case of training which can be broadly standardised. Where collaboration is happening it is informal and arranged on an ad hoc basis. The introduction of a structured process or forum would therefore be of benefit, as would a culture of enhanced intentionality and communication.

Reduction of duplication and enhanced collaboration would better allow gaps to be addressed. There is a need for better development of leaders, particularly given the complexities of conciliar leadership, as well as societal and ecological crises. Training needs to be holistic, incorporating compliance-focused initiatives, practical skills, and scriptural and theological reflection. There is space for enhanced training on inclusivity, sexual harassment, racial justice, and issue-based theology. Certain age brackets also seem to be missing from current provision, particularly older adults. Some areas of ministry training are currently underserved, in particular community engagement and intergenerational ministry. Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) were largely absent from the conversation, despite their prominence in the URC.

Overall, the consultation highlighted the breadth, energy, and complexity of the URC's education and learning portfolio. The sheer scale of need is a significant challenge, which can only realistically be met by a concerted effort to rightsize, scale, and rationalise the denomination's offering. There is notable passion, intellect, creativity, and commitment being devoted to education and learning across the Church, but this could be better applied by reducing duplication, filling gaps, and grasping opportunities for partnership. The path forward must embrace collaboration, standardisation where helpful, and a deepened focus on discipleship, inclusion, and mission.

4. Outcomes: educational need in the United Reformed Church

4.1. The facilitators shared some preliminary high-level outcomes with attendees at the end of the consultation. The working group subsequently expanded on these outcomes, which are discussed in detail below.

4.2. Tensions

A number of tensions were surfaced, named, and acknowledged at the consultation. Participants were honest about their fears as well as their hopes, accepting that difficult strategic conversations were being held at a time of change and uncertainty. These tensions are a key outcome, because they will guide and inform the working group's subsequent discussions, as well as future decision making. The tensions include:

- A need for confidentiality vs a desire for openness
- Questions about finance vs the importance of seeing the issue through a lens of theological, educational, missional, and ministry need
- Appetite for bold action vs caution and anxiety
- Responding to acute challenges vs a need for strategic long-term thinking
- The importance of following a clear process vs holding space for prayerful and continual discernment.

4.3. Denominational development, local delivery

There was a shared understanding that we should collaboratively develop materials for use across the whole denomination with wide conciliar input. These denominationally developed materials should then be contextualised and delivered locally. This requires a wide cohort of people to be drawn into the development of material, with overlap between those who design and those who deliver, to ensure learning materials are usable on the ground.

It was felt that there is a clear role for RCLs in the development of this denominational material, given their pedagogical and theological expertise, but nothing emerged to indicate the number or location of RCLs required for this to work. A process for decisions related to the RCLs is outlined in Paper ADH2.

To improve the learning experience of individuals across the URC, there is an identified need for more 'Train the Trainer' learning opportunities, which may or may not be delivered by RCLs. This would ensure that all delivery is of a consistent quality, underpinned by good pedagogical practice.

4.4. Rationalisation of the Education and Learning portfolio

Implicit in section 4.3 is a necessity for an overall rationalisation of the URC's education and learning portfolio. This rationalisation would aim to significantly reduce duplication, identify and address things which are not working, fill gaps where they exist, and promote and enhance things which are already working well.

For the rationalisation to be a success, we need to enhance trust between bodies. Enhanced collaboration will be essential to establish a system where development is denominational and delivery is local, so that Synods have confidence that they can adapt high quality denominational resources, rather than create bespoke local versions.

4.5. Gaps in current provision

Arising from the conversation about the education and learning needs of different groups discussed in section 3.8 above, several gaps were acknowledged in current provision. Identifying and filling these gaps is a critical factor in properly responding to the repeatedly expressed theme of whole-church education and learning, available to every member, designed denominationally, tailored to specific needs and context, and delivered locally.

Elders were identified as a group who would benefit from a clear and consistent training framework, consisting of core elements with wider training available based on contextual requirements. This is of particular importance in an era where many local churches are overburdened by compliance issues and other practical challenges. The principle of core training, alongside more specialised wider training, could be broadly applied to a number of different groups.

Another key area of training need relates to the challenges of leadership within a conciliar polity. To facilitate the development of this training, some principles for conciliar leadership are suggested. In a conciliar church, authority resides collectively in the Councils of the Church, reflecting the belief that decisions are best made together as the Body of Christ. Leadership is viewed as a spiritual gift meant to support and enable these councils in their deliberation and decision-making. Effective personal leadership, rooted in theological and spiritual insight, serves to:

- Guide councils in engaging scripture and theology
- Help understand the church's current context, opportunities and broader creation
- Provide insight and expertise to inspire vision and discernment
- Foster inclusive and diverse participation across generations, cultures, and differing perspectives and cultures
- Support those with differing views in the process of finding ways forward together, through respect, compromise, and agreement
- Ensure the decisions of councils are effectively enacted
- Link work within, across, and between councils through fostering meaningful relationships
- Ensure transparent and responsible stewardship of all resources
- Leadership empowers church councils to exercise their authority faithfully and wisely.

More should also be done to incorporate General Assembly priorities like racial justice and anti-sexual harassment into existing and future training.

4.6. Data, evaluation, learning outcomes, and learning objectives

A significant weakness in our understanding of learning outcomes was identified at the consultation. In effect, this means we have little comprehensive data on whether the training being delivered is having an impact. There is an urgent requirement for data to help us better analyse the impact of the training being delivered across the denomination. Data would also help in assessing the quality of the learning opportunities on offer and areas for development. It is strongly suggested that all future learning delivery is followed up by evaluation, to assess overall participant experience and satisfaction, fulfilment of learning objectives, and in the longer term, the difference the learning intervention made to the

learner's practise. Best practice in evaluation should go beyond the completion of 'happy sheets', and explore the longer-term impact of training delivery.

Linked to a desire to better understand the impact of education and learning interventions, it is strongly suggested that every piece of training should have clearly stated learning objectives or aims, to help enhance the targeting of delivery, and to better allow evaluation against each of the objectives.

Finally, there is a need for increased accountability to be inbuilt to education and learning provision, so that we have a robust basis for future decision making underpinned by high quality data and thorough analysis.

4.7. **Cohort size**

There was no single, agreed view on what the ideal cohort size should be. Despite this, attendees at the consultation agreed that cohorts are an essential element of the learning experience and process. For EM1 in particular, cohorts provide an enduring support network, and Ministers often sustain deep and lasting friendships from within their cohorts. Examples from the RCLs, Newbigin, and Synod settings were discussed, with an emphasis on the diversity of cohort size dependent on the context. It was broadly agreed that cohort size is dependent on the programme, material, and context, and that there is no 'magic number' for a learning cohort. A key finding is that the formation of cohorts requires accountability, with a focus on group dynamics as well as practical considerations. More work may need to be done to assess the minimum cohort size in various settings, and associated questions around scalability.

4.8. **Provision of denominational materials**

Previous conversations around a potential Learning Gateway will need to be considered in light of the new denominational resources portal, which is being developed jointly by the Church Life Review and Church House Administration and Resources Team, in response to Resolution 50 from General Assembly 2023. Conversations about making denominational education and learning resources available through the resources portal will be taken forward.

4.9. **Governance**

The working group noted that underlying many of the consultation outcomes is a clear gap in governance. For key strategic outcomes to make a difference, a defined body needs to take responsibility for overseeing the changes. Practically this is challenging, because some areas are the responsibilities of Synods, and others General Assembly. It is therefore suggested that the new Ministries and Learning Forum should take on a governance role in relation to the rationalisation of the education and learning portfolio. This will be a sub-group of Ministries and Faith in Action Committees, responsible for overseeing lay and accredited training. It was also noted that the governance body may shift over time as arrangements change. Accreditation for new Assembly accredited training, where relevant, will sit at Assembly level, in line with current practice.

Paper ADH2

Proposals for addressing the excess capacity and associated costs in our formation of accredited and recognised ministries

Business Committee, Education and Learning Committee and Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	John Bradbury john.bradbury@urc.org.uk Nicola Furley-Smith nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 14 General Assembly determines to cease using at least one RCL for the delivery of EM1, meaning that from September 2026 EM1 students will only be sent to one or two RCLs.</p> <p>Resolution 15 General Assembly adopts the financial ‘envelope’ within which funding for EM1 and RCLs must be delivered from the M&M fund.</p> <p>Resolution 16 General Assembly adopts the criteria set out at 4.1 in the report as the criteria which are to be used in making determinations about which RCLs will continue to offer EM1.</p> <p>Resolution 17 General Assembly adopts the key aims for the future use of RCLs within the life of the United Reformed Church.</p> <p>Resolution 18 General Assembly adopts the timetable for decision making as set out in section 8 of the report.</p> <p>Resolution 19 General Assembly invites the Revd Dr Andrea Russell to serve as an external consultant in the engagement of the working group with the RCLs.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To bring proposals for addressing the excess capacity and associated costs in our formation of accredited and recognised ministries in light of the educational needs of the denomination.
Main points	<p>The current financing of provision through the Resource Centres for Learning for the Education and Learning needs of the denomination especially Education for Ministry 1 (EM1), is no longer sustainable. Equally, cohort sizes within RCLs of EM1 students are no longer educational sustainable. Discussion about future arrangements have been going on for too long. The pressure on the budget is too great. Therefore, change is needed sooner, rather than later. This paper sets out:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the educational principles and priorities for the denomination; 2. the key criteria by which proposals shall be made; 3. the process and timetable for decisions to come to Assembly Executive in February 2026.
Previous relevant documents	Paper AD1 Resource Centres for Learning, Assembly Executive 2025.
Consultation has taken place with...	The task group was set up according to Resolution X Assembly Executive February 2025.

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (eg ecumenical)	

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At its meeting in February 2025, Assembly Executive was invited to discuss a joint paper from the Education and Learning Committee and the Business Committee (www.urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/AD1-Resource-Centres-for-Learning-FINAL-AE-Feb-2025.pdf) clarifying the current position of Education and Learning funding of the Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs). No resolutions were formally proposed. The direction of travel proposed in the paper was not endorsed. Instead, a clear awareness of purpose emerged in the discussion that the current situation was unsustainable, that discussion about future arrangements had been going on for too long, that the pressure on the budget was too great and that change was needed sooner, rather than later.
- 1.2 The debate highlighted budget pressures, excess capacity, and concerns over insufficient cohort experience for EM1 students. These issues led to the conclusion that solutions likely required ceasing the use of at least one RCL for EM1 and potentially withdrawing Education and Learning entirely from one RCL. While the resolution did not explicitly state this, the implication was clear. Failing to directly address these proposals could reasonably lead the Assembly to believe it was not being presented with the full range of options it had requested.

Transparency in discussing these potential measures was therefore essential to maintain trust and informed decision-making.

- 1.3 From the discussion, two resolutions emerged which Assembly Executive adopted unanimously. This paper deals with Resolution X, although it is acknowledged that Resolution Y informs Resolution X. Resolution X stated: *Assembly Executive instructs the Education and Learning and Business Committee Working Group to bring back to July General Assembly 2025 proposals for addressing the excess capacity and associated costs in our formation of accredited and recognised ministries.*
- 1.4 This paper is brought jointly by Business Committee, Education and Learning Committee, and Ministries Committee, with input from Resources Committee through the working group. The brief of the group expanded because it was realized that the issues were greater than Education and Learning.
- 1.5 A working group was formed to respond to Resolutions X and Y, consisting of the Revd Dr John Bradbury (General Secretary), the Revd Nicola Furley-Smith (Secretary for Ministries), Ms Pippa Hodgson (Convenor of the Education and Learning Committee), the Revd Michael Hopkins (Convenor of the Resources Committee), Ms Victoria James (COO), the Revd Jenny Mills (Deputy General Secretary Discipleship), and Mr Alan Yates (Treasurer). The Church Life Review Programme Manager also attended meetings of the working group following the Education and Learning Consultation, to provide support and 'external' input.
- 1.6 It is also vital that the process leading to the proposals that Resolution X seek, are conducted fairly, transparently, and that decisions made are made against clear criteria, that reflect the needs of the United Reformed Church as a whole.
- 1.7 This paper aims to set out a clear process and should be read alongside Paper ADH1 which responds to Resolution Y from Assembly Executive in February 2025, and relates to the task group designing and implementing a review of the learning needs of the denomination, with facilitation and external support and to bring back a needs analysis to July General Assembly 2025.
2. **Principles and priorities**
 - 2.1 In addressing the excess capacity and associated costs in the denomination's formation of accredited and recognised ministries, the key principles for what the URC needs from its Education and Learning provision, particularly with reference to EM1, need to be set out.
 - 2.2 As a denomination, the URC has long held a commitment to equipping the whole people of God for mission through an integrated and contextually sensitive approach to Education and Learning. Education and Learning is delivered across the whole life of the denomination and is embedded in all of its councils. The 2005 Education and Learning framework identified four core principles:
 - **Integrated education for Mission.** Training should equip all God's people for mission, in line with Equipping the Saints and Catch the Vision reports.
 - **Ecumenical engagement.** There should be active participation across the different traditions.
 - **Reformed identity.** There is the need to maintain a distinctive Reformed identity within this ecumenical setting.

- **Contextual delivery.** There needs to be a responsiveness to the unique contexts of a church in England, Scotland, and Wales ensuring that education is relevant, inclusive, and effective.

- 2.3 To this end, the Education and Learning Committee agenda is always headed with a summary of the aspirations the committee: The Education and Learning Committee aims to endorse, inspire and encourage lifelong learning for all God's people. Our aspiration is that learning opportunities are accessible, inclusive, integrated and involve cooperation and collaboration across the whole URC. In other words, education is not just for the beginning of ministry or for ministers alone, but for the ongoing spiritual growth and leadership development of the entire Church.
- 2.4 With this framework in mind, in 2024 the Education and Learning Committee, Ministries Committee and the RCLs have developed expectations for ministerial formation of candidates for ordained ministry as outlined document URC Requirements for EM1. It is clear any future arrangements must be able to deliver these. These are broadly summarised as:
- Learning in the range of traditional theological disciplines (Old and New Testament, Systematic Theology and Church History, Ethics, Pastoral and Practical Theology).
 - A range of skills related to the practice of ministry, and skills in reflective practice.
 - A range of experiences of the breadth of the ministerial context and demands.
 - Appropriate placement hours.
- Any future arrangements must be able to deliver these expectations.
- 2.5 This holistic vision is mirrored in the Church's Discipleship Development Strategy, which aspires to create opportunities for all people to encounter God, to deepen their prayer lives, and to grow as disciples. Lifelong learning is intended to meet people where they are in their journey, providing meaningful and appropriate opportunities for learning and growth.
- 2.6 The Learning Needs conference held on 29-30 April 2025 identified that team ministry and teamwork, pastoral skills, conflict and crisis management, time management, and ongoing development (spiritual resilience, cross-cultural competence, and ecumenical/interfaith collaboration) should be developed for today's ministry throughout EM1-3.
- 2.7 Other specific areas where educational support is required include the discipleship journey around baptism and public profession of faith, systematic discipleship development programme(s) currently in the form of Stepwise, and resources to support and deepen the knowledge, experience and skills of Elders and Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers and Locally Recognised Worship Leaders and those who undertake the Church Leadership Programme.
- 2.8 The Learning Needs consultation highlighted that the needs of the Church are not static. Educational provision must be scalable and sustainable, capable of evolving in response to both the expansion and contraction of ministries.

- 2.9 If the denomination is serious about growing disciples, empowering ministers, and nurture a community of lifelong learners – people equipped for mission, service, and witness then the means and mode of delivery of our training will need to respond to such a changing landscape. This will require consideration being given to the long-term sustainability of our current methods of delivery including the place of the RCLs in providing training.
- 3. EM1 and cohort size**
- 3.1 At Assembly Executive in February 2025, we heard clear concerns about the experience of EM1 students and the importance of cohort size. There are various concerns about cohort size:
- 3.1.1 The pedagogical reality of an effective learning environment. This is both about formal learning, and peer group size in the classroom being effective, and the seminal importance of informal peer-group learning through the education experience. It must be noted that formal classroom learning peer group learning is most significantly affected in URC specific parts of programmes, in all RCLs in many parts of award programmes students are learning with peers from other denominational traditions which offers the peer group context.
- 3.1.2 The reality is that it is far easier to have clear expectations of a cohort of students. The lived experience would appear to be that once cohort reduces to a level at which everyone is essentially on an individually tailored programme, universal expectations upon students become difficult to uphold and the discipline of formation becomes weakened.
- 3.1.3 There is also a concern for identity formation – what is it to become a minister of the United Reformed Church. Whilst hard to quantify, being part of a peer group on the journey towards inhabiting that identity is experienced as seminal by those who've benefitted from it and can at times be perceived as a lack on occasions when, for whatever reason, students follow a fairly isolated pathway through their studies.
- 3.1.4 Cohort is also difficult to immediately quantify. Across our RCLs it will be experienced within an RCL differently by different students. Some are on weekend pathways, some weekday block week pathways, some come together for URC specific formation in multi-year group cohorts and so on. Whilst the URC may send four students to an institution in an academic year, there is no guarantee their lived reality will be as a cohort, depending on their specific programmes.
- 3.2 We have in initial consultation on this process with RCLs heard some representation that cohort size must not be understood simply as URC students in any one institution, as the reality is students form cohort with ecumenical colleagues, and also that it would be possible to develop cohort experience across the three RCLs by closer working together. Whilst this is so, the working group still believes that there is significant benefit in there being a reasonable working cohort of URC students in EM1 in an institution, and that it is not possible any longer to maintain this across three institutions. This, coupled with the financial implications (see below) means we believe it is right to test the mind of General Assembly about this assumption, so that the working group has a clear

mandate to bring back a recommendation that at least one RCL cease being used for EM1.

4. Key criteria to be used in determining which institution(s) should continue to offer EM1. These are the key criteria that RCLs will be asked to respond to as they engage with the working group.

- 4.1 From the principles and priorities, the task group distilled the following overarching criteria to be adopted in decision making about the future provision of Education and Learning through RCLs in response to Resolution X. There are nine key criteria:

Theological and ministerial formation for Ministries of Word and Sacrament and Church Related Community Work

Education must provide a strong foundation in biblical studies, theology, church history, ethics, pastoral care, and reflective ministry practice.

Mission-focused and integrated learning

Education and Learning for the whole people of God should equip the whole church for mission, and integrate theological study with practical ministry skills, effective placement work, and skills in reflective practice.

Ecumenical and reformed identity

Engagement with other denominations is essential while maintaining a distinctive Reformed ethos in theology and practice.

Discipleship and leadership development

Learning opportunities must support lifelong discipleship, leadership training for Elders, provision must be able to resource structured programs like Stepwise and the Church Leadership Programme.

Accessibility and contextual relevance

Education should be accessible, inclusive, adaptable, and delivered in ways that meet the diverse needs of URC members across different nations and ministry settings.

Financial sustainability

Any future model must significantly reduce the £800,000 RCL block grant budget while ensuring both operational and long-term financial viability, including capital investment needs.

Efficient use of Church resources

Training provision should align with Synod-funded learning initiatives, ensuring that overall church spending on education (currently over £1.7M) is used effectively and strategically.

Scalability and future-proofing

Education and Learning provision must be flexible, allowing for expansion or contraction in response to changing church needs and ministerial demands and the ability to respond to external changes in context, for example changes in validation arrangements.

Ability to contribute to the evolving learning needs of the denomination as set out in Paper ADH1

The learning needs of the denomination are coming into focus, as is a direction of travel about greater joined-up design of learning resources, to support delivery, much of which might be lock in terms of lay and Elder training. The ability of an RCL to contribute to this process, and take a formative role within such a strategy is significant.

5. Determining the financial ‘envelope’

5.1 General Assembly cannot continue to spend as it has done on its work, and continue to rely on shrinking ministerial numbers to balance the budget. This pulls resources away from the front line of the local church to the General Assembly. There must be clear-sighted realism about the situation we find ourselves in which is not one of scarcity, but is one which requires very difficult decisions about where resource is prioritised. The General Assembly has been very clear in its decision making around the CLR that it wishes to prioritise resourcing local churches more effectively, and on emerging new communities of worship and supporting existing churches with the administrative and compliance burdens which weight them down.

5.2 It is therefore clear that there is also a financial reality to what can be provided in terms of education provision. Currently the RCLs are funded by the Church through M&M contributions and the New College fund by about £800,000 PA. This figure needs to significantly reduce. A key piece of work is for the Resources Committee to determine a realistic financial envelope with which this process must work and that work is in progress. We will present the final working of the Resources Committee at the General Assembly.

6. Models for consideration

6.1 Assembly Executive heard clearly that the denomination can no longer sustain three RCLs, the result being the likely withdrawal from training for EM1 at one of the RCLs.

6.2 The following list of models is not exhaustive. These models are included both for transparency, and so that Assembly can understand the shape of options currently under consideration. These models should be viewed as different examples of what the future might resemble, rather than a series of aspirational visions. The RCLs have had a chance to comment on these models. As conversations continue and thinking evolves, other models may emerge.

A single RCL in England and continued use of the Scottish College.

This model would look to continue using either Northern or Westminster College as a single RCL in England that would be able to offer the full range of Education and Learning needs required by the denomination, and work in close partnership with Synods and the Assembly where appropriate. The College that the URC withdrew from actively supporting would need to determine its future in accordance with its charitable purposes and any resource available to it internally. The Scottish College might continue to offer its existing provision, allowing continued use of funded Scottish degrees for ordinands who candidate out of Scotland through continued use of awards from the Scottish Divinity Faculties.

Two English RCLs, only one of which delivers EM1 and continued use of the Scottish College. This model would see EM1 continue to be delivered in only one English College. The other would, with considerable reduced resource available to it, continue to offer elements of the wider Education and Learning provision of the United Reformed Church. The Scottish College would continue as it is.

One RCL. This model would see one RCL be used for all the Education and Learning needs of the United Reformed Church. The URC would cease to use and fund two of the RCLs. The other two current RCLs would determine their future in accordance with their charitable purposes and the internal resources available to them. It would be expected that one training pathway that the RCL would offer would involve Scottish students matriculating in a Scottish faculty of Divinity for an award, which would be supplemented by a programme of URC formation, thus enabling us to provide a Scottish context for education, and benefit from Higher Education funding arrangements in Scotland.

Ecumenical model. This would see the United Reformed Church come to an agreement with another provider, in all likelihood Queens Birmingham, to meet the Education and Learning needs of the Church. It might, following the Methodist model, require the URC to fund URC specific staff positions within the college.

Joined-up provision. Three RCLs would remain, but only one or two would offer EM1. However, from three 'hubs', they would become the source of all Training and Development needs for the Assembly and the 13 Synods, jointly funded by all 14 entities, offering dispersed, blended, virtual and gathered in-person Education and Learning to meet the needs of the whole United Reformed Church.

7. **Key aims in the delivery of an approach to the future RCL provision for the United Reformed Church**

7.1 To ensure that decisions are principled, purposeful, and aligned with our core values, the following strategic framework has been established:

- **A strategic imperative underpinned by theological, educational and financial need.** Every educational decision must begin with a clearly articulated strategic imperative. This imperative is not merely a reaction to opportunity or demand, but a thoughtful response to our deepest convictions that we are responding to God's mission. Funding should be prioritised where theological significance, educational importance, and financial prudence intersect.
- **What is funded is funded well.** One of the most significant challenges in institutional funding is the under-resourcing of good initiatives. This strategic principle affirms our commitment to excellence: if we choose to fund a project, course etc, we will fund it well. Focused and substantial investment in carefully chosen priorities will yield far greater long-term benefits.
- **Future funding will be driven by educational need.** As we look to the future, our funding must be driven by emerging and evolving educational needs. The educational context is not static; it continues to develop in response to cultural shifts, technological advancement, denominational expectations, and global realities. Strategic foresight will be critical identifying areas of growth, innovation, and renewal. This includes investment in

curriculum development, new modes of delivery (including digital and hybrid learning), and community engagement. By maintaining a close connection between training and funding, we ensure that our resources remain relevant, targeted, and impactful.

- **Funding details are followed through.** Commitment to funding is not complete without accountability. Once funding has been approved, there must be diligent follow-through to ensure that it is delivered, applied appropriately, and monitored for effectiveness. This includes the clear documentation of funding decisions, timelines for disbursement, and ongoing oversight. Reporting mechanisms must be in place to evaluate the outcomes of funded initiatives, including both financial and qualitative performance.

8. Process towards final proposals

8.1 There is clearly more work to be done. However, the working group would like to suggest the following timetable for determining the future direction. The timetable for decision is as follows:

8.2 **Stage 1.** The task group will ask the RCLs to submit data for consideration by 29 September 2025. The data shall include:

- Details of training pathways through validated awards for EM1 students along with details of the URC specific areas of formation and how they meet the expectations formation as set out by the Education and Learning and Ministries Committees in 2024.
- Details of their existing wider URC Education and Learning provision.
- Details of the wider ecumenical and academic context of the institutions, and the impact of that on student experience.
- An account of how the theological and academic resources of the institution enable the key criteria agree by Assembly in paragraph 4.1 of Paper ADH2 are delivered within the institution.
- Annual Financial and Charity Commission Reporting reports for the last three years.
- Up to date management accounts.
- Any business plans.
- A brief response to the proposed models in 6.2 (recognising they are not exhaustive).

This list will be finalised after General Assembly. RCLs are to be encouraged, where it is helpful, to utilise material they have already generated in engagement with the Education and Learning Committee over the last few years.

8.3 **October 2025.** Each RCL to be visited by representatives of the working group. The working group believe that some externality in the process is helpful, and suggests that the Revd Dr Andrea Russell, warden of Gladstone's library, and experienced theological educator, to act as consultant to the group. Andrea, having acted as a facilitator at the Education and Learning consultation is well briefed in the Education and Learning needs of the denomination. Visits will enable the ability to talk through RCL submissions, further clarify anything necessary, and to give full chance for personal engagement in the process by staff and governors of the RCLs.

- 8.4 **Stage 2, 28 November 2025.** A draft final report and recommended resolutions for General Assembly to be sent to RCLs for fact checking. Responses to be received by 12 December.
- 8.5 **19 December 2025.** The task group, will finalise the report to Assembly Executive in the light of any factual amendments necessary.
- 8.6 **6-8 February 2026.** Assembly Executive is invited to determine, in principle, which RCLs it wishes to continue to use to deliver EM1, and recommendations for the future shape of overall RCL provision within the life of the United Reformed Church. It is expected that this decision will shape which RCLs EM1 students will be sent to in September 2026.
- 8.7 **Stage 3. February-May 2026.** Working with the RCLs with which the Church will continue to work, the full feasibility of the proposals will be tested.
- 8.8 **3-6 July 2026.** General Assembly is asked to adopt resolutions effecting the results of the process in the light of the detailed feasibility work undertaken.

Paper B1

Children's and Youth Work Committee Final Report 2024-2025

Children's and Youth Work Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Samantha Sheehan, Convenor rev.s.sheehan@gmail.com Sam Richards, Head of Children's and Youth Work sam.richards@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information and discussion.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Report of the work of Children's and Youth Work Committee.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	GA 2024 B1 CYWC report GA 2024 B2 Proposal for a new formal Children's and Youth Work ministry – update Mission Council 2018 B3 CYWC outline strategy.
Consultation has taken place with...	URC Youth CYDO+ team.

Summary of impact

Financial	Within existing budget.
External (eg ecumenical)	Wide-ranging contribution to ecumenical networks.

Children's and Youth Work Committee (CYWC)

Children, young people and young are adults are central to God's mission and Christ's church (Matthew 18:1-14; 19:13-14)

The remit of the Children's and Youth Work Committee (CYWC) is to support, encourage and promote work amongst children, young people and young adults (0-25 years old) at all levels of the church; and to facilitate the involvement of children and young people in all the councils of the church, ensuring that their voices are heard and all decisions taken consider the impact on future generations.

Our vision is children and young people playing their part in the mission of God – experiencing, exploring and expressing the way of Jesus in, through and beyond the church. Our underlying ethos is inclusive, intercultural and intergenerational.

To think and shape this work strategically, the Children's and Youth Work Committee has met four times a year: two in person 24-hour meetings and two online evening meetings to increase accessibility and reduce environmental impact. The committee values the active contribution of URC Youth members and strives to include the voice of children creatively in all discussions. CYWC wishes to record thanks to the Revd Samantha Sheehan, Convenor for the past year during a period of uncertainty and preparation for transition.

This is our final report, as CYWC will be dissolved into the new wider Faith in Action Committee to cover the work of mission and discipleship. This is a leap of faith for Children's and Youth Work to become more deeply integrated into the whole life of the URC, and an opportunity to embed this passion across a wider range of initiatives going forwards. We have successfully reached the end of our strategy 2019-2024, approved by Mission Council in November 2018 (and extended in response to the Covid-19 hiatus), achieving the nine action areas and supporting local churches in five key areas identified in the review of 2018. Alongside this, we have responded to the deepening environmental crisis¹, and the emerging foci of URC Youth and the wider church.

CYWC have deliberately not developed a new strategy so that the new committee can agree an overarching strategy with clear aims that Children's and Youth Work can be an active participant within. We anticipate this being responsive to, and complimentary with, the Church Life Review. We look forward to children and young people having a place in wider conversations and contributing to the whole church vision and strategy.

This may be the moment for bold reorientation and creative reimagining of the church:

- a) with children, young people and their families firmly at the centre
- b) releasing the denomination from supporting every church in this area, and seeking to grow new communities of worship and discipleship that work for children and young people, and by extension others.

CYWC would like to take this opportunity to remind the new committee and the emerging new structures of two key resolutions passed by General Assembly that should shape and steer the future:

1. *Be consistently mindful of the voice of children and young people and of the impact of their decisions on children and future generations. To enable this, all councils of the church are encouraged to review how they are able to hear and respond to children and young people².*
2. *Recognise work with children, young people and families as ministry.³*

¹ GA 2020 Resolution 15: General Assembly recognises the climate emergency and challenges all councils, committees and local churches to do everything possible to make URC events and activities eco-friendly, as urged by URC Youth Assembly.

² GA2022 Resolution 4: To mark the launch of URC Children at General Assembly this year, the United Reformed Church resolves afresh to ensure that all structures and councils of the church (local church meeting, Synod and General Assembly) 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 are encouraged to review how they are able to hear and respond to children.

³ GA 2023 Resolution 11: General Assembly recognises the work of many people in local churches among children, young people and families as ministry, and celebrates the gifts, time and energy that are shared to introduce and journey with children and young people in faith in Jesus. Local churches are warmly encouraged to commission these people to these key ministry roles.

The future Faith in Action Committee will have a Children's and Youth Work Programme Enabling Group or sub-committee, which will seek to continue the excellent working relationship with the Synod appointed Children's and Youth Development Officers (or equivalent lead workers) team and the gifting of up to 20% of their time to Assembly level work. This creates a very short and effective feedback loop with local churches, so we hear and respond to their needs, enables specialism and training to be offered across the whole denomination, and very high-quality URC resources to be created and made available to local churches. It is an excellent expression of the URC as denomination, with Synod colleagues working collegially and collaboratively.

URC Youth

'Our mission is to discover God, to help each other grow in the Christian Faith, and through our lives reflect God's love to all'. (URC Youth mission statement)

General Assembly 2021 URC Youth brought two resolutions designed to increase accessibility of meeting times to enable a wider variety of people to serve:

Resolution 10: General Assembly requests all General Assembly committees and task groups to have at least one meeting each year entirely online and not during normal working hours (9-5 Monday to Friday).

Resolution 11: General Assembly also encourages all General Assembly committees and task groups to have the ability for people to join online for all meetings, with 50% of meetings each year to be held outside of normal working hours (9-5 Monday to Friday).

Eleven committees (and no task groups) responded to a survey about their meeting practices over the past two years:

Q1. Have you had at least one meeting per year online and outside normal working hours?

A: Five no, six yes.

Q2. Have people been able to join all your meetings online?

A: One no, ten yes.

Q3. Have at least half your meetings been held outside normal working hours?

A: Eight no, three yes, with one committee writing to explain that meetings were arranged at times to suit the members, which included one living overseas.

URC Youth are pleased to see the general availability of joining meetings online for those not able to attend in person. However, the timings of meetings still represents a significant barrier for many, particularly those involved in education or employment, which in turn impacts the diversity of people able to consider taking up committee roles. URC Youth would urge all General Assembly committees to ensure that meeting times are not established before new members are recruited, so that meetings can be flexibly arranged to suit the actual needs of the members after a truly open recruitment process, in line with these resolutions from 2021. They would also remind committees to review this regularly, as the lives of those in education and employment can change considerably year to year. This is particularly important at this time of reshaping the URC's committee structure and other changes likely to result from the Church Life Review.

Two members of URC Youth attended the **CWM Assembly** in Durban, South Africa in 2024: Zeerak Shahbaz representing the URC at the Youth Assembly, and Heather Moore (Moderator) acting as a steward at the main event.

Youth Assembly 2024 had encouraged local churches to engage with Student Christian Movement's **Honest Church** campaign (honestchurch.org.uk) to be transparent about the welcome they offer different groups, and a leaflet was created and sent to every church in September.

A **Disability Awareness** task group completed work on a set of resources raising awareness of issues surrounding disability and Church and promoting the perspectives of disabled people of all ages in the URC, which are now available as Conversations Starters here: www.bit.ly/URClearning.

URC Youth Executive visited a different URC local church each time it met, broadening their experience of the denomination. They were consulted twice about aspect of the Church Life Review, with a particular focus on issues of membership for young people and new worshipping communities.

Youth Assembly 2025 moved venue and time of year, to March at Kings Park Northampton, in response to the move of Assembly Executive from November to February (see the video and read RoundUp here: www.urc.org.uk/your-faith/children-young-people/urc-youth/urc-youth-assembly/). The theme was All Are Welcome.

Heather Moore completed her term as Moderator at Youth Assembly 2025. Maya Withall commenced her term as Moderator at Youth Assembly 2025.

Youth Assembly 2025 received the URC Youth Executive Review of the roles and responsibilities of the Youth Executive, commissioned at Youth Assembly 2024. As a result, 2025 is going to be a year of piloting a transition towards having three distinct sub-groups with specific foci: Synod Representatives Network; Youth Assembly Planning Group; Youth Executive Officers Group. The aims are to reduce the role demands and to enable a wider group of URC Youth to participate. The Youth Executive for 2025-2026 is the most diverse yet.

Alongside Youth Assembly, we ran the fourth **URC Youth Leaders' Gathering**, for the first time leaders were at a separate conference centre and enjoyed the retreat aspect of the event. We plan to repeat this in 2026.

We support Youth Executive through hosting residential weekend meetings, employing a Youth Intern to support their Comms, and hosting **What Do You Think?** preparation events for under 26 representatives at General Assembly and Assembly Executive.

2024-2025 saw a strategic focus on 18-25s. We co-organised **Junction 25**, an ecumenical weekend gathering of young adults with the Methodists, Baptist, Church of Scotland and Quakers, in January 2025. This piece of work arose out of the **Youth Ministry Denomination Leads Roundtable** which we host twice a year. We are currently exploring the feasibility of offering this again with a wider group of ecumenical partners in 2026. We produced **Creative Connections**, a resource to support local churches and 18-25s to build and keep connections during this period of transition. It is available free on the website (www.urc.org.uk/your-church/family-friendly-church/)

or to order from **children.youth@urc.org.uk**. We are offering a **Pilgrimage to Taizé** for 18-25s in August 2025.

Other opportunities for URC Youth in 2025 include **1T4**, a weekend for 11-14s in May, and an invitation to join the Lutheran and Reformed Churches of France in their summer camp **Le Grand Kiff** in the Dordogne in July for 11-18s.

URC Children

The free weekly online resource **Faith Adventures for Children Together** (FACT), launched in April 2023, continues to provide churches with non-lectionary, Bible-based resource of pick and mix material to support engagement with 0-11 year olds, including a take-home postcard. Since January 2024, this has been supplemented with **Faith Adventures Youth Resource** (FAYR) for 11-14s based on the same Bible passage each week. There is a thriving Facebook group for those using these resources.

In November 2024 the first residential **URC Children's Workers Together: THE CONFERENCE** was held at Ripon College, Cuddesdon, Oxon. Following its success, it is hoped to hold this annually and Highgate House, Northampton has been booked for November 2025.

We continue to support the **Pilots** community through their online termly gatherings and provision of resources.

CYDO+ team

The team of Synod employed leads for Children's and Youth Work, collectively known as the CYDO+ team, continue to work collaboratively across the denomination creating whole range of resources, opportunities, training and events that we offer as the Assembly level programme for Children's and Youth Work. The generous gifting of up to 20% of their time by the Synods to this joint work makes us the envy of other denominations and ensures that the programme offered is relevant and appropriate to the needs of local churches. They also enable children and young people to have a voice throughout the structures of the URC (where it is not possible for children or young people to be present themselves) through championing and advocacy. We support the CYDO+ team through hosting regular online meetings (monthly since January 2025), termly in person or hybrid day meetings and training opportunities. In November 2024 the residential 48-hour meeting included a joint day with the Synod Safeguarding Officers, further anti-racism training and a strategic review of work undertaken. In November 2025 we are offering the team a 48-hour residential retreat led by the Revd Stewart Cutler. CYWC wishes for the final time to acknowledge the huge debt owed to the CYDO+ team and the value of the collegiate working processes that enable them to shape strategic priorities, multiply the impact, amplify the sharing of stories, offer specialist skills across the denomination and enable the URC to keep children and young people at the heart of the life of the church. The nature of this relationship will require some clarification going forwards.

01. Northern – Hannah Middleton (part-time) and John Stephenson (part-time)
02. North Western – Leo Roberts
03. Mersey – Steven Mitchell
04. Yorkshire – Megan Tillbrook
05. East Midlands – Richard Knott
06. West Midlands – Helen Laird (since December 2024)
07. Eastern – Nicola Grieves

- 08. South Western – vacant
- 09. Wessex – Philip Ray and Ruth White
- 10. Thames North – Lorraine Downer
- 11. Southern – Tom Hackett
- 12. Wales – Judy Harris
- 13. Scotland – Jessica Poole (part-time) and Matt Baines (part-time until 31 January 2025).

We would like to encourage Synods where there are vacancies to explore and consider filling these posts.

Church House staff

Lorraine Webb (Programme Officer) took early retirement at the end of March 2025. With the full review of staffing at Church House in progress we have not been able to explore recruiting a replacement for this post. The rest of the team of three full-time equivalent staff has remained the same: Tricia Harding (part-time Admin Assistant), Sharon Lloyd (part-time Programme Assistant), Dr Sam Richards (Head of Children's and Youth Work) and Heather Wilkinson (Administrator) who celebrated 30 years at Church House in November 2024. The URC Youth Intern (Comms) very part-time one year post has been held by Rhys Lloyd 2023-2024 and Lizzie Crossley 2024-2025 (funded by the Carmichael Montgomery Trust).

Resources for local churches

The theme for 2024 was **Story, Story, Story**, and for 2025 is **All Are Welcome**. Each year a themed resource with material for 0-25s and intergenerational suggestions has been produced and sent to each church and to Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers. An accompanying free **Holiday Club** resource has been produced. The small grants to support the running of holiday clubs have been accessed by 13 churches in 2024. Future plans include resources to support churches in preparing children and young people for baptism, communion and membership.

We have continued to produce an **Advent resource** for churches to give away to families with invitations to their Christmas events. In 2024, we produced and despatched 5,000 packs at £2.60-£3 each and gave churches posters with a QR code to the video. We recognise that these are a significant missional tool for local churches, but as our budget reduces so does our ability to subsidise this resource to the extent of previous years. For 2025 we are creating a more durable gift with estimated price of £4-£4.50 per pack (because not book-based these incur VAT), available to pre-order over the summer. Alongside, we will offer local churches bumper editions of Faith Adventures for use with groups and in services.

Nine more churches have been approved as a **Children and Youth Friendly Church** and awarded plaques (now also available in Welsh) over the past year.

Lundie Memorial Award

We have continued to receive a wide range of nominations from across the URC for children and young people aged 0-25 playing their part in the mission of God. In 2024, we marked the first **50 awards** with a poster sent to all churches celebrating these amazing young disciples. In the past year the awardees have ranged in age from eight to 19, for everything from creative fundraising, ministries of jokes and noticeboard design, evangelism, pastoral care and being young leaders (see bit.ly/URCLundie).

Grants

We have continued to offer **small grants to individuals**, supporting young people's access to educational and discipleship opportunities. In 2024-2025 we support two young people visiting Norway and Sri Lanka. Following an agreement with the Discipleship Development Fund, we are able to offer quick response **group grants** (five so far) for Children's and Youth Work, and since April 2024, small grants to support churches building relationships with **unformed groups** (19 to date).

We have applied to the Discipleship Development Fund for support with three pieces of work. Firstly, for Youth Assembly, to subsidise every place; secondly, for the Taizé trip, to cover travel for young adults, and thirdly, for the coaster project (see below). We are very grateful to the Large Grants Group for their support of this work.

Wider URC work

Wider URC work has included supporting **Holiday Forum** with their children's and youth work provision in 2024 and will again in 2025. The CYDO+ team have also run the youth venues (The Engine and The Den) at **Greenbelt Festival** in 2024, and 2025 will be the final year, with plans to pass over the baton to Ripon College. We continue to champion Walking the Way and whole life discipleship throughout our resources. We contribute to **You're Welcome** conferences for those newly appointed to the URC and **Enquirers Conferences**.

We have worked closely with the Safeguarding team, producing a leaflet sent to all churches pulling together information on safer recruitment, training and resources for all working with children and young people (**Safeguarding-leaflet-Oct-24.pdf**).

We have strengthened links with Mission Committee through collaborative working. We have continued to produce the series of **Go with Greta** (5-11s)/#connect2 (11-16s) resources for Commitment for Life for Transcarpathia over 2024-5 and working on a further resource in 2025-2026.

We have responded to JPIT's work around refugees and migration with material for children and youth people in our themed resources. We have focused this year on the renewed called to evangelism in materials for young people. JPIT have contributed to the Advent resource also.

We have embedded the work of Equalities Committee and the desire to be an intercultural church in our resources for 2025 (All Are Welcome and Bags of Welcome) and the Disability Awareness for All conversation starters.

Following Resolution 51a at General Assembly 2023, we helped plan and run **Conversations at the Crossroads**, a joint residential for URC mission and discipleship animators which included the CYDO+ team, to explore how new worshipping communities are encouraged and supported. We have also continued to support the development of the Newbigin Pioneering Hub training and pioneer community.

The work to develop proposals for a formal ministry of children's and youth work following Resolution 13 at General Assembly 2023 (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) has involved collaboration at

a number of points with Ministries, Education and Learning, Finance and Worship, Faith and Order and the Resource Centres for Learning over the past two years. Please see the separate joint paper regarding this.

Training and development for those working with children and young people

A wide variety of training opportunities have been offered through the CYDO+ team, facilitated by agreements with Godly Play UK and Youthscape, in addition to the Youth Mental Health First Aid training offered in response to URC Youth resolutions. The URC Youth Leaders Gathering has continued to be held each year alongside Youth Assembly as a regular gathering and training opportunity, and the URC Children's Workers Together conference has been added to the annual offer.

Less formal training has been offered in partnership with Education and Learning through URC Training as online sessions in Widget, Holiday Clubs and introducing new resources. Three Makaton 'learn and grow' courses designed for churches have been offered. A monthly 'Talking About' session offers space to hear from experts and discuss a wide variety of topics in Children's and Youth Work. A new online calendar of events and training has been developed (see bit.ly/URCCYWcalendar).

We contributed to the Education and Learning Consultation about the future needs of the URC.

Ecumenical connections

We actively participate in ecumenical networks. The URC hosts a Roundtable for Denominational Youth Ministry Leads (out of which the young adults gathering emerged) which has now been recognised by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) as their network for youth ministry. We co-founded Intergenerate UK intergenerational ministry network (www.intergenerateuk.org) which has hosted three webinars and two in person networking sessions at conferences. Sam Richards serves on the Children's Ministry Network (CMN) executive. Through CMN we have developed Children's Ministry Essentials training programme for children's ministry and we are finalising the Family and Intergen Ministry Essentials programme for the whole Christian sector (superseding Core Skills and before that Kaleidoscope) see the video here.

With CMN we created a resource to support churches hosting school visits. We are co-hosts of Join the Conversation, an international online gathering of intergenerational ministry leads, which grew out of an in person gathering in London in 2019. We have also been involved in consultations for ChurchWorks Family Hubs, Messy Church, Boys Brigade, Roots, Youthscape and various research projects including co-authoring a paper on Taking the Pulse. Sam Richards is presenting a paper at Intergenerate USA conference in June and will be keynote speaker at the Messy Church International Conference.

Partnership with Ugly Duckling Charity/Table Talk

CYWC and Mission Committee are working with the Ugly Duckling Charity to produce branded coasters for use as conversation starters at church and Synod events.

The coasters have thought-provoking questions on them to encourage deepening relationships (and a link to new daily question) and could be used as a pre-evangelisation tool. Every local URC will be sent a small sample with the Children's and Youth Work all churches mailing in September, and will be able to order more for the cost of P&P. We are excited by this small initiative, funded by the Discipleship Development Fund, and encourage churches to use the coasters creatively.

Paper BDFH1

Update on a Ministry of Children's and Youth Work

Children and Youth Work, Education and Learning, Ministries, and Worship, Faith and Order Committees

Basic information

Contact name and email address	<p>Samantha Sheehan (Convenor), Children's and Youth Work Committee rev.s.sheehan@gmail.com</p> <p>Pippa Hodgson (Convenor), Education and Learning Committee pippahodgson147@gmail.com</p> <p>Mary Thomas (Convenor), Ministries Committee dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk</p> <p>Robert Pope (Convenor), Worship, Faith and Order Committee rpp20@westminster.cam.ac.uk</p>
Action required	Resolutions below.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 20</p> <p>Following the outcome of the discussion at Assembly Executive 2025, General Assembly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) commends the training programmes offered through Northern College and Westminster College to train Children's, Youth and Family Workers at local level; b) instructs the new Ministries and Faith in Action Committees to explore how this training can be offered to those working with children and young people, including funding opportunities; c) encourages the conversations to continue as the URC focuses on ministry, training and the Church Life Review; d) thanks the Task Group for its work.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Updating on Paper BDFH1 presented at Assembly Executive February 2025 and following the discussion that led to Resolution 14 being withdrawn.
Main points	The proposed direction of travel to establish an accredited ministry to children, youth and/or family was discussed at Assembly Executive in February 2025 and there was no strong appetite for it, nor financial support. The discussions were

	taken back to be discussed by the Task Group. The Task Group proposes that the formal consideration of this type of ministry does not go ahead at this point in time.
Previous relevant documents	B1: Recognition of Children's, Youth and Family Ministry, Children and Youth Work Committee, General Assembly 2023; B1: Towards a Formal Ministry for Children's, Youth and/or Family Work, Assembly Executive February 2024; B2: General Assembly 2024 CYWC Update; BDFH1: Towards a New Formal Ministry for Children's and Youth Work: Direction of travel, Assembly Executive February 2025.
Consultation has taken place with...	CYDO+ Team Children's and Youth, Education and Learning, Ministries Committees Resource Centres for Learning – Northern College and Westminster College.

Summary of impact

Financial	None at this time.
External (eg ecumenical)	Other denominations currently offer such training and those from the URC may choose to access their training.

Background

- 1.1 At General Assembly 2023, Resolution 13 stated: '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 a 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. Paper BDFH1: Towards a New Formal Ministry for Children's and Youth Work, was offered at Assembly Executive, February 2025.
- 1.2 The resolution in Paper BDFH1, Assembly Executive February 2025, was withdrawn, following discussion. There did not appear to be general warmth to the proposal of this new form of stipendiary ministry amongst Assembly Executive at that time.
- 1.3 The Task Group met to discuss the next steps and proposed an alternative, which was Assembly Accredited Children's, Youth and Family (AACYF) Worker. This was a pragmatic approach following the feedback from Assembly Executive, February 2025.
- 1.4 This proposal was discussed at Children's and Youth Work, Education and Learning and Ministries Committees, and was not felt to be a suitable way forward. There were questions around who would take up this local offer of ministry and concern that this could be created with no take-up. Much encouragement is offered

to the work of the Children's and Youth Work Committee and it was felt as if this encouragement was in word only.

1.5 The Task Group met on 2 May and it was decided that an Assembly Accredited Children's, Youth and Family Worker was not the way forward.

1.6 Each committee created its response to the proposal.

Children's and Youth Work Committee

2.1 Following Assembly Executive and the revised proposal to pursue Assembly Accredited Children's, Youth and Family Worker as a new ministry, we had feedback from the CYDO+ team as well as the URC Youth Leaders Gathering. There is a great deal of frustration and disappointment in the feedback from Assembly Executive and the new potential direction of travel.

2.2 The CYDO+ team do not see how the proposed AACYF Worker will have a direct impact on those involved in children, youth and family ministry. It does not go far enough in valuing children's and youth work as ministry or in supporting those that are already involved in this ministry. This conclusion was also shared by those on the committee. From those in local churches, hurt was shared, and a feeling of being undervalued and not recognised by the denomination. They had viewed the proposed children's, youth and family ministry paper as the denomination acknowledging the ministry they offered, and subsequent withdrawal of the proposal as a rejection of this.

2.3 There were questions about how this new proposal linked with the CLR local church workers stream, because it is felt that requiring all local workers to be Assembly Accredited as a minimum standard was too much of a barrier for it to be effective (given that these are time-limited posts, frequently filled by non-URC members). It was also noted that there are already a significant number of 'spare time training' programmes which local workers can already access, included ones hosted and offered by the CYDO+ team (Children's Ministry Essentials and Youthscape Essentials).

2.4 The proposed AACYF Worker does not address a number of key issues:

- how as a denomination we form theologically reflective and professionally skilled URC children's, youth and family ministers;
- how the denomination could deploy this ministry where most effective. (AACYF workers would be volunteers or employed by local churches and therefore are limited to where churches can afford them);
- how as a denomination we could support those with a lifelong vocation for this ministry.

2.5 As a committee, we do not feel able to continue supporting the direction of travel and work towards an AACYF Worker as we do not see how this will have an effective impact on those currently involved in children, youth and family work or those discerning a call to children, youth and family ministry.

2.6 We are grateful for the willingness and journey the task group has been on, the conversations it has generated and work that has been undertaken.

- 2.7 We see children's, youth and family ministry as an integral part of the Children's and Youth Work Committee's response to the Church Life Review, and to General Assembly 2023 Resolution 51A, which asks the Mission and Discipleship Departments to look at how mission, evangelism and ministry which would lead to the emergence of new United Reformed Church communities of discipleship and worship might be encouraged and resourced.
- 2.8 In the light of the discussions at Assembly Executive, Children's and Youth Work Committee strongly urge that all ministers be equipped to work with children and young people through embedded training offered through RCLs and Synods for new and serving ministers of Word and Sacraments and Lay Preachers/Local Worship Leaders.

Education and Learning Committee

- 3.1 The committee recognised the effect of the discussions that occurred at Assembly Executive and the subsequent proposal from the Task Group for an AACYFW. They heard the frustration of the Children's and Youth Work Committee and also the fact that, as a voluntary role, this would be limited to those who could afford it. The Education and Learning Committee acknowledged the work done on this by the RCLs and commended the learning pathways offered, acknowledging that they are ecumenical courses that have been carefully planned to accommodate those wanting to work with young people. It was felt that the work that had gone into developing the learning opportunities had not been appreciated and Education and Learning Committee is reassured that the offerings are included in this paper. They also thanked the Task Group for all their hard work over the past two years and that they wanted this work to continue in some form and not be forgotten in continuing conversations around ministry and in the Church Life Review.

Ministries Committee

- 4.1 The committee fully understood the decision of the Children's and Youth Work Committee not to proceed with an Assembly Accredited ministry despite the value of accreditation but acknowledged there were already people doing this sort of work in local pastorates who would not wish for accreditation. The committee were still supportive of this ministry and wish to affirm that the work done thus far will not be lost should conversations in the future warrant another look at the ministry.

Worship, Faith and Order Committee

- 5.1 The Worship, Faith and Order Committee was consulted about Faith and Order issues relating to the recognition of a new, formal and accredited ministry in the United Reformed Church. Guiding principles included:
- 5.1.1 The Basis of Union confirms that it is the whole people of God who continue Christ's ministry in the world (paragraph 19 and 20).
- 5.1.2 Paragraph 13 confirms that Ministers of the Word and Sacraments, Elders, and Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers focus attention (in varying degrees) on worship, mutual care and encouraging mission because these are recognised ways in which God's saving love is made known. Furthermore, in paragraph 12, we are told that the life of faith to which the United Reformed Church is called is a gift of the Spirit, received through Word and Sacrament.

- 5.1.3 Paragraph 11 confirms that Church-Related Community Workers focus attention on the gospel imperative that God's love is for all, and that this has implications for community development.
- 5.2 These ministries have something to declare, but they are also listening ministries, exercised in the knowledge that God can speak to us through others.
- 5.3 In the light of this, a specific ministry for Children, Youth and Families seemed theologically justifiable along the following lines:
 - 5.3.1 Children, Young People and Families are part of the whole people of God, called to continue Christ's ministry in the world. Dedicated ministry should help to strengthen them in that calling (as in paragraph 19).
 - 5.3.2 Dedicated ministry would have something to say of God's saving love to children, young people and families. But it would also be a listening ministry, helping the United Reformed Church to fulfil its commitment to listening to the voices of children and young people as a natural, rich, God-given blessing to the Church (affirmed by General Assembly in 1984 and reinforced by the Charter for Children in 1990) as well as its commitment to working with Children and Young people (affirmed by General Assembly in 2008 and in the more recent resolutions calling for this new ministry to be established).
 - 5.3.3 Early discussion ruled out a specific Ministry of the Word and Sacraments because this would introduce a second order of that Ministry (the principal in the URC being that there is one order of Ministry of the Word and Sacraments). It also seemed difficult to justify a Ministry which included presidency at the Sacraments which would not be offered to the whole Church.
 - 5.3.4 It was considered important that this new ministry should not be confused with Church-related Community Work. The name agreed by the Working Group, and approved by WFO, was 'Church Commissioned Children/Youth/Family Worker'. This seemed to confirm that it was a recognized ministry of the Church, that it was not a ministry that would preside at the Sacraments, and that it would be flexible to apply to the diverse needs of the denomination and its local churches.
 - 5.3.5 The decision at Assembly Executive, and subsequently at the Children and Youth Work Committee, paused this conversation. However, the Worship, Faith and Order Committee feel it is important to acknowledge the clarity achieved on questions of polity. This will be useful should conversations about new ministries resume in the future.

Northern College

- 6.1 We have appreciated being part of the journey with the United Reformed Church in exploring ministry to children, young people and families. Luther King Centre is excited to introduce a new pathway designed for those exploring a call to ministry with children, youth, and families – or seeking to grow in their current roles. This two-year, part-time programme has been developed in response to conversations with the URC and a wider recognition of the need for specialised training in this vital area of ministry.
- 6.2 Successful completion of the programme leads to the Durham University Common Awards Certificate in Theology, Ministry and Mission. It offers a dynamic blend of academic study and practical training, grounded in contemporary theological thinking and real-world application. Participants will be supported to grow spiritually, personally and professionally as they prepare for, or deepen, their ministry with children, young people, and families.

Westminster College

- 7.1 Training for the new Church Commissioned Ministry in Children's Youth and Family Work could be offered by Westminster College, in association with the Cambridge Theological Federation, through an existing course validated by the University of Durham and leading to a Certificate in Higher Education. Formal study would be accompanied by formational input and those in training would learn alongside students entering other formal ministries. Although the conversation has now paused, these learning opportunities still exist and those working in these areas in the United Reformed Church can be encouraged and enabled to take them either as distinct modules or as a full programme leading to a qualification.
- 8.1 It was felt that the proposed training pathways that were offered through Northern College and Westminster College could be offered, despite the decision not to pursue an accredited pathway. It was felt important that people were able to access funding if they chose to do this training. The Education and Learning Committee does have oversight of the Discipleship Development Fund and believes that this could be a source of funding for any lay training for children's, youth and/or families' workers, especially the small grants offered through the Synods. The URC also has a number of funding opportunities that are available, more information can be found on the URC website: urc.org.uk/grants-funding-opportunities.
- 8.2 The Task Group feel it is important to continue conversations with the Church Life Review through the Programme Director, Myles Dunnett. This would be around the stream focusing on employing lay workers.

Conclusion

- 9.1 The joint Task Group seeks the support of General Assembly for the resolutions and hopes that, in future, there could be a possible, accredited ministry to children, youth and/or families.

Appendices

1. Northern College

Children, Youth and Families Pathway at Luther King Centre.

Introduction

This learning pathway is ideal for individuals who currently serve as, or aspire to become, Children, Youth and Family Workers in church-based or community roles. It combines academic study with hands-on practical experience, tailored to support those on a faith-based vocational journey.

Shaped through consultation with experienced practitioners, this ecumenical programme reflects the real-world challenges and opportunities of contemporary ministry. Developed in conversation with the United Reformed Church, Baptist Ministries, and Children's, Youth and Family Work specialists, the pathway is grounded in the lived experience of those actively engaged in faith and community work.

Teaching is contextual, encouraging students to reflect on and learn from their own ministry settings. Learning takes place within a diverse, supportive community, where students are invited to share insights, challenge assumptions, and grow together in theological understanding and practical ministry skills.

Successful completion of the programme leads to a Durham University Common Awards Certificate in Theology, Ministry and Mission.

Programme structure and delivery

Duration of study:

- Two years, part-time.

Delivery mode:

- Weekday in Manchester or online weekend sessions
- Occasional in-person residential teaching blocks.

Placement:

- Substantial church and/or community-based placement over two years
- Ongoing group tutorial support with a qualified Children, Youth and Family Work tutor.

Specialisation:

- Opportunities to focus on either children and families or youth work within selected modules.

Assessment:

- This pathway uses a diverse range of assessments to support different learning styles and ministry contexts, including practice-based portfolios, book reviews, theological reflections etc.

Core modules:

- This pathway is designed to form thoughtful, theologically rooted, and practically equipped reflective practitioners who can make a transformative impact in the lives of

children, young people, and families. To do this, students will engage with the following core modules:

Foundations for Theology and Reflective Practice (20 credits):

Develops theological reflection skills and introduces contextual theologies. Encourages both individual and collaborative engagement with experience, scripture, and global theological voices.

Values, policy and practice in Children, Youth and Family Work (ten credits, residential block):

Examines legal frameworks (eg safeguarding, risk assessment), professional values, and theological reflection on practice within the UK and global contexts.

Introduction to Theology and Human Development (20 credits, residential block):

Explores developmental psychology, theological anthropology, ethical boundaries, and pastoral care skills in work with children and young people.

Basic Playwork or Youth Work Skills in Practice (20 credits, placement-based):

Practical experience supported by tutorial groups. Covers relationship-building, communication, educational approaches, play design, team leadership, administration, and reflective practice.

Introduction to Growing Faith (ten credits):

Focuses on discipleship and spiritual growth across age groups and life stages. Engages with initiatives such as Messy Church and Prayer Spaces, and considers the cultural shifts needed to support intergenerational faith development.

Introduction to the Bible (20 credits):

Introduces Old and New Testament texts, genres, and interpretative approaches. Helps students explore how scripture can be understood and applied in their own ministry contexts.

Elements of Mission and Evangelism (ten credits):

Covers the Missio Dei, five marks of mission, church and kingdom, mission history, cultural engagement, and religious diversity.

Conflict Transformation (ten credits):

Equips students to respond constructively to conflict in faith-based communities. Includes conflict theory, practical tools, and theological reflection, with case studies and experiential learning.

Programme costs (per year)

Item	Cost
Academic teaching	£3,093
Residential weekends (incl. meals, accommodation etc.)	£345 (varies by location)
Placement costs – setup, comprehensive tutorial support and associated costs	£515
Additional costs	Individual travel, plus meals/accommodation for weekday onsite study at Luther King House

2. Westminster College

Children, Youth and Families Ministry Course

Forming Confident Leaders for Ministry with Children, Young People and Families.

Course overview

This two-year programme equips students with essential skills, theological understanding, and formational support for effective ministry with children, young people and families. Combining accredited academic modules, practical experience, skills development, reflective formation, and in-person community gatherings, the course develops confident, thoughtful leaders ready to serve the next generation. Much of the course material is common across children, youth and family ministry but also includes dedicated streams and assessment relevant to the particular ministry a student is pursuing. The course will also ensure a specifically Reformed approach. Students can pursue the course for a fully accredited University award (CertHE, University of Durham) or they can pursue the course without seeking credit. They would produce a portfolio which would be part of the evidence used to commend them for Assembly Accreditation in the United Reformed Church.

Key features

- Eight accredited modules (total: 120 credits) delivered over two years
- Supported by **online facilitated formation groups** for peer learning and reflective practice
- **Two residential conferences per year** for worship, teaching, and community building
- Flexible **flipped classroom model** to increase accessibility for diverse learners
- Option to study for credit or non-credit (portfolio route)
- Option for fully **online delivery** or a **blended model** with in-person teaching weeks.

Accredited modules

1. **TMM1207: Preparing to Learn: Doctrine, Scripture and Prayer (ten credits)**
Foundations in reflective learning, grounded in Christian practices of doctrine, Scripture, and prayer.
2. **TMM1517: Introduction to Spirituality and Discipleship (ten credits)**
Introduction to Christian spiritual practices and models of discipleship, with application to children and young people. Reformed perspectives will be emphasised.

3. **TMM1031: Introduction to the Bible (20 credits)**

Overview of the Bible's structure, content, and themes, providing tools for interpretation and approaches which will help children and young people in particular to be most engaged in biblical study.

4. **TMM1421: Brief Introduction to Pastoral Care (20 credits)**

Principles and practices of pastoral care, with focus on children, young people, and families.

5. **a) TMM1491: Basic Playwork Skills and Children's Work Practice (20 credits)**

Practical skills and theological reflection for working with children through play and activities;

or

b) TMM1501: Basic Youth Work Skills and Practice (20 credits)

Core skills for engaging young people, exploring youth work practices and theological grounding. The choice depends on the particular vocation to which the student feels a call. Both modules familiarise students with National Occupational Standards, safe practice and boundaries training.

6. **TMM1121: Creeds and Councils (20 credits)**

Study of major creeds and councils, equipping students to teach and communicate core beliefs.

7. **TMM1561: Introduction to Theology and Human Development in Childhood (20 credits)**

Exploration of human development and theology, focusing on childhood, adolescence, and faith formation.

Learning delivery

1. Flipped Classroom Online Learning

- All modules are available fully **online**, with core content (lectures, readings, videos) provided for flexible engagement.
- Live sessions focus on **discussion, reflection, and application**, rather than passive delivery.

2. Optional Face-to-Face Teaching Weeks (Blended Model)

- For students preferring in-person learning, **three modules** will be offered in **Cambridge** over **three intensive teaching weeks**.
- Students participating in the in-person option will require **accommodation and food**, which will be arranged and costed separately.

3. Facilitated Formation Groups

- Small, online **formation groups** meet regularly throughout the year, led by experienced facilitators, with particular emphasis on **Reformed theology and practice**.
- Focus on reflective practice, prayer, peer learning, and ministry integration.

4. Proposed Residential Conferences (optional)

- Two conferences per year, focused on:
 - Reformed worship and spiritual growth.

- Keynote teaching and practical workshops.
- Networking, rest, and encouragement.

Accreditation and portfolio route

For academic credit:

- Completion awards 120 credits at Level 4 over two years
- Pathway available towards a **Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE)** or further study
- **Cost: £3,050 per student per year** plus conference costs (additional costs apply for in-person teaching weeks: accommodation and food). This fee is standard for those pursuing a University qualification through the CTF (validated by the University of Durham).

Non-credit portfolio option:

- Alternative route for those not seeking academic credit.
- Completion of a **Reflective Portfolio**, including:
 - Reflections on learning.
 - Ministry application.
 - Engagement with key readings.
- Supported by formation group facilitators.
- Students receive a **Certificate of Participation** and feedback on their portfolio.
- **Cost: £1,250 per student per year** plus conference costs (additional costs apply for in-person teaching weeks: accommodation and food). This fee is based on the cost of auditing official modules with the costs associated with teaching, tutoring, resourcing and assessing.

Support

- **Theological mentoring** and practical ministry guidance throughout.
- Experienced tutors support both academic and vocational development.

Target audience

- Volunteer or paid Children's, Youth, and Family Workers.
- Those seeking **Assembly Accreditation** for Ministry with Children, Young People and Families in the United Reformed Church
- Ordinands and ministry trainees focused on children's/youth ministry.
- Church leaders seeking to strengthen skills and theological grounding.
- Those discerning a call to ministry with young people and families.

Progression

- Students may continue studies towards higher qualifications or leadership roles within children and youth ministry.

Paper D1

Discipleship Development Fund

Education and Learning Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Pippa Hodgson (Education and Learning Committee Convenor) pippahodgson147@gmail.com Jenny Mills (Deputy General Secretary, Discipleship) jenny.mills@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 21 Discipleship Development Fund (DDF) small grants funding available to Synods should increase from £2,000 pa to £4,000 pa.</p> <p>Resolution 22 The amount available to individual projects under the large grants scheme of the DDF should remain unchanged at £5,000. Normally, this grant will be available for up to three years, as before. However, a fourth year of funding may be given where clear succession planning is shown.</p> <p>Resolution 23 A new category of awards from the DDF will be made available. A sum of £20,000 will be set aside annually for spontaneous discipleship development opportunities which arise at denominational level. Applications should be made to the Discipleship Development Fund Large Grant Awarding Group (DDFLGAG).</p> <p>Resolution 24 Ongoing changes to the detail of the grants available through the DDF will now be delegated to the new Faith in Action Committee on the advice of the DDFLGAG.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Discipleship Development Fund. To enable more effective use of the Fund.
Main points	The sum of money available in the DDF is growing despite significant disbursements. These resolutions seek to make the available funds more accessible to local, Synod and national discipleship initiatives.

Previous relevant documents	Paper D3: Education and Learning Committee: Revising the Discipleship Development Strategy and the Discipleship Development Fund policy and operation, Mission Council March 2021 Paper D1: Education and Learning Committee: Discipleship Development Fund update, General Assembly July 2021.
Consultation has taken place with...	DDFLGAG Education and Learning Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	No additional administrative costs for the denomination. The DD Fund is spent down.
External (eg ecumenical)	

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Despite awarding £263,595 since September 2021, the DDF has grown from £850,000 to £964,000 as of April 2025. The intention to use the whole of the fund is not being realised.
- 1.2 At Youth Assembly the possibility of holding a worship leading weekend for young people was considered. Under present arrangements this would be difficult to fund from the DDF. Discussion has followed about how the fund might be adapted to meet such creative and exciting initiatives arising outside Synods or local churches.
- 1.3 Changes to the structure, management and sums available are proposed to address these matters.

2. History of the DDF

- 2.1 The DDF was established to provide funding for churches and individuals to engage in projects that stimulate growth in discipleship. Funds from the sale of the Windermere Centre (at that time £860,000) enabled the establishment of the fund. Its current format was agreed in August 2021, with the intention of spending down the whole fund in ten years, with £86,000 granted per year. An earlier version failed to disburse significant sums of money as it was only using the interest from the fund (www.urc.org.uk/new-grant-to-support-lay-discipleship-development-launched)

3. Administration of the DDF

- 3.1 There are currently two types of grants made from the fund:
 - Small grants administered by Synods and accessed through Synod Training and Development+ Officers for individual discipleship development;
 - Large grants administered by the DDFLGAG, with application forms available on the URC website.
- 3.2 Grants are awarded for anything which contributes to the development or discipleship of people in, or connected with, the URC.

- 3.3 Small grants, of up to £200, are awarded from the sum of £2,000, available to each Synod.
- 3.4 Large grants, of up to £5,000, are made for up to three years. Applications are scrutinised by the DDFLGAG, meeting four times each year.
- 3.5 Any recognised group can apply, but if the group applying is not an Assembly committee or a Synod, it will need to gain approval for its application from its Assembly Committee or Synod.
- 3.6 Applications for large grants come from churches in a diverse range of communities. Augustine United Church in Edinburgh were recently awarded £2,050 to support their Visitor and Heritage Ministry Team to engage with visitors through urban pilgrimages. Marginalised and minoritised families from Yorkshire have been enabled to attend the Holiday Forum. Rainbows and Brownies from The Bay URC in Birchington, Kent, received funding for their recycling project and the flourishing churches initiative in North Western Synod has been supported. In all, 70 projects supporting the discipleship of children, young people and adults have been granted funding through large grants from the DDF.
- 3.7 As the URC seeks to enable discipleship across all our churches it would be good for more funds to be available across the whole range of church life.
- 3.8 Further information about current arrangements for the DDF can be found at **www.urc.org.uk/your-faith/developing-your-faith/discipleship-development-fund**
- 3.9 Funding for creative and imaginative short-term projects is also available from the Legacy Fund (**www.urc.org.uk/your-church/guidance-support-for-churches-synods/church-finance/the-legacy-fund**).
- 4. Proposed changes**
 - 4.1 The current two-tier structure of small grants awarded through Synods and large grants awarded through the DDFLGAG will be changed to a three-tier system by adding a further tier. The third tier will make grants at denominational level to support opportunities for spontaneous new initiatives. These grants will be administered by the DDFLGAG. £20,000 annually will be set aside for this purpose. In order for these initiatives to receive swift consideration, it is proposed that they be considered via email if a DDFLGAG meeting is not in the next two weeks.
 - 4.2 Funds available to each Synod for making small grants are increased from £2,000 to £4,000 pa.
 - 4.3 Large grants will remain at a maximum of £5,000 pa for up to three years. A discretionary further year of funding may be made available to projects clearly demonstrating succession planning.
 - 4.4 To facilitate further changes, should this prove necessary, guidelines for disbursement may be altered by the new Faith in Action Committee on the advice of the DDFLGAG.

Paper E1

Equalities report on ongoing work

Equalities Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Jo Clare-Young, Acting Convenor training@urceastern.org.uk The Revd David Salisbury, Committee Secretary david.salisbury.urcwailes@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information and discussion.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To share with the General Assembly a summary of the committee's work.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	

1. Purpose and remit

- 1.1. The Equalities Committee exists to help the United Reformed Church realise its commitment that equality be enshrined in all areas of its life, work and theology, and to facilitate the development of equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging within the denomination. It does this by monitoring and, where appropriate, challenging the practice of the Church, developing resources, supporting initiatives and by hearing and responding to the voices of those who are on the margins of Church or society.

2. Committee membership and pattern of meetings

- 2.1. The Equalities Committee currently has six nominated members plus a Convenor and Secretary. In addition to these members, the committee also includes the Equality and Diversity Representative from URC Youth, the Chief Operating Officer and the Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries.
- 2.2. Since General Assembly in July 2024 the committee has met on three occasions, including a hybrid meeting for the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic.

We intentionally hold meetings on various days of the week and at different times of the day which helps most members to be able to attend most meetings.

- 2.3. From General Assembly 2025, the committee will have a new name: Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging, and will fall under the wider remit of the Mission and Discipleship Department. We are working on revising our Terms of Reference to complement and reflect the proposed changes in the committee structure of the United Reformed Church and are looking forward to continuing to hold up a mirror to the denomination so that policies and practices of equality and inclusion are maintained in the life of the church.
3. In addition to receiving feedback from other assembly committees where Equalities Committee has a monitoring and observing role, the committee considered these other items of business:
4. Support for trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming people – responding to Resolution 21, General Assembly 2023.
- 4.1. A task group, made up of members of the committee together with others, has been working on producing an information and discussion resource for the whole Church. This resource explores trans identities, looking in some detail at theology and scripture, history, biology and pastoral care. It has been written by people who have drawn on their own lived experience and professional expertise in these relevant fields. We are grateful to them for their input into this resource, and their willingness not only to share their expertise but also their vulnerability in putting it together.
- 4.2. The resource will come in two parts. There is a summary booklet available both in printed form and online which gives a brief introduction to each topic. This summary will link to more substantive online resources allowing for deeper engagement and providing suggestions for further reading, discussion and questions to ponder either individually or in a group setting.
5. **Accessibility issues at General Assembly and Assembly Executive**
- 5.1. Acting on concerns raised by some members of General Assembly and Assembly Executive about accessibility issues at the venue for these meetings – The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick – the committee made representation to the Business Committee asking that these matters be raised with the management of The Hayes as a matter of urgency.
- 5.2. Some other matters that are within the direct control of the Business Committee, were also highlighted in the hope that the experience of all members and attendees at General Assembly and Assembly Executive can be improved.
- 5.3. We are pleased to report that the resulting feedback and correspondence from The Hayes and from the Business Committee has been positive and reassures us that these matters are being taken seriously.
6. **Accessibility of churches and other venues**
- 6.1. We are often painfully aware that disabled access in many of our churches and other buildings presents huge challenges to people with disabilities, mobility problems and other needs. It is often hard to know how accessible a building is,

or what facilities churches have before visiting. This lack of information can prevent people with disabilities to feel comfortable and welcome in unfamiliar spaces.

- 6.2. We had wondered whether information supplied by churches, for example through the Annual Church Return, could be collated, categorised and made available through the URC website to share the accessibility of churches and other URC venues so that disabled people could check whether a building would be accessible for them. Closer examination of this idea led us to conclude that we wouldn't have the capacity or resources to gather the information, publish it and then, importantly, keep it up to date.
- 6.3. We do however wish to encourage churches and, where appropriate, Synods, to register their buildings with websites such as Euan's Guide (www.euansguide.com) and AccessAble (www.accessable.co.uk). These disabled access review websites allow the public to search for accessible buildings and venues, including churches, so that disabled people can make informed decisions about the places they visit. We would also encourage churches with their own websites or other online presence to include accessibility information and keep it updated, thus giving confidence and choice to disabled people who might be wondering whether a place is accessible for them.
7. On 16 April 2025, the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom ruled that the legal definition of a woman is based on biological sex. A few days later the United Reformed Church issued a statement in response to this ruling, restating our belief that the United Reformed Church upholds the worth and dignity of all human beings as created in the image of God regardless of their sex or gender. The Acting Convenor of the Equalities Committee was consulted in the formulation of this statement which can be read in full here: www.urc.org.uk/urc-response-following-the-ruling-on-the-legal-definition-of-a-woman/
8. The committee is privileged to have the URC Youth Equality and Diversity Representative as a member. They have brought wisdom and insights from the perspective of a different generation to our discussions which is always valued. Two resources from URC Youth that we wish to highlight are All Are Welcome, the 2025 Children and Youth Work theme (www.urc.org.uk/your-faith/children-young-people/children-youth-work/all-are-welcome-2025-cyw-theme), and a new conversation starter on the URC Learning Hub called Disability Awareness for All (www.tinyurl.com/u47y4zdw).

Paper G1

URC Trust Accounts 2024

Resources Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Alan Yates, Treasurer alan.yates@urc.org.uk John Samson, CFO john.samson@urc.org.uk
Action required	Consider the resolution.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 25 General Assembly notes the Trustees' Report and Financial Statements for the year ending 31 December 2024.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To draw General Assembly's attention to the availability of the audited accounts for 2024 and accompanying Trustees' Report.
Main points	The annual accounts will be available to members before the paper is due to be discussed at General Assembly.
Previous relevant documents	Audited accounts for 2024 are available on the URC website.
Consultation has taken place with...	The URC Trust and the General Secretary.

Summary of impact

Financial	General Assembly are asked to note the audited accounts – there is no financial impact.
External (eg ecumenical)	The report provides a publicly available summary of the Church's activities and financial state.

1. Both the Resources Committee and the URC Trust have considered the findings of the audited accounts and agreed to sign them off.
2. Members of the General Assembly are invited to review the audited accounts in preparation for passing this resolution. They are on the URC website and can be found on this page: www.urc.org.uk/general-assembly-papers.
3. If for any reason the accounts are not available online before General Assembly meets, the Treasurer will seek to withdraw the paper from consideration by members of the General Assembly.

Paper G2

Update from Resources Committee

Resources Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Michael Hopkins michael.hopkins@urc.org.uk Victoria James victoria.james@urc.org.uk
Action required	Note.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Resources Committee is a new committee which came into being after General Assembly 2024 and this paper provides an overview of its work in that time.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	N2 Church Life Review Structures (Resolutions 59-61), General Assembly 2023 A1 Establishing the Resources Committee, Assembly Executive February 2024 J1 Nominations Report, General Assembly 2024.
Consultation has taken place with...	N/A

Summary of impact

Financial	N/A
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

1. Background

- 1.1 General Assembly in 2023 agreed to the creation of the Resources Committee, which was to bring together the work of the Church House Management Group, the Human Resources Advisory Group, the Finance Committee and the Communications Committee. The Terms of Reference for the new committee were agreed by Assembly Executive in February 2024 and after following a safer recruitment process, Nominations brought the names of the new committee members to General Assembly in July 2024.
- 1.2 The Resources Committee therefore formally began its work after General Assembly 2024. Since then and General Assembly 2025, the committee will have met six times, although the pattern of meetings continue to evolve.

2. Decisions and main areas of focus

- 2.1 The finances of the church have been the main area of focus for the Resources Committee since General Assembly 2024 and has included:
- Preparing the 2025 budget ready for approval by the URC Trust and Assembly Executive. As there was going to be another deficit budget, this process was both a strategic and financial exercise.
 - Approval of the annual accounts for year ending December 2024 and meeting with the auditors at the start of the process.
 - Monitoring of the quarterly management accounts.
 - Preparation of the 2024 annual report and accounts for approval by the URC Trust and adoption by General Assembly. This process includes meeting with the auditors and receiving their feedback which will inform future work and decision making.
- 2.2 In considering the deficit budget position, the committee agreed a Budget Policy to help staff and General Assembly Committees effectively manage the finances of the Church. This is supported by a delegated authority framework. This approach is a significant change, and marks both an operational and cultural shift. As such, the Chief Operating Officer and the Chief Finance Officer are working on how best to effectively embed this policy with staff and committees. This work will continue through 2025 and into 2026 also.
- 2.3 After considering the Q4 2024 management accounts, the committee agreed with a proposal from the General Secretariat that now was the right time to look at staffing levels and in doing so accepted the Treasurer's recommendation that the target was to reduce the overall salary costs by 20%. The committee agreed the timeline and process for this proposed restructure and, working with the Remuneration Committee, agreed an enhanced redundancy package for anyone whose application for voluntary redundancy was accepted.
- 2.4 The General Secretariat announced on 26 February 2025 that there was to be a full review of the staff team (except for RMHS, which is not funded through the M&M budget). Through the first two weeks of March, the Chief Operating Officer and the Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship) held conversations with every member of staff without line management responsibility. These conversations were based on standard questions, which had been shared with individuals in advance. These questions were designed to understand individual roles and workloads. During the second half of March, the Chief Operating Officer and the General Secretary met with all those who have line management responsibilities and explored the same core questions about their roles, but also additional questions from a line management perspective.
- 2.5 This process had proved informative and helpful as the General Secretariat look at possible new structures and associated roles. As this process coincides with the changes to committee structures agreed at Assembly Executive 2024, it is a strategic exercise primarily, although with a significant financial imperative. The aim being that the staffing structure and associated roles best serve the needs of the modern denomination.
- 2.6 On 6 May 2025, the Resources Committee reviewed the proposed structures and associated roles in the context of a detailed outline of the strategy and rationale for the changes. It is therefore anticipated that at the time of General Assembly, we

will be in the formal consultation stages about possible changes. As such, the committee is not in a position to communicate any further details at this stage. The Resources Committee will of course ensure that there is effective communication to the wider church at the appropriate moment after the conclusion of the necessary HR processes.

2.7 Alongside this main area of focus, the Resources Committee has undertaken work relating to other key areas of its remit:

- a) Pensions – as the Pensions Committee is a sub-committee of Resources Committee, the Resources Committee has received regular updates about the move to Buy In by an insurer of the closed pension scheme. Two members of Resources Committee are also members of the Joint Working Group, working with the Pension Trust towards buy in and ultimately buy out of the Scheme.

The Resources Committee also approved the Terms of Reference for the Pension Scheme which were agreed by Assembly Executive in February 2024.

- b) Communications – following the resolution at General Assembly which requires the *Reform* Magazine to be cost neutral by the end of 2025, the Resources Committee agreed that the number of issues would reduce by two per annum, making *Reform* an eight issue per annum magazine. This was the first step towards cost neutrality. The committee also adopted a revised Communications Policy.
- c) HR – as well as the restructure referenced above, the Resources Committee has undertaken the routine cycle of policy reviews, but also approved a new Menopause Policy. Substantial changes to the Bullying and Harassment policy were also approved to address legislative changes relating to Sexual Harassment. As a result of these changes in legislation, there are now risk assessments in place and all staff have received training. Resources Committee has also agreed new roles which were to be advertised – all of these were before the restructure conversations started.

In the context of considering costs of living rises for 2025, committee suggested that we create a benefits brochure about the whole package available to staff. This was driven by a sense that there were ways that we are generous beyond matters of direct remuneration. This was approved by the Resources Committee and is now being used to aid internal communications and recruitment processes.

- d) Central Properties – the Resources Committee has made decisions to sell a former Moderator's manse in Wessex Synod, and in the National Synod of Wales. There have also been decisions about significant works on the Old Manse in South West Synod.

Central Properties have proved demanding during 2023-2025, both in terms of the number of sales and acquisitions and the amount of maintenance work required. Some of the latter has stemmed from the nature of the properties purchased historically. The Resources Committee has agreed that we will return to a position where a manse is purchased in the different Synod areas and retained, rather than purchasing a new manse each time the Moderator changes. This will enable us to maintain properties to a high standard in a

more cost-effective way and strive for net-zero credentials in a financially sustainable manner.

The Resources Committee and the URC Trust have also agreed that the Chief Operating Officer and Head of Compliance and Services should explore the best way to facilitate RMHS in taking over the management of Central Manses from a repairs and maintenance perspective.

- 2.8 Following the adoption of Resolution 21 at General Assembly in 2022, the URC committed to address the continuing negative impacts of the legacy of the transatlantic slavery on black communities in the UK, the Caribbean and Africa. At the time of writing this paper, we have received ten responses from Synods, pledging a total of £1,185k, however a number of the pledges still needed to be agreed at Synod Trust or Executive meetings. An additional £250k has been pledged from central funds. If all these offers are agreed at the various trusts, there should be a total fund of at least £1,435k.

3. Future work

- 3.1 Following the decisions on the proposed staffing structure and associated roles, the committee will work with the Chief Operating Officer through the consultation phase as necessary and then through implementation of any resulting changes. This will then lead into ensuring an effective transition.
- 3.2 Once the negotiation with RMHS has concluded, then the committee will be asked to approve the Service Level Agreement between the two entities. As well as dealing with the support on central properties, this will cover services provided to RMHS in terms of office space, HR, payroll, IT and finance. Similarly, with Westminster College for the services provided between the two entities.
- 3.3 In terms of Communications, the committee will be agreeing a strategy for the URC bookshop and ensuring *Reform* is cost neutral by the end of 2025.

Paper H1

Basis of Union Paragraphs 19-24: Ministry in the United Reformed Church

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	John Bradbury john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 26 General Assembly adopts the changes to Schedule A of The Manual with regards to Ministry in the United Reformed Church (paragraphs 19-24).

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Following agreement at General Assembly 2024, Resolution 26 was referred to Synods. No Synod has objected.
Main points	Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community 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.
Previous relevant documents	Paper H6: Basis of Union Paragraphs 19-24: Ministry in the United Reformed Church, GA 2024.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synods.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	In line with our ecumenical partners.

1. Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers (thereafter known as ministers) are members of the Church who live out their committed discipleship as office-holders not employees, in which their service to the Church and community, together with the support provided by the Church, has

never created, has never been intended to create, and does not create any contractual relations.

2. The relationship between and office-holder and the Church arises from the constitution of the Church.
3. Hitherto, while the status of an office-holder and their relationship with the Church is implicit in the governing documents of the Church, it is not explicitly described. Doing so helps provide clarity.
4. The additions to Schedule A (in blue) clarify the relationship between ministers and the Church as one of an office-holder.
5. Resolution 26 was agreed at General Assembly 2024 and was referred to Synods. There have been no objections.

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 apart shall in the case of Ministers and Elders be termed ordination and in the case of Church Related Community 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. 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 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, then 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 and 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. [Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community 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.
24. [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 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.](#)

Paper H2

Criteria for the 13 new pioneering posts to intentionally grow new Christian communities

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk Nicola Furley-Smith nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 27 General Assembly adopts the criteria for the 13 new pioneering posts to intentionally grow new Christian communities.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	<p>General Assembly 2023 agreed Resolution 51a which, through the Church Life Review (CLR), charged the Mission and Discipleship Departments to look at how mission, evangelism and ministry which would lead to the emergence of new United Reformed Church communities of discipleship and worship might be encouraged and resourced.</p> <p>In anticipation of the work, Ministries Committee reviewed the SCM programme and, in doing so, brought resolutions to Assembly Executive February 2024 which affirmed the SCM programme in its current form would be phased out and 13 new pioneering posts (one per Synod) would be created intentionally to grow new Christian communities.</p> <p>This paper sets out the definition of pioneering and the criteria by which the posts would be awarded.</p>
Main points	<p>The paper defines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) pioneering in the URC; b) models of pioneering; c) criteria for awarding the 13 posts; d) the process for application.
Previous relevant documents	Paper H2 Special Category Ministry AE 2024.

Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators Mission Committee CLR New Christian Communities stream working group.
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Summary of impact

Financial	Reallocation of SCM budget to fund.
External (eg ecumenical)	Use of CMS to train for pioneering.

1. Background

General Assembly 2023 agreed Resolution 51a which, through the Church Life Review (CLR) charged the Mission and Discipleship Departments to look at how mission, evangelism and ministry which would lead to the emergence of new United Reformed Church communities of discipleship and worship might be encouraged and resourced. That stream of the CLR has begun its work.

However, in anticipation of the work, Ministries Committee reviewed the SCM programme and, in doing so, brought resolutions to Assembly Executive February 2024 which affirmed the SCM programme in its current form would be phased out and 13 new pioneering posts (one per Synod) would be created intentionally to grow new Christian communities. As with the SCM programme, in the first instance, these posts would be for those already in a stipendiary role.

These posts would be seven years in the first instance, followed by a further five years, by which time a new URC community should be established. Partnering with those is the local community is key to developing lay leadership.

Assembly Executive added a third resolution which affirmed liminal ministries both lay and ordained, including but not limited to Chaplaincy and requested Ministries and Mission Committees to consider how such ministries might be supported and developed, returning to Assembly Executive in February 2025 with a report and proposals. Assembly Executive agreed. That timescale has slipped because of the importance of this work and Ministries and Mission Committees will be bringing something for the wider councils of the church in 2026.

This paper is not about the range of ministries in liminal spaces but centres on the 13 new pioneering posts as defined by the denomination through the Marks of Ministry at General Assembly 2022.

2. Mission lens of the URC

The mission priorities of General Assembly, as expressed in its resolutions over the last four years have formed into a mission lens for the URC. This is described more fully in Mission Committee's report to the July 2025 General Assembly. Ministries is conscious that what is in this paper should fit in with these priorities. As such, the new pioneering posts to intentionally grow Christian communities will be committed to engaging with issues of Legacies of Slavery and anti-racism, the environment and net zero, poverty, the URC's reinvigoration of its ecumenical vision and areas of deprivation, where appropriate.

The Conversations at the Crossroads Conference in January challenged the denomination to take more risks in developing new worship and discipleship communities outside of our comfort zones and intentionally increase sharing the

Good News in our contexts. There is room in the denomination for both/and – the traditional and the new, the structured and the amorphous – as we know them and as we embrace the cycles and rhythms of Kingdom life. Conversations at the Crossroads also reinforced the importance of supporting pioneering posts with teams of lay workers, some of whom should be paid.

3. What is a Pioneer?

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 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.
- The world is broken in so many ways. But another world is possible.

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

5. Criteria for Pioneering

- 5.1 Ministries recognises that the criteria for accepting an application needs to be flexible.
- 5.2 Applications should come from the Synod and have been endorsed by the Synod Ministries Committee or equivalent to the Accreditations sub-committee (ASC) of the Ministries Committee. They should include:
 - 5.2.1 **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.
 - 5.2.2 **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.
 - 5.2.3 **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.
 - 5.2.4 **Please supply a role description.**
 - 5.2.5 **Please supply a person specification.**
 - 5.2.6 **Budget.** Please 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. The URC Ministries budget will support the stipend, but other funding will need to come from Synod or other resources meeting the requirements of the Plan for Partnership. 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 and the ASC needs to feel comfortable that their budget may change as the ministry progresses.
 - 5.2.7 **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.

5.2.8 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.

5.2.9 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, by which time it is hoped that a new community will have emerged which can continue the ministry.

6. Marks of Ministry for Pioneering

A Pioneer 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.

7. Discerning whether a person is a pioneer

The Pioneer Criteria are to be used for the discernment of whether a person has the capacity for pioneer ministry in the United Reformed Church. Some of the criteria are about assessing a person'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 person 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 pioneer.** Evidence of this will be drawn from:
 - a track record of 'firsts' and initiatives in having started something new;
 - 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;
 - building partnerships strategically and prayerfully to support the vision, extending their impact and ensuring sustainability with both community leaders and collaboration with agencies outside of the church;
 - 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:

- 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 and manage 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;
- enabling others (not just the pioneer) to take on responsibility for project developments and implications;
- shift priorities and emphasis during various stages of development of a project they have been involved with;
- ensure that project team members are equipped for succession planning for when the pioneer post-holder term ends.

- **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;
- To enable others to reflect theologically on the pioneer context and ministry.

8. The process for application

- 8.1 All applications from the Synod (which is ultimately responsible for securing the funding of the post, should come to the ASC.
- 8.2 The Synod will be invited to do a presentation to the ASC at its next available meeting, normally on Zoom.
- 8.3 If successful, the post may be advertised on the Synod Moderator's List in the usual way.
- 8.4 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/pioneers 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.
- 8.5 In order to evaluate the mission of the post the ASC will conduct regular reviews with the postholder and Synod through a member of the ASC as contact person.
- 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.
- 8.6 Posts are for seven years in the first instance, with the possibility for a five year extension.

9. 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.

10. Possible financial support for pioneering

Pioneers learn to pay attention to what God is doing in the world and join in. This means reading the local context and valuing the local culture, then sharing the gospel in appropriate ways by partnering with local people to create a new contextual Christian community for people who wouldn't normally join one.

It is not intended that Pioneers do this on their own. Within the first two-three years their priority should be to grow a team and get as many local people engaged as possible. It is possible that funding may be available to pay other workers using a funding stream from the Church Life Review as pioneering practitioners seek to establish new communities.

Paper H3

Ministries general report

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk Nicola Furley-Smith nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To update on the work of two sub-committees: Accreditations sub-committee and the Assessment Board.
Main points	To update General Assembly on the ministry statistics of both sub-committees.
Previous relevant documents	Ministries report to General Assembly 2024.
Consultation has taken place with...	Ongoing consultation across the denomination.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

The committee is responsible for the ministry of the Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Work, Assembly Accredited Lay Preaching, Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneering and Eldership. Through its main committee and sub-committees, it is concerned with facilitating the ministry of the whole people of God in the United Reformed Church, through working to promote the policies of the church; advocating ministry in its widest sense; supporting ministry in its varied forms; facilitating the formation, training and learning for accredited ministries of the church.

Membership:

Convenor: Mary Thomas

Secretary: Nicola Furley-Smith

Nominated members:

Gill Bates, Terry Jinn and Lesley Moseley

Convenor of the Accreditations sub-committee: Paul Dean

Convenor of the Assessment Board: Bill Gould
 Convener of the MOM sub-committee: David Coote
 Convener of RMHS sub-committee: Paul Whittle
 Leadership in Worship Advocate: Maggie Kirkbride
 Synod Moderator: Jamie Kissack

Ministries Committee wishes to update the denomination with the following sub-committee reports which indicate the health of the breadth of ministries across the denomination.

Accreditations sub-committee

Maintaining the roll of ministers, this sub-committee accredits those applying for inclusion after training, and those coming from other denominations. It is concerned with numbers and recruitment. It also deals with applications for special category ministries and CRCW projects.

Convenor: Paul Dean
 Secretaries: Nicola Furley-Smith and Steve Summers
 Members: Bill Gould (convenor of the Assessment Board), Carole Marsden, Alison Micklem, Joanne Patterson (CRCW post holder), Jamie Kissack (Synod Moderator), Mary Thomas (convenor of Ministries Committee), SCM post holder (vacant).

1. This report of the Accreditations sub-committee since its formation marks a change of emphasis in our work in the light of policy decisions linked to the Church Life Review. The plan is for Special Category Ministries to continue for the time being, until existing postholders complete their terms. The Joint Secretaries and the committee are working towards facilitating 13 new Pioneering ministries in each Synod.
2. **Certificates of Limited Service**
 - 2.1 Certificates of Limited Service allow a minister of another denomination to serve in, and be paid by, the URC, in a specified post only and for a limited period of time. They provide a flexible way of responding to particular local ministry needs and opportunities.
 - 2.2 Two new certificates have been issued in the last year (Mark Cowling and Mark Hubbard), and one has been renewed (Duhyun Joshua Han), and no certificates have been closed because of retirement.
 - 2.3 In 2021, it was agreed that, for a period of three years, part-time certificates of limited service of 50% or less would not be counted against a Synod's deployment target. This was renewed in April 2024, and the Ministries Committee agreed to continue this for a further period of three years until 2027.

3. Certificates of Eligibility

Ministers who have come from other denominations to serve in the United Reformed Church make a vital contribution to the URC as a whole. Ministries Committee is responsible to General Assembly for oversight of the projected number of ministers for future years. On the basis of these projections and other relevant factors, decisions are made concerning the number of certificates of eligibility that can be issued to ministers of other denominations for both stipendiary and non-stipendiary service, enabling them to receive a call to service in a pastorate or post.

Since last General Assembly, there have been 41 applications. Five Certificates of Eligibility have been issued in the past 12 months, to ministers from the Disciples of Christ (1), Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (1), Presbyterian Church in Philippines (1), United Church in Southern Africa (Zimbabwe Presbytery) (2).

4. Admission to the roll of ministers of Word and Sacraments (from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025)

- 4.1 By ordination and induction: Joseph Amoah, Siobhan Louise Antoniou, Stephanie Grace Atkins, Carol Clack, Simon Cross, Julie Caroline Jefferies, Maria Jung Youn Lee, Kate Elaine Wolsey
- 4.2 By transfer from other churches: Julia Bartholomew (Church of Scotland), Stanslous Chatikobo (Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa), Alecia Patricia Johnstone (Assemblies of God)
- 4.3 By changes within the Roll of Ministers: There have been no changes within the roll of ministers.
- 4.4 Deletions from the Roll of Ministers:
By resignation: Paula Parish, Darryl Brenda Root
By transfer to another denomination: Helen Margaret Garton
By deletion under the disciplinary process: None to report.
- 4.5 Re-admission to the Roll: None to report
- 4.6 Jubilee Ministers:

Celebrating 60 years of ordained ministry in 2025:

Kenneth Graham, Malcolm Gerald Hanson, David Leslie Helyar, Donald Horsfield, Stuart Jackson, Derek John Kingston, Alwyn John Knight, Nanette Lewis-Head, Geoffrey Edward Hodgess Roper, Jacqueline Mary Smith, Keith John Spence, Raymond Brian Woodcock, Brian A Wren.

Celebrating 50 years of ordained ministry in 2025:

Bryan Michael Alderson, David Wilton Atkinson, Stuart James Brock, Martin Frederick Camroux, Graham Carling, Barry Edward Carter, Gwynfor Berwyn Evans, David Grosch-Miller, Moira Helen Kerr, Kenneth Orr Lynch, Marian Horman McKean, Robert Parker, Jaroslav Raich, Bryan Reginald Shirley, Robert Wylie White.

4.7 Ministers who have retired from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025:

Robert Andrew Barthram, Andrew Norris Birch, Ernest Geoffrey Bosse, Sarah Brewerton, Kenneth McArthur Forbes, Alan Gibbon, Richard Goldring, Joan Elizabeth Grindrod-Helmn, John Ashley Hardaker, Vivien Henderson, Terence James Hinks, John Graeme Kingsley, Peter James Little, John Mackerness, Rickey Lynn Mearkle, Shirley Margaret Miller, Helen Elizabeth Bain Pattie, Heather Joyce Pollard, Rosemary Pamela Shirley, Hans Stein, Graham Joseph Sweeney, Alison Anne Termie, Heather Whyte, Philip James Woods.

4.8 Ministers who have died from 12 July 2024 to 3 July 2025: Listed elsewhere.

5. Admissions to the roll of Church Related Community Workers (from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025):

- 5.1 By commissioning: Helen Snashall
- 5.2 Deletions from the roll by resignation and/or transfer to another denomination or by the disciplinary process: There have been no deletions to the roll.
- 5.3 CRCWs who have retired from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025:
Alison Wendy Dalton

6. Roll of Assembly-Accredited Lay Preachers

- 6.1 The following have received Assembly accreditation between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 as a result of having completed a URC course of study or having prior accreditation from another denomination:
01 Northern: Dorothy Thomson
02 North Western: Edward Hoddinott-Leighton, Tim Hopley
04 Yorkshire: Margaret Gwendoline Preece, Roland Graham Clark
05 East Midlands: Andrew William Bodsworth
06 West Midlands: Nathanael Michael Asher Paul
09 Wessex: John Douglas Sinclair
10 Thames North: Penny Stuart
13 Scotland: Laurence Wareing.

The following have received Assembly re-accreditation between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025: None to report.

- 6.2 Deletions from the Roll of Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers by resignation, removal and/or transfer to other Churches or death from 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025:
Gillian Lesley Bustard, Jack M Farraday, Peter Gerard Murphy, Alan John Myers, Wendy Elizabeth Smith, Hugh Meirion Williams.
- 6.3 Lay Preachers Retired from 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025:
Elizabeth Joy Brueck, Terence John Cooke-Davies, Pauline Angela Jones, Brenda Avril McCarron, Edwin Charles Rolles.

7. Roll of Assembly-Accredited Lay Pioneers

- 7.1 The following have received Assembly accreditation between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025 as a result of having completed a URC course of study:
05 East Midlands: Wendy Hall.

Assessment board

Convenor: Bill Gould

Secretary: Nicola Furley-Smith

Members: Liz Mullen (2), Keith Reading (3), Jamie Kissak (4), Liz Sharples (5), Samuel Silungwe (5), Mark Tubby (7), Sohail Ejaz (7) Gerald England (8), Sue McCoan (10), Martyn Neads (10), Simon Loveitt (11) Mercy Nimako (11), Jan Adamson (13).

Because of the spread of candidates across the Synods we have also needed to call upon the services of previous assessors: T Ewen Harley (13).

Flow of candidates

Since the 2024 report, one Assessment Conference has been held (March 2025). Overall, 13 candidates were considered by the Board, of whom 11 were accepted. Most of these candidates begin their EM1 training programme in the September after their acceptance, but, because of the portfolio nature of their training format, the NSM4 candidates are able to formally enter the training programme at other times of the year.

Flow of candidates chart

Date of conference		Number of candidates	Number accepted
March 2025	Non-Stipendiary CRCW	1	1
	Stipendiary Ministry	5	4
	Non-Stipendiary Ministry	5	4
	Non-Stipendiary Ministry 4	2	2
TOTAL		13	11

Students in Training, by Synod as of 31 March 2025:

02 North Western	CRCW	Joanne West
	Non-Stipendiary Ministry 4	Aftab Mughal Margaret Elizabeth Dexter-Brown
	Stipendiary Ministry	Tom Miller
03 Mersey	Non-Stipendiary Ministry	Rita Griffiths
06 West Midlands	Non-Stipendiary Ministry	Rachel Coward
	Stipendiary Ministry	Clare Nutbrown-Hughes Edward Lyne
07 Eastern	Non-Stipendiary Ministry	Charlotte Lesley Remblance Robert Dart
	Stipendiary Ministry	Alex Instone-Brewer Jo Moreira Machrina Suzi Ejaz

Tina Louise Wilson

08 South Western

Non-Stipendiary Ministry

Rachel Leach

Stipendiary Ministry

Alex Mabbott

09 Wessex

Non-Stipendiary Ministry 4

Sue Marie Nichols

Stipendiary Ministry

Abigail Ann Perrow

Simon Peters

10 Thames North

CRCW

Rachel Joanne Harvey

Stipendiary Ministry

Azeem Qadir Bakhsh

11 Southern

Non-Stipendiary Ministry

Joyce Edeki

Non-Stipendiary Ministry 4

Lynne Le Masonry

Susan Ann Knight

Stipendiary Ministry

Maurice Philips Omorojie

Yukyung Kim

13 Scotland

Non-Stipendiary Ministry 4

Eilidh Young

Margaret Winifred Higon

Stipendiary Ministry

Yvonne Carol Hamilton

Students in Training statistics as of 31 March 2025 chart:

	Students in training	Anticipated entry into URC service				
	March 2025	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
STIPENDIARY						
Northern College (RCL) CRCW	2		1	1		
Northern College (RCL) MWS	6	2	2	1	1	
Scottish College (RCL)	1					1
Westminster College (RCL)	7	1	2	3	1	
Subtotal	16	3	5	5	2	1
NON-STIPENDIARY						
Northern College (RCL)	3			2	1	
Scottish College (RCL)						
Westminster College (RCL)	3		1	2		
Subtotal	6	0	1	4	1	
NON-STIPENDIARY 4						
Northern College (RCL)	2	1	1			
Scottish College (RCL)	3	1	1	1		
Westminster College (RCL)	2	1		1		
Subtotal	7	3	2	2	0	0
GRAND TOTAL	29	6	8	11	3	1

Admittance to the URC Roll of Ministers:

		Type of ministry	Date of ordination	Date into URC	MS History for Yrbook
Joseph	Amoah	Stipendiary Minister	27/07/2024		Harrogate St Paul's 2024-
Siobhan	Antoniou	Stipendiary Minister	07/09/2024		Reigate Park 2024-; Banstead 2024-; Dorking 2024-; Redhill 2024-
Stephanie	Atkins	Stipendiary Minister	28/09/2024		Greater Manchester South Missional Partnership 2024-
Julia	Bartholomew	Stipendiary Minister		24/08/2024	Church of Scotland - 2012; Old Colwyn 2012-20; Rhos-on-Sea 2012-24.
Stanslous	Chatikobo	Stipendiary Minister	16/05/1999	07/05/2024	Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa 1999-2024; Trinity Church, Ashwell & Walkern & Sandon United Church 2024-
Simon	Cross	Stipendiary Minister	03/08/2024		Hull Area: Hull St Ninians & St Andrews, Cottingham Zion & Newland, Swanland Christ Church, Peters House 2024-
Julie	Jefferies	Non-Stipendiary Minister	21/09/2024		Prestbury URC 2024-
Alecia	Johnstone	Stipendiary Minister	01/07/2018	07/08/2024	Assemblies of God 2018-24; North Western Synod, Chaplain at HMP/YOI Preston 2024-
Maria	Lee	Stipendiary Minister	20/07/2024		Chelmsford CRCW Project 2018-22; Westminster College 2022-24; Bolton & Salford Missional Partnership 2024-
Kate	Wolsey	Stipendiary Minister	01/09/2024		Pembrokeshire Transitional Minister 2024-

Paper H4

Review of the URC Retirement Policy

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 28 General Assembly notes the report from Ministries Committee on the review of the URC Ministerial Retirement Policy and the Policy for the Extension to the Normal Retirement Age. Resolution 29 In light of the report, General Assembly is a) minded to move towards the removal of a Normal Retirement Age and instructs Ministries Committee to continue its work on the implications of the removal and bring appropriate proposals to Assembly Executive in February 2026. OR In light of the report, General Assembly is b) not minded to move towards the removal of a Normal Retirement Age and instructs Ministries Committee to continue its work on the Policy for the Extension to the Normal Retirement Age and bring appropriate proposals to Assembly Executive in February 2026.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Ministries has done significant work on reviewing the URC Ministerial Retirement Policy and the Process for the Extension to the Normal Retirement Age. In doing so, the review has raised several areas requiring further work as listed in the main points below before consideration should be given to removing the Normal Retirement Age of 68. Whilst recognising there is outstanding work still to be done, it is minded that it will be helpful to hear General Assembly's view on the removal of the retirement age.
Main points	Further work needs to be done on: 1. the process of Call and the process for Withdrawing a Call.

	<p>2. the process for reconfiguring pastorates.</p> <p>3. including the Competency and Incapacity processes within the Section O procedure so the Church can utilise the skills of those it has tasked and trained to discern in difficult situations.</p> <p>4. learning from those denominations that do not have a normal retirement age how they manage ongoing appraisals to ensure that ministers are still effective in their role. This learning will impact on our policies and processes around wellbeing, health and competency.</p> <p>5. any legal considerations.</p> <p>However, Ministries Committee would like to hear the views of General Assembly before bringing a definitive response to Assembly Executive 2026.</p>
Previous relevant documents	X3 Thames North Retirement Resolution GA 2024 (withdrawn) H4 Extension to the Normal Retirement Age Policy GA 2023 Ministries Committee Commentary URC Ministers Retirement Policy 2019.
Consultation has taken place with...	Resources Committee Synod Moderators Ministers with ten years before retirement.

Summary of impact

Financial	Some.
External (eg ecumenical)	Consulation with ecumenical partners: The Baptist Union of Great Britain, The Church of England, The Church of Scotland, The Congregational Federation, Eglwys Bresbyteraidd Cymru (Presbyterian Church of Wales), The Moravian Church.

- At General Assembly 2024, Ministries gave their assurance it would undertake a review of the current URC Ministerial Retirement Policy. Its aim was to look at current practice and ascertain whether the legitimate aims were still relevant in light of declining numbers of stipendiary ministers and falling M&M receipts. At present, all ministers are expected to retire on or before the end of the month of their 68th birthday. If they do not wish to retire then they may seek an extension using the URC Extension to the Normal Retirement Age Policy.
- The URC has previously considered that there are the following legitimate strategic objectives and denominational reasons for a Normal Retirement Age and that these aims cannot reasonably be met by other means namely:
 - The promotion of intergenerational fairness and dignity**
This means creating a balanced denominational ministerial team by promoting access to ministry for younger people; the efficient planning of the retirement and

Call of ministers; the sharing of opportunities for ministers fairly between the generations; ensuring the mix of generations so as to promote the exchange of experience and new ideas amongst ministers; avoiding disputes with older ministers over their fitness to minister.

b) The management of the number of serving ministers in a shrinking denomination

The total number of ministers needs to be managed year on year in order to match the needs of the denomination, local churches and available funding. There needs to be the opportunity and available funds for new ministers to be trained and called to ministry. It is important to ensure that there are opportunities for new ministers to come through with fresh ideas.

The changing demographics of the denomination has resulted in ministers having to take on more and different duties, which enhance the risk of health and safety issues, eg extended hours, stress, emotional fatigue and other potential issues such as the increased risk of legal claims.

The criteria for seeking an extension have always been considered against the legitimate strategic objectives and denominational reasons within the URC retirement policy¹. This approach takes into account issues such as the health and safety of the individual and also the public interest and is an outworking of our understanding of the Gospel imperative to treat all people with dignity.

3. As part of the review, Ministries felt it was the right time also to reconsider:
 - 3.1 the Call process and the extension to the retirement age
 - 3.2 why the current legitimate aims may or may not be relevant
 - 3.3 the financial implications in removing the retirement age
 - 3.4 ecumenical considerations in removing the normal retirement age
 - 3.5 to make recommendations to Ministries Committee as to what changes, if any, might be required to bring proposals to General Assembly 2025.
4. The Ministries Committee has consulted with Synod Moderators, the Resources Committee, the Legal Adviser and active stipendiary and non-stipendiary ministers over the age of 55. The latter group were surveyed anonymously through an online questionnaire. The following is a summary of the review.
5. **The Call process**
 - 5.1 In the United Reformed Church, ministry is exercised by the whole people of God. Call and vocation are intrinsic to our faith. God calls and we respond, seeking ways to use our God-given gifts, talents, abilities, and opportunities, to be faithful followers and God's presence in the world. Every moment of every day for every follower of Jesus is a response to this call on our lives; all people are called by God – believers or not. However, within the whole people of God 'the Lord Jesus

¹ See the commentary on the normal retirement age: www.urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/2023-GA-H4-Extension-beyond-the-Normal-Retirement-Age.pdf

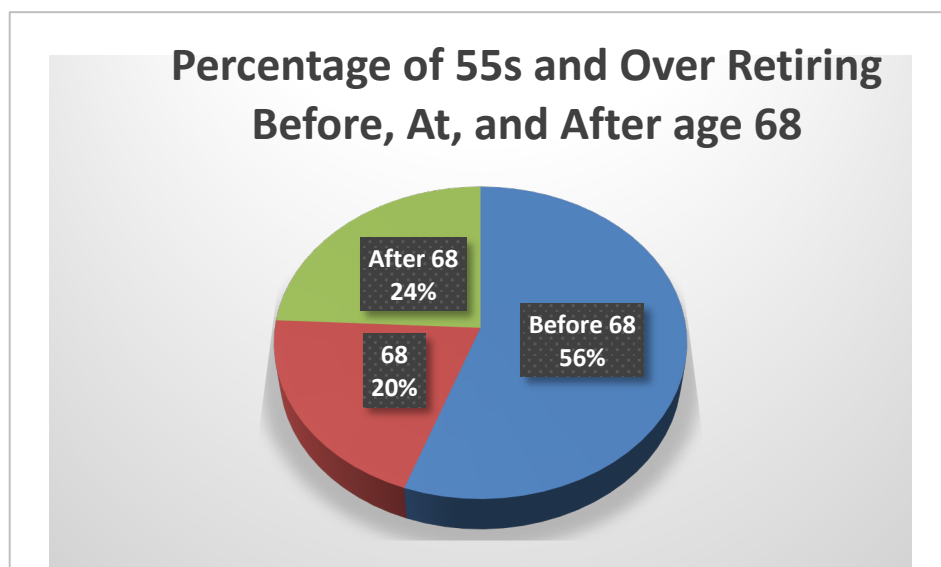
Christ gives particular gifts for particular ministries and calls some of his servants to exercise them in offices duly recognised within his Church' (Basis of Union, paragraph 20).

- 5.2 Where someone feels a sense of prompting by God to ordained or commissioned ministry the URC seeks to discern this vocation through its various Councils. The Assessment Board discerns if the call is to Church Related Community Work or the Ministry of Word and Sacraments. The Reformed tradition always sites Call to ministry within the context of the consent of the people with whom ministers serve. According to the Basis of Union, those called as Ministers of the Word and Sacraments '...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' (Basis of Union, paragraph 21). Those called as Church Related Community Workers '... may be called to be Church Related Community Workers in a post approved by the United Reformed Church, are then commissioned to the office of Church Related Community Worker and inducted to serve in a particular post for a designated period.' (Basis of Union, paragraph 22).
- 5.3 There are three 'parties' in the Call process: the minister, the local pastorate or post, and the Synod. Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers are called to their particular ministry normally by a Church Meeting or combined Church Meetings in a Joint or Group Pastorate, or by a Call Group which acts on behalf of a Synod or the General Assembly to which the wider Councils of the Church are asked to concur. Therefore, the Basis of Union, is clear that the call of God is confirmed by one of the Councils of the Church. Our Councils determine where and when ministry is needed and ensure good order.
- 5.4 For the most part, the URC does not have termed ministry aside from General Assembly posts, LEPs, SCMs, or CRCW posts. Therefore, posts are open ended until such time as the minister is called elsewhere. Ministries Committee noted that one reason why the Duty to Consider Policy (GA 2012) was formulated was so that some local churches, while honouring the service given by the minister to the point of retirement, would prefer that ministry now to come to an end. Current practice about retirement age enables this to happen while minimizing the potential for embarrassment.
- 5.5 It was also noted that ministers did not have to retire at the age of 68, but could extend their ministry through the Accreditations sub-committee provided certain criteria were met and to honour the three 'parties' in the Call process. The process also took into consideration the needs of the minister, the local pastorate, the Synod/denomination:
 - a) Whether the pastorate wished the minister to continue;
 - b) Whether an extension fitted in with the Synod's deployment policy;
 - c) Whether the Synod was over its allocation of full-time stipendiary equivalents.
- 5.6 A policy which has a normal retirement age allows the voice of the local churches and the Synod to discern whether the Call is still present.
- 5.7 The role of the Accreditations sub-committee was to monitor minister numbers, ensure finance was available to pay stipends for those ministry numbers, and to keep to the legitimate aims of the Retirement Policy.

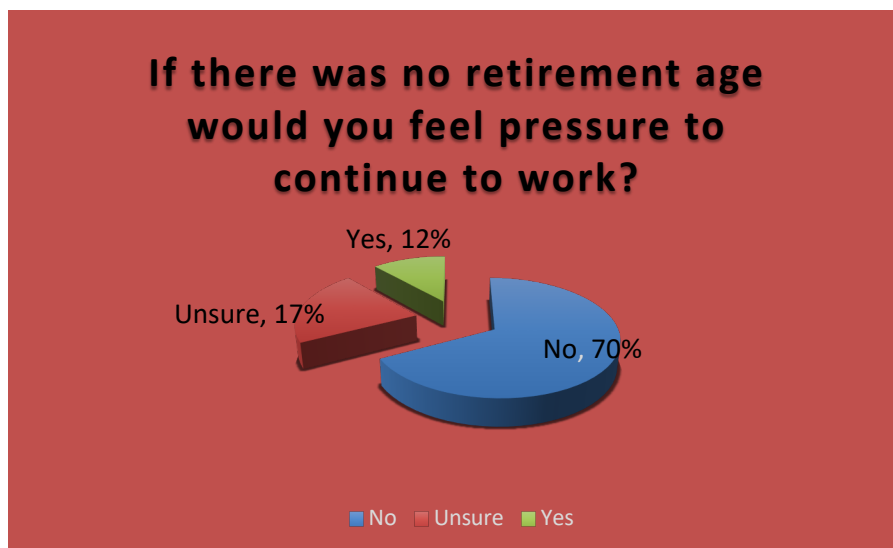
- 5.8 The Duty to Consider paper has undergone tidying up revisions since 2012 the last being at General Assembly Paper H3 2023 which resolved that all extensions to the normal retirement age would be considered by the Accreditations sub-committee to allow for consistency and to enable Ministries to track numbers to available finance for stipends. The policy changed its name from Duty to Consider to the URC Procedure for the Extension to Stipendiary Ministerial Service beyond the Normal Retirement Age.

6. The survey

- 6.1 In late November 2024, all active stipendiary and non-stipendiary ministers (MWS and CRCWs) aged 55 and over were asked to complete a short survey about their preferred age of retirement. Responses were confidential and they were asked to imagine what their answer might be if there were no compulsory retirement age. 259 ministers were asked to complete the survey. All were asked to state their preferred year of retirement. 153 ministers responded (a 59% response rate) – 128 stipendiary (62%) and 22 non-stipendiary (42%). (Three did not disclose their status and so their responses have not been analysed.)
- 6.2 The age of stipendiary ministers ranged from 55 to 73. There has been a fear that if there were no normal retirement age the MoM fund would be somewhat stretched. Figures, however, show many more ministers wishing to retire before the age of 68 than working after it. This includes both SMs and NSMs:



- 6.3 It is presumed that some respondents had an ideal retirement age earlier than their current age possibly linked to receiving the state pension before the age of 68.
- 6.4 Stipendiary ministers were asked if they would feel pressurised to continue to work if a compulsory retirement age were abolished:



6.5 45 stipendiary ministers responded. 44% (20) would not wish to continue to work after their retirement age; 20% (9) would wish to continue to work whilst 35% (16) were unsure.

6.6 A normal retirement age allows the Ministries Office to easily track retirements to balance against those newly Called to train for formal ministry. For example, this is done via the URC database which tracks those who should be invited to the Pre-retirement Course in a timely manner, five years from retirement. Whilst there may be other ways of tracking, they are less efficient for Synod deployment purposes where the tracking of retirements assists reconfiguration of pastorates.

6.7 Perhaps the most alarming thing about this survey is that 12% of ministers said they would feel pressured to remain in service with a further 19% being unsure. Anecdotal, when the retirement age was raised from 65 to 68 years, the option was given to ministers to retire at 65. Many did not opt to retire at 65 because they felt the pressure that they would be letting down the denomination by not continuing in service.

7. Financial resources required for stipendiary ministry

7.1 General Assembly 2024 agreed to the linking of stipendiary ministry costs to M&M receipts.

7.2 Ministries sent a series of questions to the URC Resources Committee to ask the impact of removing the retirement age may have on finance available for stipends.

7.3 The Resources Committee responded that, given that the vast majority of ministers are wishing to retire at or before 68, there doesn't seem to be any evidence that removing the retirement age will have a significant financial implication. There is a theoretical maximum under the tracking formula, but this is unlikely to cause the denomination to hit that at present.

7.4 Considerable progress has been made in Synods funding the deficit in M&M receipts. However, the real issue is that this 'sticking plaster' is not likely to work from 2026 or 2027 onwards. Depending on the Church Life Review, the

Resources Committee may well need to work with Synods to redefine the M&M process in 2026. Thus, in 2025 and 2026 the Synods will, more-or-less, take up the slack left by the churches. By 2027 the churches' giving may reduce by more than 25% compared to 2023 receipts; this will be problematic. If the denomination has not managed to work out some plan for 2027 and beyond, it would see a significant drop in 2027 M&M and then possibly a 2%-3% annual decline thereafter.

8. Ecumenical considerations

- 8.1 Of our closest ecumenical partners, it is only the Baptist Union of Great Britain who do not have a normal retirement age. They have ten non-retired accredited ministers who are 75 years or older. They rely on a capability procedure to move people into retirement when they no longer become fit to serve. In theory this is instigated by a church seeking to remove the minister for being incapable, after which the denomination may instigate their own capability hearing that will consider whether they remain on the list of active accredited ministers.
- 8.2 Most of our closest ecumenical partners ensure the competence of ministers through an annual appraisal. The URC does not.
9. Ministries Committee has deliberately not made a recommendation to General Assembly about whether to remove the retirement age or not. However Ministries Committee wishes General Assembly to be aware that the review has raised some interesting issues:
- 9.1 At present, there are only five ministers who serve beyond the age of 68. The recent survey does not suggest a significant demand for retiring beyond the age of 68 (the survey suggests 37) and this number can be sustained under the present finances of the denomination. However, this needs to be balanced against those candidating for ministry.
- 9.2 However, the survey also showed that, of the 153 ministers who responded (59% of ministers surveyed), if there were no retirement age 12% voiced they would feel pressure to continue to work, with a further 17% unsure. This is a higher number than Ministries would have liked or anticipated. Further, there is anecdotal evidence from Synod Minister gatherings that ministers may feel pressurised into working beyond the normal retirement age even though they feel burned out.
- 9.3 Some local churches, while honouring the service given by the minister to the point of retirement, would prefer that ministry now to come to an end. A Normal Retirement Age enables this to happen without embarrassment or hard feelings.
- 9.4 Anecdotal evidence reveals that some churches are reluctant to use the Withdrawal of Call process when things go awry, leaving damaged relationships.
- 9.5 Further, those Synods that have used the URC Competency Process have found the process takes too long. There are also ongoing talks as to whether Competency and Incapacity should be linked into the Section O process.

- 9.6 There is also anecdotal evidence that the removal of a Normal Retirement Age is a complication to the Process for Reconfiguring Pastorates and Scopings and planning for deployment.
- 9.7 Those denominations who have either raised their retirement age or have no retirement age at all have a mechanism to monitor fitness to practice in the form of an annual Ministerial Development Review or equivalent. At present, the URC has no such mechanism and can only draw a ministry to a close with the Withdrawal of Call Process or the URC Competency Process.
10. Therefore, Ministries Committee has identified the need for further work to be done in terms of the Call process and consultation around a number of areas:
- The process of Call and the process for withdrawing a call
 - The process for reconfiguring pastorates
 - To potentially include the competency and incapacity processes within the Section O process so the Church can utilise the skills of those it has tasked and trained to discern in difficult situations
 - To learn from those denominations that do not have a set retirement age how they manage ongoing appraisals to ensure that ministers are still effective in their role. This learning will impact on our policies and processes around wellbeing, health and competency
 - Any legal considerations.
11. Ministries Committee also believes the denomination would benefit from a fuller discussion at General Assembly around whether to remove the Normal Retirement Age or not.
12. Ministries Committee gives General Assembly the assurance that such a discussion will assist the Ministries Committee in formulating any future proposals along with the five areas of work named above and that this will be the main focus of its committee over the next year in order to bring something to Assembly Executive 2026.

Paper H5

Sabbaticals

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk Nicola Furley-Smith nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 30 General Assembly agrees to ministerial sabbaticals being seven years from the previous sabbatical.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	At present, Ministers on the United Reformed Church payroll may apply for a sabbatical term every ten years since the last one. Ministries Committee suggests now is the time that this should be changed to every seven years from the last sabbatical.
Main points	See above.
Previous relevant documents	N/A
Consultation has taken place with...	N/A

Summary of impact

Financial	Sabbatical grants will be paid out every seven years.
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

1. The term 'sabbatical' or 'rest' derives originally from the Old Testament and related to the Sabbath, the weekly day of rest and delight in God (Exodus 34:21; Isaiah 58:13-4). In the sabbatical year, every seven years, complete rest was commanded for the land, with no sowing or reaping, and the remission of debts and release of Hebrew slaves (Leviticus 25:4; Deuteronomy 15:1,12). To take a Sabbath is to rest from our productivity so that we can have a closer relationship with God, self, and others.
2. The URC defines a ministerial sabbatical as a period of release from the ordinary duties of the ministry, in addition to normal holidays, for the purpose of pursuing an approved programme of study, research, or experience. It is for vocational development and refreshment.

3. Sabbaticals are opportunities to re-train, refresh and renew the very core from which future ministry may develop and grow. Normally the length of the sabbatical is three months. It is usually taken in a three-month block and special permission is required for any change to this arrangement.
4. Sabbaticals can be extremely beneficial both for the individual minister, and for the health of the wider Church. The care and wellbeing of ministers is crucial to the health of the mission of the church. Healthy, fulfilled, maturing, joyful ministers who feel valued and supported are an enormous gift to God's Church. A sense of being cared for and loved will give energy and vigour when they face ministerial or pastoral challenges.
5. Well-being is more than just 'feeling good'. A positive well-being involves the interplay of physical, emotional, and spiritual health, together with the availability and quality of personal and professional relationships, within the wider context of vocation, all contribute to an overall sense of well-being. Taking a sabbatical is just one of a number of ways in which the denomination has sought to support the wellbeing of ministers.
6. At present Ministers on the Roll of the United Reformed Church may apply for a sabbatical term every ten years since the last one. Ministries Committee suggests now is the time that this should be changed to every seven years from the last sabbatical. After all, there is biblical precedent for such a suggestion as shown above.
7. The table below shows the number of ministers who will take/have taken a sabbatical by Synod since 2019.

Year	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	Total
2019		1	2	2	0	0	2	0	3			0		10
2020		1	1	0	0	2	3	0	0			1		8
2021			2	2	3	0	0	1	2		6	1		17
2022		2	0	2	1	3	1	1	5		5	1		21
2023	2	3	3	0	1	2	3	2	2		2	3		23
2024	2	3	2	1	2	0	4	1	1		1	0	4	21
2025	2		1	0	2	2	6	3	1	7	1	1		26

Of course, the totals are inaccurate, as some ministers did not take their sabbatical in the allotted year because of Covid-19. Some Synods gave their figures as total numbers since 2019, hence the blank spaces in the table and a large figure in 2024 and 2025.

8. Ministries Committee has consulted with the Treasurer and Chief Finance Officer, the M&M fund would be able to sustain the change to seven years due to the lower number of ministers eligible for a sabbatical in the future.
9. All ministers on the URC Roll of Ministers can apply for a sabbatical, although it is recognised that there are implications for non-stipendiary ministers if in secular employment.
10. It is intended that the sabbatical grant remains up to £1,200 travel, books, equipment etc. Similarly, sabbaticals of less than three months' duration will receive a

proportionately lower grant (eg for a two-month sabbatical, the maximum grant will be £800).

11. In addition to the sabbatical grant, the £700 EM3 grant can also be claimed in that year.
12. Other sources of support for sabbaticals may be available and should be applied for before making an application to the United Reformed Church EM3 Fund, ie the Coward Trust, and for sabbaticals involving travel outside Britain, the United Reformed Church's Mission department administers the Belonging to the World Church Programme.
13. Ministries Committee anticipates that, should this be agreed by General Assembly, there may be a rush of those who have served seven years from their last sabbatical. However, to ensure not too many ministers are away from their pastorates, if ministers (Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers) are due a sabbatical, they should contact their Training and Development Officer or equivalent who, in consultation with the Synod Moderator, will give priority to those who are due a sabbatical ten years' from their last one. We believe this staggered approach is fair to all concerned.
14. All other requirements around sabbaticals remain as before the change.
15. It is proposed that the change to the time between sabbaticals begins in January 2026.

Paper H6

Renaming of Models of Non-Stipendiary Ministry

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk Nicola Furley-Smith nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 31 General Assembly adopts the following designations for Non-Stipendiary ministry: Non-Stipendiary Minister and Non-Stipendiary Minister (Local) for ministry of the Word and Sacraments and Non-Stipendiary CRCW and Non-Stipendiary CRCW (Local) for Church Related Community Workers.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Ministries Committee has been troubled in recent years by a lack of understanding of different forms of non-stipendiary ministry by candidates and students who are more aware of their own sense of Call than the Church's discernment and organisation of ministry. This has led to difficulties in training and on into ministry. Renaming the models will reflect how students are trained whilst the designations 1-4 for Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and 1-3 for Church Related Community Workers will be retained for internal purposes only.
Main points	See above.
Previous relevant documents	Section M of The Manual.
Consultation has taken place with...	RCL Principals.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
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External (eg ecumenical)	None.
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1. Non-stipendiary ministry has been one of God's gifts to the churches. Much valuable service has been undertaken within the URC by Non-Stipendiary Ministers (NSMs). It is an important principle that there is an essential parity within the ordained Ministry of the Word and Sacraments (MWS) and within the ministry of Church Related Community Work (CRCW). It is also important that we sometimes respond to God's call to new, emerging and pioneering ministries, as well as chaplaincy ministry. Non-stipendiary ministry has often been that important response to God's call.
2. There are four models of non-stipendiary service for ministry of the Word and Sacraments mentioned in Section M of the Manual:
 - Model 1 – service in a congregation as part of a team. The pattern is taken from the former eldership of the Churches of Christ and is a limited local ministry. We currently have three ministers in this form of service;
 - Model 2 – pastoral charge of a small congregation, or service as part of a team of ministers caring for a group of churches. We currently have 39 ministers in this form of service;
 - Model 3 – ministers in secular employment. Service set apart to be a focus for mission in the place of work or leisure. It is related to a local church or Synod. We currently have 11 ministers in this form of service, of which three serve the Synod directly;
 - Model 4 – service in a local setting with training tailored to a specific role description and ministry vision. We currently have four ministers in this form of service.
3. There are three models of non-stipendiary ministry for Church Related Community Work:
 - Model 1 – service in an accredited CRCW posts. They can also serve as part of a team alongside a Minister of Word and Sacraments as in Model 1 above. We have no CRCWs in this form of service;
 - Model 3 – Church Related Community Workers in secular employment and Church Related Community Workers working for the URC or other Christian organisations or denominations. Service set apart to be a focus for mission in the place of work or leisure. It is related to a local church or Synod. We have no CRCWs in this form of service;
 - Locally training, Locally Commissioned – service in a local setting with training tailored to the specific role description and ministry vision. We have no CRCWs in this form of service.
4. In practice, the majority of NSM Ministers of Word and Sacraments now serve under Model 2, arguably filling gaps in deployment. The denomination has not trained any Non-Stipendiary CRCWs, with only two coming to the Assessment Conference since its introduction, although one candidate starts training in September.
5. Post pandemic, we have seen the number of candidates offering themselves for non-stipendiary ministry increase and, for this, we give thanks.

6. The Colleges train for just two models of non-stipendiary Ministry of the Word and Sacraments:
 - Models 1-3 – normally a Common Awards theological diploma or degree (or a diploma or degree from the University of Aberdeen) alongside placements and a programme of ministerial formation lasting four years. The ordinand is expected, once ordained, to serve where the Synod determines there is greatest need after consultation with both the ordinand and the pastorate. Students are not trained to a particular model of non-stipendiary service.
 - Model 4 – Ordinands normally build a portfolio demonstrating evidence of reflective practice in the common tasks of ministry. They may study Common Awards Foundation modules Level 4 for audit or take modules from Aberdeen University in theology. They may take courses tailored to a specific role description. All NSM 4 ordinands undertake a programme of ministerial formation in no less than two years. After ordination the student is expected to serve the church/pastorate/post as described in their application for ministry.
7. Whilst models of service are important, not least as part of the heritage of the United Reformed Church,¹ we do not, at present, designate stipendiary ministers differently according to their form of service, so Ministries Committee suggests we should not do so with non-stipendiary ministers. The only exception to this is for internal Ministries Office administrative purposes to monitor spheres of service for the church for the Active Minister Policy.
8. The Ministries Committee has been troubled in recent years by a lack of understanding of different forms of ministry by candidates and students who are more aware of their own sense of Call than the Church's discernment and organisation of ministry.
9. Non-Stipendiary service is generalist as ministry is generalist and can be undertaken in a variety of settings: local churches, Synods, chaplaincy etc.
10. The Ministries Committee, therefore, proposes to simplify the designations to
 - Non-Stipendiary Minister, and Non-Stipendiary Minister (Local)
Local being the former Model 4
 - Non-Stipendiary CRCW, and Non-Stipendiary CRCW (Local)
Local being the former Model locally trained, locally commissioned with such designations being used for internal URC purposes, but expects such ministers and CRCWs, and the churches and projects they serve, to be referred simply as 'Ministers' and 'CRCWs' as appropriate.

¹ Proposals for Unification were produced and approved by General Assembly in 1980. These Proposals accepted the URC's work on Auxiliary Ministry (1976) to reflect the Churches of Christ tradition, and it was to this Auxiliary Ministry that many Churches of Christ elders were ordained following unification in 1981.

Paper I1

Report to General Assembly 2025

Mission Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of Mission Committee slanecawte@gmail.com Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary (Mission) philip.brooks@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This report provides an update on the work of the Mission Committee and the Mission Team.
Main points	The report covers the areas for which Mission Committee is responsible, namely: Evangelism, Ecumenism, Public Issues and Community Engagement, Interfaith Relations, Greenbelt, Commitment for Life, Global and Intercultural Ministries, and Net Zero Task Group.
Previous relevant documents	Mission Committee Report to General Assembly 2023 Mission Report to Assembly Executive 2025.
Consultation has taken place with...	The Mission Committee works in regular consultation with other Assembly Committees and related staff.

Summary of impact

Financial	All within current budgets.
External (eg ecumenical)	This report provides an update on many areas of ecumenical cooperation.

Introduction

Mission Committee's stated brief is to seek to encourage growth in evangelism, discipleship and witness by:

- continuously evaluating the place of evangelism and mission within the work of Assembly;
- reflecting on the Church's mission practice and theology;
- formulating policy, strategies and programme (action) priorities;
- reading the signs of the times and speaking prophetically;
- working with partners.

This report provides an overview of each area for which the Mission Committee is responsible.

Evangelism

FaithTalk Webinars

Inspired by Mersey Synod, this is a denominational series with a growing momentum. At the spring FaithTalk webinar, Trey Hall, director for evangelism and growth at the Methodist Church, led a session looking at the role of prayer in evangelism. The second webinar of 2025 will take place on 23 September at 7pm and will also feature a special guest. The webinars are intended to be a relaxed forum to encourage people to share stories around their faith. The planning group represents a broad spectrum of the Church. Please do share dates in your Synods and among your networks.

Evangelism Webpage

This is a new development on the URC website and is updated regularly: (www.urc.org.uk/your-faith/evangelism-in-the-urc). It includes various Synod initiatives and strategies and a wide range of other resources to use locally. The recommendation is to tailor what you do to your local situation and the people you have available: there is no 'one size fits all' for evangelism! The starting point (other than prayer) will almost always be about welcome and growing relationships.

Partnership with Ugly Duckling Charity/Table Talk

The Mission and Discipleship teams are working with the Ugly Duckling Charity to produce branded coasters for use as conversation starters at church and Synod events. The coasters have thought-provoking questions on them to encourage deepening relationships (and a link to new daily questions) and could be used as a pre-evangelisation tool. Every URC church will be sent a small sample. Churches who wish to order more will only need to pay for the cost of postage and packing. This is an exciting initiative, funded by the Discipleship Development Fund. Churches are encouraged to use the coasters creatively.

Mission Enablers Network

The network meets regularly both online and in-person. Members of the network draw support, encouragement and inspiration from one another, despite their roles varying considerably, according to context. There are currently several Synods which are under-represented. Synods are encouraged to take an active part in the network, which provides mutual support and the sharing of creative ideas.

Conversations at the Crossroads: Towards new Christian communities

A gathering of URC mission and discipleship animators

In January 2025, 100 URC 'animators' were gathered by the Church House Mission and Discipleship Teams. The first wave of invitations went to the Synod networks of Mission Enablers, Training Officers, Children and Youth Officers, CRCWs, Special Category Ministers and principals and staff of the Resource Centres for Learning. In addition, invitations went to Moderators, ordained and lay people in pioneering roles, and ecumenical guests.

To have this rich mix all together provided a unique opportunity for sharing and learning from one another, making new connections, and understanding the Church from different perspectives. There was also a more focused purpose – to explore current practice and to learn from ongoing challenges and success stories, in order to establish new Christian communities. The conversations were guided for us by an independent facilitator in mission and pioneering, Dr Nigel Pimlott.

There was much discussion of our use of language. New Christian communities could be anything from a full church plant, a mission project, or a fresh expression. It could be a light-touch model, with little formal structure, to a full-blown constituted unincorporated association or Local Ecumenical Partnership. Those gathered sought to hear others' experiences of establishing and nurturing a range of Christian communities with the opportunity to discuss what works, and what can get in the way.

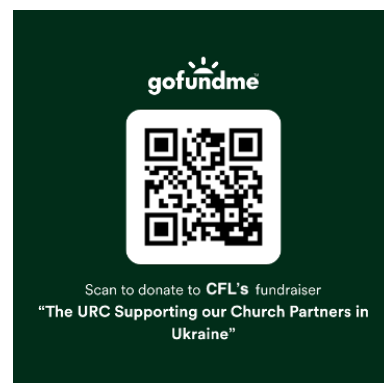
There were a number of ecumenical guests present, who immersed themselves in the table groups and downtime, so that they could contribute to the conversations and reflect back some of what they heard. Three of them joined a panel discussion, during which emerged some very straightforward takeaways, including the overriding need for prayer, and for partnership. One very successful example began with a small prayer group nearly 20 years ago, and the faithful, prayerful commitment of that first group has since borne extraordinary fruit. The conversation concluded by encouraging the Church in 'midwifing' new communities but also highlighting the need for palliative care for some, and for nurturing and/or reinvigorating others.

The conversations were recorded in many ways, through a graphic artist, through Slido polls, feedback sessions, gathered notes on flipcharts and post-its. Our facilitator also captured his sense of the main principles and themes that had emerged, which included the need to be intentional; to develop and deepen relationships; to increase evangelism; to animate local change with central support; to embed 'both/and' thinking; to lessen organisational burdens and to take more risks. He identified some themes which he heard, around death and resurrection; each of us taking responsibility for where we are; the great value in the wide diversity of views (we are a Church which also operates like a network or movement); the centrality of evangelism and that together, in our different ways, we are all seeking the kingdom.

A new Church Life Review working group is working on the next steps.

Commitment for Life

Commitment for Life (CFL) income has shown an overall increase thanks to the generosity of URC members who have ensured that the CFL appeals continue to be well supported. Alongside the much valued regular local church contributions to CFL, there have been several focussed appeals. The Gaza appeal has so far raised £28,547.00. The Joint Methodist/URC Justice Appeal for Gaza and Lebanon has raised over £25,000. The Ukraine appeal is ongoing, and we ask General Assembly representatives to share this appeal to encourage congregations in their support for our partners in Transcarpathia and in response to the resolution passed at the 2023 General Assembly, brought by East Midlands Synod. We are grateful to Children's and Youth Work for collaborating on our Greta Global Resource that focuses on supporting refugees and internally displaced persons in Transcarpathia, western Ukraine. You can find out more here: www.urc.org.uk/your-church/church-local-and-global/commitment-for-life/ukraine-appeal.



Presbyterian Church in Myanmar Appeal

The United Reformed Church has a long and close relationship with the Presbyterian Church in Myanmar (PCM) (www.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 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, a URC appeal for the PCM was launched to our local churches. An email was sent to Church Secretaries, since publicity through social media and the website could have posed potential dangers of persecution to the Church in Myanmar. There was a magnificent response from local URCs with over 50 churches contributing more than £18,000. This impressive figure has been matched by the historic Yangon fund.

Responding to the successful appeal, the General Secretary of the PCM, Revd Pek Muan Cuang, wrote:

We are overjoyed! Thanks to God, and to URC and all the members of local churches who shared the concern for us. We felt reassurance that we are not suffering alone in this turmoil but have people around the world praying for us.

We will be praying and committed to that your generous collections will work at its full potential for suffering people from Myanmar, especially our crisis affected families in Christ. We will also be making sure to share the information of the works of your kindness and prayers. So that the joy for the fruits of your kindness is echoing back to you and we can praise and thank our Lord together.

The Council for World Mission finance team assisted the URC in transferring the funds to the PCM. Since this appeal you will have heard of the devastating earthquake which hit Myanmar. Despite not being significantly directly affected by it, the PCM immediately began relief efforts to support their neighbours in other regions. URC churches have been supporting through the Disasters Relief Committee and Seedbeds www.seedbeds.org/burma-earthquake-emergency-appeal.

Jamaica

The Commitment for Life Reference Group is outlining a way to play its part in supporting the United Reformed Church's commitment to reparations for the role played by our antecedent congregations in the transatlantic slave trade. A discussion took place as to what a partnership might entail, including which projects we might usefully support. A consultation with CFL churches is underway, asking whether they would support taking on Jamaica as a fourth region, alongside Bangladesh, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (IOPT) and Zimbabwe. The premise is that Jamaica, as a possible fourth CFL region would receive 18.75% of CFL donations (around £35,000 per year). The money would be given to our church partner, the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, through the Churches' Reparations Action Forum, for a term of five years with a review to be conducted in year four. Ideally, we would look to be linked to a specific project, such as the new Free Villages. Once the results of the consultation have been received, a final decision will be taken.

Global Justice Now

An organisation supported by CFL, Global Justice Now is working on a campaign focussing on the US/UK Trade Deal. This deal covers food services and the quality of food. Global Justice Now advocates for limits to be placed on the power of corporate

monopolies as well as the trade in military technology. Illegal wars are frequently used as testing grounds for such technology. See www.globaljustice.org.uk for more information.

Christian Aid

Our primary partner, Christian Aid (CA), has announced that it is moving to a new organisational model which it hopes will make it a better steward of the resources entrusted to it by us and other supporters. The aim is to become more responsive and accountable to communities living in poverty. This new structure will entail setting up five hubs located in Bogota, Abuja, Nairobi, Amman, and Dhaka. Each hub will be responsible for a multi-country cluster of national and cross-border programmes. The changes, it is hoped, will reinforce CA's identity as the agency that enables British and Irish churches to work out their solidarity and compassion for the world's poorest and most marginalised people. CA will continue both to alleviate suffering in humanitarian emergencies, and to tackle the root causes of poverty through their four programme themes: peacebuilding; gender justice; governance and rights; climate adaptation and resilience. It is worth noting that, under the current American administration, countless global development programmes have had to be put on hold due to funding cuts. This is aggravated by UK aid budget cuts. In this context, the support of the United Reformed Church, through Commitment for Life contributions to CA partner projects, becomes even more vital.

Lay Preacher Training

A second successful Commitment for Life Lay Preachers' training event was held at Luther King House. The aim of these sessions is to train Lay Preachers who can lead creative and engaging global justice services of worship in local churches. Every available place on the course was taken and the training was enthusiastically received. Lay preachers are already beginning to take CFL services.

Global and Intercultural Ministries

URC global relationships

Global and Intercultural Ministries is a main point of contact for many of the URC's global relationships. Many (but not all) of these relationships arise through our membership of the Council for World Mission (CWM).

a) Partners in Mission

The Partners in Mission (PIM) programme was established by CWM to upturn the colonial model of missionaries being sent 'from the west to the rest', replacing this with a model of mutual sharing in which personnel, skills and resources are sent from everywhere, to everywhere, according to gifts and need. The past year has been both challenging and rewarding. GIM has overseen two ongoing PIM relationships with colleagues sent by partner Churches to work with us, and the return of two PIMs sent by us to serve in a partner context:

- **Ms So Young Jung** – a Lay Missionary, sent by the Presbyterian Church of Korea and working with Kingston and New Malden URCs in Southern Synod, has recently been accepted to train for stipendiary ministry in the URC. We celebrate this exciting development.
- **The Revd Yufen Chen** – sent by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, continues to serve in Thames North Synod, working with the Taiwanese Fellowship in London, and developing ministries primarily amongst Taiwanese and Mandarin speaking communities. Yufen completes her second term at the end of December 2025, with the potential to serve a third (and final) term to 2028.

- **The Revds Melanie Smith and Mark Meatcher** returned from their placements with the Pacific Theological College in Fiji in July 2024. We give thanks for all they contributed during their placements, and that both are now settled in new ministries in the URC.

b) Global Partnerships (Church House)

The URC's global relationships extend well beyond the PIM programme. Some of these relationships are managed via Church House, with active partnerships currently including:

- **The Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM)** – offering much-needed support as the PCM responds to the needs of its communities in light of the ongoing military coup, compounded by a series of environmental disasters. Many thanks to all individuals and congregations who responded so generously to the recent funding appeal, both through financial contributions and continued prayer.
- **The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT)** – offering solidarity as the PCT negotiates a landscape in which Taiwan is denied the right to autonomy and is excluded from particular global bodies, even while being subject to constant intimidation from China.
- **The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea** – with whom we signed a Memorandum of Understanding in June 2024, formally agreeing a framework for working together for the mutual benefit of our respective denominations.

c) Global Partnerships (Synod and Local Church)

In addition to the relationships managed by Church House, the URC has long encouraged its Synods to establish and maintain their own global relationships. In the past, GIM has suggested global partners with whom Synods might be matched. During the past year, a review has been taking place to ascertain which partnerships are live and meaningful, which are dormant and may have served their time, and to discover relationships about which Church House has previously been unaware. The aim is to celebrate and resource the relationships which work, encourage new partnerships to develop organically, perhaps, through a minister or church member with links to a community in another part of the world, and to release Synods from commitments which are no longer viable, giving thanks for what has been, and freeing them to explore new areas of focus if desired. As relationships evolve and develop, we encourage the partners to think broadly and creatively, exploring a variety of ways through which to interact beyond environmentally costly exchange visits so that the relationships are truly mutual to the benefit of all. GIM can be contacted for practical support and advice.

Legacies of Slavery (LoS)

The URC's three-strand commitment to acts of 'repairing justice' addressing the legacies of transatlantic slavery, adopted by General Assembly 2023, is progressing. The LoS Task Group continues to meet as a whole body to guide the work, and has also subdivided to enable greater focus:

a) Local: Anti-racism training

- Anthony Reddie has continued to work with us to complete the delivery of centrally organised sessions.
- Feedback from session participants has been overwhelmingly positive.
- The 'local' subgroup has drafted a number of proposals for cascading the anti-racism training. The aim is to equip the Synods to take over responsibility for delivering the sessions while maintaining consistency in approach and quality.

The anti-racism training is ambitious, seeking to elicit a culture-change in the URC. While it is still early days, we believe we can see green shoots of change starting to emerge.

b) *Regional: Mentoring projects focussed on young black men*

- The subgroup has been working to tighten the proposals – including consideration of the relationship between the URC and the emerging projects, and how the projects will be managed and overseen.
- It is proposed that the projects operate under the umbrella of the new amalgamated Mission and Discipleship Committee, giving periodic updates to General Assembly so that the work continues to be held by the whole Church.
- The Revd Les Isaac (founder of Street Pastors) has been approached to journey with us as a consultant, helping to identify possible mentors, advising us in establishing the projects, and keeping us true to the initial vision.

c) *Global*

- Close relationships are being maintained with the Churches' Reparations Action Forum in Jamaica (CRAF). The GIM Secretary met with the Revds Gordon Cowans and Collin Cowan (CRAF Principals) in Jamaica in November 2024 to further develop the proposals, which include support for the creation of New Free Villages to address the issue of landlessness which sees 30% of Jamaicans classed as squatters, and a joint project to promote positive self-identity and belonging amongst African and African diaspora participants.
- We are exploring the production of a number of very short films to provide quick and accessible insights into the actions being proposed, why they are needed, and the anticipated outcomes.
- Conversations have been taking place within GIM about the possible broadening of the Commitment for Life (CfL) remit to include support for CRAF's work.

In addition to the three repairing justice strands, further developments include:

d) *Legacies of Slavery Fund*

- Following agreement by General Assembly 2024, a LoS Fund has been established to resource our repairing justice commitments, starting with a £250k input from central funds, with Synods invited to contribute with an aim of reaching a minimum target of £1m.
- At the time of writing, definite pledges combined with ongoing conversations indicate that we are likely to exceed the £1m target.

It is apparent that some Synods are hesitant about making pledges, wanting to hear more specifically how the funds will be spent. While this is understandable, it misses a key point of reparation/repairing justice – which is about letting go of that which, at least in part, belongs elsewhere and freeing the wronged party to address the harms suffered as they determine. That said, the LoS task group has never suggested a 'carefree' approach – but has linked with trustworthy partners, outlining the proposed areas of work even while explaining that specifically what we can achieve will be determined by the extent of the funds we raise. This is a definite 'chicken and egg' situation, with members of the task group ready to offer clarity as they are able.

e) *The LoS webpage*

- The LoS Webpage has recently been updated and now effectively tells the story of the URC's LoS journey.

- The page includes reference to the April 2024 Ecumenical Pilgrimage to Jamaica and features two docufilms produced during the pilgrimage, one of which captures the URC's Statement of Confession and Apology being delivered, in-person, by the then GA Moderator, the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson.
- The webpage also features a reflection by the Revd Geoff Felton, who joined the pilgrimage as part of his sabbatical and is championing the issue of Modern Day Slavery alongside his focus on LoS. Geoff subsequently represented the URC at a CWM Global Consultation addressing this issue.

f) *Ecumenical links*

It is worth noting that the URC's work regarding the legacies of transatlantic slavery is highly regarded and frequently drawn upon by ecumenical partners both in the UK and globally. The GIM Secretary currently serves on the Methodist Church's Reparations Advisory Group.

Racial Justice in the URC

a) *Racial Justice advocates and Cascades of Grace*

The first strand of the LoS repairing justice proposals – anti-racism training – specifically engages with our 2020 commitment to journey from a position of 'not racist' to becoming actively 'anti-racist'. It is GIM's hope and intention that the URC's two racial justice networks, the Racial Justice Advocates (RJAs) and Cascades of Grace (COGs), will play a significant role in this journey, even while recognising that they need to be resourced to do so. Strengthening the networks will be a priority in the next period.

Recent network activities include:

- A joint residential in Liverpool in October 2024, including a visit to the International Slavery Museum, with a further 24-hour COGs core-group gathering taking place in February 2025.
- Welcoming three recent additions to the RJA network. Our hope is for every Synod to have a named RJA, and for each of those individuals to be resourced by their Synod to gather a small team to advocate for racial justice and to develop appropriate work. It is, perhaps, worth noting that Racial Justice Advocates DO NOT need to be Black. Indeed, we need colleagues from all ethnicities, working together, if we are to effectively tackle the issue of racial injustice.

b) A fond farewell



The Revd Zaidie Orr retired in March 2025, having served as Convenor of both the RJAs and COGs for the past five years, and made a significant contribution as a member of the LoS Task Group (and to many other areas of the URC's life). Zaidie will be missed – but we are sure she is not going to disappear.

The photo shows Zaidie presented with a gift basket by members of the COGs core group.

A happy update

It is heartwarming to see former GA Moderator, the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, continuing to make an impact within and beyond the URC. On 13 April 2025, Tessa was inducted as the new Moderator of the and, in so doing, became a President of Churches Together in England. This follows Tessa's ecumenically acclaimed keynote input at the CTE Forum in March 2025, brilliantly addressing LoS, reparations, and other justice-related issues. The keynote speech can be accessed at the URC website.



Ecumenical

URC Ecumenical Officers (EOs) and Posts

EOs met together online this spring. We heard about newly formed Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) in the Synod of Wales and Eastern Synod and were heartened by Yorkshire Synod's new ecumenical strategy. We continue to encourage Synods to ensure that EO vacancies are given priority, and that paid roles are considered where possible. EOs can be hugely more effective when they are given the time to fulfil their roles. URC EOs will meet again in person at Churches Together in England's (CTE) All Ecumenical Representatives conference. In January this year, Mission and Ministries met to consider the remaining applications for ecumenical posts. We were delighted to approve the following posts:

- St Andrews URC, Douglas and Ramsey Methodist and Trinity URC LEP, Ramsey, Isle of Man (Mersey Synod)
- Cambridgeshire Ecumenical Minister (Eastern Synod)
- Oxfordshire Ecumenical Minister (Wessex Synod)
- Grahamston United Church, Falkirk (ecumenical minister to central Scotland).

Roman Catholic/URC Dialogue Group

The group drew its third quinquennial to a close by taking a pilgrimage to Rome together. The theme of this latest phase of dialogue has been *Journeying Together*, and instead of a conventional report, the group put together a practical resource pack for local RC and URC churches. It is aimed at encouraging local churches to meet using the resource as a study guide and to encourage further activity together. The pack has been updated since the ecumenical pilgrimage and now includes a report of the pilot, undertaken by The Bridge URC, Otley, Yorkshire. In Rome the resource was received by the RC Dicastery for the Promotion of Christian Unity and by officers of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The Pack is now available online here: www.urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2025-1-3-RC-URC-Resources-FINAL.pdf. We encourage members of General Assembly to share the resource with Synods and local churches.



Methodist/URC Liaison Group

The group has recently started regular meetings again following a short break. The group continues to discuss how it can support ministers and regional leaders in better understanding one another's traditions and structures. This is to enable closer working together, as we consider, for example, the differences between Elders and stewards and denominational procedures around 'call' and 'stationing', in terms of ministerial deployment. URC/Methodist and wider ecumenical regional leaders' training sessions are planned for later in the year.

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. Tim Meadows, Moderator to GA, has faithfully attended the Church of England's General Synod meetings, representing the URC.

Methodist/Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission (MAPUM)

We are fully participating observers on this panel, and the most recent meeting grappled with language around pioneering, hearing from some on-the-ground practitioners undertaking rich and valuable work in their communities.

Churches Together in England (CTE)

Our engagement with CTE takes place in several different areas. The URC was represented on the planning group for the annual Learning to be Missionary Disciples conference, the Living with Diversity working group (working on better ways for CTE members to work together with difference, specifically around sexuality), and the Enabling Group (which brings together over 50 member churches). We are part of the team for the New Ecumenical Officers training in January and continue to be active in the Group for Evangelisation. In the last year this group has been hosted by the Redeemed Christian Church of God and the Methodist Church. It is always challenging and invigorating to hear the perspectives and approaches of other churches. At CTE's Forum in March, the URC was active in its contributions from the platform and in delivering workshops as well as offering



worship. The Revd Dr Susan Durber and the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson delivered keynote presentations. As Free Churches Group Moderator, following her induction in April, Tessa is now one of the CTE presidents. There was a large URC delegation at Forum (see photo) and there are films of the sessions available on the CTE YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/@ChurchesEngland). Many of these would work well as a resource for local churches or Synod events.

National Ecumenical Officers (NEOs) involved in LEPs continue to meet regularly to discuss individual and broader issues that have been brought to them, identifying patterns and offering support. NEOs continue to encourage the use of CTE's Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission Toolkit to inspire and guide practical and missional partnerships.

European Ecumenism

Although the URC withdrew from the Council of European Churches (CEC) last year, as have some other close ecumenical partners in Britain, we remain committed to our relationships with the Church in Europe through the Council of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) and World Council of Reformed Churches (Europe). We have long-standing and close links with the Evangelical Church of the Palatinate (Pfalz) and are developing closer connections with the United Protestant Church of France, including establishing a three-way Friendship Group. A Friends of the Pfalz webinar in April, including friends of other European churches, was well attended and we look forward to developing this work further. Please email mission@urc.org.uk if you are interested in connecting with this group or want to know more about our work with European churches. The Moderator of GA, the Revd Tim Meadows, attended the 400th Synod of the Waldensian Church in Italy in August 2024. There continues to be an active Waldensian Group in the URC, which meets regularly online as well as organising visits to Italy. Relationships with other members of the Council for World Mission's European churches were reinvigorated by the recent Members' Mission Forum, and there are particularly encouraging possibilities with the Protestant Church of the Netherlands (PKN).

Inter Faith

In late February 2025 the United Reformed Church joined with the Church of Scotland, Methodist World Council, Methodist Church in Great Britain, and the (US) United Methodist Church on an ecumenical solidarity visit of justice to East Jerusalem and the West Bank. This visit took place in the context of a conflict that, according to multiple human rights organisations and the International Court of Justice, meets all the criteria of genocide in Gaza. We witnessed the aftermath of attacks and house demolitions that were carried out by Israelis living in illegal settlements, protected by the Israeli occupational forces, in the South Hebron Hills. Our solidarity visit was met with enormous appreciation. There are almost a dozen video resources that you can use in this playlist. Scan the QR code to access them. Palestinian Christians asked us to reflect on whether our churches were doing enough to pressure our governments to reconsider their military, economic, and political support for a country that almost daily carries out egregious acts of violence against Palestinians in the name of security.



The Inter Faith Network has been formally dissolved. A third party has re-registered the name, which may be a malicious action. Members should be cautious of communications from this source. A closing event was held on 29 April in central London with 32 churches in attendance. The United Reformed Church regrets the decision by the former government to cease funding for the Inter Faith Network at a time when inter religious tensions are spiking. The rise in tension is in part fuelled by the worrying rise in global conflict and the increasingly polarised nature of politics and discourse.

An Inter Faith Week Consultation in England was organised by the Faith and Belief Forum with funding from the government. Regional and national consultations are ongoing. The Council for Christians and Jews (CCJ) is to host its annual Rabbi-Clergy event on 14 May 2025 and Andy Lie from Northern Synod will attend with the aim of reporting back to the next Interfaith Enabling Group meeting.

The Interfaith Enabling Group (IEG) continues to meet regularly. These meetings are ecumenical by design, offering a connecting point for partner denominations. The IEG has been working with Northern College and others to wrestle with the changing nature of inter faith engagement and work, given the cuts to funding by government and denominations for inter faith work. Some of the key items on our agendas are: the rise of Islamophobia and antisemitism; the move to decolonise our thinking; conversations, and practice in shaping the inter faith agenda in the UK. Applications to the Interfaith Fund have been received from the CCJ, and the LUMODO Association (History and Literature of Syriac Christianity) and these are being considered by the IEG.

'Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (IOPT) in focus': Following the 2024 General Assembly resolution on Gaza, the IEG, in partnership with Commitment for Life and YoURChurch, has offered a series of educational webinars called 'IOPT IN FOCUS'. A recording of the 'Christian Zionism' session led by the Revd Philip Woods can be found at youtu.be/cliEN0yWiwc and the 'Nakba and Occupation' session with Charlotte Marshall, Sabeel-Kairos UK, is here: youtu.be/2Riv7BKkDfA.

Public Issues

The Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT)

In April 2025, Alex Clare-Young joined the team as JPIT's Campaigns and Church Engagement Officer, based at Methodist Church House. Among many projects, Alex is co-ordinating JPIT's next justice conference, 'For Goodness Sake!', on 8 November 2025 in Derby. See more at jpit.uk/conference.

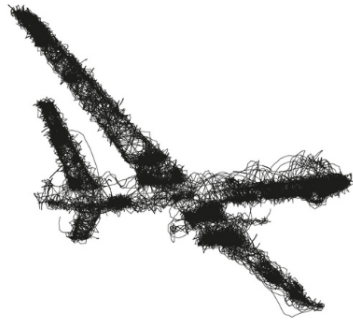


JPIT continues to have six key areas of focus, providing assistance to the Church and to local congregations to pray, speak out and take action for justice and peace:

- a just economy that enables the flourishing of all life
- a society where the poorest and most marginalised are at the centre
- a world that actively works for peace
- a planet where our environment is renewed
- a society that welcomes the stranger
- a politics characterised by listening, kindness and truthfulness.

A new Constituency Action Network has been formed to support congregations that are seeking to develop a meaningful relationship with their MP. JPIT is supporting this

through monthly webinars and occasional one-to-one meetings. One URC LEP congregation (Cirencester Ashcroft Church) has become a full member of the Constituency Action Network, with several other URC congregations also building better connections with their MP through engagement with the network. See jpit.uk/can.



Future of Arms

JPIT has produced a major report on the rise of autonomous weapons, with an accompanying video presented by Christine Ntim, Youth Representative for Thames North Synod. See jpit.uk/foa.

As Artificial Intelligence embeds itself further into our daily lives, it has already been integrated into several military applications, some of which have already been tested in live combat situations. Echoing blockbuster films over the

decades, the new reality of warfare has increasingly blurred lines around who is ultimately in control. As people who favour peaceful resolutions to conflict and to avoid killing, how should the Church speak into this discussion of automated weaponry?

Individuals and local churches are encouraged to explore the issue and sign the petition calling on government leaders around the world to develop international laws that prohibit the use of machines that target people, reducing us to objects, stereotypes and data points.

Public responses

The URC, as part of the Joint Public Issues Team, has released or signed statements or written open letters, including:

- Child poverty: www.urc.org.uk/faith-leaders-call-for-bold-action-on-child-poverty
- International aid budget cuts: www.urc.org.uk/church-leaders-lament-cuts-to-international-aid-budget
- Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty: www.fossilfueltreaty.org/faith-letter#faith-letter
- Quaker Meeting House police raid: www.jpit.uk/concern-over-police-raid.

We also, independently of JPIT, crafted public responses to the resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Supreme Court ruling on the legal definition of a woman and on the Assisted Dying Bill.

These are not straightforward issues in our society. We could not and do not try to respond to every public issue, but tread carefully by addressing those areas where the General Assembly of the URC has come to agreement and where it seems relevant and important that the URC should be speaking into the public square, sometimes where other Churches are reluctant to do so.

Faith in Affordable Housing

This initiative has continued to progress, involving Mike Hart from North Western Synod, Chris Atherton from the Synod of Wales and Becki Winter from the Church of England (and formerly Housing Justice). Guidance for Synods towards repurposing URC church land for affordable housing has been drafted.

The Church Buildings for Mission

Webinars have proved popular with local church members, Elders and Synods. The first webinar in this period included presentations and conversations about Eco Church and making church buildings fit for climate objectives, majoring on initiatives in the Synod of Wales, while the second webinar explored creative use of church spaces, illustrated by two fine examples from North Western Synod. The next webinar is on 20 November 2025, 11.30am-1pm.

‘A Church with people at the margins’

This report was presented at the 2024 General Assembly giving rise to Resolution 53 which requested Synods, Assembly committees and task groups to consider the implications of the North Western Synod report, and how this particularly relates to the Church Life Review. This is now being developed by the Church Life Fund steering group. The Synod of Scotland has adopted its own resolution similar to the NW strategy and it is good to see the momentum of this initiative gathering pace. The event ‘Dreams and Realities: In the Thick of It 2’ in May at the Luther King Centre, Manchester facilitated conversations between people with lived experience and those engaged in different marginal contexts and has provided learning and ideas for resourcing churches in low-income communities going forward.

The ChurchWorks Commission

The ChurchWorks Commission is made up of 23 senior church leaders drawn from 16 major UK church denominations, umbrella organisations and Christian charities to collaborate with government and to equip local congregations to transform the lives of the most vulnerable people in local neighbourhoods and communities. The URC began partnering with and investing in ChurchWorks in September by contributing staff time and experience, linking with local churches and networks, and a small financial contribution.

ChurchWorks has three key mission areas in communities across the UK: tackling poverty, mental health and wellbeing, and vulnerable children and families. This includes:

- supporting those vulnerable to poverty and the cost-of-living crisis through the Warm Welcome Campaign;
- promoting positive mental health and wellbeing in churches and communities;
- supporting vulnerable children and families.

ChurchWorks has actively promoted the ‘Who Cares’ Campaign by the Home for Good/Safe Families merger charity to support children and families within or at risk of entering the care system.

The Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson has accepted the invitation to be a URC representative as a ChurchWorks Commissioner.

Church and community engagement newsletter

The newsletter is a new resource which is published twice a year. It provides 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. Over 200 subscribers from local churches and Synods now directly receive this useful resource.

Migration, refugees and asylum seekers

John East, a non-serving Elder and lay preacher in the East Lancashire Mission Partnership, attended the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe conference in December 2024. John is one of the founders of Darwen Asylum and Refugee Enterprise (DARE) and shared the impact that DARE has had on his region, as well as how URC congregations are supporting refugees and asylum seekers to adjust to life in the UK.



Prayers for Ukraine

For the third anniversary of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, URC congregations were encouraged to reflect on prayers written by leaders of the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia in Ukraine: www.urc.org.uk/prayers-to-mark-the-third-anniversary-of-russias-war-on-ukraine/

Greenbelt

The United Reformed Church's presence at Greenbelt Festival, 21-24 August 2025, will be in an enlarged tent shared with the Trussell Trust. Echoing the festival-wide theme of 'Hope in the Making', the URC at Greenbelt will engage with and equip festivalgoers through crafting, facilitated conversations, music and displays.

Once again, there will be a family-friendly café on site, thanks to the generous efforts of 65 volunteers, including a combined kitchen team made up of staff from REFUSE community café in Durham and Lodge Road URC in Birmingham.

Greenbelt's youth programme will be overseen by the URC this summer for the final time after several years of providing this vital, faith-building and creative space for young people.

The whole of the URC is invited to participate in Greenbelt: by attending for a day or longer where possible, by sending craft items to be displayed in our large tent and distributed after, or by joining in our Sunday service, broadcast live from the event in partnership with YoURChurch.

More information on these opportunities can be found at: www.urc.org.uk/greenbelt.



Caring for Creation

The URC's Green Apostle Network has been working hard to encourage and support congregations and Synod offices in caring for creation. There are now seven Synods who have achieved a bronze award from Eco Church: North-Western, Mersey, West Midlands, Eastern, Thames North, Southern and the National Synod of Wales. The National Synod of Scotland is part of Eco-Congregation Scotland, a similar scheme but with no Eco Synod equivalent.

Over 30% of URC congregations are registered with Eco Church (in England and Wales) or Eco-Congregation Scotland. Of those congregations, almost two fifths have a Bronze award, over one-fifth have a Silver award, and eight congregations have achieved the top Gold award for their achievements in making their churches more eco-friendly, from buildings and energy use to services and personal lifestyles.

The National Synod of Scotland, Northern Synod and West Midlands Synod have recently updated their Synod environmental policies, implementing and extending the URC Environmental Policy which was received by General Assembly in 2022.

Net Zero Task Group (NZTG)

Despite a worsening global picture, our general conclusions, and our assessment of the challenges and opportunities remain much as we reported last year. We now have significantly more information provided by the Synods in their annual reports to the Mission Committee, and there is some progress towards our goal. Different parts of the URC vary in response, and in capacity to respond, to the call to achieve a net zero church.

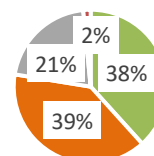
Progress in the Synods

Synods have responded well to our first detailed enquiry which has set the baseline for assessing our progress annually. Some have got much further along their net zero journey than others, and our non-critical approach is focused on encouragement. There are some common themes among the ten Synods that have sent us their responses to date:

- Capacity: those who enable Synods to function are stretched and many respondents clearly wished they could respond more completely to our enquiry. We will refine the document without losing the continuity necessary for year-to-year monitoring. However, we note with concern that capacity is the universal primary issue for all Synods.
- Missing knowledge and skills were the second main concern. Work is progressing with URC Communications to ensure that practical information and signposting is more accessible.
- The need to improve communication within Synods was the third main concern flagged.
- The Green Apostles are strategically key. They also have limited capacity, and an increased engagement from all of us is necessary for maintaining focus and increasing momentum.

AWARD STATUS OF REGISTERED CONGREGATIONS

- No award
- Bronze Award
- Silver Award
- Gold Award



- There are signs of encouragement and effective action. We hope to see some of these shared across the URC. Those who have yet to share their good news stories are encouraged to do so. Most Synods have a regularly featured eco e-news.
- Synods are offering support to local churches for adapting buildings to reduce emissions. Whilst the grants available are no match for the need, they play a part in getting this shared enterprise moving.

Busy Synod Officers and others made time to assess and report on actions. Synods now have a baseline from which to assess and report all further progress. Synods are encouraged to share their findings with their churches and committees to help develop a focus on action. Variations among the Synods include:

- The designated lead on net zero might be a Green Apostle, the Moderator, the Synod Clerk or another. We recommend appointing someone who is not responsible for managing too much other work but appreciate that this may mean a shift in prioritisation.
- The financial strength of a Synod does not predict the amount of progress made towards net zero. Capacity to focus and energise seems to matter more.
- How carbon emissions are assessed or measured varies. Climate Stewards 360° Carbon Calculator is the most-used measure. There is variety in what activity is identified for measurement. Although more standardisation would help assess overall progress, we think more will happen if Synods use the tools they prefer.

To illustrate, here are a few of the actions we have heard from the Synods:

- Northern has increased grants to local churches for emissions reduction works.
- North Western has increased car sharing, hybrid vehicles and hybrid meetings.
- Mersey has achieved Bronze Eco Synod Award and adapted the Synod Office.
- Yorkshire has continued the use of Zoom meetings and is exploring a car charging point.
- East Midlands have established a fund to support local churches in reducing emissions.
- Eastern produced sustainable buildings guidance, now adapted for the URC website.
- South Western has reduced manse stock and offers 50% grants to lower emissions.
- Southern Synod has adapted its office and been given its first Eco-Church award.
- Wales has established a fund to help churches assess heating replacement options.
- Scotland has started a grants scheme to support church energy-saving measures.

We are inviting those in Synods who will respond to future annual enquiries to participate in a webinar in October. This will help us refine our method and provide a forum for shared experience and wisdom.

Assembly Committees

All Assembly committees are actively seeking to lower emissions resulting from their work. Learning from our first use of an annual enquiry for Synods, we aim to have an equivalent document available for committees to assess and report progress. This should be available later this year.

Associated Bodies

The NZTG has not assessed progress in the various bodies that serve the URC but are not constituted as parts of it. We hope to engage with these in the year ahead.

Developing Resources

For congregations in England and Wales, participation in A Rocha's newly revised Eco-Church scheme is encouraged. Not specifically a net zero programme, it is straightforward to get started and progress, setting in motion actions towards net zero. In Scotland, Eco-Congregation Scotland offers a similar scheme. Improving a building for reduced emissions can seem daunting. A straightforward guide, most of which is already familiar to many in Eastern and Thames North Synods, is being made available on the URC website at: **www.urc.org.uk/your-church/church-local-and-global/greenerchurch/**. A short companion guide on reducing emissions created by the activities within buildings towards net zero is nearing completion. UN Sustainable Development Goals are being featured in Reform, and we recommend A Rocha's template for a local church environmental policy as a helpful tool to help churches to plan.

The URC website is being adapted to make it easier for all parts of the URC to access guidance on making steps towards net zero. The Resources Committee is utilising the Church Building Fund to support Synods in pilot projects to demonstrate what can be achieved.

The new Stepwise course, Faith-Filled Environment, will be an excellent way of growing engagement through discipleship, with the potential to increase the number of people willing to offer time, energy and new knowledge and skills to projects in local churches: **www.urc.org.uk/stepwise**.

Increasing momentum

The context is changing, and becoming more challenging. Across the world, swings in politics both change and reflect attitudes. The necessary international cooperation seems to be stalling. Technology offers no magic solutions, but we can expect some helpful developments.

As for ourselves, modest adjustments can be the right starting place, but they will not get us across the line. We have begun to move, but our progress must gather pace, and we need to lighten the load. Some of our buildings cannot realistically be adapted, others require intimidating levels of investment, and our current patterns of use may exacerbate these issues. Painful as it must sometimes be, we need to rationalise our buildings – adapting some and (responsibly) relinquishing others. We believe we will have to go on making this point, which also has a prophetic edge. If the church is not the building, it may be time to act on our faith. In doing so, we may rediscover some aspects of being an authentic church. There is liberation in letting go what is too much to carry.

Paper 12

A missional lens for the URC

Mission Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of Mission Committee slanecawte@gmail.com Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary (Mission) philip.brooks@urc.org.uk
Action required	For decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 32 General Assembly affirms its commitments to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) address issues of racial injustice, including furthering the URC’s commitment to becoming an actively anti-racist Church, and responding to the continuing negative impacts of transatlantic slavery;b) prioritise work seeking to recognise, address, and dismantle poverty in the UK;c) respond to the climate crisis, including accompanying local churches in their respective journeys;d) reinvigorate our ecumenical vision through ecumenical working and resource sharing; and endorses these commitments as the denomination’s ‘missional lens’, asking its Assembly Committees to use it as a focus in considering their work for the next four years.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To provide a missional focus for the URC over the next four years.
Main points	This paper sets out the priorities of recent Assembly decisions, draws them together into a missional focus which can be used to assist in prioritising where resources are deployed.
Previous relevant documents	Assembly reports and resolutions: GA 2022 Environmental Policy GA 2023 Poverty and Inequality in the UK GA 2024 A Church with People at the Margins: A strategy for mission and ministry (NW Synod) GA 2021 Action Towards an anti-racist Church

	GA 2022 Legacies of (Transatlantic) Slavery GA 2023 Legacies of Slavery: Proposals for repairing justice GA 2024 Legacies of Slavery: Repairing Justice GA 2022 and 2023 – Reinvigorating the Ecumenical Vision of the URC.
Consultation has taken place with...	All of the strands of the proposed Missional Lens have been formulated following intensive consultation across the denomination as a whole.

Summary of impact

Financial	This resolution does not require any additional spending but provides guidance in terms of mission objectives for spending decisions to be taken within current budgets.
External (eg ecumenical)	Adopting the Missional Lens will provide the opportunity to work even more closely with ecumenical partners and in several areas the URC is fulfilling a leading role.

Introduction

‘Yesterday, today, forever – Jesus is the same’. While the Gospel call remains the same, the world around us changes; its needs change, and we must be light-footed in our responses, able to adapt to our changing world even while remaining true to Jesus’ call. The United Reformed Church is restructuring for the future. That is a positive thing. If we are to be a Church fit for the future, we cannot be a Church that remains stuck in the past, nor a Church that is afraid of change.

But if the URC has something to offer into the world, we must be mindful that in adapting, or even changing, we don’t let go of that which makes the URC uniquely ‘us’. That raises the question, ‘Who are we – at our core?’ What do we care about? What do we stand for? And leading from that, what should be our missional lens?

What do we mean by a ‘missional lens’?

Since 2022, the URC has agreed, through its Assembly discussions and resolutions, to adopt several major mission initiatives. These decisions have led the denomination to set in train key pieces of work which will only bear fruit if we maintain our focus on what Assembly has itself agreed to. In a world so full of pressing problems, it is all too easy to move on to the next shiny, new programme, forgetting the core missional objectives we have already given ourselves. Recognising that we are a small denomination, with finite resources, it is better that we commit to doing a few things well than attempt to do everything and fall short across the board. The ‘missional lens’ is the perspective from which we will engage our conversations, actions and commitments, seeking to ensure they come together as an intentional whole. It will prompt us to keep asking the question ‘Is this what we have committed to do – or are we losing focus?’

The purpose of this paper and its accompanying resolutions is to draw together the strands of who we are and the changes we have promised to bring about, to serve as the missional lens for the way we deploy our scarce resources, both human and financial, over the next four years.

Who are we?

The URC understands itself as a Church which cares deeply for our communities, for those beyond our borders and for our created world. We are a Church which is Christ-centred and justice-focussed, inspired by the call to love God and love our neighbour as ourselves. Our very existence as a Church came about through a willingness to move and change. We are a courageous Church, willing to face and navigate challenge. All of this is not just our self-understanding, but qualities observed and frequently admired by many of the ecumenical and secular partners with whom we engage.

Our inspiration

The URC is embracing anew the call to evangelise, to make disciples, with a commitment to become a growing church by enabling the creation of new worshipping communities, whilst deepening our commitment to faith in action, informed by the Gospel. The emerging 'Faith in Action Committee' which brings together Mission and Discipleship has, as part of its brief, the responsibility and privilege of helping to give focus to resources made available through the work of the Church Life Review. As we look to the future, we seek inspiration from Jesus, the Christ, who called people not to worship him, but to follow him. Jesus knew who he was. He was rooted and unwavering. His focus was outward-looking – feeding, healing, loving; welcoming those on the outskirts; restoring people to fullness of life – and challenging the unjust structures of his day. Jesus was resolute – even when the road was difficult; even when others rejected him or turned away. Even if it meant being crucified. This Jesus tells his followers to learn from his actions – then go out to do the same.

As we prepare for the next stage in the life of our Church, surely we need to focus on resourcing the journeys of all Jesus' would-be followers – those new to faith and long-standing believers – by equipping them for the road ahead; enabling them to be confident and rooted in their relationship with Christ, even while using their faith as the platform to live a transformed world into being. Just as Jesus set his face to addressing the injustices of his time, our discipling must seek to challenge and dismantle the unjust structures which distort and diminish lives today.

Our missional lens

In preparing for all the above and recognising the priorities that our Assembly gatherings have already adopted, the United Reformed Church is living out the commitment to:

- address issues of racial injustice – striving to become an actively anti-racist Church, and committing to concrete actions to bring about positive change in response to the continuing impacts of transatlantic slavery
- prioritise action seeking to recognise and address the issues confronting those who experience poverty and marginalisation, working with ecumenical and secular partners as we strive to eradicate poverty in the UK context
- recognise and respond to the climate catastrophe, including a stated commitment to work towards net zero carbon emissions by 2030, accompanying local congregations in their respective journeys
- reinvigorate our ecumenical vision through ecumenical working and resource sharing.

The missional strands outlined here are interwoven with our integral commitments to intentionally listen to the voices of children, young people and young adults; to seek and listen to the voices of those who are often marginalised or silenced; and to ensure that safeguarding is at the heart of all we do. Together, these form our missional lens.

Missional lens as a call to action

We have recognised that we can't just speak into situations – we need to live God's upside-down kingdom into being. We are called to be a Christ-centred, courageous, community of faith, hope, and love – in action. And while that calling may sometimes feel costly – it will never be more costly than the cross.

By holding fast to where we have discerned that Christ is leading us in the Assembly decisions taken since 2022, we join the strands of what we have already agreed in an intentional way, providing a missional lens for the next four years, shaping our decisions and priorities. Through this missional lens, we answer Jesus' call to reach out to those who have been marginalised and discriminated against; remain true to the ecumenical prayer that we should work as one; whilst always caring for the integrity of creation. It will be for all Assembly committees to consider their work through this missional lens. As we seek to continue to be Christ's hands and feet in the world in these intentional ways, may God bless us and all we do, say and are.

Paper J1

Report to General Assembly 2025

Nominations Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Victoria Blunt victoria.blunt@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 33 General Assembly appoints members of committees and representatives of the Church, as set out in paragraph 5 of this report, subject to the adoptions and corrections contained in supplementary papers to Assembly.</p> <p>Resolution 34 General Assembly resolves to dissolve the Panel for General Assembly Appointments from the close of General Assembly November 2025.</p> <p>Resolution 35 General Assembly instructs the Nominations Committee to recruit a new Panel for General Assembly Appointments, in line with the constitution set out in the Ministries Paper H2 (General Assembly Book of Reports 2024).</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To appoint members of various committees and groups and external appointments, to note changes that have been implemented since General Assembly 2024 and to thank people standing down from service.
Main points	As above.
Previous relevant documents	Paper H10, General Assembly 2024 Paper J1, General Assembly 2024.
Consultation has taken place with...	Wide consultation with staff and officers of General Assembly, Convenors of Assembly Committees, Synod Moderators and Clerks and the committees and groups where appointments are required.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	Recruitment of members to ecumenical bodies.

Report to General Assembly 2025

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The committee brings to General Assembly for appointment the names of people to serve as Assembly Officers, as convenors and secretaries of Assembly committees, or as members of those committees, for set periods. It also brings names of people to serve on various Panels and to represent the United Reformed Church on other bodies.

2. Work since General Assembly 2024

- 2.1 As mandated by General Assembly 2024, the new Nominations Committee has been developing the detailed framework for a new safer recruitment process for members of Assembly level committees.
- 2.2 In the new process, the responsibility for seeking names for vacancies lies with individual committees, who are required to advertise vacancies and use job descriptions and person specifications. Committees are also tasked with seeking references and conducting safer recruitment conversations as part of the discernment process.
- 2.3 To support the process, the Nominations Committee has produced a comprehensive recruitment pack. It includes step-by-step guidance on the process, along with template advertisements, job descriptions and person specifications, as well as guidance on undertaking safer recruitment conversations, reference request templates and template letters to volunteers. This pack was made available in February 2025 and can be accessed at: **www.urc.org.uk/general-assembly-assembly-executive-assembly-committees/nominations-committee/nominations-volunteer-recruitment-pack/**. A webinar was also held in January 2025 to share the process with Committee Convenors, secretaries and Synod Moderators.
- 2.4 The role of the Nominations Committee is to support committees to undertake this process and to ensure that the process is followed. Once completed, the Nominations Committee brings the proposed names forward for appointment by General Assembly or Assembly Executive.
- 2.5 The process has already been used by a number of committees, and there are good news stories to be shared. As a result of advertising, new volunteers have come forward, including individuals who have not previously served at Assembly level and who reflect some of the diversity within the United Reformed Church.
- 2.6 Whilst the impact of the new safer recruitment process so far appears positive, the Nominations Committee recognises that this represents a significant culture shift for the denomination and for individual committees, and so remains committed to offering support and guidance as committees navigate and implement this new approach.
- 2.7 The Nominations Committee is also aware that the process will evolve and be refined over time as experience is gained and feedback is received.
- 2.8 Work is currently underway to provide clear guidance for committees on data protection and the retention of documentation associated with the safer recruitment process, in line with GDPR requirements.

- 2.9 The Nominations Committee is also looking at ways to support committees to identify the levels of diversity within their membership and to consider how best to address under-representation, such as developing advertising strategies aimed at encouraging applications from different demographic groups.

3. Thanks to all who serve on Assembly Committees

- 3.1 The Church remains fortunate to have numerous dedicated members who generously contribute their time and talents to serve on its committees, panels, and working groups, as well as by representing the Church on outside bodies. The Nominations Committee wishes to express its sincere appreciation for all who offer their service in these roles and thanks those people who have either stood down or whose terms have come to an end.

4. Those to be appointed or re-appointed

- 4.1 Those agreeing to be appointed for the first time or for a further term:

<i>Committee/group</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Years</i>	
Pensions Trust	Mr Willie Duncan	Member	2025-2029	New appointment
Retired Ministers Pension Trust	Mrs Faith Paulding	Director	2025-2027	Extension of term of service due to buy-in/buy out
	Mr Vaughan Griffiths	Honorary Assistant Treasurer	2025-2027	Extension of term
Interfaith Enabling Group	The Revd Dr Mark Godin	Member	2024-2028	Extension of term that should have been recorded at GA 2024
Interfaith Enabling Group	The Revd Dr Graham Adams	Member	2024-2028	Extension of term that should have been recorded at GA 2024
Interfaith Enabling Group	Miss Victoria Turner	Member	2025-2029	Extension of term
Business Committee	Ms Hilda Darkwah	Member	2025-2029	New appointment

5. Membership of committees, panels and working groups, and representatives to other bodies

- 5.1 In the interests of clarity and brevity, this report includes only the changes to the membership of committees, panels, and working groups. A full list of current membership will be published in the Record of Assembly and is available on request from the Nominations Committee at nominations@urc.org.uk.

6. Panel for General Assembly Appointments

- 6.1 Ministries' Paper H10 from General Assembly 2024 recommended that the pool from which people are drawn to serve on nominating panels for General Assembly Appointments be significantly reduced, to a team of eight people who commit to undergoing training and making themselves available to serve on the majority of such panels for a five-year period. It also recommended that the pool

for nominating panels would continue to be recruited by the Nominations Committee using appropriate safer recruitment processes.

- 6.2 Whilst General Assembly 2024 resolved to adopt Annexes 2 and 3 of Paper H10 in Resolutions 30 and 31 – setting out the requirements for nominating panels and the process for appointing Synod Moderators and Assembly Appointed Posts – it did not pass a resolution specifically addressing the composition of the pool from which panel members are drawn.
- 6.3 The Nominations Committee expresses its sincere gratitude to all who have served on the Panel for General Assembly Appointments to date.
- 6.4 To implement the recommendations contained in the Ministries report to General Assembly 2024, the Nominations Committee recommends that the existing Panel for General Assembly Appointments be formally dissolved, and that a new panel be nominated in accordance with the revised structure and safer recruitment practices. Those currently serving on the panel will be invited to apply to continue their service within the new framework.
- 6.5 To ensure continuity, the Nominations Committee recommends that General Assembly dissolves the existing Panel effective from the November 2025 meeting of General Assembly. This gives the Nominations Committee time to recruit a new Panel and present names to the November 2025 meeting of General Assembly for appointment.

Paper N1

Church Life Review progress update

Church Life Review

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Myles Dunnett, Programme Manager, Church Life Review myles.dunnett@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information only.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To update Assembly on Church Life Review progress.
Main points	Church Life Review Phase Two (Design) continues to make progress towards fulfilling its terms of reference, which were set out by General Assembly 2023. There has been significant progress on each of the four workstreams (financial resource sharing, provision of shared support services, employment of lay workers, and new URC communities of worship and discipleship), with a focus on consultation. Next steps will focus on turning the outcomes of the four workstreams into proposals and Resolutions for the extraordinary session of General Assembly in November.
Previous relevant documents	Paper N1, General Assembly 2024 Papers N1 and N2, General Assembly 2023 Resolutions 47-51a, General Assembly 2023.
Consultation has taken place with...	CLR Steering Group and sub-committee (and working groups on finance and new communities). Attendees at CLR consultations in June 2024, November 2024, January 2025, and May 2025 (consisting of representatives from Synods, trusts, Church House, URC Trust, and others).

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The purpose of this paper is to update General Assembly on Church Life Review (CLR) progress since last July. The extraordinary session of General Assembly in November will be the formal end date for Phase Two (Design). Therefore, this paper does not bring any substantive proposals or resolutions. The full package of CLR proposals and resolutions will be put before Assembly in November.

2. CLR Phase Two recap

- 2.1. The CLR is currently in Phase Two (Design). This phase is intended to bring proposals to an extraordinary session of General Assembly in November 2025.
- 2.2. Phase Two was given terms of reference by General Assembly 2023, consisting of four workstreams: financial resource sharing (finance), provision of shared support services (services), employment of lay workers (lay workers), and new URC communities of worship and discipleship (new communities). An update on each of these four workstreams is included below. The resolutions which established these workstreams can be found in the 2023 Record of Assembly, Resolutions 47-51a, pp. 24-26: www.urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Record-of-Assembly-2023-web.pdf.
- 2.3. Phase Two is being guided by a Steering Group: Steve Faber (Convenor), Muna Levan-Harris, Romilly Micklem, Elizabeth Hall, Tim Hopley, Jan Adamson, and Lythan Nevard (John Bradbury, Myles Dunnett, and Ornella Mbula in attendance).
- 2.4. Phase Two is being overseen by a sub-committee of the Business Committee: John Bradbury (Convenor), Victoria James, Alan Yates, Sarah Moore, and Darnette Whitby-Reid (Myles Dunnett and Ornella Mbula in attendance).
- 2.5. The CLR core staffing team consists of a Programme Manager and Administrator.
- 2.6. The CLR is committed to being an open, inclusive, and collaborative process. Accordingly, significant emphasis has been placed on holding consultations, to allow varying communities of interest to contribute to and shape the CLR proposals. Consultations were held in June 2024 (first finance), November 2024 (shared services), January 2025 (new communities), and May 2025 (second finance).
- 2.7. The entire CLR is relentlessly focused on delivering for the URC's existing and future local church communities.

3. Vision, Mission, and Strategy Statement

- 3.1. The CLR Steering Group agreed a vision, mission, and strategy statement for the programme.
- 3.2. **Vision** (*the desired future state – 'tomorrow'*)
A flourishing Church, less burdened, and better enabled.
- 3.3. **Mission** (*what we are doing currently to achieve the vision – 'today'*)
To hold a space for discernment of where God is working and leading us, and enable collective action to support church communities, so that existing and new

URC communities can be freed to realise God's vision for them and develop their faith through evangelism, discipleship, and outreach.

3.4. Strategy *(a brief explanation of the programme's approach and objectives)*

Phase 1 laid the groundwork, leading to four workstreams looking at finance, employment, services, and new communities, each aimed at responding to an area of critical need with a medium-term focus.

Phase 2 is investigating, proposing, and guiding changes which will help the URC flourish into the future.

The concrete expression of this work is the proposed refocussing of the Church's financial resources and the creation of a substantial new shared fund, to collectively make best use of the denomination's resources and finance CLR activities in line with agreed values and principles.

By establishing a shared fund, the Church Life Review is seeking to:

- Design and fund new, collective shared services, including a denominational resources portal, to reduce burdens and better support church communities
- Pave the way for the establishment and resourcing of new URC communities of worship and discipleship
- Identify the best models of lay worker employment for local churches, and provide meaningful support for local churches who could not otherwise afford or manage lay workers.

After General Assembly in November 2025, Phase 3 will:

- Implement the outcomes of the four Phase 2 workstreams
- Collaboratively explore longer-term strategic questions as the denomination continues its journey
- Relentlessly focus on delivering for the URC's existing and future church communities.

4. Progress on the four Phase Two workstreams

4.1. Finance

The finance workstream responds to Resolutions 47 and 48 from General Assembly 2023, which set out the task, as well as values and principles for any proposals. After the first CLR finance consultation in June 2024, the Steering Group noted energy around the idea of creating a new shared fund to finance CLR proposals.

A decision was made to establish a Finance Working Group (FWG). Members of the FWG were: Romilly Micklem, Faith Paulding, Chris Atherton, John Denison, and Catriona Wheeler; the FWG was Co-Chaired by Alan Yates and Myles Dunnett. The FWG were asked to report to the CLR Steering Group. The FWG had a series of conversations exploring variants, comparators, and alternatives, and subsequently produced a proposal which was sent to Synods in January 2025.

The next step is a consultation with Synod Moderators, Treasurers, and Trust Convenors, taking place on 16 May at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine in Limehouse. The purpose of this consultation is to hold a space for discussion and review of the proposal, explore governance questions, and agree a way forward. Work after 16 May will include reviewing and incorporating outcomes from the

consultation, assessing and modelling the scale of the fund (and implications on capacity), and further refining the proposal in advance of General Assembly in November. The hope is to come to the Assembly in November with a proposal which is agreed by Synods and trusts, with a comprehensive understanding of the likely scale of the new shared fund. The Steering Group are clear that the viability of the other three workstreams and subsequent proposals depends on the establishment of a CLR shared fund.

Please note that the Proposal to Establish a CLR Shared Fund is available on request, but has not been attached as an appendix due to the likelihood of changes being made between the time of writing this paper and General Assembly in July, as well as to avoid pre-empting the proposal being formally brought before Assembly in November.

The financial resource sharing workstream is appropriately viewed as an enabling workstream. The proposals that will come before General Assembly in November will outline that the outcome of the finance workstream, ie the proposal to establish a CLR shared fund, is the concrete enabling mechanism through which the proposals from the other three workstreams can be financed.

4.2. **Shared services**

This workstream consists of two pieces of work, responding to Resolutions 49 and 50 from General Assembly 2023:

- a) Establishment of a shared resources portal for the entire denomination
- b) Design of collective shared services beyond the resources portal.

A CLR Shared Services Consultation took place in November 2024 in Milton Keynes. Out of this consultation, we emerged with a high-level operating model for the resources portal, as well as a list of shared service areas to explore beyond the portal. It has been acknowledged that some style of support function (eg a helpdesk) for the portal would be a major benefit to users, to contextualise resources and provide advice. The possibility of a support function is being modelled, and is dependent on the capacity of the eventual shared fund.

A small working group, including a member of the CLR Steering Group and staff from the Administration and Resources team, is working on the design of the portal, with a plan to operationalise an initial version with a first tranche of resources before November.

Additional work is being undertaken to design other shared services, including IT, HR, payroll, accounting support for local churches, and a procurement/buying solution. The CLR is also monitoring a living lab in North Western Synod, exploring the usefulness of, and calls upon, a helpdesk for local churches (the results of which will be relevant to the resources portal support function).

4.3. **Lay worker employment**

This workstream responds to Resolution 51 from General Assembly 2023. Previous work on the employment workstream includes counsel's opinion on appropriate employment arrangements for lay workers in local churches, with regard to employing entities.

The CLR Steering Group decided to engage Eido, a faith-based research organisation, to undertake eight case studies exploring different models of lay worker employment across the denomination, including lay workers employed directly by local churches, and lay workers employed by Synods on behalf of local churches. Interim findings from this study are highly encouraging, and will form a core part of the lay worker recommendations. The full report will be brought before Assembly in November.

The CLR Steering Group will also seek a second legal opinion, exploring specific implications of different models of employment.

4.4. **New communities of worship and discipleship**

This workstream responds to Resolution 51a from General Assembly 2023. The 'Conversations at the Crossroads' consultation in January was an opportunity for a diverse group of 'Mission and Discipleship Animators' to consider opportunities for new communities of discipleship and worship in the URC. We emerged from the consultation with a list of outcomes and themes, which will be refined and expanded into a blueprint for the establishment of new communities.

Following the consultation, the planning group, in conjunction with the CLR Steering Group, decided to establish a CLR New Communities Working Group (NCWG) to take the work forward. The NCWG members are: Steve Faber (Convenor), Nicola Furley-Smith, Ruth Maxey, Lindsey Brown, Sarah Moore, Muna Levan-Harris, and Myles Dunnett (Ornella Mbula in attendance). The group will have discussions and consult as widely as necessary to produce a proposal for the CLR Steering Group and others. Care will be taken to ensure that the new communities proposal responds to a number of priorities set by General Assembly, including anti-racism, net zero, and areas of poverty and deprivation. The proposal will be a permissive rather than restrictive document, intended to inform both funding decisions and the development of church communities on the ground.

5. **Path to General Assembly in November and beyond**

- 5.1. The outcomes of the work discussed in section four will be written up as papers and resolutions for the extraordinary CLR session of General Assembly in November.
- 5.2. The CLR Steering Group and Business Committee will begin planning for General Assembly in November. It is currently expected that the November Assembly will have three parts: a presentation of the overall package of proposals, business to consider the resolutions, and finally a facilitated session to consider longer-term questions. This is subject to revision and confirmation.
- 5.3. It is important to note that the four Phase Two workstreams have a primarily medium-term focus, with the exception of the new communities workstream. On the basis that these four workstreams respond to more urgent areas of need, the Steering Group will also spend some time considering longer-term strategic questions. One option is to propose that CLR Phase Three could simultaneously implement outcomes of the four Phase Two workstreams *and* hold space for consideration of the longer-term questions facing the denomination through a new workstream(s). This conversation is ongoing, and all proposals for Phase Three will be brought before Assembly in November.

- 5.4. It has been noted that one of the most helpful aspects of the CLR process has been the creation of spaces for Synods, trusts, and others to meet and consider challenges facing the church in an open, safe, structured, and strategic way. It is hoped that this way of working, modelled by CLR phases one and two, will be carried through into phase three and beyond, and will eventually be embedded throughout the councils of the Church.
- 5.5. As the likely scale of the shared fund becomes known, work will be done to work-up costings and estimates. The Steering Group have acknowledged a 'chicken and egg' challenge related to the ordering of assessing the scale of the fund and assessing the scale of ambition/capacity. The CLR shared fund is currently expected to be apportioned roughly in thirds across the shared services, lay worker, and new communities funding streams. With the lay worker and new communities funding streams in particular (and less so with the shared services workstream), it is expected that the CLR shared funds will be dispensed like grants, with funding decisions made in accordance with criteria which will be shaped based on the outcomes of the relevant workstream. More information about the specific mechanism for funding decisions, as well as governance, support in making applications, and other technicalities, will be brought before Assembly in November.
- 5.6. Any questions or comments about the Church Life Review can be sent directly to the CLR inbox, **churchlifereview@urc.org.uk**, where they will be passed onto the Programme Manager Steering Group for consideration. To arrange a discussion with the Programme Manager, please contact Ornella Mbula: **ornella.mbula@urc.org.uk**.

Paper T1

Safeguarding Committee annual report Safeguarding Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Roger Jones, Convenor rjones@urcsouthern.org.uk Sharon Barr, Secretary sharon.barr@urc.org.uk
Action required	To note.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Overview of safeguarding in the URC.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlights • Risk areas • Areas of development • Summary of Safeguarding Strategic Plan • Summary of Annual Church Safeguarding Returns for 2024.
Previous relevant documents	None.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Safeguarding Officers.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

Background

The Safeguarding Committee meets four times a year with one of these being a full day in-person meeting, the pattern of meeting fits in with work flow for Assembly Executive and General Assembly.

The committee is made up of 15 people, with various roles both within the URC, and external representatives. In this year we have had vacancies because of two resignations due to their outside commitments; for one place we have a nomination to fill the role; the other, which is for an independent external representative, will need further work to identify the most appropriate person.

Outside of the formal meetings, the Convenor and Secretary meet regularly to review and monitor the work of the Safeguarding Committee.

Highlights

Church House staff team

The team have remained the same since General Assembly 2024 with the following people still in role:

- Sharon Barr, Designated Safeguarding Lead (part-time)
- Carrie Kaunda, Training and Development Coordinator (part-time)
- Kerry Baker, Policy Development Coordinator (part-time)
- Emma Pearce, Administrative Assistant (full-time supporting both the Safeguarding and Ministries teams).

During 2024 the committee supported the recruitment of a Case Work Supervisor who was appointed in July 2024. Matt Knowles joined the team with a wealth of knowledge from both within safeguarding in the denomination and with the police. Matt supports Synod Safeguarding Officers (SSOs) on cases. There has been a varying level of engagement from each Synod but Matt is available to all SSOs. He has support with the development of the denomination-wide case management system for safeguarding and has been able to offer support on Section O and Compliance cases.

Please make contact with any of the team; they are here to support the work of safeguarding across the denomination in partnership with the Synod Safeguarding Officers.

Safeguarding Team Residential

The Synod Safeguarding Officers and the Church House Safeguarding Team met for their annual two-day residential; this is a great opportunity for the teams to come together to learn, develop and build positive relationships with each other, as the roles are often quite isolated. We had a session led by Diana Taylor, SSO for the National Synod of Wales on Crisis Prevention Intervention, the Revd Dr Adam Scott, Principal of Northern College on Survivor Psychology, and the Revd Cham Kaur-Mann. Cham was the first Asian woman Minister with the Baptist Union of Great Britain and is the Co-Director of Next Leadership; she spoke to the group on the topic of Equality in Safeguarding.

Joint meetings and collaborative working

The wider safeguarding team have been meeting annually with the Moderators, building relationships and working and learning together to look at areas of work that need collaboration. The safeguarding team also met with the CYDO+ team last year at one of their gatherings to look at real-life case studies and look at training related to children, young people and online abuse.

Training

Carrie offers the bespoke training courses to anyone across the denomination and these have been really well received and attended, with 390 people attending the online courses. The Foundation eLearning course also has a high take-up, with 1134 courses completed during the past year.

Synods continue to offer intermediate and advanced safeguarding training. The Church of Scotland deliver equivalent training to churches in the National Synod of Scotland,

and the National Synod of Wales offer slightly varied courses to meet the new framework expected by Social Care Wales.

There are some changes to the Training Framework being brought to General Assembly 2025; see separate paper for further detail.

Policy

The URC's Good Practice documentation was reviewed in 2023. During 2025 any relevant amendments will be made. It is expected that these will be minor so a supplementary sheet will be shared to go alongside GP6. Kerry has supported reviewing GP6 and its supporting documents in line with the variations that are needed for the National Synods of Wales and Scotland.

Kerry has also published updates on the following documents:

- So They've Asked Me to be a Church Safeguarding Coordinator
- Lone Working Guidance
- DBS/PVG Matrix
- Guide to Domestic Abuse
- A suite of resources on supporting those that pose a risk in church
- General Assembly and a URCT Safeguarding Policy
- Template Synod Safeguarding Policy.

She also continues to work on the Quality Assurance Framework, the future Strategic Plan as discussed further below, and the DBS update service guidance.

Risk areas

Risk Register

As with all committees, the group submit a risk register biannually; the two highest risk areas that were identified in the URC's risk register for safeguarding in 2023 were:

1. Compliance with the reporting of safeguarding serious incidents to external agencies including the Charity Commission. This may involve the need for local churches, Synods, Synod Trusts and the URC Trust (URCT) to make reports and notifications. There is now a URCT Policy for Serious Incident reporting, which will be adapted to reflect the requirements of Synods and local churches. '*Good Practice 6*', along with training and the resource of Synod Safeguarding Officers should enable churches to have a clear understanding of when safeguarding concerns should be referred out to external agencies and how.
2. Ministerial discipline process, particularly around safeguarding practices, risk management and timescales. Both of these areas are being addressed, firstly the review of the Disciplinary Process, which is ongoing, and the use of an external HR company to carry out the investigation stage of the Section O process.

Due to both these areas having measures put in place to reduce the risks they are likely to be deemed lower risk when reviewed in 2025.

Areas of development

Quality Assurance Framework

The committee are supporting the development of a safeguarding quality assurance framework for safeguarding. This is crucial to ensure the denomination consistently and effectively fulfils its duties to protect individuals at risk. It will provide a structured approach to assessing the effectiveness of safeguarding practices, identifying areas for improvement, and demonstrating accountability.

The working group developing the framework – which is made up of people from all areas of the Church – are creating it to be person-centred, purposeful, flexible, and open. We understand that resources are limited across the denomination and will ensure that this is reflected in the approach that is taken. The committee are grateful to all local churches and Synods for the work they complete on the annual safeguarding return. Over the coming year the group will continue to work with key stakeholders, with the aim of presenting the final framework to General Assembly 2026.

Past Case Review

Mission Council May 2015 instructed the General Secretariat to put in place a safeguarding review. The review was completed in two phases:

Phase One aimed to ensure that the URC appropriately addressed any cases of historical abuse and examined the processes and procedures at the time of any complaints or grievances, which applied to both the Roll of Ministers and the Roll of Church-Related Community Workers; this included all who had been added to the Roll since 1972.

Phase Two invited individuals connected to the United Reformed Church to report any concern that they could have been a victim of abuse. It was concerned for allegations involving any lay, ordained or commissioned member of the URC which could suggest that someone: behaved in an abusive or inappropriate manner with a child or adult; may have committed a criminal offence against, or related to, a child or adult; or behaved towards a child or children or adult(s) in a way that indicates they were unsuitable to work with children or adults

The Past Case Review was concluded and reported back to Mission Council 2018. The current Safeguarding Committee are grateful to all those who worked on PCR1 and the mammoth task they undertook.

The Safeguarding Committee are proposing that the denomination carries out another past cases review and are in the early stages of working on how this would be carried out and will consult with the appropriate councils of the church to develop this review.

There are a number of reasons for the need for another review:

- Record keeping and management
 - Recording keeping for PCR1 is not robust and it is difficult to understand the outcome of cases that needed action;
 - PCR1 Phase Two call for people to come forward was short-reaching;
 - Ministers' and CRCW's files were not centrally located or digital at the time so there is a concern that not all available documents were read, some files had more contents than others and therefore some documents may have been disposed of over the years;

- There was a large number of volunteers with varying levels of safeguarding knowledge and experience who read files; there is a concern that this may mean that there was not consistency when reviewing files.
- Change in culture and personnel within the URC
 - There has been a positive cultural shift in recent years towards safeguarding within the URC and this is evidenced through the annual safeguarding returns data, the additions to the Rules of Procedure, Safeguarding Statement and implementation of the Safeguarding Committee made at General Assembly 2021, having SSOs now in all Synods who are from safeguarding backgrounds, and having built confidence in safeguarding.
- High profile cases across the faith sector
 - There have been a number of high-profile reviews of cases across various faith sectors and denominations. In turn this had led to an increase in people coming forward to the URC to ask us to review their cases that are known to the denomination but also to share allegations previously unknown to the denomination. This has evidenced that PCR1 Phase Two did not reach all those that have undisclosed cases to share.

Summary of Strategic Plan 2020-2025

The Safeguarding Strategic Plan was adopted by General Assembly in 2020.

There has been a significant transformation of safeguarding during this period, including changes in personnel at denominational and Synod level, changes to the structure and rules of procedure related to safeguarding, the change from a reference group to a committee of General Assembly and the cultural shift in attitudes to all of our safeguarding responsibilities.

Since the current DSL came into role the plan has been reviewed regularly and formally on an annual basis at the Safeguarding Committee. We are proud of the work that has been undertaken to achieve the key tasks outlined in the plan. There has been varying use of the plan by Synods and their safeguarding governance groups.

Below is the Strategic Plan in its entirety with an additional column for final comments on the plan from the committee. The Success Indicator and Final Comments columns have been RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rated. The plan attached is the original agreed at General Assembly 2020 so some of the terms and reference will relate to 2020 and may be different now.

Looking forward to a future plan, the Safeguarding Committee have delegated to a working group the task of looking at a future plan. The aim of the new plan will be to make it user-friendly for all councils of the Church, for it to be linked to the URC's Safeguarding Statement, Rule of Procedure and Structure additionally from General Assembly 2021 and the Good Practice Document.

URC's Safeguarding Strategic Plan 2020-2025 Final review for General Assembly 2025

Safeguarding people is a core part of the URC's mission. We safeguard the integrity of creation, and we all go together as one Church and one body to ensure the Church is a sustained community of care where everyone – particularly the most vulnerable – find a place of love, pastoral care and support.

Keeping people safe

The Past Case Review (2015-2017) indicated the need for the Church to undertake systemic changes. Responding to instructions given by Mission Council, the Safeguarding Advisory Group reviewed all the PCR Learning Report's recommendations, consulted with Synods and produced this comprehensive strategic safeguarding plan for the Church to take effect from 2020 to 2025. Having already accepted the recommendations of the Past Case Review Learning Group Report, Mission Council in November 2019, acting on behalf of General Assembly, endorsed the URC's safeguarding strategic plan as the next step of the journey and directed the safeguarding advisory group:

- a) to oversee the development, implementation, review and monitoring of the plan
- b) to advise Mission Council/General Assembly on progress at subsequent meetings.

Moving towards a five-year strategy

This strategy with its six clear objectives aims to effect cultural change and improvements in the safeguarding policies, practices and procedures of the United Reformed Church over the next five years. According to the URC's mission, the aim of the Church is to proclaim the love of God in Jesus Christ in word and deed. A main strategy to achieve that overall aim is to ensure that anyone who engages with our congregations, Synods, institutions, and offices across the three nations of England, Scotland and Wales is committed to protecting children and adults who are or might be experiencing abuse or neglect.

The strategy for safeguarding at the URC places ethos, shared responsibilities and collaborative action at the forefront of delivering the tasks and actions of this strategy in ways that align with the conciliar traditions and policies of the Church as well as with safeguarding statutory requirements and regulations. Central to this is the view of safeguarding as being everyone's responsibility, to support the welfare and wellbeing of people across the denomination, along with a commitment to a common policy – 'Good Practice 5 – *Safeguarding for children and adults at risk*' – as the only safeguarding policy of the Church. In Scotland, elements of the URC strategy will be delivered in accordance with the Safeguarding Policy and Procedures of the Church of Scotland due to the specific Scots law. For instance, safer recruitment and disciplinary processes are not covered in the current safeguarding agreement with the Church of Scotland.

Delivery of the Strategic Plan will occur in two phases: years one, two, three and four will focus on planning, delivery and evaluation. Finally, in year five the Safeguarding Advisory Group (SAG) will review progress against its published objectives and will undertake planning and consultation to develop a new Strategic Plan for 2025 onwards. The Safeguarding Advisory Group will be responsible and accountable for overseeing the priorities and activities in the plan, approving additional funding requests from Synods and reporting to Mission Council through its secretary (the Safeguarding Adviser of the Church). The Synods will make their own strategic arrangements related to the whole-Church strategy depending on available resources and existing safeguarding practices and they will have access to Assembly-level support throughout the years in delivering the plan.

Outline of six strategic objectives: Charting the way forward

1. Instil a safeguarding ethos of care and service within all local congregations, Synods and bodies of the URC.

Key tasks	Rationale	Success indicators	Deadlines	Key people	Wider issues and possible implications	Final comments
1.1. Ensure that each local church and community has safeguarding designated persons committed to protecting children and adults who are or might be at risk of experience abuse or neglect.	All URC churches have at least a single point of contact to protect places of worship and all those who are working for and affiliated with them.	Each local church has identified and appointed safeguarding coordinators to whom safeguarding incidents and concerns are reported.	March 2022	CSC Data/Admin staff Elders Pastoral Committees	Not enough and able volunteers to undertake the role – one CSC can be shared across a pastorate or group of local churches. A transparent approach to local safeguarding arrangements is valued in practice. Good examples of active safeguarding coordinators, elders and volunteers be acknowledged.	4.5% of local churches do not have a CSC SSOs and the central team continue to raise awareness of the need to have this role in place. The ACR gives us the opportunity to monitor this and for SSOs to then approach those without at CSC. The aim would be to have someone in every church in this role but is this realistic? We need to prompt alternatives more widely, such as sharing CSC across pastorates.
1.2 Raise awareness of child protection and safeguarding adults at risk with guidance, resources and	Keep every minister, children's and family worker, youth worker, elder, staff member and volunteer	Materials downloaded from websites, distributed and used. More requests for training made by churches.	Ongoing	SSOs CSCs S/G Adviser	Constant changes in public policy and legislation. The use of the website, new technologies, video clips, social media, newsletters and free resource packs to disseminate new knowledge	The national safeguarding team produce a quarterly safeguarding newsletter, they share with CH contact and with SSOs to share within Synods.

material within the worship, care and life of the URC.	regularly updated and well supported to place safeguarding at the heart of church life.	Training intake from children/youth workers, SSO and CSC.		S/G Training/ Development Coordinator Comms team Assembly and Synod staff and leaders Church Ministers and Elders	and examples of promoting good practice. Churches with no electronic systems are recorded and supported accordingly. Pay attention to identifying and defining spiritual abuse at the URC. A working group to look at the contested nature and theological implications of this form of abuse for the benefit of the whole denomination.	The central team have now produced and review the foundation, intermediate and advanced training which is rolled out by SSOs. Bespoke courses are mainly delivered by the central team, who have also worked with the children and youth team to produce training for young people and resources. In 2023 there were 3000 attendees of training across the denomination. GP6 has now been launched and includes updated links to resources both inhouse and external.
1.3 Develop shared awareness of safeguarding, and what counts as a safeguarding concern across the denomination in alignment with legislation and internal ethos.	Build on common understanding of protection and safeguarding among leaders, ministers, frontline staff, elders and other volunteers and encourage teamwork and collaboration in dealing with safeguarding incidents and concerns.	Training material and resources produced and accessed. Working groups crossing boundaries between different departments and roles within the URC.	June 2023	S/G Adviser S/G Training/ Development Coordinator SSOs	A culture of deference and inaction to be alarmed of and discouraged. A URC-standardised basic safeguarding training that reflects the needs of our Church. The opportunity of updating GP4 and recognise it as the only safeguarding policy and guidance document for the whole church. The vital role of keeping up with the regular meetings of SSOs.	The changes to the URC Constitution and the Safeguarding Policy Statement adopted by GA 2021 and 2022 gives weight to the importance of safeguarding in all areas of the church and describes the responsibility of different groups within the church, this continues to be shared with local churches by SSOs and the central team. Feedback from the 2023 and 2024 annual safeguarding returns evidenced a shift in thinking around safeguarding

					that it isn't a compliance and governance issue but a fundamental Christian value. The central team have now produced and review the foundation, intermediate and advanced training which is rolled out by SSOs. Bespoke courses are mainly delivered by the central team. The Safeguarding Committee, Training Review Group and Policy Review Group are all made up of people from different roles and departments within the URC nationally and Synod level.
1.4 Improve safeguarding communications between Church House, Synods, local churches and URC safeguarding designated persons.	Enable better information cascade, sharing of expertise and good practice in handling safeguarding incidents and concerns internally and externally.	Agreed flow chart for sharing information within the URC. Number of Synods using the main database. Use of URC recording form is standardised and increased.	January 2023	S/G Adviser SSOs CSCs	Recording and Sharing Information principles are clear and standardised in all parts of the Church. Three national meetings with all SSOs annually. Periodic 1-2-1 conversations of SSO with SA. Synod meetings and networks of local churches. Relevant events, training courses and conferences are shared within the Church.
					An information-sharing document for the main LEP stakeholders has been released for use. All Synods now have access to the case management system and feedback has been positive about its capacity. The CMS also have the capacity to share information between departments such as ministries, communications etc.

							All Synods are now using the URC database.
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2. Ensure initial and appropriate pastoral care and support to those who are impacted by safeguarding incidents and concerns

Key tasks	Rationale	Success indicators	Deadlines	Key people	Possible issues and wider implications	Comments
2.1 Establish ways of support that contribute to a lasting healing process for survivors and those affected by abuse, harm or neglect from the time of disclosure.	This allows individuals who disclose abuse or neglect to feel they are listened to and that the Church is ready to meet their pastoral care and support needs and/or signpost them to appropriate specialist services or other sources of support.	<p>Positive feedback and evaluation by survivors.</p> <p>Reduced number of complaints and reports about the URC not supporting survivors.</p> <p>Increased number of referrals to external specialist support.</p>	January 2021	<p>S/G Adviser</p> <p>SSOs</p> <p>CSCs</p> <p>Active Ministers</p> <p>Elders</p> <p>Synod/CH Pastoral Care Committees</p>	<p>Limited resources. Not enough people at the church or Synod to provide pastoral support and strong funding implications.</p> <p>Access to local help and/or relevant local services to be identified and offered.</p> <p>The ongoing impact of abuse on survivors. Avoid re-traumatisation of processes, which compounds the original abuse.</p> <p>Standardised training established for those with pastoral care responsibilities within URC.</p>	<p>Survivors work in the URC is in its infancy and needs to be developed.</p> <p>DSL to link in with external survivor groups, and also approach any URC survivors that may want to form a group.</p> <p>Feedback from the 2023 annual returns is that pastoral and specialist support for survivors is managed well at Synod and local church level.</p>
2.2 Co-produce with Synods an appropriate case management	This helps assess and prevent safeguarding risks	Number of individual cases.	July 2021	<p>S/G Adviser</p> <p>SSOs</p>	Not sharing the same understanding of what counts as a case –	The case management system is now in place

system that provides prompt and proportionate support to those children, young people and adults in greatest need.	with pastoral care needs established as early as possible and followed up.	<p>Number of occasions that pastoral support was offered.</p> <p>Number of cases that pastoral care and support has taken.</p> <p>Number of referrals to internal or external support.</p>		CSCs Synod/CH Pastoral Care Committees Synod and CH admin staff	<p>Definitions be provided in GP5 and internal protocols.</p> <p>Access for all Synods and Church House's relevant staff to a centralised recording system of allegations and cases of abuse, harm and neglect.</p> <p>Expectations and challenges of managing workload.</p> <p>Need for extra specialist support and supervision for those who handle serious cases.</p>	<p>and being accessed by all Synods.</p> <p>The central team now have a case work supervisor in place to support with case management.</p>
2.3 Consult and engage with survivors and relevant groups and organisations in all safeguarding developments.	This ensures that the URC co-produces with survivors, develops and adopts appropriate approaches to supporting survivors and preventing abuse.	<p>Number of consultations and reviews with survivors and relevant groups.</p> <p>New services of care and support.</p>	Ongoing	<p>S/G Adviser</p> <p>SSOs</p> <p>SAG</p>	<p>Budget implications.</p> <p>Ethical considerations – Principles of confidentiality and integrity are paramount.</p> <p>Voices are heard in meaningful and non-tokenistic ways in all future developments.</p> <p>Learn from/work with other denominations, organisations and specialist agencies (eg NAPAC).</p>	<p>Survivors work in the URC is in its infancy and needs to be developed.</p> <p>DSL to link in with external survivor groups, and also test the water for any URC survivors that may want to form a group.</p> <p>We do have 'survivors' on various groups that don't identify themselves as that but are valued members of group that are enabled to have input.</p>

2.4 Use internal or external specialists to support local congregations affected by serious incidents of abuse.	A whole-congregation approach will enable local church communities to recover from trauma and crisis in a supportive environment for all.	<p>Lessons drawn and impacted on local safeguarding practice.</p> <p>Sharing good stories of church community work in the area of safeguarding.</p>	Ongoing	<p>Elders</p> <p>Active Ministers</p> <p>SSOs</p> <p>Synod Moderators</p>	<p>Capacity problems – The vital role of leadership and collaboration (including GA appointed officers and Interim Moderators).</p> <p>High risk of stigma and conflicts to inflict more trauma to the lives of those affected by serious safeguarding situations.</p> <p>Principles of informed consent, confidentiality and transparency to be applied.</p> <p>The interrelated work of pastoral committees and LEPs.</p>	<p>The URCs approach is to not have a one size fits all response to supporting survivors and congregations but this should be bespoke to the individual to situation.</p> <p>The annual church safeguarding return now allows a space for churches to share good practice.</p>
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3. Set up secure and appropriate systems and processes of data and information handling and reporting

Key Tasks	Rationale	Success indicators	Deadlines	Key people	Wider issues and possible implications	Final comments
3.1 Develop and implement a centralised, standardised electronic system to record and follow up safeguarding	This protects the rights of individuals and relationships across the URC and ensures individual cases, and ministerial and case files are integrated,	<p>All Synods access the system</p> <p>Adoption of Appendix A8: Reporting</p>	June 2023	<p>S/G Adviser</p> <p>SSOs</p> <p>Ministries office</p>	<p>No clear lines of accountability and duties to record and report. Guidelines to align with Sharing Information Policies and Legislation.</p> <p>Not all Synods accessing the main database. Added</p>	<p>The CMS is now in place and all Synods have made use of it.</p> <p>Feedback has been positive and tweaks to the system have been implemented.</p>

cases and concerns from the beginning of the process to resolution.	monitored and securely stored in one unified system.	<p>concerns form across the URC.</p> <p>Number of resolved cases.</p> <p>Positive reviews from those who access the system.</p>		IT and admin staff	<p>costs for new systems/training to be considered at early stages of delivery. Access and permissions to appropriate staff are granted</p> <p>Disintegration of data in different parts of the church. Protocols are developed, applied and reviewed</p> <p>Different context in Scotland.</p>	DSL has access to all cases and can pull of reports.
3.2 Ensure there are clear lines of accountability by use of standard reporting forms and procedures on a regular and annual basis.	This helps those with safeguarding responsibilities keep an oversight of practice and share information with councils, committees and groups of the Church.	<p>Protocols established, used and reviewed.</p> <p>Number of reports produced and shared.</p>	June 2022	<p>S/G Adviser</p> <p>SSOs</p> <p>CSCs</p> <p>Members of relevant committees and groups</p>	<p>People not aware of lines of accountability.</p> <p>Roles and job descriptions with clear reference to responsibilities and duties to report and share information.</p> <p>Standardising GP5 as the main safeguarding policy and practice guidance across the URC.</p> <p>New policies (whistleblowing, bullying/harassment, lone working) are developed and applied across the URC (by SAG, HRAG or CHMG).</p>	<p>The CMS is now in place and all Synods have made use of it.</p> <p>GP6 make clearer where responsibility lay in safeguarding responsibilities, listing the different areas of the church.</p> <p>The constitutional changes from GA 2021/2022 clearly set out different areas of the churches responsibilities.</p> <p>CH have Bully and Harassment, Lone Worker and Whistleblowing Policies.</p>

3.3 Each URC Synod provides safeguarding data and information annually in a consistent format.	Consistency of what information is required as well as regular reports and reviews of internal safeguarding policy and practice will help monitor and review changes.	Evidence of review and changes on policy and practice. Use of standardised forms across Synods and churches.	Each May in all years.	Church Secretaries CSCs SSOs	Crossover with HR and comms/reputation management. Heavy workloads. Risk of not meeting deadlines. Provide adequate planning time for those who collate information and produce the annual S/G report for SAG and the whole church. Access to appropriate systems.	All Synods completed their annual safeguarding return in 2024 and 87.7% of local churches completed their returns for 2024 which is an increase on previous years.
3.4 Co-produce with Synods minimum standards of compliance with legislation and internal procedures and obtain benchmark progress for each Synod.	This will embed a culture of co-design on the journey of improving URC's safeguarding practices in open and transparent ways.	Synod positive feedback of co-production. Number of consultation meetings with Synods.	Each May in all years.	S/G Adviser SSOs Chairs of relevant committees and groups	Avoid a hierarchical model. Provide clear guidance on what is compulsory in the review of GP4 and production of GP5. Working closely with Synods.	GP6 was reviewed with personnel from all areas of the Church. This document sets minimum standard and compliance. All Synods completed annual returns in 2024 for compliance monitoring. A working group has been commissioned by the Safeguarding Committee to look at the URCs internal and external quality assurance framework, the aim is for a paper to be presented at GA 2026.

3.5. Establish tools to measure change and review adequacy of procedures and robustness of policies.	Support a culture of continuous learning and improvement in the local church and identify systemic barriers across the denomination.	Standardise and consistent use of audit tools. Periodic independent reviews and audits.	April 2024	S/G Adviser SSOs CSCs Elders	Fear of an independent oversight at the denomination, Synods and local churches. Building trust and collaboration. Co-produce audits with survivors of abuse in the design and delivery. Avoid long-lasting reviews and excessive paperwork.	A working group has been commissioned by the Safeguarding Committee to look at the URCs internal and external auditing processes, the aim is for a paper to be presented at GA 2026.
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4. Ensure the safeguarding policies and procedures are updated, reviewed, and implemented in practice throughout the URC

Key Tasks	Rationale	Success indicators	Deadlines	Key people	Possible issues and wider implications	Final comments
4.1 Update URC's safeguarding policy every two years following the publication of 'Good Practice 5' (annually for each local church).	This ensures good practice guidance is regularly reviewed and updated in line with new legislation and policy changes.	Up-to-date publications and e-resources intake.	January 2020 January 2022 January 2024	S/G Adviser SSOs	Meeting the needs for the whole denomination. Consultation with all parts of the church to identify policy areas that require improvements. Resources (writing group, publications, etc). Update and brief people to use GP5-GP6.	Churches are asked if they review their policy annually through their annual return, this is a prompt for them to review. SSOs and central teams monitor this through the annual returns. GP6 is now in place and all resources have been reviewed. As we now have a Policy Development coordinator in role this review process will happen in a timely manner.

4.2 Review current safer recruitment practice of the URC and develop a Good Practice Guidance for all parts of the Church.	Provide specific and clear advice that ensures appropriate recruitment, induction, and retention of trustees, and of paid and voluntary workers (ii) arranges lawful criminal record checks (DBS/PVG) for all who need this.	<p>New guidance's intake.</p> <p>Updated lists of eligible roles for DBS/PVG checks.</p> <p>Reduced number of inquiries to CH, Synods and DDC.</p> <p>Positive feedback in undertaking checks through DDC Satisfaction survey.</p>	October 2021 and ongoing	<p>S/G Adviser</p> <p>SSOs</p> <p>Ministries Office</p> <p>DBS Verifiers</p> <p>DDC staff</p>	<p>Over-checking criminal records of people affiliated with the URC.</p> <p>Create guidance that helps people clarify when it is not appropriate to check, and which roles are eligible for criminal record checks.</p> <p>Understanding checks as part of a wider recruitment process.</p> <p>Scotland's different policy requires separate guidance.</p>	<p>This is in place from GP6, Safer selection of Elders and minister, training course Safer Recruitment and training delivered by DDC about DBS/PVG checks.</p> <p>DBS check matrix was updated and a Scotland version has been created for PVGs going to AE in 2025.</p> <p>CSC are now DDC verifiers which was requested by local churches.</p>
4.3 Develop the capacity of safeguarding designated persons to conduct thorough safeguarding risk assessments and support offenders, alleged offenders and perpetrators of abuse across the URC.	Protect against abuse and better support those who are accountable to manage risk and monitor anyone who may pose a risk.	<p>Tools and resources produced and used.</p> <p>Number of safeguarding contracts/agreements.</p> <p>Number of DBS/PVG referrals.</p> <p>Publications and resources intake.</p>	March 2021	<p>S/G Adviser</p> <p>SSOs</p> <p>CSCs</p> <p>Elders</p>	<p>Interpersonal relationships can minimise the importance of risk assessment in the life of the church.</p> <p>Equip people with the right skills and specific guidance.</p> <p>Regular reviews of existing risk assessment tools and relevant sections of GP4/GP5. (Risk assessment and covenants of care forms and templates.)</p> <p>Information sharing protocols with other denominations.</p>	<p>All the documentation for those who pose a risk have recently been published on the URC website.</p> <p>CH team are looking to develop training on this subject.</p>

4.4 Connect safeguarding policy and procedures with URC's disciplinary processes, especially those related to ministers/CRCWs.	This helps establish good practice and expertise among all members of mandated groups and those involved in safeguarding cases that lead to instigation of disciplinary procedures.	Evidence of joint thinking and consultation in the review process of Section O. Setting up disciplinary processes for other relevant roles within the Church. Number of safeguarding cases recorded in the disciplinary processes.	June 2020	S/G Adviser MIND Ministries Office SSOs	Disconnection between safeguarding and disciplinary processes. A clear and transparent process is jointly agreed and reviewed. Mandatory safeguarding training for members of mandated group involved in the Section O process. Defined role for safeguarding officers and advisers in the new disciplinary process. Adherence to GP5/GP6 requirements and legislation (eg Employment Law).	The Section O process has been reviewed and continues to be reviewed to be clearer how safeguarding fits into this process. Disciplinary for office holders now in place. Lessons learnt group now in place for Section Os that have been concluded. Section Os are logged on the case management system.
4.5 Ensure people in positions of leadership and accountability are aware of any changes to safeguarding policy and practice.	New policy changes are discussed within supervision and training development of employed staff and shared within teams or working groups.	Communication material shared. Policy updates added on agendas. S/G advanced training uptake is increased.	January 2020 and ongoing	S/G Adviser SSOs Synod Moderators	Challenges in information sharing (language, terminologies, technical issues). Use of newsletters, briefs and reports to MC/GA to inform the right people. The central role of elders, ministers, Synod Moderators and General Secretaries in understanding safeguarding and being aware of URC's policy and practice.	The national team produce quarterly newsletter that keep people updated including those in leadership. Safeguarding training is mandatory for those in leadership roles and updates form part of training. GP6 was widely shared at all levels of the church and is accessible on the URC website.

5. Provide appropriate and accessible safeguarding training for all those who are accountable for and working with children, young people, and adults

Key tasks	Rationale	Success indicators	Deadlines	Key people	Possible issues and wider implications	Final comments
5.1. Benchmark and co-produce with Synods URC's standardised safeguarding training programme for all roles and positions within the URC expected to undertake regular and mandatory safeguarding training.	Align with current Synod practices and public policy requirements to enable all those working with children and adults at risk as well as those responsible for their care undertake regular safeguarding training.	<p>Training used consistently in each Synod.</p> <p>A system to monitor attendance and renewals is established and standardised.</p>	June 2021	<p>S/G Adviser</p> <p>S/G Training/ Development Coordinator</p> <p>Education and Learning staff</p> <p>SSOs</p> <p>Synod Training officers</p> <p>CSCs</p>	<p>Lack of consistency across Synods.</p> <p>Recording attendance and renewal of URC or other denominations' training.</p> <p>Resistance to travel to attend training. Online access can help but limits interaction and collaboration. Accessibility needs.</p> <p>Accrediting URC safeguarding training.</p> <p>Defining training packages tailored to specific roles and positions (eg Elders<>SSO).</p> <p>Adaptation to national contexts of Scotland and Wales.</p>	<p>The Training Framework was agreed at GA 2021.</p> <p>The central team have produced and review foundation, intermediate and advanced training. Along with the bespoke courses these courses are being delivered both by the central team and in Synods.</p> <p>Training numbers are monitored through the annual church and safeguarding returns in 2023 showed 3000 people attended training across the denomination.</p> <p>The training reference group are looking at issuing guidance on monitoring attendance at training and systems vary from Synod to Synod and use of the database.</p>

5.2 Ensure robust guidance on delivering mandatory training in both areas of safeguarding (children and adults at risk) for all identified groups involved in regulated activities.	Mandatory training will ensure monitoring the delivery of standardised and refreshing safeguarding training for identified roles of accountability and leadership.	Numerical evidence of training attendance. Evidence of positive action taken as a result of training Number of certificates per role.	December 2021	S/G Adviser S/G Training/ Development Coordinator SAG SSOs Ministries	Non-attendance for those who are involved in direct work with children and adults at risk. A framework of sanctions for non-attendance. Mandatory safeguarding training for active ministers. GA certificates. There needs to be a system in place to monitor and manage those that are not attending the training they are mandate to do.	The Training Framework was agreed at GA 2021. The central team have produced and review foundation, intermediate and advanced training along with the bespoke courses these courses are being delivered both by the central team and in Synods.
5.3 Develop and maintain quality standards of regular safeguarding training and professional development across the URC.	Consistency and quality at different levels of development and delivery of safeguarding training are reviewed regularly.	Positive evaluations and reviews of training provision.	June 2021	SAG S/G Training/ Development Coordinator SSOs Ministries	Connection with accreditation. Working with Learning Resource Centres.	The central team have produced and review foundation, intermediate and advanced training along with the bespoke courses. These courses are being delivered both by the central team and in Synods.
5.4 Develop and update a comprehensive guidance and package of support resources to make serving elders and trustees (URC and	The aim is that elders/trustees feel confident in preventing abuse for all people in the church as well as protecting the assets and	Number of interactions/meetings of designated safeguarding persons with elders. Feedback from elders meeting.	June 2023 and ongoing	S/G Adviser S/G Training/ Development Coordinator SSOs	Data of elders are not recorded at CH or Synods. High number of elders – cost and GDPR implications. Enabling regular interactions and briefings in Elders or Trustees Meetings to	Elders as Trustee training has been produced and is run across the URC, Elders are currently mandated to complete foundation training.

Synod) aware of their legal responsibilities.	reputation of churches.	Numbers of elders attending basic safeguarding training. Evaluation of training provision. Referrals to CC.		Education and Learning Committee	<p>minimise concerns and build trust.</p> <p>Working closely with other departments/teams within the URC.</p> <p>Keep elders up to date regarding changes to regulations and policies using traditional and visual methodologies (induction material, <i>Reform</i>, video, etc.</p>	<p>The changes to the URC Constitution and the Safeguarding Policy Statement adopted by GA 2021 gives weight to the importance of safeguarding in all areas of the church and describes the responsibility of different groups within the church, this continues to be shared with local churches by SSOs and the central team.</p> <p>National team to look at the 'So They Have Asked Me to Be an Elder' booklet to see if it covered safeguarding responsibilities and share this with the Ministries team who own this document.</p> <p>GP6 is to make it clearer who plays what role in safeguarding situation including local church/elders.</p> <p>All Synods now have an SSO solely in that role.</p> <p>SSO attend an annual residential together.</p>
5.5 Value the expertise of and contribute to continuous development of	Ensure Synod designated persons are equipped and remain resourceful to	Numbers of co-working groups and surveys with SSOs. Records of attending relevant training and	Ongoing	SSOs S/G Adviser	<p>Heavy workloads and increased commitments.</p> <p>Common understanding of safeguarding between SSOs to be fostered.</p>	

Synod Safeguarding Officers.	lead all aspects of safeguarding practice in their local churches with continuous support and supervision.	professional development opportunities. Positive appraisals and feedback from SSOs.		Line managers of SSOs Synod Moderators Relevant Synod committees and groups	Joint posts with CYDO roles to be reviewed Adaptations to national contexts (Wales/Scotland).	Peer-led training sessions for SSOs continue. Standalone training sessions have been delivered for SSOs. Case work supervisor now in role to support SSOs on cases. SSO training is not currently recorded. Synods are responsible for appraisals and these are not shared with the central team or the Safeguarding Committee.
5.6 Ensure safeguarding is part of the induction of any newly appointed persons to URC roles (particularly trustees, children's and youth workers and those in regulated activities with adults) alongside the specific role induction.	This enables each new role holder to understand the personal and corporate liability should a safeguarding incident happen, while building a culture of prevention at every church setting.	Number of job and role descriptions where safeguarding is listed as duty.	June 2022	HR CSCs Active Ministers Pastoral Committees Training Officers	Oversee essential requirements set up by Government guidance or CC. HR teams to update existing recruitment and induction policies. Update safer recruitment guidance for those who recruit, induct and line-manage workers and volunteers.	Safeguarding training is mandatory in these roles but there is no timescale on how long someone has to undertake this training, an amendment to this is coming to GA 2025. CH employees all complete safeguarding training during induction period.

	committee, venue.						
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6. Encourage and build constructive partnerships with statutory, non-statutory bodies, other denomination and faith-based communities

Key tasks	Rationale	Success indicators	Deadlines	Key people	Possible issues and wider implications	Final comments
6.2 Improve public awareness of URC's good practice in safeguarding across denominational, cross-denominational and ecumenical settings.	Encourage personal drive and actions of URC people (particularly volunteers) to improve the safeguarding ethos at the local church and public acknowledgement of personal and collective efforts.	Increased number of local initiatives and campaigns. Opportunities to share expertise externally.	March 2023	Synods S/G Adviser SSOs CSCs SAG	Initiatives and events. Links with other developments 'Walking the way safely'. Links with Methodists, Baptists and Anglicans.	DSL on ecumenical working groups and member of Christian Forum of Safeguarding. Some SSOs attend local interdenominational meetings. The URC was core participants of the IICSA. Safeguarding symposium to be run bi-annually. Central team linking in with the Communications team at CH and more social media posts being made around safeguarding.
6.3 Develop and share guidance on safeguarding when churches hire out their premises or	Promote good practice in allowing our premises to be used by	Increased use of the guidance.	June 2023	S/G Adviser SSOs	Serious incidents not reported to CC. Clear safeguarding arrangements and agreements.	New safeguarding clauses have been issues to Synods following a lengthy development and consultation period.

providing space to groups/ organisations whose work involves children.	external organisations working with children and adults at risk.					
6.4 Endorse close partnership and knowledge exchange of best practice with other denominations to support LEP's and church communities.	Promote ecumenical dialogue and co-produce partnerships for the benefit of public worship, protection of the vulnerable and pastoral care of communities.	Publication of material and resources. Number of joint events and seminars.	Ongoing	S/G Adviser SSOs CSCs CFS Local ecumenical groups	Shared resources and common events. Ecumenical and international settings.	DSL on ecumenical working groups and member of Christian Forum of Safeguarding. Some SSOs attend local interdenominational meetings.

Glossary

CC Charity Commission	DSL Designated Safeguarding Lead	SAG Safeguarding Advisory Group
CFS Churches Forum for Safeguarding	GP4/5/6 Good Practice 4/5/6	S/G Safeguarding
CH Church House	LEP Local Ecumenical Partnership	SSO Synod Safeguarding Officer
CRCW Church-related Community Workers	LADO Local Authority Designated Officer	GA General Assembly
CSC Church Safeguarding Coordinator	MC Mission Council	GP Good Practice
CYDO Children's and Youth Development Officer	MIND Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group	URC The United Reformed Church
DBS Disclosure and Barring Service	PVG Protecting Vulnerable Groups (Scotland Scheme)	
DDC Due Diligence Checking Ltd		

Annual safeguarding report 2025

This report is created from data captured from the Annual Church Safeguarding Returns for 2024, but does not include analysis from Synod Safeguarding Officers (SSOs) through their reporting, due to time frame for submission. Further in-depth analysis will be reported to the September 2025 Safeguarding Committee for reflection and action.

Introduction

87.7% of churches completed safeguarding annual returns.
4.5% of churches have no Safeguarding Coordinator.

Comments: Again this year, there has been an increase in churches completing their annual safeguarding return (+6%) which is positive. Also the number of churches without Safeguarding Coordinators had reduced, which is encouraging. SSOs continue to reach out to those churches not completing returns or without Safeguarding Coordinators to offer support and encouragement.

There is a sense that the culture of safeguarding in our church has shifted, with feedback that safeguarding is seen as who we are as a Christian denomination to want to keep people safe, and to love and support those who have been harmed, and not a governance and compliance issue.



Safeguarding concerns

Number of concerns related to children: 55, the main two categories of abuse are emotional abuse and neglect.

Number of concerns related to adults: 159, the main two categories of abuse are emotional abuse and domestic abuse.

(These figures are likely to be higher when final data is collected by SSOs and do not include high numbers of low-level concerns supported by SSOs).



Comments: The number of concerns being reported and supported by safeguarding personnel have slightly increased on last year's figures. This is to be expected as we become more aware through training and awareness-raising of what is a safeguarding concern and how to report this.

The safeguarding training offered is continually being reviewed, updated and developed to ensure that all safeguarding personnel across the denomination are trained in topical issues as well as core safeguarding topics.

The Church Life Review questionnaire responses were very positive in relation to how safeguarding is supported across the denomination in terms of training, personnel and shared resources. The central and Synod safeguarding teams continue to work hard to offer this high level of support to local churches and value the positive feedback.

Pastoral care and support

Comments: Local churches and Synods continue to source pastoral care and support for individual and groups in need of this support, with access to Place for Hope support as needed.

Managing risk

65 known people who pose a risk to children or adults are attending URC churches.

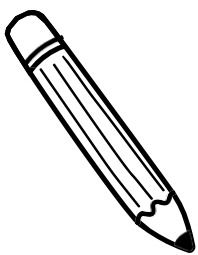
Comments: Those on safeguarding agreements in local churches continue to be supported by the Church Safeguarding Coordinators and Synod Safeguarding Officers. The guidance documents for supporting those that pose a risk has had a major overhaul over the last period and is now available on the URC website. We hope that these documents make it clearer to all how we can safely manage those that pose a risk in our churches.



Safer recruitment

Comments: With the culture shift within safeguarding, the understanding of the need for safer recruitment continues to be recognised and adhered to. In turn, this has led to an increase in the number of DBS/PVG checks being completed: 2,565 being completed in 2024 as a small part of the safer recruitment/safer Election of Elders process.

Of those 2,565 DBS/PVGs being completed in 2024, 1.1% were issued with a blemish which required a risk assessment on the suitability for the individual to carry out the role. These were carried out by the Synod Safeguarding Officer in liaison with the local church.



Additional comments

The Safeguarding Committee would like to thank all local churches and church Safeguarding Coordinators for taking the time to complete the Annual Return. It really does support the work of the Synod Safeguarding Officers and that of the Church House safeguarding team. IF you have any feedback on the annual safeguarding return, then please contact **safeguarding@urc.org.uk**.

Paper T2

Safeguarding training framework

Safeguarding Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Roger Jones, Convenor rjones@urcsouthern.org.uk Sharon Barr, Secretary sharon.barr@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 36 General Assembly adopts the amended Safeguarding Training Framework for use across the United Reformed Church. Resolution 37 General Assembly instructs the Denominational Safeguarding Team and Synods to oversee the implementation of the framework.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	<p>The URC's Past Case Review indicated the need for standardised mandatory safeguarding training for those working with children, young people and adults at risk across the denomination. The Safeguarding Advisory Group brought the first URC Safeguarding Training Framework to General Assembly 2021.</p> <p>The denomination has now been working with the framework for four years. There have been various changes within safeguarding in these years, including a significant change in safeguarding personnel, the cultural and attitude shift to see safeguarding as who we are as a Christian denomination and not a compliance issue, and important external reports and inquiries related to other faith organisations.</p> <p>The framework has been regularly reviewed and critiqued, and it is felt by the Safeguarding Committee that replaced the Safeguarding Advisory Group, and other key stakeholders, that there are changes that need to be adopted by General Assembly.</p>
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	The updated framework is presented in the main body of this paper and rationale for changes are included.
Main points	The framework outlines a) the training pathways: Introduction, Foundation, Intermediate, Advanced and Bespoke b) which pathway is mandated for different roles within the church.
Previous relevant documents	Safeguarding Training Framework, Paper T5 from General Assembly 2021.
Consultation has taken place with...	Safeguarding Committee Members Synod Safeguarding Officers Synod Moderators Synod Clerks Children and Youth Development + Team Secretary for Ministries URC's Chief Operating Officer 50 Church Safeguarding Coordinators 50 Church Secretaries 50 active Ministers. All those that responded were in support of the changes to ensure the URC is taking seriously its responsibility to safeguarding everyone, and through training to increase levels of understanding and responsibilities.

Summary of impact

Financial	There will be no additional costs to those which are already incurred for training including staff/trainer costs and development of resources.
External (eg ecumenical)	

URC Safeguarding Training Framework

Guidance

The requirements for safeguarding training in Scotland and Wales are different to those in England and therefore there are distinct elements to the framework for churches in England, Wales and Scotland and further details will be found below.

If you are in the National Synod of Wales, please go to [section 6 on p9](#) of this document where you will find the guidelines for Wales along with the training matrix for this Synod.

If you are in the National Synod of Scotland, please go to [section 7 on p17](#) of this document where you find the guidelines and matrix for the National Synod of Scotland.

1. Introduction

The United Reformed Church recognises that it is everyone's responsibility to safeguard others and thus needs to ensure that people holding certain roles and responsibilities are specifically equipped to protect vulnerable groups including both children and adults.

2. URC's Safeguarding Training Framework

In order to achieve this goal, the URC offers regular safeguarding training for all those working with children and adults at risk as well as those they support. They need to know how to promote the welfare of those they support, reduce the likelihood of harm, abuse or neglect, and respond effectively to concerns or allegations of abuse which arise.

The Safeguarding Training Framework details a tiered structure of training: Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced. There is also a combined course which comprises Foundation and Intermediate and at the proper time this will replace the need to do two separate training courses. Those who currently need both training courses and have not yet done Foundation can access this instead. There is also an introductory course to assist those who have had equivalent external training and the details of this can be found below. There are Bespoke Modules which are highly recommended in certain roles.

The General Assembly has made it mandatory for some role holders in the life of the church, paid or voluntary, to undertake safeguarding training: for these individuals that will be either at Foundation, Intermediate or Advanced level. The aim of all training is that we become a safer church for all.

3. Safeguarding Training Structure

The URC safeguarding training programme has been structured into three distinct but related modules; Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced training. There is also a combined module which combines Foundation and Intermediate to assist with the roll-out of this training. Training is designed not just to be informative but based on case examples. Some training will be available as online learning which will enable more participants to engage in safeguarding training. The Foundation module can be accessed by anyone within the URC. Members of the church who have no requirement to do safeguarding training can undertake this training if they wish and there is no log-in or registration requirement for this. This training can be found at: www.urclearninghub.org.uk/course/view.php?id=24 The table in Appendix Two illustrates the recommended level of training for individuals in various roles.

Training should be renewed every three years. Training will be renewed at the highest level needed and therefore those who need Intermediate would ONLY complete the Intermediate refresher and would not need to repeat Foundation training. Those who have completed Advanced training will only need to refresh at this level and will not repeat Foundation or Intermediate training.

The flowchart below illustrates where equivalent training may be accepted by the Synod to fulfil the requirements of the URC's training framework. Where external training is accepted the introductory e-learning course MUST be completed. This can be found at: www.urclearninghub.org.uk/course/view.php?id=69.

4. Recording of training

Completion of attendance at all Foundation, Intermediate, Advanced and Bespoke level training delivered by the Synod must be recorded onto the URC's National Database by the Synod. Completion of Bespoke modules delivered by the Central Safeguarding Team will be recorded on the database by the Central Team Administrator. It is the responsibility of the Church Safeguarding Coordinator to ensure that training is up to date for local churches, and they are required to liaise with their Church Secretary to ensure all role holders are listed on the database and that this information is up to date. The database can be updated with role holders when the Annual Returns are due and there is an expectation that Church Safeguarding Coordinators will monitor training compliance as part of the Annual Safeguarding Return. This is a pertinent time to encourage role holders to book onto training courses. Where there is no Church Secretary the Church Safeguarding Coordinator must liaise with the Elders to ascertain who has responsibility for the returns. Any questions about this can be directed to the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

The Ministries team at Church House will have oversight of whether Ministers' training is up to date and will run reports accordingly, sharing with Moderators and SSOs as relevant.

For Synod roles and Assembly roles, Line Managers and the relevant Committees will need to be in conversation to ensure training is completed and up to date.

5. Compliance

All office holders are required to complete the necessary level of training to ensure their church is compliant with requirements set out by General Assembly, the Charity Commission, and their insurer (and the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator' for those in Scotland).

Office Holders should aim to complete the first level of necessary training within six months of starting in role. If no training is available to them in this time they should book on the next available training as soon as possible.

Failure to complete the required training may result in the Ministerial Discipline or Disciplinary for Office Holders Policy procedures being evoked. Where learners are unable to complete the required training, the reasons will be discussed and steps taken to ensure training is accessible. Synods will endeavour to offer training via a range of methods where resources allow but churches should support learners to access training online and look at ways that role holders can be supported to do this.

6. Training pathways

Volunteers and office holders who have completed equivalent training in a relevant external role and are competent in recognising signs and symptoms of abuse and responding correctly may use this prior learning to bypass the Foundation training and proceed to the Intermediate Level if this training has been completed in the past year. When this situation arises, the person must complete the Introductory module to ensure they understand the specific considerations within the Church as well as the specific guidance and policies within the URC. Intermediate training must then be completed with the URC if the role requires this level.

A mapping exercise has been conducted to ensure that training from ecumenical partners in the Church of England and the Methodist Church matches with the requirements laid out by the URC.

Those who have completed Advanced Level training in the Methodist Church are trained to the equivalent level of our Intermediate training and may therefore proceed straight to Advanced training if they have completed this within the last three years and their role requires. They must also complete our Introductory module.

Those who have completed Leadership Level training in the Church of England are trained to the equivalent level of our Intermediate training and may therefore proceed straight to Advanced training if they have completed this within the last three years and their role requires it. They must also complete our Introductory module.

Any person coming from other denominations can discuss their training and the learning outcomes with the Training and Development Coordinator (Safeguarding) if they wish to progress up a pathway without completing Foundation or Intermediate training.

Those who have completed training elsewhere must present their certificate to the Church Safeguarding Coordinator, and the Church Safeguarding Coordinator must liaise with the Church Secretary (or Elders where there is no secretary) to ensure this is recorded on the database. Synod Safeguarding Officers must also be consulted to ratify this decision and can also be contacted to update the database if necessary. Ministers and CRCWs must still complete URC training to ensure they can work across churches that follow our safeguarding.

7. Requirements for those under the age of 18

Where the roles in the matrix are held by those who are under the age of eighteen, Foundation training will still need to be completed. Consultation has taken place with the Children and Youth team to ensure that training is suitable for anyone who is under the age of eighteen, and whilst the subject matter is sensitive there is still a need for those in role to understand expectations and to be able to recognise and respond to any concerns. If the course is to be taken as e-learning this should be completed alongside a trusted adult and the Children and Youth Development Officer should be informed.

Introductory module

This module is available as e-learning and focuses on the specifics of safeguarding within a church context and safeguarding within the URC. This course contains vital information that would not be found in external training. This course can only be taken in lieu of Foundation training by individuals who demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of the signs and symptoms of abuse and an understanding of the Four Rs (Recognising, Responding, Recording and Reporting Abuse). The introductory module will contain the following material:

- An introduction to the importance of safeguarding and the specific risks associated with safeguarding in a church context.

- Legislation, policy, and guidance including 'Good Practice 6' (and its successors) and its appendices.
- The barriers to the Four Rs including an overview of how the Four Rs can be addressed in line with the concept of forgiveness in the Christian Faith.
- The role of local church Safeguarding Coordinators and Synod Safeguarding Officers and how they can support local churches to be as safe as possible.
- An overview of what is required in each church including policies and a safeguarding coordinator.
- A basic overview of legal obligations placed upon faith-based organisations including the role of Trustees and Elders as stipulated by the Charity Commission. (Elders will be directed to additional information on this when undertaking e-learning).
- Basic knowledge around what Spiritual abuse is and the signs and symptoms to look out for in the Church.

The introductory course usually takes 45 minutes to complete.

Foundation Safeguarding Training

The Foundation module is available as e-learning but may also be delivered online or face to face where necessary. The training will contain the following:

- An introduction to the importance of safeguarding and the specific risk associated with safeguarding in a church context.
- Legislation, policy, and guidance including Good Practice document and its appendices.
- The types of abuse and an awareness of the signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect.
- The Four Rs and how to effectively use these in a church context.
- The barriers to the Four Rs including an overview of how the 4Rs can be addressed in line with the concept of Forgiveness in the Christian Faith.
- The role of local church Safeguarding Coordinators and Synod Safeguarding Officers and how they can support local churches to be as safe as possible.
- An overview of what is required in each church including policies and a safeguarding coordinator.
- A basic overview of legal obligations placed upon faith-based organisations including the role of Trustees and Elders as stipulated by the Charity Commission. (Elders will be directed to additional information on this when undertaking E-learning)
- Online safety.
- Basic knowledge around what Spiritual abuse is and the signs and symptoms to look out for in the Church.

Foundation training is between 90 minutes and two hours depending on the mode of delivery.

Intermediate Safeguarding Training

Intermediate training is complementary to the Foundation module and enhances the knowledge that participants gained, whilst also introducing new topics and focusing on safer practices:

- Safer Culture building on the information in *Good Practice 6* document.

- Safer Working Practices building on the information in the Good Practice document including hiring of the building, ratios, lone working, and social media in line with codes of conducts.
- Safer recruitment principles and the need for a consistent approach across the denomination. This includes an understanding of the common barriers to recruiting paid staff and volunteers safely, and the safer Election of Elders.
- The principles of safeguarding adults at risk, including issues of capacity and when to override consent in an adult's best interests.
- Confidential record keeping and the importance of seeking and recording consent in relation to church activities.
- A review of the Four Rs and how to challenge inappropriate behaviours.

Intermediate training is estimated to last 2.5 hours.

Combined Foundation and Intermediate module

The combined module will combine both Foundation and Intermediate modules for those that need an Intermediate level of training. Those that need an Intermediate level can therefore do this course as one training instead of completing the e-learning and the Intermediate level.

- The importance of safeguarding and the specific risk associated with safeguarding in a church context.
- Legislation, policy, and guidance including the Good Practice document and its appendices. This will include a look at safer culture and safer working practices.
- The types of abuse and an awareness of the signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect.
- The Four Rs and how to effectively use these in a church context.
The barriers to the Four Rs including an overview of how the Four Rs can be addressed in line with the concept of Forgiveness in the Christian Faith.
- The role of local church Safeguarding Coordinators and Synod Safeguarding Officers and how they can support local churches to be as safe as possible.
- An overview of what is required in each church including policies and a safeguarding coordinator.
- A basic overview of legal obligations placed upon faith-based organisations including the role of Trustees and Elders as stipulated by the Charity Commission. (Elders will be directed to additional information on this when undertaking e-learning)
- Online safety.
- Basic knowledge around what Spiritual abuse is and the signs and symptoms to look out for in the Church.
- Safer recruitment principles and the need for a consistent approach across the denomination. This includes an understanding of the common barriers to recruiting paid staff and volunteers safely.
- The principles of safeguarding adults at risk, including issues of capacity and when to override consent in an adult's best interests.
- Confidential record keeping and the importance of seeking and recording consent in relation to church activities.

Combined training is estimated to last 2.5-three hours.

Advanced Safeguarding Training

Advanced training is to support those who have leadership roles in which they support, manage, and oversee safeguarding arrangements and practice.

The Advanced module contains the following content:

- The attitudes and values of the individual and how these can impact safeguarding decision-making. This includes how to recognise personal prejudices and biases.
- Systemic grooming, and the impact on the entire denomination. This includes how to have safe relationships with appropriate boundaries in place.
- Handling allegations against those involved in the church whether paid or voluntary, lay or ordained.
- Supporting those who may pose a risk to children or adults, whilst maintaining policies that place safeguarding at the heart of the church.
- Referrals to external partners including the role of the Charity Commission during an allegation, and the role of the Designated Officer (DO).
- An Advanced understanding of how to recognise, respond, record and report safeguarding concerns, deal with allegations, complaints, and disciplinary procedures, and how to support others in the Church.

The Advanced module is estimated to last approximately four hours.

Refresher Training

Training needs to be refreshed every three years at the highest level required.

Foundation Refresher Training

Foundation training will be reviewed regularly and updated but a fully refreshed version will be released every three years to ensure that those who refresh will encounter new material. When refreshing please utilise the current e-learning package.

Intermediate Refresher Training

This training will cover all of the topics listed above for Intermediate Training along with:

- The Four Rs and how to effectively use these in a church context.
- An overview of what is required in each church including policies and a safeguarding coordinator.
- A basic overview of legal obligations placed upon faith-based organisations including the role of Trustees and Elders as stipulated by the Charity Commission.
- Basic knowledge around what Spiritual abuse is and the signs and symptoms to look out for in the Church.

Advanced Refresher Training

This training will cover all of the topics listed above for Intermediate Training along with a pre-read and a video which will cover:

- A review of the Four Rs and how to challenge inappropriate behaviours.
- Safer Culture building on the information in 'Good Practice 6' document.

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- Safer Working Practices building on the information in Good Practice document including hiring of the building, ratios, lone working, and social media in line with codes of conducts.
- Safer recruitment principles and the need for a consistent approach across the denomination. This includes an understanding of the common barriers to recruiting paid staff and volunteers safely.
- The principles of safeguarding adults at risk, including issues of capacity and when to override consent in an adult's best interests.
- Confidential record keeping and the importance of seeking and recording consent in relation to church activities.

Matrix for England: Levels of mandatory training

Roles requiring mandatory training	Foundation	Intermediate or Combined	Advanced	Recommended Bespoke Modules
Synod Safeguarding Officers	✓	✓	✓	
Line Managers of Synod Safeguarding Officers	✓			Line Manager training
Church Safeguarding Coordinators	✓	✓	✓	Spiritual Abuse Domestic Abuse Online Safety Safeguarding Children and Young People Safeguarding Adults Verifiers and Safer Recruitment Church safeguarding Coordinators E-learning this can be found at: www.urclearninghub.org.uk/course/view.php?id=70
Deputy Safeguarding Coordinators	✓	✓		Spiritual Abuse Domestic Abuse Online Safety Safeguarding Children and Young People Safeguarding Adults
Members of the General Assembly Safeguarding Committee	✓			
Synod Safeguarding Committees and Reference Groups	✓			
Active Ministers and CRCWs including retired ministers who meet the requirements of active ministry)	✓	✓	✓	Spiritual Abuse Domestic Abuse Online Safety Safeguarding Children and Young People Safeguarding Adults Supporting Survivors

Synod Moderators	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Synod Clerks	✓				
Synod staff	✓				
Church House staff	✓		As directed by line management	As directed by line management	
Youth and Children Workers including volunteers	✓		✓		Safeguarding Children and Young People Online Safety
Adult workers including volunteers	✓		✓		Safeguarding Adults Modern Slavery Drug and Alcohol Abuse and the links to Safeguarding Refugees and Asylum Seekers
Managers of children, youth and adults workers	✓		✓		Safeguarding Children and Young People Safeguarding Adults
Pastoral visitors	✓		✓	Where visits include offenders managed by the church	Domestic Abuse Safeguarding Adults Modern Slavery Supporting Survivors
Worship Leaders and Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers	✓		✓		
URC Trustees and Synod Trustees	✓				
Elders as Trustees	✓		✓	Where there is no Minister and if there is a managed offender in the church at least one Elder must undertake this level.	Elders as Trustees
Church Secretary	✓				Verifier and Safer Recruitment
Chaplains and Ministers on the Roll in other roles	✓		✓		

Bespoke Modules

These are available to ANY member of the Church or role holder. Bespoke modules can be completed at any stage of a learner's journey once they have completed Foundation training, and can be undertaken prior to other levels (ie Intermediate and Advanced) within the mandated framework.

The Modules are currently:

- Domestic Abuse
- Supporting Survivors
- Spiritual Abuse
- Drug and Alcohol Abuse and the links to Safeguarding
- Refugees and Asylum Seekers
- Safer Recruitment
- DDC Verifier training
- Modern Slavery
- Online Safety
- Protecting Children and Young People
- Safeguarding Adults
- Elders as Trustees.

Dates for this training are circulated by the Central Team and each training will be available on Zoom. Bookings for this training can be made via the Church House Safeguarding Administrator. New modules will still be developed in line with feedback from the annual returns and in response to legislation or topical issues. All bespoke training will be reviewed regularly to reflect the current climate surrounding each topic.

Wales

All training delivered in the URC National Synod of Wales is designed to align with the National Safeguarding Training, Learning and Development Standards – <https://socialcare.wales/resources-guidance/safeguarding-list/national-safeguarding-training-learning-and-development-standards> and the framework set out by the URC.

Group A Social Care Wales training and 'An Introduction to Safeguarding in the URC' are recommended to members of the Church congregation. These are both available as e-learning modules.

Group B/Intermediate training will cover the topics set out in the framework for Intermediate training alongside the requirements set for Group B training in Wales. Group B/Intermediate training takes five hours to complete and comprises either an entire day face to face training, or combined training delivered via 3 modules, two online learning modules and one two hours Zoom module.

Group C training will cover the topics set out in the framework for Advanced training alongside the requirements set out in the framework for Group C training in Wales.

The Welsh B and C training courses provided by the URC are specific to the URC and learners must ensure they complete these within this church if their role requires. However, if they have previously completed Group B or Group C training

Safeguarding Committee

with external providers, they will only need to do an additional top up module to ensure they have been trained in line with the URC framework as well as Welsh requirements. The extra module should take no more than 90 minutes.

There are some roles which require Advanced URC training but do not require Group C training and this is defined in the training matrix below.

Matrix for Wales – Level of mandatory training

Roles requiring mandatory training:	Group A Social Care Wales Training And the URC Introductory Module	Group B Intermediate URC Wales Training	Group C Advanced URC Wales Training	Recommended Bespoke Modules
Synod Safeguarding Officers/Advisors	✓	✓	✓	
Managers of Synod Safeguarding Officers/Advisors	✓	✓	✓	Line Manager training
Church Safeguarding Coordinators	✓	✓	Required to do URC advanced training	Spiritual Abuse Domestic Abuse Online Safety Safeguarding Children and Young People Safeguarding Adults Verifiers and Safer Recruitment Church safeguarding Coordinators E-learning this can be found here: www.urclearninghub.org.uk/course/view.php?id=70
Deputy Church Safeguarding Coordinator	✓	✓		Spiritual Abuse Domestic Abuse Online Safety

					Safeguarding Children and Young People Safeguarding Adults
Members of the Safeguarding Committee, Synod Safeguarding Committees and Reference Groups	✓		✓		
Active Ministers and CRCWs (including retired ministers who meet the requirements of active ministry)	✓		✓	Required to do URC Advanced level training	Spiritual Abuse Domestic Abuse Online Safety Safeguarding Children and Young People Safeguarding Adults Supporting Survivors
Synod Moderators	✓		✓	✓	
Youth and Children workers including volunteer leaders	✓		✓		Safeguarding Children and Young People Online Safety
Youth and Children's workers (volunteer helpers) **	✓		✓		Safeguarding Children and Young People Online Safety
Adult workers including volunteer leaders	✓		✓		Safeguarding Adults Modern Slavery Drug and Alcohol Abuse and the links to Safeguarding Refugees and Asylum Seekers
Adult workers (volunteer helpers) **	✓		✓		Safeguarding Adults
Managers of Children, Youth and Adults workers	✓		✓		Safeguarding Children and Young People

					Safeguarding Adults
Pastoral workers/visitors	✓		✓		Safeguarding Adults Domestic Abuse
Synod Clerks	✓		✓		
Section O Investigation, Commission and Appeal Panel Members	✓		✓		Spiritual Abuse
Worship Leaders and Assembly-Accredited Lay Preachers	✓		✓		
URC Trustees and Synod Trustees	✓		✓	✓	
Lead Synod Trustee for Safeguarding					
Elders as local church trustees	✓		✓		Elders as Trustees
Chaplains and Ministers on the Roll in other roles	✓	✓	✓		

** Those helping at a holiday club, assisting occasionally with Sunday school, running a craft activity at Messy Church, running the tuck shop at a youth group, helpers at a craft club/lunch/trip etc, where it is clear these people are in 'helper' roles, are always working in the presence of, and under the supervision of, a 'leader'.

Scotland

The United Reformed church has a service level agreement with the Church of Scotland regarding safeguarding training and therefore everyone in Scotland is required to complete training in line with the requirements set out in the Church of Scotland training framework (www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/departments/safeguarding-service/training). As our churches differ slightly, we require at least one Elder/Deacon to complete the Leadership level if they are in leadership in a church where there is no Minister and no plan for there to be a Minister imminently. This should ideally be the Elder/Deacon who sits on the safeguarding panel for the church. This training will be delivered specifically for those Elders/Deacons and will be co-facilitated by the URC Training and Development Coordinator.

Any queries regarding this can be addressed to the Moderator.
Scottish Synod Moderators are encouraged to complete both the Scottish training and the URC training.

Those with a role in a church in Scotland may access bespoke training courses if they so wish and there is guidance in the matrix regarding the courses which may be relevant to each role.

The matrix below details the roles in line with the Scottish framework. Please note if you have more than one role then you must complete training at the highest level required.

Matrix for Scotland: Levels of mandatory training

	Introductor y	Advance d	Trustee e	Leadership p	Recommended Bespoke Modules
Synod Safeguarding Administrator			✓		
Managers of Synod Safeguarding Administrator			✓		Line Manager training
Moderator	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Church Safeguarding Coordinators	✓	✓			Spiritual Abuse Domestic Abuse Online Safety Safeguarding Children and Young People Safeguarding Adults Verifiers and Safer Recruitment Church Safeguarding Coordinators E-learning (this can be found at www.urclearninghub.org.uk/course/view.php?id=70)
Deputy Safeguarding Coordinators	✓	✓			Spiritual Abuse Domestic Abuse Online Safety Safeguarding Children and Young People Safeguarding Adults
Synod Safeguarding	✓				

Committees and Reference Groups						
Active Ministers and CRCWs including retired ministers who meet the requirements of active ministry)	✓	✓	As required (if they also act as a trustee)	✓	✓	Spiritual Abuse Domestic Abuse Online Safety Safeguarding Children and Young People Safeguarding Adults Supporting Survivors
Youth and Children Workers including volunteer leaders	✓					Safeguarding Children and Young People Online Safety
Youth and Children's Workers (volunteer helpers)	✓					Safeguarding Children and Young People Online Safety
Adult Workers including volunteer leaders	✓					Safeguarding Adults Modern Slavery Drug and Alcohol Abuse and the links to Safeguarding Refugees and Asylum Seekers
Adult Workers (volunteer helpers)	✓					Safeguarding Adults

Managers of Children, Youth and Adults Workers	✓					Safeguarding Children and Young People Safeguarding Adults
Pastoral Visitors	✓					Domestic Abuse Safeguarding Adults Modern Slavery Supporting Survivors
Worship Leaders and Assembly-Accredited Lay Preachers	✓					
URC Trustees and Synod Trustees				✓		
Elders/Deacons as Trustees				✓		Elders as Trustees
Church Secretary	✓					Verifier and Safer Recruitment
Serving Elders/Deacons	✓		✓			
Synod Clerk						
Chaplains and Ministers on the Roll in other roles	✓		✓			

Key changes and rationale

Pre-Foundation

To be removed completely. This has never been available, and the key areas are seen in Foundation training, which is available online as a self-led course. Some Synods offer Foundation course in-person.

Foundation Training

The topics remain the same as in the previous framework with content to be reviewed regularly and fully updated every three years.

Introduction of a Safeguarding in the URC Course

This course is suitable for those that have completed the equivalent of Foundation level in another denomination or organisation. This training focuses on processes specific to the URC denomination and the unique elements to Safeguarding in our church, which would not have been covered in the course completed in another setting but enables learners to not need to duplicate course content. This course would be completed as an alternative to the Foundation course where prior learning has been agreed by the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

Intermediate Safeguarding training

The topic 'Good practice guidance including security in church buildings, food hygiene, safe transportation, insurance and hire of premises' has been removed from the Intermediate training in line with the changes adopted in 'Good Practice 6'. Health and Safety has been removed from the Safeguarding document and the Intermediate training will cover Safe Working Practices as an alternative topic. Some of the topics around food hygiene and safety are health and safety and not safeguarding and this has been echoed by their removal in 'Good Practice 6'. This has been passed on to the relevant team at Church House.

The topic 'The principles of safeguarding adults at risk, including issues of capacity and when to override consent in an adult's best interests', was in the Advanced training which will now be included in the Intermediate level. This is because people who are required to complete the Intermediate training will be working with adults. This is also a topic of a bespoke course.

The topic 'Handling allegations against those involved in the church whether paid or voluntary, lay or ordained', will be moved to the Advanced training course as it is far better suited to the roles that are required to complete the Advanced course. Intermediate training is estimated to last 2.5 hours.

Introduction of a Combined Foundation and Intermediate Module

This will eventually replace Intermediate training altogether and those who need Foundation would only be able to access this via e-learning. Anyone who needs Intermediate training would be offered this course in person or over Zoom to reduce the amount of training courses needed and ensure a higher level of training is available for more people.

Advanced Safeguarding training

The topic 'Managing the safer recruitment process, and the importance of ensuring safe and suitable people are appointed', will be removed from the Advanced training as it is

covered in the Intermediate training and was a duplication on the original training framework. In addition there is a bespoke safer recruitment training course.

The topic 'How to identify and respond to domestic abuse, and an awareness of how deeply held views can contribute to a culture where abuse is condoned', will be removed from the Advanced course as it is a bespoke training course. This is such a large topic that a bespoke course is far better at addressing it.

Changes to who should do which level

Ministers

Requirements to now undertake Advanced level as they need to understand grooming and how to manage those that pose a risk. The previous framework stated Advanced training is to support those who have safeguarding leadership roles in which they manage and oversee safeguarding arrangements and practice. Ministers have leadership responsibility and as a trustee need this level of understanding in their role.

Church Safeguarding Coordinators

Requirement to complete Advanced as above. The previous framework stated Advanced training is to support those who have safeguarding leadership roles in which they manage and oversee safeguarding arrangements and practice. This is their role directly and they need this level of knowledge and understanding.

Children and Youth Workers

Removal of the need to do Advanced level. Advanced level focuses on those that pose a risk, and Children and Youth Workers would not be managing those who pose a risk. Instead, there is a recommendation that they do other bespoke training more relevant to their role.

Existing Ministers

Now require Advanced training and will be expected to complete the Advanced course when they are next due to complete their training (i.e. within 3 years). All new CSCs and ministers will need to work through the levels of training within 18 months of coming into post.

Elders

Will now be required to undertake the combined module to ensure they are trained up to Intermediate level but only have to do one training course going forward and then one refresher in subsequent years. This is needed as the majority of Elders are undertaking significant leadership roles for their churches. All current Elders will need to be trained to Intermediate or equivalent by undertaking the combined module within the next 18 months. We still highly recommend that Elders also complete the Elders as Trustees course as this focuses on the specific role of Trustees in line with the Charity Commission expectations.

Bespoke Training Modules have been listed as recommendations and these are linked to topics that are relevant to specific roles.

During the process of amending the framework, research has taken place into the Methodist and Church of England requirements. We currently have less mandated training for Elders and Ministers than both of these denominations. Methodist Ministers and Deacons are all required to complete Advanced training as are Safeguarding Coordinators.

The Church of England have even more mandatory courses and require higher levels of training in significantly more roles than we have previously mandated. The Methodist Church recognises the Church of England Leadership Module as equivalent and qualifying training to the Advanced Module. Therefore, those who have undertaken that Church of England course will have satisfied attendance requirements for the Methodist Church.

Our new framework puts us in closer alignments with our ecumenical partners.

Accountability

The Church Safeguarding Coordinator will ensure that training has been completed by those listed in the framework. This responsibility will be supported by the Elders in their roles as trustees. Trustees take responsibility for safeguarding in line with the requirements of the Charity Commission and must therefore ensure they support the church safeguarding coordinator to fulfil the framework. Where those with roles do not undertake training the Church Safeguarding Coordinator should speak to the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

Any person with line management responsibilities will ensure those they line manage have undertaken the correct level of training.

Finally, all role holders must ensure they note that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and when accepting a role they must seek to undertake the relevant training.

Paper X1

Love's Farm Church (LEP) becoming a local United Reformed Church

Eastern Synod

Basic information

Contact name and email address	David Coaker clerk@urceastern.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 38 General Assembly receives Love's Farm Church (LEP) as a local church of the United Reformed Church.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Eastern Synod gives thanks for the journey of life and witness of Love's Farm Church from a Mission Project of Eastern Synod to become a local church of the United Reformed Church. We request General Assembly to authorise this.
Main points	<p>Love's Farm Church emerged from a shared vision for a Christian presence on the new housing developments of Love's Farm and Wintringham in St Neots. It grew out of prayer and commitment by churches and individuals across the town, and a practical partnership between the Eastern Synod and the Church of England (Ely Diocese).</p> <p>They began meeting in September 2015 and from the outset they sought to be a place where people who weren't used to going to church would feel comfortable. As a church they meet at the heart of the community and seek to have the community at the heart of the church. What they hope for as a church is: community, encounter and discipleship.</p> <p>The Eastern Synod voted in March 2025 to bring the above resolution to General Assembly.</p>
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Church of England, Diocese of Ely Eastern Baptist Association Lindsey Brown, Mission Support Officer.

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (eg ecumenical)	This is built on, and will continue to foster relations with, the housing developments of Love's Farm and Wintringham in St Neots and with the Diocese of Ely.

Resolutions

Resolution 1

General Assembly adopts the terms of reference for the Faith in Action Committee (Discipleship and Mission) as contained in Paper A1 of the July 2025 General Assembly.

Resolution 2

General Assembly delegates authority to take any necessary urgent decisions on behalf of the Faith in Action Committee to the three previous Committee Convenors (Children's and Youth Work, Education and Learning and Mission) along with the DGS (FiA), supported by the new Faith in Action staff team, until the new Faith in Action Committee is established in late autumn 2025.

Resolution 3

General Assembly adopts the Terms of Reference for the new Ministries Committee and its sub-committees.

Resolution 4

General Assembly delegates authority to take any necessary urgent decisions on behalf of the Ministries Committee to the two previous Committee Convenors (Education and Learning and Ministries) along with the DGS (Ministries), until the new Ministries Committee is established in late autumn 2025.

Resolution 5

General Assembly resolves that from the close of General Assembly 2025 the Equalities Committee will become the Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging sub-committee of the Faith in Action Committee.

Resolution 6

General Assembly resolves that from the close of General Assembly 2025 the Faith and Order Advisory Group will become a sub-committee of the Business Committee and be known as the Faith and Order Reference Group.

Resolution 7

General Assembly instructs the Business Committee to bring back proposed amendments to the Structure of the United Reformed Church which would enable the Assembly Executive to adopt changes to the General Assembly and Assembly Executive as proposed in model X.

Resolution 8

General Assembly resolves that the General Secretariat shall be known as the Senior Leadership Team.

Resolution 9

General Assembly resolves that the role of Secretary of Ministries become henceforth Deputy General Secretary for Ministries.

Resolution 10

General Assembly resolves that the Senior Leadership Team shall consist of the General Secretary, the Chief Operating Officer, the Deputy General Secretary

(Faith in Action) and the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries) as of the close of the July 2025 General Assembly.

Resolution 11

General Assembly adopts the revised terms of reference for the General Secretariat as contained in Paper A5 of the July 2025 General Assembly.

Resolution 12

General Assembly delegates the responsibility for determining the make-up of the General Secretariat to the Resources Committee, to ensure that it is an integral and joined-up part of any future developments in the staffing structure of the Offices of the General Assembly.

Resolution 13

Assembly endorses the findings and themes from the Education and Learning Consultation, and instructs the working group and others to enact the outcomes listed in section four. Assembly instructs Business Committee, Faith in Action Committee, and Ministries Committee to report back to General Assembly 2026 with an update on progress.

Resolution 14

General Assembly determines to cease using at least one RCL for the delivery of EM1, meaning that from September 2026 EM1 students will only be sent to one or two RCLs.

Resolution 15

General Assembly adopts the financial ‘envelope’ within which funding for EM1 and RCLs must be delivered from the M&M fund.

Resolution 16

General Assembly adopts the criteria set out at 4.1 in the report as the criteria which are to be used in making determinations about which RCLs will continue to offer EM1.

Resolution 17

General Assembly adopts the key aims for the future use of RCLs within the life of the United Reformed Church.

Resolution 18

General Assembly adopts the timetable for decision making as set out in section 8 of the report.

Resolution 19

General Assembly invites the Revd Dr Andrea Russell to serve as an external consultant in the engagement of the working group with the RCLs.

Resolution 20

Following the outcome of the discussion at Assembly Executive 2025, General Assembly:

- a) commends the training programmes offered through Northern College and Westminster College to train Children’s, Youth and Family Workers at local level;

- b) instructs the new Ministries and Faith in Action Committees to explore how this training can be offered to those working with children and young people, including funding opportunities;
- c) encourages the conversations to continue as the URC focuses on ministry, training and the Church Life Review;
- d) thanks the Task Group for its work.

Resolution 21

Discipleship Development Fund (DDF) small grants funding available to Synods should increase from £2,000 pa to £4,000 pa.

Resolution 22

The amount available to individual projects under the large grants scheme of the DDF should remain unchanged at £5,000. Normally, this grant will be available for up to three years, as before. However, a fourth year of funding may be given where clear succession planning is shown.

Resolution 23

A new category of awards from the DDF will be made available. A sum of £20,000 will be set aside annually for spontaneous discipleship development opportunities which arise at denominational level. Applications should be made to the Discipleship Development Fund Large Grant Awarding Group (DDFLGAG).

Resolution 24

Ongoing changes to the detail of the grants available through the DDF will now be delegated to the new Faith in Action Committee on the advice of the DDFLGAG.

Resolution 25

General Assembly notes the Trustees' Report and Financial Statements for the year ending 31 December 2024.

Resolution 26

General Assembly adopts the changes to Schedule A of The Manual with regards to Ministry in the United Reformed Church (paragraphs 19-24).

Resolution 27

General Assembly adopts the criteria for the 13 new pioneering posts to intentionally grow new Christian communities.

Resolution 28

General Assembly notes the report from Ministries Committee on the review of the URC Ministerial Retirement Policy and the Policy for the Extension to the Normal Retirement Age.

Resolution 29

In light of the report, General Assembly is

- a) minded to move towards the removal of a Normal Retirement Age and instructs Ministries Committee to continue its work on the implications of the removal and bring appropriate proposals to Assembly Executive in February 2026.

OR

- b) In light of the report, General Assembly is not minded to move towards the removal of a Normal Retirement Age and instructs Ministries Committee to

Resolutions 30-38

continue its work on the Policy for the Extension to the Normal Retirement Age and bring appropriate proposals to Assembly Executive in February 2026.

Resolution 30

General Assembly agrees to ministerial sabbaticals being seven years from the previous sabbatical.

Resolution 31

General Assembly adopts the following designations for Non-Stipendiary ministry: Non-Stipendiary Minister and Non-Stipendiary Minister (Local) for ministry of the Word and Sacraments and Non-Stipendiary CRCW and Non-Stipendiary CRCW (Local) for Church Related Community Workers.

Resolution 32

General Assembly affirms its commitments to:

- a) address issues of racial injustice, including furthering the URC's commitment to becoming an actively anti-racist Church, and responding to the continuing negative impacts of transatlantic slavery;
- b) prioritise work seeking to recognise, address, and dismantle poverty in the UK;
- c) respond to the climate crisis, including accompanying local churches in their respective journeys;
- d) reinvigorate our ecumenical vision through ecumenical working and resource sharing;

and endorses these commitments as the denomination's 'missional lens', asking its Assembly Committees to use it as a focus in considering their work for the next four years.

Resolution 33

General Assembly appoints members of committees and representatives of the Church, as set out in paragraph 5 of this report, subject to the adoptions and corrections contained in supplementary papers to Assembly.

Resolution 34

General Assembly resolves to dissolve the Panel for General Assembly Appointments from the close of General Assembly November 2025.

Resolution 35

General Assembly instructs the Nominations Committee to recruit a new Panel for General Assembly Appointments, in line with the constitution set out in the Ministries Paper H2 (General Assembly Book of Reports 2024).

Resolution 36

General Assembly adopts the amended Safeguarding Training Framework for use across the United Reformed Church.

Resolution 37

General Assembly instructs the Denominational Safeguarding Team and Synods to oversee the implementation of the framework.

Resolution 38

General Assembly receives Love's Farm Church (LEP) as a local church of the United Reformed Church.



The
**United
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