

# Paper A5

## Terms of Reference and composition and name of the General Secretariat

### 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><b>Resolution 8</b> General Assembly resolves that the General Secretariat shall be known as the Senior Leadership Team.</p> <p><b>Resolution 9</b> General Assembly resolves that the role of Secretary of Ministries become henceforth Deputy General Secretary for Ministries.</p> <p><b>Resolution 10</b> 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><b>Resolution 11</b> 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><b>Resolution 12</b> 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.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	The Resources Committee.

## Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	This report and resolution responds to the staffing restructure and associated cost savings requested by the Resources Committee.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	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

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

<b>Length of term</b>	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.
<b>Minute Secretary</b>	PA to the General Secretary.
<b>Accountability and reporting duties</b>	To General Assembly, Assembly Executive and the Business Committee.
<b>Terms of Reference review</b>	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

- 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.