

Paper A1 Update

Business Committee

Basic information

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

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To update Assembly on the work of the Business Committee and report on decisions taken on behalf of the General Assembly since Assembly Executive met in February 2026.
Main points	Update on the work of the committee; update on work in progress.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (eg ecumenical)	

The general work of the committee

The Business Committee meets once in the year residentially, and three times via video conference. After Assembly Executive, the composition was amended to include the convenors of the three core General Assembly Committees. It therefore brings together the Officers of the Assembly, the Senior Leadership Team, the Core Assembly Committee Convenors and two additional members appointed by the Assembly. The hope is that this will allow for a strategic view to be taken of the whole work of the General Assembly.

The Assembly arrangements work of the committee is now being held by a sub-committee, led primarily by the staff responsible for General Assembly arrangements, supported by the Convenor. This should allow the main agenda of the Committee to concern the overview of all the Business and ongoing work of the Assembly

Ongoing work overseen by the Business Committee

There are a number of key pieces of work instructed by the General Assembly that the Business Committee is responsible for. Of these, two pieces are reported on in separate reports: the review of the Ministerial Disciplinary Process and the Review of Education for Ministry phase one (EM1) and Resource Centres for Learning (RCL) capacity.

Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Review

Assembly 2023 directed that an external consultancy be appointed, working with a steering group, to exercise a review of the life of the United Reformed Church in terms of Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB). Initial attempts to find an appropriate consultancy stalled, then the advice of the most likely consultancy to effectively carry out this work advised the key priority would need to be the revision of the Nominations process, which was already underway. We were advised to ensure these changes were made and bedded in, before attempting further EDIB review work.

The changes to the Nominations process are now bedding in, and we have returned to this question. A working group was formed consisting of John Bradbury (General Secretary), Jo Clare-Young (Convenor of the EDIB sub-committee), David Salisbury (Secretary of the EDIB sub-committee), Karen Campbell (Head of Global and Intercultural Church) and Maxine Parker (Head of People and Benefits), and Alex Clare Young (Assistant Clerk). A remit has been produced for consultancy work to form the basis of a tender process which the Business Committee has agreed. The group is currently in the process of seeking out appropriate consultants or consultancies to invite to tender.

The EDIB sub-committee needed to be re-formed in the light of the committee structure review, and it has been agreed that it take on the role of the steering group for the process, and nominations are seeking to fill roles on the sub-committee accordingly.

Review of the Structure of the United Reformed Church

The Committee has begun giving consideration to how this work might most effectively be undertaken. A working group will need to be established, and it is hoped to be able to work through the means of qualitative research which will involve careful facilitation and listening to the concerns of a few representative local churches, as well as engagement with Synods, and a wider call for engagement through a more qualitative process.

When this piece of work was proposed at Assembly Executive, the paper warned that it may take some time for the capacity to become available for this work to progress, and the capacity is unlikely to be available until early 2027 when the General Secretary returns from sabbatical, and when hopefully the Head of Governance Services role has been filled.

The Clerk, Assistant Clerk and General Secretary had a helpful preliminary meeting with Synod Clerks to map the areas for consideration, and give thought to how we might most effectively hear from 'hard to reach' congregations, who perhaps are those who might benefit most from potential changes to the structure in terms of local congregational life.

Further changes to the General Assembly, Assembly Executive and the relation of these councils of the church to the URC Trust (with a view to it potentially becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation) will form part of the review of the Structure. Active consideration of this becomes more possible once the Ministerial Pension Scheme Buy-out process is complete, hopefully in the second half of 2026.

Work on the horizon

The Business Committee has given active thought to a number of matters which it believes may need the consideration of the wider Church. One is the question of how the General Assembly is enabled to become more strategic in terms of setting priorities. There is the tendency of business to come from committees, and Assembly to adopt

resolutions and call for pieces of work which are valuable in and of themselves, but we can struggle to resource them. Our life as a denomination might be more effective if we were better able to prioritise, over a period of time, what the key priorities of the life of the United Reformed Church were. This would also enable us to more effectively determine what resource is needed, to enable the priorities the Assembly had set, to ensure that resources were directed towards those priorities. Now the Business Committee fully brings together the core committees of the Assembly, along with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the Officers, we will be able to further consideration of this more effectively, and hope to bring proposals to future meetings of the Assembly and Assembly Executive concerning by what processes the Assembly might be enabled to discern the priorities that we are called to for periods of time.

The identity of the United Reformed Church

We are very aware that from a number of places, there are increasing calls for the General Assembly to give consideration to the questions around the core identity of the United Reformed Church. This emerged as one of two major themes from the consultative part of the Extraordinary General Assembly in 2025 (along with questions around the ministries the church needs to thrive). These questions also frequently arise in gatherings of Assembly Office staff, Moderators meetings, and within the wider life of the church. We believe this is potentially a very valuable piece of work to engage with, and continue to give thought to how this might more helpfully, and creatively, be engaged with.

Decisions taken on behalf of the General Assembly since the Assembly Executive met in February 2026.

The Terms of Reference of the Committee require us to report on any decisions taken on behalf of the General Assembly between meetings of the Assembly and the Assembly Executive.

Since February, in the absence of an appointed General Assembly Appointments Panel (that Nominations were in the process of appointing), the Business Committee appointed the following appointment and nominations groups for various nomination and term-review processes in accordance with the process for appointments and reviews adopted by the Assembly:

For the term-review of The Revd. Dr. John Bradbury (General Secretary):
Catriona Wheeler (convenor), Gilbert Esambe, Carole Marsden, and Darnette Whitby-Reid

For the term-review of The Revd. Nicola Furley-Smith (Deputy General Secretary Ministries):
Confirmed - John Bradbury (convenor), Nneoma Chima, Ewen Harley, and Tim Llewelyn.

For the review of Ms. Karen Campbell (Head of Global and Intercultural Church):
John Bradbury (convenor), Elizabeth Hall, Dean Taylor, and Paul Whittle

For the review of The Revd. Jamie Kissack (Moderator of the Yorkshire Synod):
John Bradbury (convenor), Graham Jennings, Paul Robinson, and Darnette Whitby-Read