

Book of Reports 2022



The
United
Reformed
Church





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Online papers: urc.org.uk/general-assembly-papers.

Please answer the following questions by email to andy.jackson@urc.org.uk or by using the space below and posting the card back to the address overleaf. These responses will be used on social media and at the events marking the 50th anniversary on 1 October, 2022. Please respond by 26 August, 2022. With warmest wishes and thanks, Andy Jackson, Head of Communications, The United Reformed Church.

Why am I a member of the URC?

What is great about being part of the URC?

I became a member of the URC because of the welcome I received by the minister and congregation when I visited. The URC enables people to be fully involved and contribute to the life of the church. *Geoff Watt, Moderator, Thomas Mann Synod*



Please include your name, area and church if you're happy to share them.

I love the fact that we are so open to diversity in a way I have not seen in other denominations. We take seriously the journey of 'Legacy of slavery' and for that I am grateful.



Please include your name, area and church if you're happy to share them.

THIS IS THE HOME I KNOW - THE HOME I LOVE AND TREASURE

HOSPITALITY - AN EVENT OF WELCOME TO ALL.



Please include your name, area and church if you're happy to share them.

① because it enables all people, wherever they are, to be an active 'priesthood of all believers', led by the Spirit and because of its commitment to ecumenism.

② In addition to above - great sense of being part of whole URC, across the nations, as there are so many opportunities to create & sustain fellowship with others in every synod.



Please include your name, area and church if you're happy to share them. WENDY SWAN, SOUTHERN SYNOD, ST. JOHN'S URC, ORFING-TO

Please answer the following questions by email to andy.jackson@urc.org.uk or by using the space below and posting the card back to the address overleaf. These responses will be used on social media and at the events marking the 50th anniversary on 1 October, 2022. Please respond by 26 August, 2022. With warmest wishes and thanks, Andy Jackson, Head of Communications, The United Reformed Church.

Why am I a member of the URC?

What is great about being part of the URC?

1. By accident. I am a Christian & the denomination is secondary.
2. We are seeking to be ecumenical and anti-racist and I welcome this. Also, the flexibility we have is helpful.



Please include your name, area and church if you're happy to share them.

I was taken to Billingham Congregation Church at the age of 2 weeks and was part of that family until we moved and started to attend Baptist URC - before candidating for URC ministry.

The Unity we hold despite our differences, our Love of God, our passion to share Jesus in word and deeds.



Please include your name, area and church if you're happy to share them. Paul J. Wade, Abington Ave URC Northampton.

I chose the URC, coming from South Africa because of:

- the open table
- non hierarchical structures
- engagement with social justice
- inclusion of LGBTQ+ people



Please include your name, area and church if you're happy to share them.

Sense of being among friends



Please include your name, area and church if you're happy to share them.

Dear friends in Christ,

It is now four years since the General Assembly last met in person. Much has happened in those four years within the life of the Church and the world. We find that we are, all of a sudden, 50 years old as the United Reformed Church, and are marking a moment of jubilee. Jubilee is a key biblical concept that helps us frame both our world and ourselves as belonging first and foremost to God. And so we gather, as the General Assembly, to discern God's ways with the world, and God's ways with the church. We gather open to the wind of the Holy Spirit blowing within our midst, calling us to repentance, renewal, and to being alert to the new thing that God is continually doing in our midst.

This is the first in a new format of in-person General Assembly. We are somewhat smaller than when we previously met, and the decision to reduce the size and meet at the Hayes Conference centre changes the ethos of the Assembly. In some ways, we have thought about Assembly as a larger version of the Assembly Executive, and less of a major 'event'. There is, therefore, a greater concentration on the business of the church, surrounded by worship, prayer and Bible study.

As a Church in the Reformed Tradition, we believe that we discern the will of God most effectively together, not as individuals. We gather, in the spirit of worship, around the Word, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to seek the will of God. To discern well takes time, and we hope that concentrating the agenda of the Assembly on our business gives us the time we need. Taking time sometimes means not just time in one Assembly, but time to help those thinking over larger scale pieces of work test out their thinking, allowing the discernment of the wider Church to help shape the next stage of their work. Some of our time will, therefore, be spent in consultative mode – not taking final decisions, but assisting in ongoing processes of discerning God's will for us.

It is good that our focus will also be taken beyond the immediate concerns of the Assembly business. We look forward to welcoming children from the United Reformed Church to join with us on Saturday as we launch URC Children. We will hear greetings from friends around the world who, on this occasion, have not been able to join with us in person as international guests. We will also hear stories of work that has been going on in local churches through a series of short videos that we will engage with alongside our business, and hear of inspirational work going on from the winners of the Community Awards this year.

Since Assembly last met in person, most of those responsible for the organisation of the General Assembly have changed, and we find ourselves preparing for an event without any prior experience. We're very grateful to the Revd Michael Hopkins, the Clerk to Assembly, who is the only officer of the Assembly with any immediate prior experience of arranging Assemblies for his guidance and memory! We ask for your patience as some of us find our feet at the game which is called assembly arrangements.

As you prepare for Assembly, I trust that you will do so prayerfully. The words in this book represent a great deal of work done on behalf of the Church, and as you read and absorb it, and ponder where we might be called in the future, I pray that your hearts and minds will be filled with the Holy Spirit. For it is the Spirit that unites us together as the Body of Christ and enlivens us as God's People in the world today.

I look forward to seeing you all in Swanwick in July.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "J. P. Bradbury" with a small number "2" written below it.

John Bradbury
General Secretary

Minutes of the Assembly Executive, November 2021

The General Secretary

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The General Secretary john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
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**The United Reformed Church
Minutes of Assembly Executive meeting
held at High Leigh, Hoddesdon,
22-24 November 2021**

Monday 22 November 2021

Session one

The Moderator, the Revd Clare Downing, was in the Chair.

21/16

The meeting opened at 14:00 with worship led by the Chaplain, the Revd Helen Everard.

The General Secretary welcomed everyone and identified new members.

21/17

The minutes of the Mission Council meeting of March 2021 were approved. There were no matters arising.

21/18

Paper A1

Standing Orders

The General Secretary introduced the paper, and the Assembly Clerk moved amendments 3.2 and 3.16:

3.2 Meetings should only be recorded by the official host, only when necessary, and always in compliance with both safeguarding and data privacy policies.

3.16 (correction of typographical errors)

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

The Clerk moved Resolution 3:

- 3. Assembly Executive resolves to add the Rules of Procedure 1.3: unless they resolve to use the Standing Orders of the 2018 General Assembly.**

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

The Clerk moved the amended Resolution 1:

- 1. Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Assembly Executive agrees the revised Standing Orders as set out in the amended paper A1 of Assembly Executive November 2021 with immediate effect.**

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

The Clerk moved Resolution 2:

- 2. Assembly Executive reminds committees, synods, and District Councils of rule 1.3 of the Rules of Procedure: The Standing Orders...shall apply to all meetings of the Assembly and the Assembly Executive and, in so far as they are applicable, to meetings of synods, District Councils and their committees, unless they resolve to use the Standing Orders of the 2018 General Assembly.**

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

During consideration of the resolutions, considerable discussion took place regarding the requirement (at 12.13) for a two-thirds majority when a vote is taken. Mr Alan Yates suggested a threshold of more than two thirds and suggested increasing from 67% to 80%. The Clerk undertook to take up this issue with the Business Committee.

The meeting adjourned at 15:30.

Session two

Assembly Executive resumed at 16:30.

21/19

Paper H2

RMHS Sub-Committee

The Convenor of the Ministries Committee, the Revd Paul Whittle, presented paper H2 and moved the Resolution:

Assembly Executive adopts the new Terms of Reference for the Retired Minister's Housing Society Sub-Committee of the Ministries Committee.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

Paper H4

The safer election of Elders

Mr Whittle presented paper H4, and moved the Resolution:

Assembly Executive strongly recommends local churches to use the process for the Safer Election of Elders.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

In discussion Assembly Executive *agreed* to recommended that the Ministries Committee consult with the Assembly's Safeguarding staff and the Clerk to clarify the text of 4.1.4 c) with respect to the definition of a *relevant* DBS/PVG and noting which are the appropriate URC policy documents.

21/20

Paper I4

Mission Committee – Conversion Therapy

The Convenor of the Mission Committee, Ms Sarah Lane Cawte, presented paper I4 and moved the Resolution:

Assembly Executive resolves:

- a) **to support and adopt the definition of conversion therapy set out in the 'Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the UK'**
- b) **that the practice of conversion therapy is unethical and potentially harmful**
- c) **to call on all church members and ministers to refuse to offer or participate in offering conversion therapy in any form**
- d) **that no conversion therapy can take place in the name of the United Reformed Church**
- e) **to express support for proposals to ban conversion therapy, and urge that current proposals be strengthened to ensure greater protection for potential subjects of conversion therapy.**

Miss Victoria Turner proposed an amendment that:

in clause b) the word 'potentially' be removed. Seconded by Mr Reuben Watt.

The amendment *fell*.

The Revd Geoff Felton proposed an amendment that:

the words 'in any form' be removed from clause c)

Seconded by the Revd Graham Hoslett.

The amendment *fell*.

Following discussion, the Resolution was put.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

21/21

Paper B1

Children's and Youth Work Committee

The Revd Paul Robinson and Dr Sam Richards presented paper B1

21/22

Paper N2

Church Life Review

The General Secretary presented an initial update from the Church Life Review Group, and responded to a number of questions and comments. The Moderator noted that Assembly Executive would have further opportunity to address the Church Life Review in a later session.

The Chaplain led the meeting in worship, and Assembly Executive adjourned at 20:50.

Tuesday 23 November 2021

Session three

Assembly Executive resumed at 09:15.

Opening worship was led by the Chaplain, the Revd Helen Everard.

21/23

Paper G3

M&M Fund Budget 2022

The Convenor of the Finance Committee, Mr Ian Hardie, presented paper G3 and moved the Resolution:

Assembly Executive adopts the M&M Fund budget for 2022 as set out in the Appendix to paper G3 for November 2021 Assembly Executive.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

Paper G1

Pension Update

Mr Hardie presented paper G1 and offered responses to a number of questions, among which was Mr Hardie's personal suggestion that a policy of dealing with cases of financial hardship among retired ministers might be more appropriately addressed by the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee.

Paper G2

Pension Deficit Funding

Mr Hardie presented paper G2 and moved the Resolution:

Assembly Executive, acting on behalf of General Assembly:

- **expresses its deep gratitude to all the synods and synod trusts which have, according to their means and where appropriate with the approval of their synod meetings, committed to contributing to the new Ministers' Pension Support Restricted Fund**
- **approves the recommendation of the directors of the URC Trust Ltd to contribute from its general reserves to this restricted fund £500,000 in 2023 and £500,000 in 2024**
- **approves the intention of the directors of the URC Trust should there continue to be a deficit in the Ministers' Pension Fund at the 2024 valuation to contribute to the restricted fund from its general reserves £500,000 in 2025, £600,000 in 2026 and £600,000 in 2027 or such smaller amounts as are agreed at the time**

- approves the intention of the directors of the URC Trust should there continue to be a deficit in the Ministers' Pension Fund at the 2027 valuation to contribute to the restricted fund from its general reserves £600,000 in 2028, £600,000 in 2029 and £600,000 in 2030 or such smaller amounts as are agreed at the time
- authorises the URC Trust to amend the guarantee it gives the Ministers' Pension Trust to cover up to £24 million of contributions due under the Schedule of Contributions or in respect of any "Section 75" debts arising from future cessation of participation in the scheme by other scheme employers.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

21/24

Assembly Executive viewed a video on inclusive and expansive language.

The meeting adjourned at 10:50

Session four

21/25

Paper I3 Pioneering and Fresh Expressions Enabling Group

Assembly Executive met in groups to discuss Paper I3, following which Ms Sarah Lane Cawte outlined something of the current work of the Pioneering and Fresh Expressions Enabling Group, and Assembly Executive reflected upon the paper.

The meeting adjourned at 12:50

21/26

Session five

The meeting resumed at 16:00

The General Secretary moved the En bloc Resolutions:

- A2 Business Committee: Updating the Rules of Procedure
- B1 Childrens' and Youth Work Committee: Update
- D1 Discipleship Development Fund
- F1 Faith and Order Committee: Report
- H3 Plan for Partnership Revisions
- H5 Active Ministers Policy
- H6 Ministries Committee: House for Duty
- I1 Walking the Way Steering Group: Update
- P1 Law and Polity Advisory Group: National and Provincial Synods and Trust Companies
- I2 Mission Committee: Update

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

21/27

Paper H1 Confidentiality Policy

The Convenor of the Ministries Committee, the Revd Paul Whittle, presented Paper H1, and the Resolution:

Resolution H1: Assembly Executive adopts the URC Confidentiality Policy.

Mr Whittle noted that policies were continually being updated, and undertook to ensure that a number of adjustments already required will be incorporated into the policy.

Some unease was expressed by a number of members about the first paragraph of 5.5. It was agreed to consult with the Legal Adviser and return to the matter later in the meeting.

21/28

Paper J1

Nominations Committee

The Convenor of the Nominations Committee, Mrs Helen Lidgett, presented paper J1 and the Resolutions, and responded to questions about the process of nominating and appointing members of the Assembly Commission for Discipline Panel and the Disciplinary Investigation Panel.

The Resolutions were put simultaneously:

- 1) **Assembly Executive notes the changes set out in Section 1 of the report to the list of Nominations agreed at the July 2021 meeting of General Assembly.**
- 2) **Assembly Executive notes and approves the changes set out in Section 2 of the report to the list of Nominations agreed at the July 2021 meeting of General Assembly.**
- 3) **Assembly Executive appoints according to the nominations in Section 3 of the report.**
- 4) **Assembly Executive appoints according to the nominations in Section 4 of the report.**

Assembly Executive *agreed*

The General Secretary noted that matters raised in discussion regarding the processes for recruitment, nomination and appointment suggested that some serious thought needs to be given to those processes and called upon the Nominations Committee to review them.

Resolutions J2 were moved:

1. **Assembly Executive notes the changes set out in Section 1 of the report to the published list of Nominations.**
2. **Assembly Executive notes and approves the changes set out in Section 2 of the report to the published list of Nominations.**
3. **Assembly Executive appoints according to the nominations in Section 3 of the report.**
4. **Assembly Executive appoints according to the nominations in Section 4 of the report.**

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

21/29

Paper R1**MIND**

The General Secretary presented paper R1, expressed thanks to the Revd Sarah Moore for extensive work on the drafting for this paper, and moved the Resolution:

1. **Acting on behalf of the General Assembly, Assembly Executive rescinds resolution 40 2021.**
2. **Acting on behalf of the General Assembly, Assembly Executive adopts the 'Process for dealing with cases of discipline involving ministers and Church Related Community Workers' ('Disciplinary Process') detailed in Paper R1 of the General Assembly Book of Reports 2021 as amended in the document accompanying this resolution.**
3. **Acting on behalf of the General Assembly, Assembly Executive rescinds resolution 42 (a) and (b) 2021.**
4. **Instructs the General Secretary to make any necessary consequent changes to lettering/number necessary in the light of these changes.**
 - a) **The provisions of the new Disciplinary Process concerning appointments to the Assembly Standing Panels for Discipline, the Disciplinary Investigation and Commission Panels, the Appeal Commissions List and the posts of Assembly Representative for Discipline, Secretary to Assembly Commissions for Discipline and to Disciplinary Appeal Commissions are to come into force at the close of this session of the Assembly Executive meeting at High Leigh on 22-24 November 2021.**
 - b) **The Assembly Executive thanks those who had indicated a willingness to serve on Synod Standing Panels for Discipline and asks synods to release them from this commitment.**

It was noted that the Moderator, Clerk and General Secretary have deemed that changed circumstances justify this Resolution under 7.6.4 of the Standing Orders.

The Resolution was put, and Assembly Executive *agreed*.

Session six

21/30

Paper N2**Church Life Review**

Assembly Executive met in groups before convening in plenary session.

The Resolutions were put for discussion:

1. **Assembly Executive welcomes the initial report of the Church Life Review Group, and affirms its direction of travel.**
2. **Assembly Executive affirms the proposal to engage in partnership with Theos to undertake research into the identity, hopes, dreams and expectations of local congregations within the United Reformed Church.**

3. **Assembly Executive affirms the proposal to work with Moore Kingston Smith to analyse income, expenditure and capital across the family of the General Assembly and the synods. It encourages all parts of the United Reformed Church to engage positively in this process.**
4. **Assembly Executive requests the General Secretariat to engage in a quick and thoughtful review of present structures and bring proposals to General Assembly 2022 for any immediate rationalisation that might be possible.**

Mr Rueben Watt proposed an amendment that the words 'and thoughtful' be added after 'quick' in Resolution 4. This was seconded by the Revd Paul Robinson

The amendment was *carried*.

The Resolutions were put simultaneously.

Assembly Executive *agreed*

Worship was led by the Chaplain, and the meeting adjourned at 20:55.

Wednesday 25 November 2021

Session seven

21/31

The Session was opened in worship led by the Chaplain.

The Convenor of the Education and Learning Committee, Mr Alan Yates, reported with sadness that the Revd Samantha White has given notice that she will be demitting office as Principal of Westminster College. Mr Yates expressed appreciation for her service to the college, and sought Assembly Executive's prayers for the governors and staff.

The General Secretary reported that Ms Francis Brienen will be leaving her post as Deputy General Secretary (Mission) in spring 2022. He noted that in the midst of a review making a permanent appointment would not be appropriate. A suitable solution is being sought by the General Secretariat, who sought Assembly Executive's approval to make appropriate interim arrangements, to be agreed by the Assembly Officers. No formal resolution was put, but Assembly Executive clearly indicated its approval.

21/32

Paper N1

Jubilee Planning Group

Mr Andy Jackson and Dr Sam Richards presented Paper N1, which was discussed informally.

21/33

Paper H1 (from 21/26)

Confidentiality Policy

The Revd Paul Whittle, having consulted with the Legal Adviser, proposed the following amendments:

2.1: Add to the end of para "(hereafter termed as workers)"

5.3: Add at the beginning, under the heading:

“Elders, church members and volunteers will operate this policy in line with the Data Privacy Notices of their church.”

5.5: First sentence, amend end of sentence after ‘open prayers’ to read “unless express consent and permission has been given by the individual or is a legitimate interest as outlined in the Data Privacy Notices of the local church.”

Following brief discussion, the amendments were put. Assembly Executive *agreed*.

Mr Whittle moved the amended Resolution H1. Assembly Executive *agreed*.

The session closed at 10:40, and the meeting was concluded with the celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion, led by the Chaplain.

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.
- 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 twelve 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 in aggregate exceed 15 minutes, nor shall speeches in support of any particular committee or Synod motion exceed five minutes, (eg 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.
- 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.

Synod Moderators' report

Synod Moderators

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Steve Faber moderator@urcwestmidlands.org.uk
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Introduction

In our report to last year's General Assembly, we spoke of the changing season for life – we were in the midst of a global pandemic that had shaken our practice and self-understanding deeply. We were in the midst of it – living it – but we could not know if we were in the middle of it – halfway through, with the dawn of the new day emerging at the horizon. We spoke of being in a time of liminality, an inbetween time of change.

We might make many of the same points. At the time of writing, even in these islands with the privilege of easy access to vaccines and a high uptake rate, the pandemic is not over.

An ecumenical colleague observed that the Church has 'long Covid'. We know how many of our members, friends and family members are living with that syndrome, and despite having been clear of infection for many months, they are still living with the sense of exhaustion. The same is true in our churches, where the stresses of living with and/or in fear of the potentially deadly virus has left many wrung out. This is both an emotional and a spiritual malaise. Many of our congregations have had key people die, dearly loved members and adherents, and a great many others find that they are not yet ready, willing or able to return to the areas of service they had been involved with previously, for a whole variety of reasons. Some never will: they have found a break point for service that they were already tired of before Covid-19, or they hadn't realised how tired they were and now, having stopped, find they simply don't have the energy to resume. The landscape has changed forever, and we find ourselves more deeply embedded in an unfamiliar land.

We are in our Golden Jubilee year, and in many other walks of life, a 50th anniversary might be time to slow down, reflect with thanksgiving on what has been, and glide into a peaceful existence. We must certainly give thanks and appreciate what has brought us thus far, but there is no retirement plan in mind here. It may be just one of those stories we like to tell ourselves that the URC was born to die, but our conviction is that God still wants us to live.

On the move

God who sets us on a journey
to discover, dream and grow,
lead us as you led your people
in the desert long ago;
journey inward, journey outward

stir the spirit, stretch the mind,
love for God and self and neighbour
marks the way that Christ defined.

We are called to be a people on the move. The Bible is full of accounts of people moving on. Some do so willingly, some very reluctantly with a huge burden for what they are called to leave behind. Some travel knowing where they are headed, others told to set out and God would show them the way as they travelled. Within our own heritage, our 17th century forebears were ejected from their living: our non-conformist roots, we might argue, show that we were never intended to be fixed in one place with one way of doing things. Could it be that Joy Dine's hymn will help us to discover this afresh? Our 'travelling, wandering race, the people of God' (from *'Moses, I know you're the man'*, Estelle White) are supposed to discover, dream and grow. What is stopping us? It is safe for us to journey outward as we seek to live the life God intends for God's people, for we do not travel alone.

We are supposed to discover, dream and
grow. What is stopping us?

Lord, to whom shall we go?

Exploration brings new insights,
changes, choices we must face;
give us wisdom in deciding,
mindful always of your grace;
should we stumble, lose our bearings,
find it hard to know what's right,
we regain our true direction
focused on the Jesus light.

In this exploration of the unknown, are we facing the right direction? Are we 'looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith' (Heb 12:2 NRSV)? He has, 'the words of eternal life; we have come to believe and know that [He] is the Holy One of God' (John 6:68f NRSV). We pause to ask you to ask yourselves how true is that? How true is it that we both know and believe that Jesus is the Holy One who will lead us faithfully? Does that give us more confidence to undertake our journey? We suggest that it should.

How true is it that we both know and
believe that Jesus is the Holy One who
will lead us faithfully?

We can't stay where we are

End our longing for the old days,
grant the vision that we lack-
once we've started on this journey
there can be no turning back;
let us travel light, discarding
excess baggage from our past,

cherish only what's essential,
choosing treasure that will last.

As we learn to appreciate what we have and from where we have come, we need to discern what we must now leave behind to enable forward movement. As a denomination, we are a small fraction of who and what we were in 1972 – we have about a fifth of the membership we had on our formation, and the number of churches has fallen from a little over 2,000 to a little under 1,300. We have about three-fifths the number of churches compared with one-fifth of the membership. These churches are served by 390 Ministers (Stipendiary and Non-Stipendiary), compared to 1,844 in 1972. Again, the 'workforce' of Ministers of Word and Sacrament is about one-fifth of the number 50 years ago.

The days of one minister serving one church are gone forever – we simply don't have the ministers available or the finance to make it possible. So how shall we manage our limited ministerial resource? How should we best deploy and distribute our ministerial resources? All Synod Moderators and the relevant Synod committees are pouring countless hours into finding workable patterns for deployment, and we never lose sight of the fact that we are seeking to provide appropriate ministry for local churches: our planning and discussions are always in the context of local ministry needs. None of us is completely happy with the options we have so far identified – we would all love to be able to put more ministry into local churches, but that is simply not possible with the constraints within which we all operate. (The Moderators would also love to be free to do more to promote deepened discipleship and church growth rather than, seemingly, play this never-ending game of chess, moving pieces from one square to another but never 'winning'.)

Inevitably, we are drawn back to work that has been done several times before by General Assembly regarding the development of local leadership. The question the Moderators typically ask of a church facing ministerial vacancy, 'What do you need a Minister to do that only a Minister can do?' takes on renewed importance and greater urgency. What will make a difference to this local church? What are the charisms that a minister of Word and Sacraments might bring to this fellowship that would not be available otherwise? Perhaps of even greater importance is a different question: 'How shall we provide appropriate ministry and leadership for each congregation?' This must surely come not only from ministers of Word and Sacraments, but also, increasingly, from those called and ordained to the ministry of Elders, and from all members of the church. We do not, in theory, follow a priestly model of ministry when 'only the Minister counts' – we must be sure to follow a more Reformed practice, too. The old models simply do not work; we cannot stay where we are or rely on the way we used to do things.

As we freely acknowledge, much of this is not new thinking, but it really does seem the *Kairos* moment to finally take these questions seriously, own the fact that we are not what we once were or even what hoped we might become, but finally see that things must now be done differently.

Our structures have been changed within our history, as our union grew and as we ended the role of the District Councils (except for very specific and occasional purposes). This is undoubtedly a point where we need to review and simplify our structures. We never meant to create a bureaucratic institution, yet many of us feel that we are too often bound up in red tape and unable to respond creatively to the new direction in which the Spirit of God is trying to blow us.

What are those things that are essential for us to carry forward, and what can we safely leave behind for the next phase of our journey?

What are those things that are essential for us to carry forwards and what can we safely leave behind for the next phase of our journey? What are the things that now leave us heavy laden and encumbered? A former General Secretary remarked that we are held back by two equally dangerous phrases: 'We've never done it like that before,' and 'We've always done it this way.' Can our Jubilee be one where we consign those sentiments to the past, while taking forward the positive aspects of our past that will help us for our next 50 years as this part of Christ's Body? We are not called to iconoclasm, destroying what has been important and helpful in the past simply because it is part of our inheritance, but neither can we possibly carry forward everything we have valued – we must retain what we need, but no more.

Courage, not comfort

When we set up camp and settle
to avoid love's risk and pain,
you disturb complacent comfort,
pull the tent pegs up again;
keep us travelling in the knowledge
you are always at our side;
give us courage for the journey,
Christ our goal and Christ our guide.

Joy Dine © Joy Dine

In our anniversary year, are we ready to ask God to pull up our tent pegs to prevent us stopping where we shouldn't? It has been said that Jesus came to disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed. We experience both comfort and disturbance in our lives, and sometimes rely too heavily on the familiar as a place of refuge or hiding, rather than turning to our God who will shelter under God's wings and dwell within God's tent, not ours (Psalm 61). After a bruising, even brutal, couple of years, we need comfort, but we must find that in God, not elsewhere.

Are we ready to ask God to pull up our tent pegs to prevent us stopping where we shouldn't?

Taking risks

We are convinced that the denomination now needs to take risks. We don't have the resources, particularly the most valuable ones – people – to do all that we once did or that we would like to do. We are being forced, or at least very firmly guided, into looking at how we can and how we should do things differently, to suit a new age and new circumstances.

General Assembly has recognised this in commissioning the Church Life Review. The Synod Moderators are perhaps better placed than anyone else to see this need lived out in the life of a variety of local churches, needs that are deep and real.

Some churches have struggled more than others, and many have reached the conclusion that their particular fellowship has reached the end of its life and witness. We give thanks to God for all that has been achieved in Christ's name through the faithful service in these places.

In many places, by God's grace, we have been able to show the most remarkable resilience.
Thank you.

Others, by God's grace, have been able to show the most remarkable resilience, not only through the pandemic but through coping with changing patterns of ministry, decreased income and increased expenses, and (we might argue most importantly) with an ageing and declining membership. We have been heartened beyond measure as we have seen so many ministers, elders and members step up in sacrificial service of church and community, especially in these months and years of Covid-19. In the face of increasing challenge, the Church has done what she must, and responded wonderfully. It has not been easy for anyone, but to all who have gone the extra mile in pastoral care, providing worship online, meeting local needs to alleviate loneliness and poverty and generally to be Christ in your neighbourhoods – we see you, and God sees you.
Thank you.

Covid-19 is likely to be with us always, and continue to mutate and produce new variants, but we hope and trust that we have now travelled through the worst of this pandemic. So how shall we live in this time and in the years to come?

Again, we don't want to dishonour and disregard all that has brought us to this place and made us who we are. Yet is undoubtedly true that we can no longer do things, 'the way we've always done them'.

How shall we identify the risks we need to and are willing to take? At one Moderators' Meeting, we spent some time considering 1 Peter 3:13-18 (NRSV):

Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer

for doing evil. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.

Walking ever closer with Christ as Lord, we can know that doing the right thing because it is the right thing, will always be right, even if it might prove costly to us. Yet, who will harm us if we are eager to do good, and even if we do suffer, God will bless us.

As Abram was called to leave the familiar and travel into an unknown land, as Moses led the people out to slavery in the Exodus, and the first disciples gave up their familiar living in order to follow Christ, we can know that we do this at God's call.

In our Jubilee year, we remember also how our predecessors lost their living in parish churches for the sake of dissent – and in order to follow the path onto which God had called them. Our traditions have their roots in a travelling people, leaving behind the familiar in order to respond to the call to move on with God.

In the wilderness, the people grumbled and wanted to go back to how things were – even though that would mean returning to slavery.

We would rather listen to the prophet Isaiah's words, which we appropriate and adapt for the United Reformed Church:

See, God is about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. Do not fear, for God has redeemed us; God has called us by name and will be with us as we pass through the waters, where even mighty rivers will not overwhelm us. We are precious in God's sight, and honoured and loved by God. Are we ready to venture with God into the unknown and embrace this new life?
(Based on verses from Isaiah 43.)

Now that the Covid-19 restrictions have all but ended (at the time of writing), we find ourselves with an opportunity ahead. When the Moderators offered 'Ready for the New Normal' to the United Reformed Church two years ago, we were signalling that the pandemic gave us all a chance to imagine things differently. Some have been able, despite the anxiety and uncertainty, to re-order life locally and fit themselves for a new age of being and doing. We see other churches that have yet to catch up, and sadly too many congregations that have reached the end of the road for the worship and witness, and have taken the, usually painful, decision to close. We pray for the whole United Reformed Church, that together and in our own fellowships we may discern the mind of Christ on how to move forwards.

We do not believe in a 'one-size-fits-all' solution, but according to local context, some of the answers will involve choosing to adopt locally-recognised 'lay leadership' rather than an ordained Minister, more creative collaboration between congregations, merging some churches and ceasing operation in other places. Alongside this we commend experiments to plant new causes through Fresh Expressions of church and pioneering ministry, and, true to our DNA, ecumenical co-operation wherever possible.

We do not believe one approach will suit everyone or fix every approach. But we do believe that there is hope for the United Reformed Church and for the world.

Personalia

Despite all the challenges and changes of this season, the Moderators' Meeting remains united, and it is a pleasure and privilege to work together in the service of the Church. Since the General Assembly, we have been delighted to welcome Geoff Felton and Lythan Nevard among our number, serving Mersey and Eastern Synods respectively. We also record our continuing thanks to the Revd Ron Reid who has so helpfully minuted our meetings, but has indicated that he wishes to relinquish this responsibility at the end of this year, and to those who have taken on additional responsibility in various Synods during periods of moderatorial vacancy, especially those who have so ably represented their Synods at our monthly meetings – Richard Bradley, Paul Ellis, and Tim Meadows.

Discussion questions

1. What are you most excited about in this report? What concerns you most?
2. If you could make one change to your local church, what would it be?
3. How will you raise that idea in your church and how can you take action to bring it about?

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Paper A1

Business Committee

Basic information

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Action required	To be noted.

1. Arrangements for the General Assembly

This is the first Assembly taking place at the Hayes Conference Centre. The hope had been that all members of Assembly would be able to be resident at the Hayes, and that the capacity of the Hayes would act as something of a limitation on the size of the Assembly.

Unfortunately, the Assembly is already beyond the capacity of the Hayes, and it is likely that some will need to stay in nearby accommodation. This to some extent undermines one of the key reasons that the Hayes was selected as a venue. Along with concerns about the lack of flexibility from the venue, the Committee has agreed to explore possible alternative venues that would allow Assembly to be contained on a compact site but may provide more appropriate accommodation for our needs.

If proposals are brought to change the venue of Assembly, it is unlikely this would take effect for a number of years because of provisional bookings already having been made.

2. Standing Orders

New Standing Orders, that can function for hybrid meetings, were adopted at Assembly Executive in November 2021. The Standing Orders are designed to keep the key elements of consensus decision making, whilst allowing the decision making part of the process to proceed on a 'supermajority' principle.

Where the Moderator feels that Assembly is too divided in the course of debate, it is within their gift to determine that Assembly will not proceed to a formal vote to allow for more reflection across the family of the United Reformed Church. Where votes are taken, the required majority is two-thirds. The Committee invited Mr Alan Yates, who had articulated particular concerns, to a meeting to allow for further conversation on the topic.

Following careful deliberation, the Committee has decided not to bring revised Standing Orders to General Assembly. The primary reasoning for this is that constitutional changes require a two-thirds majority. This is determined in the Rules of Procedure and is clearly to prevent major changes within the life of the church from happening on a very slender majority.

It seems illogical to require a higher level of percentage for matters which don't have constitutional weight, than those that do. Therefore, we are minded that for the time being, we will continue with the Standing Orders as adopted in November 2021. This will be the first time they have been used in a General

Assembly, and it seems wise to experience the reality of their use before proceeding to further change. If it becomes clear the will of Assembly is for further revision of the standing orders after they have been experienced in operation, that course of action of course remains open to us.

3. **Future dates of General Assembly and Assembly Executive**

Assembly Executive expressed a preference at its meeting in November 2021 for its regular in person meetings to happen in February, rather than November.

Historically, the reason November was chosen was because this is the point at which a budget needs agreeing for the following year. November is, in reality, very soon after General Assembly in July. The committees of the Church tend not to meet over the summer, and initial meetings after Assembly are normally in September. Papers for a November Assembly Executive must be prepared by October, and this is too small a window for meaningful work to have been achieved since General Assembly.

Now that Zoom meetings of the Assembly Executive are possible, the intention is that there would be a short Zoom meeting in the autumn each year, for the purposes of adopting the budget for the following year, and to attend to any other urgent business.

The main in-person meeting of the Assembly Executive will then be in February, which will allow meaningful work to have taken place since General Assembly and prove a good point in the cycle of the Church's year to test the mind of Executive about work being prepared for the General Assembly.

It has not proved possible to move the November 2022 meeting to February 2023, so in 2022, Executive will be meeting in November. This also assists with the timetable for the proposed adoption of a new pension scheme, and the adoption of a new General Assembly Committee structure.

The first February meeting of the Assembly Executive will therefore be in February 2024, replacing that initially scheduled for November 2023.

Provisional bookings have been made for the following dates and venues:

Assembly Executive and General Assembly dates and venues overview		
Season	Dates	Venue
AE Autumn 2022	Monday 28 - Wednesday 30 November 2022	High Leigh
GA 2023	Friday 30 June - Monday 3 July	The Hayes
AE Spring 2024	TBD	TBD
GA 2024	12 July - 15 July 2024	The Hayes

Paper B1

Children's and Youth Work Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Samantha Sheehan (acting Convenor) rev.s.sheehan@gmail.com Sam Richards (Head of Children's and Youth Work) sam.richards@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>From Youth Assembly:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. a) General Assembly resolves that nominations for Moderator of the General Assembly may be received from Youth Assembly in addition to Synods. b) General Assembly instructs the Business Committee to work with representatives of URC Youth to establish a proper process for these nominations. <p>2. URC Youth Assembly reaffirms its commitment to tackle the stigma surrounding mental ill health. Youth Assembly strongly encourages individuals to take part in Mental Health First Aid training and for local churches, Synods and General Assembly to look into ways to help individuals access this training. Youth Assembly asks General Assembly to join it in recommending that local churches strive to ensure that at least one member of the leadership team has undertaken this training.</p> <p>From CYWC:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Children's and Youth Work Committee asks General Assembly to dissolve the Pilots Subcommittee as a formal structure in recognition of the changes within Pilots following General Assembly 2021. Children's and Youth Work Committee will continue to engage with and support Pilots through their network of companies and informal gathering, alongside other such networks for Children's and Youth Work. 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

	<p>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.</p>
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Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Report of the work of Children's and Youth Work Committee.
Main points	Review of past two years, update on strategy, URC Youth report, launch of URC Children.
Previous relevant documents	GA2021 B1 URC Children and the future of Pilots GA2020 Children's and youth work review and five-year strategy Mission Council 2018 B2 CYWC review report 2018 Mission Council 2018 B3 CYWC outline strategy.
Consultation has taken place with...	URC Youth Pilots Subcommittee.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Church House staff

URC Youth created a very part-time intern post to assist them with communications, and Charlotte Elliott was appointed in June 2021 (funded by the Carmichael Montgomery Trust fund). Steve Tait, Pilots Coordinator (0.4FTE) resigned in May 2021, and Triin Kubar, Administrative Assistant and Pilots Desk (0.6FTE) resigned in January 2022. Following the General Assembly resolutions on the future of Pilots and development of URC Children, the roles have been reviewed, and Tricia Harding was appointed as Administrative Assistant (0.4FTE) from January 2022 and Sharon Lloyd as Programme Assistant (0.6FTE) from April 2022.

Ecumenical work

We contributed to the Churches Together in England resources for Education Sunday in 2020 (pre-recorded service) and 2021. We contributed to Creating Space with Children online programme, led by the Methodist Church during 2020-2021. Lorraine Webb, Programme Officer, is part of the planning group for European Conference on Christian Education (for Children's Ministry Network), and organised a mini-conference online in 2021. We are part of the ecumenical group developing new training for children's, family and intergenerational ministry (to replace Core Skills) called Essentials for Ministry. Sam Richards, Head of Children's and Youth Work, is part of an international group creating resources to help churches explore intergenerational ministry.

Pilots

Pilots were supported with online gatherings for Synod Pilots Officers and FOFA@home resources sent directly to Pilots Captains during lockdown. A recorded Pilots Sunday service was created in 2020. An online training session was offered to Pilots Officers in 2021. A special badge for all Pilots, bunting, and a video of the prayer was created to mark the 85th anniversary of Pilots in 2021. During 2020-2021, Children's and Youth Work Committee (CYWC) conducted a review of Pilots, resulting in the paper to General Assembly in 2021 and resolutions 8 and 9, reducing staff and financial support for Pilots, and creating capacity to launch URC Children (see below). Pilots continues to be supported through provision of resources (although these are no longer exclusive to Pilots), and staff support for managing merchandise, record-keeping and accessing funds. The Pilots Subcommittee has not been able to recruit new members. The Pilots community held a summit residential and hybrid meeting in October 2021 supported by staff, and its first online gathering in 2022, as it finds new ways to operate going forward without the formal structures it is unable to sustain.

Children's and Youth Work Committee asks General Assembly to dissolve the Pilots Subcommittee as a formal structure in recognition of the changes within Pilots following General Assembly 2021. Children's and Youth Work Committee will continue to engage with and support Pilots through their network of Companies and informal Gathering, alongside other such networks for children's and youth work.

CYWC strategy update

Mission Council November 2018 approved the CYWC strategy (originally 2019-2023, now extended to 2024 because of the pandemic).

Vision: **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.

Strategy: support and strengthen local congregations in five key areas:

- Faith – sharing spiritual resources
- Community – sharing relational resources
- Identity – sharing stories, events, connections
- Engagement – sharing in the life of the local context
- Growth – sharing new, creative, risky change (to develop potential).

The focus for 2020 was 0-5s, with a series of resources produced to signpost local churches to ways to engage with and support families with 0-5 year olds. Families on Faith Adventures@home (FOFA@home) began as a weekly resource for churches to send to families during the first lockdown, and we have now passed the milestone of more than two years of this weekly resource, which is widely used by churches in a variety of ways to support groups and families. We ran 'TRlialogue', a regular broadcast online discussion for 16-25s. We created pre-recorded services for Pentecost, and we ran an online 'fringe event' after the summer Mission Council. We ran an online conference 'Faith with under-fives' with ROOTS over three evenings. We created the URC Infant Feeding Policy, which was approved at November 2020 Mission Council. The Children and Youth Friendly Church scheme was launched to replace the Child Friendly Church award. We created an Advent resource, 'Hope and Joy' boxes, for churches buy to give to families during lockdown, and 2,000 were distributed. We created accessible versions of the safeguarding posters for local churches.

The focus for 2021 was 5-11s. The annual themed resource was Heroes and Villains. We ran an online conference 'Living Faith with 5-11s' over three evenings with ROOTS. We created an intergenerational Lent resource, 'Walking towards Easter Together', for churches to buy to give away during lockdown, and 3,500 were distributed. We created a Holiday Club resource 'Supersleuths' for local churches, and offered small grants to support children's work over the holidays. We created a new resource with Commitment for Life, 'Go with Greta' (for 5-11s) / #connect2 (for 11-14s) on Nicaragua. We ran an online 'fringe event' after General Assembly. We created a recorded service for Environment Sunday. We created an Advent resource, 'Come and See' boxes, for churches buy to give to families during lockdown, and 5,000 were distributed. We launched URC Training with Education and Learning, offering online workshops to help churches build skills in social media, video editing, sharing good news stories, and hybrid church. We launched 'Let's talk about' online sessions for children's and youth workers. We hosted an online gathering around neurodiversity. We introduced the Children and Youth Friendly Synod scheme.

Throughout the pandemic, we produced guidance for local churches in relation to children's and youth work, and more recently for church activities in private dwellings.

So far in 2022, we have supported URC Youth Assembly, and ran a URC Youth Leaders' Gathering event alongside it for the first time in January. We contributed to the URC Lent resource 'Faith Hope and Love on the way to Easter'. We prepared to launch URC Children as a new umbrella identity for all children connected to the URC and those who work with them.

It is now a consolidation year in 2022, as we try to take stock of the impact of the pandemic, and help churches to refocus on their engagement with children and young people. We are aware of the very mixed picture in local churches, some of whom struggled to stay connected with children, young people and families, while others find increased demand from families through food banks, free school lunches, and free resources children's and family resources (such as craft bags, Advent boxes etc). Some churches were helped by young people to embrace technology, while others lost contact with teens and young adults. Many volunteers have had to step down for a variety of reasons, and many groups and activities have not reopened or are being reassessed. The launch of URC Children and supporting URC Youth's review underline the URC's commitment to its calling as a church for all ages.

CYWC is extremely grateful to the CYDO+ team (and the Synods for releasing their time) for all their invaluable contributions over the past two years, which have enabled all the work referred to above, and much more, to be offered denomination-wide. This way of working together to identify needs and respond in a coordinated manner became incredibly important during the pandemic, and enabled the URC to lead the way in supporting churches as they endeavoured to maintain contact with children, young people and families, and resource volunteers, during a very challenging period.

CYWC has recognised significant progress so far in achieving the goals of the six-year strategy, and reconfirmed their commitment to the following priorities:

- Faith – support and resource local churches, and through them grandparents, parents and carers in sharing spiritual resources with children and young people, with a focus on prayer, dwelling in the Word and encountering God in worship,

creation and the whole of life, providing resources (FOFA@home, Holiday Club, annual theme etc), and offer training to build confidence.

- Community – support local churches in building intergenerational relationships and offering care to children and young people – Mental Health First Aid training, emotional resilience, pastoral care, doing things together (worship, service) – and re-focus on relationships rather than programmes and rotas.
- Identity – build a sense of identity among children and young people in local churches through the launch of URC Children and supporting the URC Youth review, engaging with 11-17s, connecting over 18s with wider URC life and supporting their discernment of vocation. Building networks for those working with different groups for mutual support (eg Messy Church, Pilots, uniformed groups, toddler groups, junior church, youth groups). Offering resources, gatherings, events and opportunities alongside sharing stories (eg Lundie Award, Greenbelt).
- Engagement – support local churches in partnering with others to engage with children and young people in the local community – highlight potential partners and examples from across the URC, and support URC Children and URC Youth in engaging with social and global justice as mission.
- Growth – offer supported ways into new, creative, risky change – Children and Youth Friendly Church scheme, young leaders training, Stepwise, Pioneering Hub, New Reality Same Mission, Eco-church and Eco-Congregation programmes.

2022 year of jubilee

The booklet *Celebrate Together*, telling the story of holding a party linked to the Biblical concept of jubilee and sharing something of the history and current life of the URC, was created as an intergenerational resource to enable local churches to include all ages in celebrating the URC's 50th anniversary. In all, 50,000 free copies were made available for churches to give away (thanks to generous funding from the Liggart Trust and the James Donald Tract Fund), along with accompanying resources to link this to worship. We contributed to the jubilee pack sent to all local churches and active ministers. Our annual themed resource for all ages on jubilee went to all churches and lay preachers. We have been helping to develop the Newbigin Pioneering Hub as a 50th anniversary project investing in the future mission of the Church, and offering opportunities to young adults and others.

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).

The pandemic has had a huge impact on URC Youth. The Youth Exec were not able to gather and many were personally affected by the pandemic. Despite this, they remained actively engaged in church life in a variety of ways, through serving on committees and contributing to online worship such International Youth Day August 2020.

URC Youth was not able to hold Youth Assembly in person in 2021. With no mechanism to appoint to posts without a physical gathering, Youth Moderator Reuben Watt and Moderator Elect Jo Harris agreed to continue in-post for an extra year. An online Youth dis-ASSEMBLED event was held in January 2021, with Saturday night entertainment and Sunday morning worship. Across 2021, under the banner of Youth RE-assembled,

they followed a series of themes (picking up on things that would normally have been discussed at Youth Assembly) such as vocation, Israel and Palestine, hostile environments, Pride, world church, anti-racism and mental health. This was supported by the TRialogue online discussion programme. They issued statements on Black Lives Matter, free school meals, and conversion therapy.

Online preparation events were held for URC Youth representatives going to Mission Council in 2021, and What Do You Think was held as a hybrid in-person and online event ahead of the online General Assembly 2021.

Youth Assembly 2022 was held in person, in line with the Covid-19 guidance at the time, and many valued the opportunity to gather together and consider the theme of jubilee through commemorating the past, celebrating the present and creating the future. Following the struggles of the past couple of years, URC Youth Executive will be conducting a review of URC Youth and Youth Executive, including racial diversity, reporting progress to the next Youth Assembly. URC Youth reaffirmed its condemnation of conversion therapy. Philippa Osei became the first BAME Youth Moderator Elect. URC Youth brings three resolutions to General Assembly from Youth Assembly. The two are a response to their reflection on the lack of diversity among key office holders in general, and the Moderator of General Assembly in particular, as highlighted in the discussions at General Assembly 2021, and seek to address this by enabling Youth Assembly to nominate directly:

General Assembly resolves that nominations for Moderator of the General Assembly may be received from Youth Assembly in addition to Synods.

General Assembly instructs the Business Committee to work with representatives of URC Youth to establish a proper process for these nominations.

The third reflects URC Youth's continued mission to encourage the URC to tackle the stigma surrounding mental ill health, as highlighted in resolution passed at General Assembly 2014:

URC Youth Assembly reaffirms its commitment to tackle the stigma surrounding mental ill health. Youth Assembly strongly encourages individuals to take part in Mental Health First Aid training and for local churches, Synods and General Assembly to look into ways to help individuals access this training. Youth Assembly asks General Assembly to join it in recommending that local churches strive to ensure that at least one member of the leadership team has undertaken this training.

URC Children

CYWC has worked on developing a framework for URC Children, which parallels URC Youth, but needs to be different in form and appropriate to the age range:

URC Children will:

- Be an inclusive community, including and valuing every child aged 0-12 in the United Reformed Church
- Be a safe space to explore, experience and express a lifelong adventure with Christ
- Be a body that enables the voice of children to shape church life

- Be an umbrella organisation that, in partnership with URC Children's and Youth Work team, ensures different local groups, households and schools have support and resources
- Be a family who care and love for each other as they discover God together locally, regionally and denominationally
- Be a prophetic voice for the world to hear
- Be people on a mission to serve Christ and build the Kingdom as part of an Intergenerational Church
- Enable children to step into God's call through support and opportunities, valuing gifts, skills and passions
- Be child-led
- Provide a sense of identity within the whole URC
- Provide opportunities for participating, serving, training and development
- Be enabled by children's workers (voluntary/paid), local/Synod/CYWC, and URC structures.

CYWC has identified four key areas for development:

1. **Structures** – how we enable URC children to be child-led and to enable the Church to hear and respond to the voices of children locally, in Synods and as a denomination.

We will seek to work with children to develop structures – potentially looking to create a Children's Assembly of some sort – recognising that this will take time as we consult with children and work with local churches and Synods. In the meantime, we need to be modelling how to engage with children and listen to them, and create resources and training to enable others to move in this direction, with a particular focus on supporting local churches to do this well.

2. **Children** – how we enable children to have a sense of belonging to something bigger through URC Children, and for this to strengthen their identity as disciples.

We have a new logo with the strapline 'URC Children together', and will develop some materials and merchandise. We have a competition to design birthday cards for churches and Synods to use. The CYDO+ team will promote this in their engagement with local churches and through Synod events. The URC website needs a section to parallel URC Youth. We need to start hearing from children about what they want, and we will begin by identifying some local groups we can engage with.

3. **Those who work with and support children** – how we network, resource, and support those engaging with children and their families through local churches across the breadth of work (toddler groups, Messy Church, Junior Church, Pilots, uniformed groups, holiday clubs etc).

We propose to start with those supporting the very youngest, and work up through the age groups from 0-12 to create networks and explore resources and gatherings that would support this group. Pilots and URC Guide and Scout Fellowship are already leading the way, and we will continue to work with them. We will champion Children and Youth Friendly Churches as they are awarded, and share good news stories.

4. **Theology of children** – revisiting and promoting the URC's theology of children to underpin all our work in this area.

We will review all previous theological material pertaining to children, including the Charter for Children in the Church and the series of theological reflection booklets, and seek to work with URC theologians to develop an accessible resource to inform practice across the URC.

CYWC are excited to be launching URC Children at General Assembly in the URC's jubilee year:

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.



Paper B/D/M 1

Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers and the Newbigin Pioneering Hub

Ministries, Children's and Youth Work, Education and Learning and Mission Committees

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Paul Whittle moderator@urcscotland.org.uk Sarah Lane Cawte slanecawte@gmail.com
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>5. General Assembly agrees to use the Newbigin Pioneering HUB to train and support its lay pioneer ministers.</p> <p>6. General Assembly recognises the ministry of Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers as a ministry of the United Reformed Church and instructs the Ministries Committee to bring 'Marks of Ministry of a Lay Pioneer' to the Assembly Executive for adoption.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To recognise a new ministry of Assembly accredited Lay Pioneers and to train them through the URC Newbigin Pioneering HUB.
Main points	There is an opportunity to work with CMS and seedbeds in establishing a newly accredited ministry of lay pioneers which a) builds on work already begun in Mission Committee through the Fresh Expressions and Pioneering Task Group b) to support and train lay pioneers through the Newbigin HUB c) and, as both denominations celebrate 50 years, to work in cooperation with the Congregational Federation.
Previous relevant documents	Patterns of Ministry (1995) Equipping the Saints (2004) A Challenge to the Church (2008) What is the Spirit saying to the churches?: the future of the United Reformed Church (2015) Fresh Expressions Enabling Group Report Mission Council June 2019.
Consultation has taken place with...	Ministries, Children's and Youth Work, Education and Learning and Mission Committees, Congregational Federation.

Summary of impact

Financial	To be funded from existing Ministries budget.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Planning involvement of, and possible partnership with, the Congregational Federation as the first Free Church HUB which will open the HUB up to other denominations.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 *All are called. All are called to discipleship; all are called to ministry; all are called to mission... not all are called to the same expression of discipleship, the same form of ministry, the same field of mission¹.* In an age of decline, the challenge to the church in responding to God's call is to open eyes, hearts and wills to the gifts of ministry that God gives his people, and to release and nurture those gifts.
- 1.2 Since 1972, we've adopted many programmes and initiatives to equip people to be actively focused outwards into the world. Now we are ably Walking the Way, rediscovering where we believe God is calling the United Reformed Church.
- 1.3 We are, of course, richly blessed that our reformed heritage doesn't restrict ministry simply to that of ordained clergy. While we still believe wholeheartedly that Ministers of Word and Sacraments and CRCWs have a place within our denomination, but we also rejoice that we value the place of the whole people of God – such is the inclusivity and diversity of servant leadership within our church.
- 1.4 If we are truly looking to be inclusive in our church life, it will mean reshaping already existing church life to include a wider variety and understanding of 'church' and not the reshaping new members to fit into our existing church life.²
- 1.5 The 2021 General Assembly Moderators' Report – Wisdom for liminal times challenged:
- The balance between the pastoral and the missional is difficult to strike. In the past, the church has almost definitely focused too much on the pastoral and been more inward-looking. However, there remains a place for the more traditional pastoral model of church, typically associated with a building, alongside a pioneering missional approach. If this could be linked with release of funds for new pioneer ministries / CRCW work in the area, that might be an encouragement.*
- 1.6 If all are called, but not to the same form of ministry, then we need to be creative in crafting newly accredited ministries where there is need. This is not about plugging gaps, but genuinely and intentionally trying to find out what God is calling the Church to be and do.
- 1.7 As Lesslie Newbigin said '*The role of the church is to be a sign, an instrument and foretaste of God's coming reign in the place for which it has responsibility*'. Our action comes from a readiness for responsibility.³
- 1.8 In our 50th year, perhaps it is no coincidence, some might even say it is God-given, that an exciting opportunity has opened up to partner with the Church Mission Society in creating a new accredited ministry, which meets the framework already affirmed by

¹ 'Incarnation Ministry being with the church' Samuel Wells page114

² Mission Council Appendix five Report from the 20-40 task group from GA2018 Book of Reports page 29

³ Action springs not from thought, but a readiness for responsibility D.Bonhoeffer

Mission Council through the work of the church's Fresh Expressions and Pioneering Enabling Group.

2. The background

- 2.1 Ministries Committee, in collaboration with the Fresh Expressions and Pioneering Steering Group (Mission Committee), has been considering ways to facilitate the ministry of the whole people of God within the United Reformed Church, in accordance with its remit.
- 2.2 Previous Ministries Committee reports⁴ to General Assembly have encouraged Synods and local pastorates to consider alternative ministries alongside Ministers of Word and Sacraments and CRCWs. Although progress has been made with regard to this, there is still a recognition that opportunity is limited in many places by the lack of resources.
- 2.3 In 2015, 'What is the Spirit saying to the Churches?: the future of the United Reformed Church' challenged the URC:

The affirmation the Faith and Order Committee feels led to make is that the future of the United Reformed Church is not about dying, but about living more fruitfully, prophetically and adventurously, being re-energised by the power of the Holy Spirit in faithfulness to Jesus Christ... An invitation went out on the United Reformed Church website and through the synods to contribute papers... 30 papers were received covering a range of fruitful areas... including an interesting proposal that the United Reformed Church should become a pioneer missional movement or a Reformed order within another church.⁵

- 2.4 In November 2017, Mission Council agreed to fund additional ministries. While some individual churches or group pastorates may have the funds to pay for alternative ministry and leadership on a part-time, or even full-time, basis, this is beyond the reach of most churches, for whom the first call on their financial resources rightly remains the M&M fund. Yet in some places lay people can be identified to exercise such ministries in a voluntary capacity, but very often the lack of available volunteers thwarts such enterprises.
- 2.5 As a result, in 2019 Ministries Committee set aside £75K for three years to fund such ministries, and set out the criteria for Synods to make 'bids' for the finance. However, by 2021 it was clear that all the pilot ministries had faltered or ceased because of the pandemic. Ministries took the decision that it would be virtually impossible to evaluate the scheme and a line was drawn under it.
- 2.6 At the same time, in 2018, Mission Committee reported that the Fresh Expressions future strategy would focus on three areas for future work:
 - Training: more training of lay people to engage in fresh expressions; development of a pioneer pathway in ordination training; integration of fresh expressions thinking in the training elements of Walking the Way, such as Stepwise
 - Supporting the fresh expressions the URC has and encouraging the development of new ones
 - Setting targets in consultation with Synods.

It was noted at the time that it is essential that any strategy evolves organically, and that it is more about creating a culture of permission giving, storytelling, recognising 'Kingdom stuff', and releasing resources. As a result of the above, the Gathering was established in 2020 but, again, because of the pandemic, activities had to be reframed.

⁴ Patterns of Ministry (1995), Equipping the Saints (2004), Challenge to the Church (2008)

⁵ 'What is the Spirit saying to the Churches?: the future of the United Reformed Church' challenged the URC pages 9-10

- 2.7 However, in discussions in the FX Enabling Group, it became apparent that lay ministries were moving in a new direction with pioneering at the forefront. While new ministries of NSM Model 4 (ordained) and NS CRCW (commissioned) had been established with a module on pioneering available at one of the RCLs, there was still the gap of supporting and training lay ministries in this ministry.
- 2.8 In May 2021, the FX Enabling Group collaborated with Jonny Baker from the Church Mission Society (CMS), which already partners with a few dioceses to run Hubs offering their Certificate in Pioneering, with a view to establishing a pioneering Hub which would create a space to encourage the pioneer gift in different missional contexts, nurture innovative mission on the ground, and grow a network of people re-imagining and transforming the UK with the Gospel story.
- 2.9 There are currently no Hubs that serve the Free Churches.
- 2.10 The following proposals builds on the work already brought to Mission Council by the Mission Committee, in line with the agreed framework for Fresh Expressions work, and are a collaboration between Children's and Youth, Education and Learning, Ministries and Mission.
- 2.11 The cost for running the course and the HUB will be £43k per annum, which will come from the existing Ministries budget for lay ministries. It is anticipated there will be additional income from external users. A verbal report will be given at General Assembly as to the commitment of the Congregational Federation who have yet to take this proposal to their General Assembly.

3. Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneering Ministry

Proposal 1. To recognise a ministry for lay pioneers (Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers) which is accredited by and accountable to the URC.

- 3.1.1 Pioneering is about firsts.
- Being the first to lead ministry into new places for and with others. Pioneers must be able to see a new future, and have the skills and gifts needed to make it a reality now.
 - Pioneers connect with people outside of Church, creating new ways of doing Church together in their community.
 - Pioneers are leaders of innovation, with a gift for seeing what God is doing and responding creatively to it.
- 3.2 Pioneering is a big part of the church's mission to be a growing church for all people in all places for the sake of God's Kingdom.
- 3.3 Those who complete the training would be accredited to this new ministry in the same, or similar, way that Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers are accredited to their ministry, with opportunities of ongoing support and accountable to the denomination.
- 3.4 There is a critical opportunity to grasp here that builds on work already agreed by Mission Council and General Assembly to train more lay people to engage in fresh expressions and pioneering. We are already aware that many, including our 20-40s, may not fit easily into the ministries that others have already prepared.
- 3.5 CMS delivers a proven training programme, but if the URC can recruit, recognise and release a new generation of pioneers, then a fresh lease of life is possible in the local communities we are called by God to serve. The HUB will also serve as a mechanism for recognising those in existing pioneer ministries.

- 3.6 The Ministries Committee has prepared a safer recruitment policy for Lay Pioneers and Guidelines on the Conduct and Behaviour of Lay Pioneers (who will be subject to the Disciplinary Policy for Office Holders). These are modelled on existing policies for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers. If Assembly adopts the proposal, the Ministries Committee will bring to Assembly Executive a paper for adoption on the 'Marks of Lay Pioneer Ministry'. If anyone would wish to see these policies, they are available from the Ministries Office at Church House.

4. The Newbigin Pioneering HUB⁶

Proposal 2. General Assembly recognises the ministry of Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers as a ministry of the United Reformed Church and instructs the Ministries Committee to bring 'Marks of Ministry of a Lay Pioneer' to the Assembly Executive for adoption.

- 4.1 Hubs create a space to encourage the pioneer gift in different missional contexts, nurture innovative mission on the ground and grow a network of people re-imagining and transforming the UK with the Gospel story.

- 4.2 At an away day in February, representatives from Ministries, Children's and Youth Work, Education and Learning, Mission, the Congregational Federation and the West Midlands Synod met to look at the how the HUB might train and support lay pioneers. We determined the purpose of the HUB would be:

'To discover, nurture, empower and release a new Community of Pioneers, able to see God's love and shalom flourish in their local communities.'

- 4.3 When we were looking to set up the Hub, we were aware from our conversations with CMS that they already had a good track record of being a catalyst for mission offering training opportunities for lay Pioneers, using a model already established, and working in varying geographical settings. It seemed sensible to use their expertise and knowledge to enable the URC to step out and locate the HUB in a pioneering context with them. They have a track record of creating relationships, possibilities and opportunities with people and churches. This enables the HUB to be rooted, connected, and agile. Such a setting can bring people together and grow Pioneers, but also support and resource them for their futures.

- 4.4 It is therefore proposed that the HUB be situated at Lodge Road URC, Birmingham, with the assistance of the Revd Ashley Barker, a URC NSM, who has a wealth of experience in pioneering and running accredited training courses. Ms Linda Rayner, URC Coordinator for Fresh Expressions, will be a key link person for the denomination. The Hub would be a URC 50th anniversary project investing in the future mission of God.

- 4.5 It is envisaged that the Newbigin Pioneering HUB will become a training space for lay people, and develop a supportive network of pioneers. The hub will enable the URC to:

- Identify and train pioneers – 20 per year target
- Nurture and support a community of pioneers
- Connect to wider networks – through CMS and beyond
- Share stories of hope.

- 4.6. The Hub would offer the CMS Certificate in Lay Pioneering to a new accredited ministry of lay pioneering (Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneer). The training pulls people together, and creates a place of learning, resourcing and action; then the network, longer term,

⁶ Permission has been sought from the family of the Revd Dr Lesslie Newbigin to use the Newbigin name and has been granted.

provides ongoing encouragement, connection, support and communication. Training brings a level of accountability, denominational recognition, and access to wider resourcing.

4.7 The cost of the course for six modules will total £600, or £300 for URC approved participants. It is anticipated that the CMS Certificate course will be open to lay persons of other Free Churches, creating a potential income stream to support the community.

4.8. The curriculum will consist of:

- What is Pioneering mission?
- Mission spirituality
- Reading the Bible for context
- Missional community engagement
- Church in mission
- Missional entrepreneurship.

Other modules are available, such as:

- Missional leadership
- Rural pioneer ministry
- Justice and reconciliation
- Doing theology
- Reflective practice.

4.9 Delivery of the course will be in hybrid form

- Three residential weekends at Greenhouse, near Bromsgrove
- Three Saturdays – in person at Lodge Road or online access (hybrid)
- Six evenings – in person at Lodge Road or online access (hybrid)
- Plus online small groups / learning circles and one-to-one mentoring
- This equates to 14 hours teaching per module (weekend or day, plus two evenings)
- Presentation to panel and graduation day at the end of the course.

4.10 It is envisaged that the first cohort will begin training in September 2022. The process has already begun to recruit, with an online Enquirers' Day in April, and an in person Taster Day at Lodge Road URC in May.

4.11. CMS will provide the teaching, assessment and module course support for the first cohort, while training up Ash Barker and a team of suitable people from within the URC and beyond to take on the training and assessment over the subsequent two years. Ash will coordinate the course recruitment and delivery, recruiting small group leaders and mentors from among those already exercising a pioneering ministry, who will also be invited to join the pioneering network.

4.12. Application and selection will follow the same process for safer recruitment as other accredited ministries.

4.13. Once training has been successfully completed, the Church will determine an individual's appropriateness to commission as an Assembly Accredited Pioneer. If Assembly agrees to the adoption of this new ministry, the Ministries Committee will prepare the necessary suite of policies to support it. These will include 'Marks of Ministry' (as we have for Ministers, Lay Preachers and others), criteria for accreditation and mechanisms for appropriate deployment, support and oversight of the ministry. Lay Pioneers will be subject to the same disciplinary policy as other comparable Office Holders within the life of the church.

- 4.14 We perhaps need to remind ourselves that, given the Church at best is relational, it can only flourish by relating deeply to the variety of people within and around it. Church at best is flexible, and patterns of church life that have worked in the past may not serve the future.⁷ It is our hope that a newly accredited ministry of lay pioneering will enable others to flourish in God's love and shalom.

⁷ Mission Council Appendix five Report from the 20-40 task group from GA2018 Book of Reports page 22

Paper E1

Affirmative action towards an anti-racist Church

Equalities Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Anne Lewitt, Convenor of Equalities Committee aelewitt@gmail.com Karen Campbell, Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries karen.campbell@urc.org.uk
Action required	Discussion and decision.
Draft resolution(s)	7. General Assembly endorses the report of the Affirmative Action Task Group. It instructs the task group to continue consulting with other URC committees and groups, bringing firm proposals to General Assembly 2023 to ensure the URC takes positive action towards becoming an anti-racist church in terms of its recruitment and representation.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Update on the work of the Affirmative Action Task Group.
Main points	Mapping the formation and make-up of the group; key areas of conversation and concern; the legal position; and recommendations at this stage in the journey. General Assembly is asked to endorse the work thus far and instruct the Task Group to continue this work, bringing firm proposals to General Assembly 2023.
Previous relevant documents	From 'Not Racist' to Anti-Racist – Mission Council November 2020.
Consultation has taken place with...	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Black URC members and ministers 2. John Bradbury – URC General Secretary 3. Jane Baird – URC Deputy General Secretary, Admin and Resources 4. URC Human Resources 5. Jenny Mills – URC Secretary for Education and Learning 6. Nicola Furley-Smith – URC Secretary for Ministries 7. URC Mission Committee

	8. Ecumenical Partners – including the Methodist Church and Baptist Union of Great Britain.
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Summary of impact

Financial	None at this point.
External (eg ecumenical)	Our UK ecumenical partners are greatly interested in how racial justice and Positive Action initiatives are implemented in our respective spheres, and are keen to learn from each other as well as supporting each other’s journeys.

Affirmative action towards an anti-racist Church

1. Background

The Affirmative Action Task Group was created in late 2021 under the remit of the Equalities Committee, as instructed by General Assembly in July 2021.

The group was tasked as per General Assembly resolutions 15, 16 and 18:

- a) To explore how the URC might implement a policy of ‘affirmative action’ to address the persistent underrepresentation of black and ethnic minority people in Assembly-appointed posts.
- b) To specifically explore the possibilities and practicalities of a recruitment policy which actively engages with, and addresses, the current racial imbalance in Assembly-appointed posts.
- c) To bring recommendations arising from the work of the small group to General Assembly 2022.

2. The Task Group

2.1 The make-up of the group was deliberately diverse in respect of ethnicity, age range, lay and ordained members, and experience of/in the URC.

2.2 Members were:

- Karen Campbell, Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries – Convenor
- The Revd David Salsbury, Secretary to Equalities Committee – Task Group Secretary
- Lindsey Brown, Mission Committee
- Philippa Osei, URC Youth (subsequently Youth Assembly Moderator-elect)
- Muskaan Jonathan, young adult
- The Revd John Macaulay
- Pat Poinen, Cascades of Grace; Racial Justice Advocate
- The Revd George Mwaura
- The Revd Andrew Mudharara.

- 2.3 The group met four times via Zoom, between December 2021 and March 2022. Discussion points included:
- a) Many URC members have no direct experience of being ‘the other’, or of being in a minority group.
 - b) There is, therefore, a lack of understanding within the URC of the need for the anti-racism resolutions.
 - c) That said, we are seeking to journey forward together as the *United* Reformed Church. There is no ‘them and us’; we are one.
 - d) There is a need for a culture change in order for the URC to become a *truly* multicultural Church; a Church in which different cultures are not just present, but their presence makes a difference – to who we are and how we do things.
 - e) There have been many good intentions concerning racial justice expressed by the URC over many years, yet it feels that very little has changed – and, in fact, some things have slipped. There is a need to remind the URC of our previous commitments, and to hold the URC accountable for continuing to honour those commitments.
 - f) Racism absolutely does exist within our Body, as borne out by the experiences of many black and ethnic minority members of our Church. It is most often structural and unintended, although not always so.
 - g) There is a need to help the whole Church to understand by communicating something of these testimonies without compounding the pain of those who have been hurt by asking them to keep retelling their experiences.
 - h) Conversations are needed in every part of the URC – including local church, Synod, and General Assembly – to bring about the desired culture change. Specifically for the task group, there needs to be a shift in mindset regarding who and how the URC recruits to Assembly appointments.

3. Consultation

The task group consulted the following individuals, groups and resources:

- Black URC members and ministers
- John Bradbury – URC General Secretary
- Jane Baird – URC Deputy General Secretary, Admin and Resources
- URC Human Resources
- Jenny Mills – URC Secretary for Education and Learning
- Nicola Furley-Smith – URC Secretary for Ministries
- URC Mission Committee
- Ecumenical Partners – including the Methodist Church and Baptist Union of Great Britain
- The Equality Act 2010 – sections 158; 159
- Equality and Human Rights Commission.

4. Task Group findings

- 4.1 ‘Affirmative Action’ is not a term recognised in the UK. Instead, the Equality Act 2010 refers to ‘positive action’, wherein an employer can take action to address a

disadvantage specifically relating to any one of a number of protected characteristics, including race. Such action might include encouragement for such individuals to apply for management positions, or providing specific training to equip those individuals. Even so, the decision of who to select must be made on merit alone.

- 4.2 The exception to this is where a candidate who shares a protected characteristic is 'as qualified as' a candidate who does not share the characteristic. In this instance, s159 can be applied – allowing the employer to favour the individual who shares the characteristic over the individual who does not. This might be used, for example, where it is felt that a disadvantaged group is underrepresented in the particular area to which people are being recruited.
- 4.3 It is not possible to have a *policy* of positive action. Positive action can only be applied on a case-by-case basis – and, in the instance of s159, it should be noted that **both** candidates must be qualified and appointable.
- 4.4 The task group noted that the current appointment processes generally follow a business model, with weight given to extensive résumés and 'professional' presentations. While we do not doubt the intentions of these processes, or that they identify 'good candidates', it was highlighted that on some occasions, members of appointment panels have felt less than confident that they were led to appoint 'the right person'. This is, perhaps, unsurprising as the URC is not a business; it is a Church. Where, then, is the room for discerning the Spirit?
- 4.5 A number of black and ethnic minority members of the URC feel they have received insubstantial or unhelpful feedback following unsuccessful applications for Assembly appointments. The task group considered the possibility of such feedback being the panel's way of 'being kind', rather than saying, 'You were unsuitable', or 'un-appointable'. We felt, however, that honesty was an important part of the feedback for any candidate. We further considered whether greater accountability could positively impact appointment panels, and the recruitment processes used. What if those involved knew, in advance, that they would be required to properly explain their decisions; might this encourage panel members to address their conscious and unconscious biases, influence the questions asked of candidates, or impact how seriously black and ethnic minority candidates are considered? What if the default approach was to seek to appoint black and ethnic minority candidates rather than discounting them for what they may be perceived as lacking?
- 4.6 In particular, the task group noted that 'lack of experience' was a recurring theme. Our black and ethnic minority colleagues are not without skills and experience. So, this raises the question of who determines the 'right' skills and experience for appointments – and how? A process designed and predominantly populated by white middle-class men will almost certainly identify 'required skills' as those

possessed by white, middle-class men. We reflected on the text of Isaiah 43:18-19:

Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.

¹⁹ I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.

Could it be that God is trying to do a new thing, using people, skills and experiences we have not tapped into before? Could these give opportunity to explore exciting paths, breathing new life into our structures and processes?

5. Senior leadership conversations

Draft Resolution 17 concerning a skills development programme for black and ethnic minority colleagues was withdrawn at General Assembly 2021, so did not form part of the group's remit. Even so, conversations on the theme of 'senior leadership' have been taking place between Education and Learning, Ministries, Mission and Equalities. While there is recognition of the specific need to address underrepresentation of black and ethnic minority people in Assembly appointed posts, it has also become apparent that some of the issues go beyond racial justice, intersecting with issues of gender and class. The continuing conversations seek to examine our processes to bring about greater equity.

6. Task Group recommendations

6.1 Positive action towards an anti-racist Church

The task group recommends that the URC commits to positive action as a best practice model for future Assembly appointments. This would see:

- a) Job Descriptions and Personal Specifications reviewed and revised to ensure they are not unfairly skewed towards specific groups while being exclusive of others.
- b) Attention given to the language and wording used when vacancies are advertised, to deliberately attract and welcome applications from under-represented groups.
- c) Attention given to the places where vacancies are advertised to reach a wider breadth of candidates.
- d) All candidates who possess the baseline qualification requested for a post should be regarded as 'equally qualified', ie if the academic requirement is 'a degree', a candidate holding one degree will be deemed 'as qualified as' another possessing two or more degrees. There would be no inherent impetus to favour the candidate holding additional qualifications beyond those specified.
- e) All appointment panels should reflect ethnic diversity so that no candidate ever faces a completely white (or completely black) panel.
- f) Awareness raising for members of appointment panels regarding positive action principles.

6.2 Anti-racism training

a) Anti-racism training (including 'white privilege') should be mandatory for the following people/groups, and should be revisited periodically:

- All members of appointment panels
- All members of Assembly committees
- All Church House staff, including the General Secretariat
- Synod Moderators; we are encouraged that the current Moderators' Meeting has voluntarily implemented such training.

The above list should not be regarded as exhaustive, and should remain under constant review.

- b) Governing Bodies should be strongly urged to ensure anti-racism training for Resource Centres for Learning (RCL) staff if this is not already taking place.
- c) An anti-racism thread should be incorporated into the curriculum throughout the period of training for RCL students, so that anti-racism becomes a default approach rather than something to be explored at specific times.
- d) The task group is conscious that there are various questions to be addressed regarding how the programme of anti-racism training will be implemented in practice. Focused thought will be given to this before General Assembly 2023, with further refinement as the training is implemented.

6.3 Mentoring and support

- a) An offer of mentoring should be made available to all individuals who wish to explore Assembly posts.
- b) In addition, there should be an emphasis on peer mentoring available for all individuals who come to serve the URC from overseas, giving practical guidance regarding UK life in general, and negotiating the URC specifically.

6.4 Accountability

The URC should be called upon to revisit and consciously seek to implement its past commitments to racial justice – including but not limited to the commitment for Synods to include at least one black/ethnic minority member in its delegation to General Assembly. If black and ethnic minority members are not involved in the structures and processes of the Church, how will they become known in order to be nominated? And how will they become familiar enough with the structures to be able to imagine themselves in Assembly appointed roles?

7. Endorsements

The thoughts and recommendations outlined in this paper have been drafted in consultation with the Secretary for Education and Learning and the Secretary for Ministries. They have been endorsed by the Mission committee, Cascades of Grace, and URC Youth representatives to the Equalities committee.

8. Conclusion

This paper is offered by way of an update and indication of the direction of travel thus far. Conversations will continue within and between the URC departments, and with our

ecumenical partners. The Affirmative Action Task Group – now to be known as the 'Positive Action Task Group' – commits to bringing concrete proposals to General Assembly 2023.

Paper E2

General report

Education and Learning Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Mr Alan Yates alan.yates@urc.org.uk The Revd Jenny Mills jenny.mills@urc.org.uk
Action required	None.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Update on the work of Education and Learning.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	Costs to Assembly of the various work is covered by the Education and Learning budget.
External (eg ecumenical)	

The Education and Learning (E and L) 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. The committee supports the initial and ongoing professional development of ministers of Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers, Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, Elders and other lay ministries.

Introduction

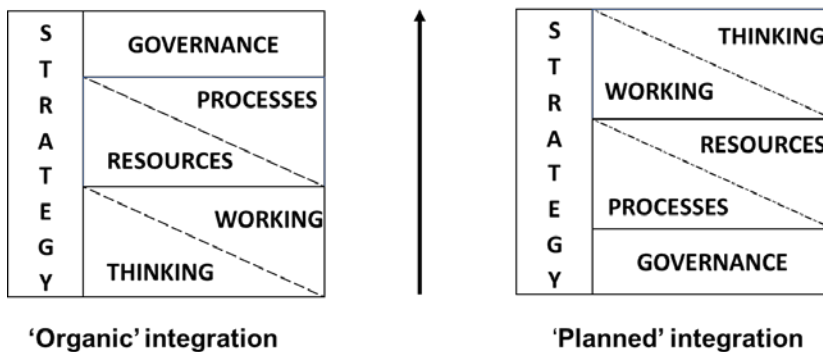
1. The past two years have seen a great deal of change, some expected, and some not expected. We take this opportunity to thank Revd Fiona Thomas for her stalwart service since September 2008, and we welcome the Revd Jenny Mills who joined the team as Secretary in October 2020. We were already on a journey towards a reduced carbon footprint using video conferencing, albeit at a careful pace, when Zoom became much more than just an ice lolly from our past! The disruption caused by the pandemic affected every part of the Education and Learning world, but in particular it had a devastating effect on the hospitality income the English Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs) use to support their operations. Fortunately, we were able to provide some extra financial support to the RCLs because we were underspent in most other areas of our budget. The RCLs have coped with massive change caused by lockdowns and worked extremely hard to keep things going both academically and pastorally.

The area of E& L that thrived in the past two years has been Stepwise, as a programme that developed blended and flipped learning really came into its own and embraced being fully online!

2. Strategic development

- 2.1 In September 2019 the committee started our strategy review. This was intended to be a 'light touch' review as we believed the broad direction set by General Assembly in 2005/6 was still relevant. In fact, the 2005 mandate was still seen as work in progress. This resulted in the plan agreed in General Assembly 2020 (<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Record-of-Assembly-2020.pdf> p7). Significant progress has been made in each of the six areas of development. The achievements were presented in an update to General Assembly 2021 (https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/1638/22/Paper_D2_EL_Way_Forward_review_final.pdf). The remaining work provided the focus for much of the past year, which has been on *Integration* (as highlighted in the 2005 aims), RCL Collaboration and Carbon Neutrality.
- 2.2 **Carbon Neutrality.** In July 2020, the committee agreed to a green charter committing us to play our part in achieving carbon neutrality for the URC well before 2050. Early achievements of this charter have been to reduce face-to-face meetings to one per year, reducing the size of the committee and introducing a Carbon Calculator that helps us to estimate (and reduce) the carbon content of the committee's travel.
- 2.3 **Integration.** In November 2020 Mission Council (<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/mission-council-november-2020-minutes.pdf>) agreed to a denomination-wide consultation to develop a view of how education and learning within the URC can achieve the integration envisioned in the 2005 General Assembly. In March 2021 (<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022>

/02/mission-council-march-2021-papers.pdf p.29) preliminary feedback was presented to Mission Council. The feedback provided many useful insights. One of the outcomes was an attempt to define what is meant by integration – how ‘joined-up’ are we, which is best summarized by the following diagram.



2.4 The other issues that were highlighted were a desire for RCL consolidation, improved access to and pathways for development, better integration between Synod and denomination-level education and learning, and better integration or coordination between Assembly Committees. All are, to some extent, being actioned by the committee, details of which are included below.

3. Lifelong learning for all God’s people

‘When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 Then he began to speak, and taught them,’ Matthew 5: 1-2

3.1 **Living through the pandemic- opportunities and threats for E and L.** The first impact of the pandemic was that staff had to work from home. This was not an issue for the Stepwise Programme Manager or Instructional Designer as they are home based, other staff needed to sort IT equipment and sort out working from home. This was done smoothly and with massive goodwill and adaptability. The pattern has altered slightly on and off in and out of lockdowns and as Church House reopened (or closed again) and the pattern is now hybrid for all staff. The work of E and L has been able to continue due to technology, good communication between staff, committee and others and things have progressed well. In the report the progress made in conversations with the RCLs, the changes around courses and the increased cooperation with other committees and departments can attest to the hard work of staff in all areas of E and L. The pandemic has limited swift decision making and ‘water cooler’ conversations, because using tech is not always as immediate or casual.

3.2 Resource Centres for Learning

3.2.1. Northern College

My brief was to write about “highlights and lowlights”. Highlights, as the foil-wrapped hair-colouring treatment provides, are those things which show the best of what we are, and ‘lowlights’ is being honest about the challenges.

We have an excellent and stable academic staff team, and a full complement of supportive governors. The appointment of a successor Principal may be made before General Assembly, but whoever takes over, whenever they take over, there will be support from the experienced team surrounding her/him. The one change has been the

retirement of our long-serving, College Administrator, Christine Thornborough. Some of you will know Christine was the main architect of the student financing scheme and a support to those who administered it in other colleges. We have welcomed Paul Barrett, who was formerly the assistant registrar with Luther King Centre, and who brought with him a wealth of experience and significant gifts.

Midweek, full-time students are back in-person. It has been good to learn, worship and share together in these ways again. The academic part of the weekend programme (NSM students mainly) has stayed online, but those students come into college for three block weekends a year. This has worked well, giving the students real community together.

The newest addition to Northern College's work has been the Assembly-Accredited Lay Preachers' (AALPs) course, with opportunities to join next year already advertised. There's a lovely article accessible through the URC website, giving feedback from the pilot group of seven students. The course mainly functioning by Zoom, with mentor and personal tutor support, and two residential weekends a year. The AALP students quickly became a community too. However, even more excitingly I believe, these AALP students, and another year's intake, will experience integrated learning alongside each other and the NSM weekend students next year. It will be encouraging to see a larger group of students exploring their different vocations as they learn together.

The other type of integration we have worked at this year is to find ways for NSM4 and Assembly-Accredited Lay Preaching students to work together with lay people in synods – we are planning both funerals and weddings training in the next year that will bring these different experiences and needs together. It has been harder, of course, during the pandemic to offer training into the wider church though we had Zoom conferences around Trauma that were attended by over 100 people, and did some weddings training by Zoom. Now the diary is filling up again, and we look forward to engaging 'out there', and we look forward to invitations from Synods and churches.

Noel Irwin has worked hard with the English Standards Board for Community Development to be ready to take non-stipendiary CRCW students (NSCRCW). There haven't been any coming through Assessment Conferences yet, but we are 'ready to go'. That gives me a great way in to talking about 'lowlights', because another meaning of this phrase, to me, is about the things that simmer on the backburner – that are 'on a low light'. We will be able, in the not-too-distant future, to welcome lay people into the same training as these NSCRCWs.

There have been challenging aspects of our work here, of course there have. It has been difficult to attract independent students to Luther King Centre over the last two years, though figures for next year look more promising. It's also been tough to find the monies to maintain capital work for maintenance and development of the site in Manchester – an experience shared across the URC and beyond. There have been frustrations and disappointments around discussions we thought might lead us into a particular future, but we have the chance, now, to make exciting use of our resources – people, opportunities and beyond – to support vocations and education of many kinds. We look forward to serving you all in continuing, and fresh, ways. Please look out for more advertisements in Reform, and explore our rebranded and relaunched website <https://northerncollege.co.uk/>, which is an up-to-the-minute resource with videos, an interesting blog, and much else you can dip into.

Rosalind Selby (Principal)

The Revd Dr. Adam Scott has been appointed to the role of Principal of Northern College. Adam currently serves as Tutor for Ministerial Formation at Northern College and comes with experience of Pastorate and Chaplaincy Ministries along with extensive experience in the field of Psychology. We greatly look forward to working alongside Adam in this new role. After a period of transition, Adam will succeed the Revd Dr. Rosalind Selby as Principal and we will greatly thank her for her devoted service and caring leadership when she retires in 2023.

John Grundy (Chair of Governors)

3.2.1 The Scottish College (Congregational and United Reformed) SCIO Organisational Changes

As the College passes 210 years 'on the clock' since its foundation as the Glasgow Theological Academy, the Officers completed plans to reform and update its governance. On 1 October 2021 the assets, students, staff, partnerships and traditions of our learning community transferred to a new corporate form and the Scottish United Reformed and Congregational College, a private charitable association, became The Scottish College (Congregational and United Reformed), a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO).

The College celebrated this transition at the Annual Service in September 2021, when the Revd Thomas R Wilson, Chair of the Congregational Federation in Scotland, was guest preacher. The new constitutional status as a SCIO gives concrete and practical effect to the College's desire to be in relationship with both United Reformed and continuing Congregational churches in Scotland, while respecting the wider partnerships – ecclesiastical and educational - in which the churches and the College are embedded. At the 2022 Annual General Meeting in March the College was delighted to convene representatives of its new member congregations, including some local churches of the Congregational Federation in Scotland.

Educational partnerships

The College continues to work closely with educational partners at the Scottish Episcopal Institute, through whom it offers Common Awards qualifications, and with colleagues in Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Glasgow. A further relationship of co-operation has developed with the University of Aberdeen, whose teaching supplements the College's in-house provision for NSM4 students.

College life

The impact of pandemic restrictions was felt for most of the past year. Perhaps the greatest challenge has been the uncertainty that has necessarily accompanied all planning until recently. One negative consequence of this has been the difficulty in making elements of the programme for ordinands open to fellow learners in the churches as much as has been possible in the past. The College hopes that this wider fellowship of learning will be restored and extended as church and society move into new times. Congregational development and training activities continue to be offered online, with others scheduled for in-person presentation in the summer and beyond.

The College supports Education of Ministry Phases 2 and 3 in Scotland and is happy to report a renewed interest in ministerial development activities.

The College is grateful to placement supervisors, mentors and associated placement sites for their contribution to Education for Ministry Phase 1. There was, in the latter part of the year a real and joyful sense of returning to in-person contextual learning.

Staff changes

The past year has seen changes among the tutorial staff of the College. The Revd Lindsey Sanderson finished in her role as college tutor in July 2021 following seven years' service. The College is grateful to Lindsey for her service as tutor, for her continuing contribution to our teaching and for serving as an NSM4 mentor and as a Trustee of the College. Professor Scott Spurlock continues continued to support the College as tutor. The Revd Fiona Bennett was elected to serve as Moderator of the United Reformed Church's General Assembly for 2022-2023. Fortuitously perhaps, before her election the College had already asked her to serve as a tutor (and Fiona agreed). Fiona has engaged actively with the ordinand students and travelled widely to attend College events and learning meetings. We are proud that the General Assembly has called Fiona to be its Moderator and offer our support during her year of office. Over the past few years of pandemic colleagues and students have appreciated the involvement of the Revd Andy Braunston in College life. Andy has agreed to join the tutorial team as locum tutor to cover Fiona Bennett's reduced availability during her moderatorial year. The College is grateful to Andy for agreeing to support our teaching in this way.

John McNeill-Scott (Principal)

3.2.3 Westminster College

After delivering all learning events online in 2020-2021, classroom teaching resumed in autumn 2021. This included a Lay Preachers' event which was, given the circumstances, remarkably well-attended, as well as the block-week and term-time provision made for EM1 and independent students. After an extended period where placements were difficult if not impossible to arrange, from autumn 2021, it is pleasing to report that all EM1 students have been actively engaged in physical as opposed to online placements.

Staff and students familiarized themselves with hybrid teaching and community life. Some activities remained online, others occurred in the building and still others took place with some participants in the room and others joining remotely. We have invested in new equipment which, through a generous gift, has enabled us to equip the Lewis Room to offer live-streaming. We have purchased a portable camera and streaming device which should be able to stream from any part of the College. Just before Christmas 2021, we installed equipment in the College chapel so that our worship – so very much at the heart of what we are and do – can be streamed to members of our community who are off-site and who can now join 'remotely'. This has enabled us to continue to pray together, as we did throughout lockdown, and build the sense that whether on block or term-time teaching we belong to the one community. The Healey Room will shortly be equipped for live-streaming as well. We are entering a new epoch of greater flexibility and we are excited at the possibilities such technology offers us in reaching the whole United Reformed Church with learning events and to be available to all who wish to deepen their discipleship.

The Principal, the Revd Samantha White, indicated her intention to stand down with effect from 24 March. Since 3 December, the Governors have designated the Revd Dr Robert Pope as Acting Principal. Further thought is being given to what arrangements

should be in place in 2022-2023. For a variety of reasons, the post of Director of Ministerial Formation was withdrawn. The College is grateful to the Revd Dr Rick Mearkle for his willingness to continue as interim Director of Pastoral Studies in 2022-2023.

The resignation of the College Bursar with effect from 3 January 2022 necessitated a further interim appointment and the College is fortunate that Mr John Ellis has agreed to fill that position in the short term. The post has now been advertised and it is hoped an appointment can be made in the near future.

Working with students in ministerial formation, high points have included the following:

- All candidates for stipendiary ministry who are leaving EM1 in summer 2022 have been called to pastorates. Furthermore, the first candidate for NSM model 4 will be ordained having been trained through Westminster
- Three joint RCL community evenings have occurred during the academic year on Zoom exploring race and class, sharing faith journeys and asking theological questions
- Easter Term 2022 has seen the return of ministers from the world church to the Cheshunt sabbatical programme.

In seeking to fulfil its remit as a Resource Centre for Learning providing integrated, life-long learning for the whole people of God, highpoints have included the following:

- Events in West and East Midlands and Eastern Synods exploring the Bible and being missional post-Covid-19
- Helping to coordinate a day for ethnically-minoritised women in the URC in Thames North Synod
- Beginning to host training for pastoral supervisors in conjunction with Wesley House and Ministries Department
- An online conference on Meeting Dementia with Spiritual and Pastoral Care in partnership with the Faraday Institute
- 'Roadshow' taking Westminster to the Synod of Wales
- Hosting the URC's 'You're Welcome' course, a conference for CYDOs, an event for the Eastern Synod's young people and the online Synod meeting
- Housing the Cambridge Theological Institute for Prisons as it seeks to achieve charitable status.

Despite the challenges we all face, the College community is generally in good heart. There is a good atmosphere with dedicated staff committed to the College's future as an RCL for the United Reformed Church, a place of theological education and also of retreat and spiritual renewal.

Robert Pope. (Principal)

We thank the Revd Samantha White for her service in the role of Principal and wish her well in her future ministries.

Jenny Mills (Secretary for E and L)

3.3 Education for Ministry 1 (EM1)

The initial training of students for Ministry has continued through our RCLs and their hard work, adapting to online and hybrid and their support for the students has been amazing. The increased collaboration with Ministries has meant changes to the

Enquirers' Conference, which is now online and attracts around 20+ people looking into different lay and ordained ministries. The requirement to complete a Synod Welcome to the URC course is now optional as the course offered through Westminster College with E and L, Ministries, Children and Youth and Global and Intercultural Ministries has been revamped and is now offered online in June and in person in October. It is 'You're Welcome: Exploring the Ethos and History of the URC'. The grant payment system, which involved termly payments and a summer payment will change for the academic year 2022-23 to being four equal payments (mid-August, mid-November, mid-February and mid-May, with a possible reduction for final year students depending on circumstances of call). We hope this will aid budgeting and enable students to manage regular payments more easily.

3.4 Education for Ministry 2 (EM2)

The Revd Elizabeth Gray-King retired from her role as Programme Officer for Education and Learning in August 2021. She had worked hard to implement a programme that was thorough and relevant to those who were in their first three years of ministry. It includes induction at Church House in year one, support from a Chaplain and a Pastoral Adviser, synod support, an annual Summer retreat, webinars and required reflection on the Marks of Ministry or CRCW Core Competencies. Each EM2 Minister also has access to a £350 grant for continuing Education for Ministry.

3.5 Education for Ministry 3 (EM3)

The focus for E and L is around lifelong learning for all and this extends to those serving our churches as Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers. For 2021 the EM3 grant was increased to £700, the amount it had been before it was reduced in 2013 due to budgetary constraints. This decision was made to support Ministers and CRCWs and to enable them to access more learning opportunities to help them in this 'new normal'. The Education and Learning Committee agreed to continue this increase for EM2 and 3 for the foreseeable future.

3.6 TD+ Network

The Training and Development Officers' Network is a gathering of those in synod training roles. This network brings together those in training roles and is supported by E and L. It was the role of the Revd Elizabeth Gray-King when she was Programme Officer to support them and now the Secretary and Administrator for E and L both support this group. The group meets regularly to share practice, learning, information and to offer help and advice to each other. In the past it has been for TDOs but as Synods are increasingly appointing people with different titles or choosing not to appoint a training officer, it has become a gathering of those responsible for training or those who are synod training contacts, in the 13 Synods. The title of the gathering has now been changed to reflect this altered group make-up and will be known as the Training and Development+ Network (reflecting the CYDO+ team within Children and Youth Work). For Education and Learning, the hardest part of this variety of provision is ensuring effective communication with each Synod and getting information to the correct person so it can be shared or responded to.

4. Accessible, inclusive and integrated

'With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it;'
 Luke 19: 33-35a *'As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' They said, 'The Lord needs it.' Then they brought it to Jesus;'*
 Mark 4: 33

'For just as the body is one and has many members, and all of the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ'. 1 Corinthians 12: 12

4.1 Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, Locally Recognised Worship Leaders

At Mission Council in March 2021, a resolution was passed: 'Mission Council adopts the process for becoming a Worship Leader or Lay Preacher as detailed in this paper (D/H2)'. At General Assembly 2021, the pathways for the training of Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and Locally Recognised Worship Leaders were presented. In September 2021, the first tranche of students began the Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers' Course being offered through Northern College. This course has been particularly well received and is proving a valuable pathway for those wishing to gain Assembly Accreditation.

"As well as the inspiring and supportive online and face-to-face teaching and the discussions with the other students from all around the country, another valuable part of this course is that it is local, too, in that our Synods assign a local mentor to us," says Jean Summers. For the training of Locally Recognised Worship Leaders each Synod has chosen the pathway that they feel best equips those they are supporting- a locally developed course or the training offered through E and L and Ministries using Stepwise, extension tasks and local support and oversight. We know how important it is to have quality training for those leading worship in our churches and the Resource Centres for Learning offer continuing learning opportunities for lay preachers through the year. The grant for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers has been increased to £300 to enable them to access learning or buy resources to support their preaching.

4.2 Learning Hub

Update on the URC Learning Hub

Launched last year the Learning Hub is a resource for all in the URC. Most join the Hub when they register for one of the URC-wide blended learning programmes:

Stepwise (groups sign-up via stepwise@urc.org.uk)

- Faith-filled Life (revised in 2021)
- Faith-fuelled Leadership
- Faith-filled Confidence
- Faith-filled Community
- Faith-filled Worship.

Church Leadership Programme (individual sign-up via philippa.linton@urc.org.uk)

But anyone involved in the URC can request access to the system and use the open, self-paced courses:

- Exploring Eldership
- Safeguarding.

Training resources for other groups are also housed in the Hub:

- EM2/3
- Training and Development+ network
- Hub management for Course and Programme Co-ordinators.

In 2022-2023 further courses under development are:

- Planning and evaluating learning
- Guidelines for designing blended learning
- A revised version of Faith-fuelled Leadership.

Education and Learning welcomes suggestions for future programmes.

With secure hosting and specialised technical support provided by eLearn Design Hub users have safe and reliable (100% in 2021-22) access to programmes from a system that complies with privacy and GDPR regulations and respects accessibility needs.

4.3 Stepwise

4.3.1 Introduction.

Stepwise is the discipleship development programme created by the United Reformed Church. It began in 2018 with Faith-filled Life, the opening stream, and was made available to participants in phases as the design of the four longer Stepwise streams was completed. All five of the Stepwise streams are now in place.

4.3.2 Participation and engagement.

Participation in Stepwise, particularly Faith-filled Life, has been encouraging, even throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. The number of Stepwise groups who have completed Faith-filled Life exceeds 25, comprising of over 200 participants, with positive feedback and more engaging all the time. The form and nature of Stepwise groups is many and varied. This is partly due to the restrictions of the pandemic and the possibilities of using video conferencing which has come into its own during the past two years. Some Stepwise groups were in full flow, meeting physically, when lockdown began. Of these, some paused or found they were unable to continue whilst others switched to Zoom making full use of the technology and the adaptability of the Stepwise material. Since then we have seen a rich variety of group experiences, with Zoom groups being formed made up of participants who sometimes live many miles from each other – *even* in different Synods! As we look ahead, we see a mixed economy emerging, with some groups preferring to meet physically and others seeing the advantages of hybrid or purely online groups. As the numbers of participants completing Faith-filled Life grows, so are the numbers beginning to engage in the longer Stepwise streams and interest in these is increasing. (See Appendix 1)

4.3.3 The Stepwise staff team would like to thank Synod Stepwise coordinators and all the group facilitators who have worked so hard to advocate, support and deliver the Stepwise programme especially whilst also navigating the challenges of Covid-19.

4.3.4 Updating and developing the Stepwise material

Because the Stepwise learning resources are all hosted in the URC Learning Hub and not reliant on printed media, the task of refreshing the material in response to participant feedback is made easier. Over the past year we have worked to update parts of Faith-filled Life to give a better experience for participants whilst also considering the varied nature of Stepwise groups. We are currently carrying out a similar task with Faith-fuelled Leadership and see the refreshing and updating of the Stepwise material as a rolling project.

4.3.5 Advocacy and Promotion of Stepwise

The positive stories of those who have completed parts of Stepwise and the ways it has impacted their lives and faith are an important part of advocating the programme to others. We have found ways to enable some of these stories to be told, through print and video, and continue to explore this as a method of encouraging others to participate

in Stepwise. There are now quite a number of short films relating to Stepwise on the URCs YouTube channel that can be used for this purpose.

4.4 The Church Leadership Programme

4.4.1 Purpose.

The Church Leadership Programme (CLP) is a comprehensive programme to refresh and equip experienced lay and ordained church leaders in authentic Christian leadership, helping them to develop external skills from their core sense of calling and being. The overarching principle of CLP is that the leader grows from the inside out and that leadership is essentially about collaboration, not control.

4.4.2 What does it seek to achieve?

- To continue to place Christian leadership within the context of vocation and ministry within the United Reformed Church
- To enable growth in personal formation for participants, and extend the knowledge and skills necessary for effective Christian leadership
- Reflection on personal leadership experience, alongside new ways of leadership discernment
- To develop leaders who enable United Reformed Churches to become communities of more faithful disciples, better equipped to share in God's Mission – Walking the Way of Jesus together.

4.4.3 Programme delivery

Since 2021 the CLP has been delivered in a hybrid style, with a blend of residential and online learning experiences. For the eight participants in the 2021/22 cohort this comprised of two weekends and a 24hr residential at Hinsley Hall in Leeds. Between these events were a series of online virtual sessions, supported by material accessed through the URC Learning Hub. The CLP is resourced and tutored by a small delivery team comprising URC ministers and leaders who have previously completed the programme.

4.4.4 Positive feedback from participants

For participants the programme takes time to settle into and requires time out of busy schedules to engage with properly. That being said, participants who complete the programme almost always tell us how good it has been for them and that they would encourage others to take part. Each CLP cohort forms a community of learning, worship and mutual support which often continues well beyond the end of the programme. Participants speak of being reconnected with their sense of call to serve the church as leaders, equipped to do so more effectively and renewed for future ministry and service.

4.5 Changes in the E and L team

The Education and Learning Team has changed dramatically in the past 22 months as Fiona Thomas finished in post as Secretary for Education and Learning at the end of September 2020; Elizabeth Gray-King retired in August 2021 from the Programme Officer post. In August 2022, Anne Hewling will retire from the post of Instructional Designer. She has been instrumental in developing Stepwise as an online resource, encouraging blended and flipped learning and then consolidating the URCLM Moodle with the Stepwise one and developing the URC Learning Hub. The aim of the Education and Learning Committee to actively increase financial support to resource the wider church has meant that we have not had the budget to replace staff as well and this shift in emphasis has enabled us to double EM3 grants and increase lay preacher grants. The workload of Elizabeth and Anne has been/will be taken on by the Revd Jenny Mills,

the Revd David Salsbury, Philippa Linton and Marion Brown, who are the E and L Team going forward. It is envisaged that material for the Hub will be developed using external sources due to its specialist nature.

4.6 RCL Collaboration

Following the findings of the Integration Consultation, E&L started talks with our three RCLs on possible 'consolidation' [the word used by respondents to the Integration Consultation]. Please be aware that consolidation was never intended to be a euphemism for closure or cost reduction. When these talks started the RCL Principals had already been considering how they could improve their collaboration. The talks have been hindered by personnel change and the pandemic (making it impossible to meet face-to-face and causing the RCLs' focus to be on financial matters due to the loss of hospitality revenue).

4.6.1 Despite a huge amount of effort and a liberal dose of good will, the talks have not reached a stage where we have concrete proposals to bring to General Assembly. However, the talks did produce other 'fruit'. Four key issues emerged which, if addressed, will provide a better foundation for future talks. They are:

4.6.2 Funding

The way the RCLs are funded are different in all three cases; Northern College is given a block grant, Westminster College has some key roles funded, and Scottish College is a mixture of the two. Not only does this inconsistency make it difficult to ensure fairness it also impairs budgetary control. This was already being addressed before the pandemic struck; and the project will now be reinstated.

4.6.3 Governance

It became increasingly clear that the governance relationship between the colleges and the E&L Committee (on behalf of Assembly) was at best unclear. This is clearly not good practice, but it also has an impact on dampening the entrepreneurial spirit of the colleges. The General Secretary has picked up this issue.

4.6.4 Requirements

What the denomination expects from the RCLs has never been clearly communicated. In recent conversations with the RCLs it was agreed that clearer requirements would be helpful. Having these requirements in place will help us better balance denominational needs with our budget in the future. Ministries and the E&L Committee has picked up this issue.

4.6.5 Capital funding

If and how the denomination should fund capital projects in the RCLs is unclear. There is no policy covering capital funding on the assets we own (100% for Westminster College and 16% for Luther King Centre), nor what should happen to any net hospitality income made by the RCLs from these assets. This will be addressed once the governance issues are clearer.

4.7 Sabbatical reports

In revising the Ministerial Sabbatical form, it was discovered that the reports produced were intended to go to Westminster College to be made accessible to read, but this

practice had ceased over time. The Education and Learning Committee felt that it was important that any reports produced were valued and appreciated by the URC and also made accessible, as appropriate, to the wider URC. Many Ministers and CRCWs produce interesting, informative and often challenging reports or papers and these are not accessed by those whose giving supports the work being done. From Assembly 2022, all Sabbatical reports will be sent to Dr Meg Warner, Northern College (megan.warner@lutherking.ac.uk) and she will triage them. Those that have a more academic focus will be published on the URC Research Network page of the Northern College website and those more general in nature will be sent to SecretaryEandL@urc.org.uk and each year will be compiled into a document that can be accessed via the website. It is accepted, in this new process, that some reports are not for general publication or viewing and some Ministers or CRCWs may not produce a comprehensive written report due to the nature of the focus of their Sabbatical. This is overseen by the person with responsibility for training in the Synod and it is this person who is responsible for sending the reports to Dr Meg Warner.

5. Cooperation and collaboration.

'Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help.' Ecclesiastes 4:9

'And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.' Ephesians 4:32

'May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.' Romans 15:5-6

5.1 Discipleship Development Fund

The Discipleship Development Fund has received applications since September 2021 after it was agreed to make up to £86,000 available in large grants each year. We welcome applications to develop lay discipleship and would encourage applications to be clearly focused on how the money would specifically support lay discipleship within the URC. The ethos of the DDF is to be proactive in giving the money to support lifelong learning and discipleship. We seek to look favourably on relevant applications in order to meet our aim to spend the money on resourcing lay discipleship in the URC, and ultimately deplete the Fund. Current grants given or pledged total £69310 (some are over a three-year period). See below the grants given:

- St Columba's Oxford – a contribution to fund a role that supports the discipleship of Trans and Gender Non-conforming people
- Herringthorpe URC – funding to support a Church weekend away especially funding speakers and children and youth
- Chesterton URC – a part-time discipleship development lay worker
- Lodge Road URC – a contribution to a Children's and Family worker in an area of extreme poverty
- Northerly Synods – funding a Leading your Church into growth conference for lay leaders
- Reigate Park URC – a contribution to a Children and Family worker
- Yorkshire Synod – supporting a conference for lay preachers and worship leaders
- 50th Anniversary Open Day – a grant to supporting the event on 1 October in Church House.

5.2 You're Welcome course

The revised course now titled 'You're Welcome' has been opened up so that it can be offered to Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers in training as well as EM1 students and those coming into Assembly or Synod posts. Offering it online and in person has made it more accessible and we will offer the online one over a weekend to ensure including those in weekday employment or study.

5.3 The Newbiggin Pioneering Hub

Education and Learning have been part of the collaborative work alongside Ministries, Children and Youth, the Fresh Expressions Enabling Group and Mission in setting up the learning opportunity for Pioneering lay ministry and Pioneer support.

5.4 Increased collaboration with other teams and departments

The Secretaries for Education and Learning and Ministries have been working very closely together in relation to all aspects of their work that overlap and seeking to keep clear channels of communication with the RCLs (including a visit in person to each RCL to understand more about EM1 training and what the RCLs offer. The work around what the URC requires of the RCLs will be done collaboratively. This level of support and communication has been beneficial to both departments. Cooperation and collaboration is something the whole Discipleship team is focused on and encouraged by the Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship). There have been comments from people beyond Church House about 'silo working' and we are all keen to challenge this and demonstrate a willingness for open communication and working together more closely.

6. Looking forward

6.1 Ethos of lifelong learning

In the past couple of years E and L have been striving to broaden the scope and access to life-long learning, without increasing our budget. Economies from reduced departmental resources, travelling and accommodation expenses have enabled us to invest more in the whole people of God. This will remain our aim going forward.

6.2 Stewarding the Church's Resources

With the continuing decline in denominational membership and income, we are conscious that departmental budgets are likely to decline. We recognise our privileged position in managing the largest budget (excluding the costs of stipendiary ministry) and will play our part in any budgetary constraints. Our hope (and prayer) is that General Assembly will be able to provide a strategic view to enable us to manage our costs accordingly. Particularly as far as our RCLs are concerned, only having visibility of URC grants for 12 months ahead is problematic when they are making four-year commitments to students.

6.3 Continuing and enhancing collaboration and communication

We will continue to work closely with the other Assembly Committees within Discipleship and Mission. This has already borne fruit and will continue to do so. We will continue to seek improved integration between the RCLs and between the RCLs and the Synods, ensuring we provide the best learning opportunities to all in our denomination.

6.4 Our focus for the next year

- We will continue the conversations with the RCLs in relation to governance, requirements of the URC, funding model and capital investment
- We will keep developing our EM2 programme to ensure it adequately supports our newly ordained ministers.

Education and Learning Committee

- We will continue to promote Stepwise and CLP as learning programmes.
- We will keep seeking opportunities and possibilities to promote and support lifelong learning and discipleship development, for the whole people of God.

Appendix 1 Stepwise number chart

Number of people engaged with Stepwise – April 2022			
<i>Faith-filled Life</i>			
Active Groups – 10	Participants - 77	Facilitators – 20	
Completed Groups – 21	Participants - 156	Facilitators – 25	
Groups that didn't continue due to Covid – 2	Participants - 12	Facilitators – 3	
Total Groups – 31	Total Participants – 245	Total Facilitators – 48	
<i>Faith-fuelled Leadership</i>			
Active Groups – 1	Participants – 7	Facilitators – 2	
Completed Groups – 2	Participants – 12	Facilitators – 4	
Total Groups – 3	Total Participants – 19	Total Facilitators – 6	
<i>Faith-filled Community</i>			
Active Groups – 0	Participants	Facilitators	
Completed Groups – 1	Participants – 5	Facilitators - 1	
<i>Faith-filled Worship</i>			
Active Groups – 3	Participants – 18	Facilitators – 5	
Completed Groups – 1	Participants – 8	Facilitators – 2	
Total Groups - 4	Total Participants - 26	Total Facilitators - 7	
Groups participating by year – April 2022			
Groups 2019	Groups 2020	Groups 2021	Groups 2022
3	7	23	6

Paper F1

Report from the Faith and Order Committee

Faith and Order Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Robert Pope, Convenor rpp20@cam.ac.uk Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary (Mission) and Faith and Order Secretary philip.brooks@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Update on the work of the Faith and Order Committee.
Main points	This paper outlines the work of the Committee since its previous report to General Assembly in 2020 as it responds to its remit to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • address issues of faith and order on behalf of the URC participate in and respond to ecumenical and interfaith discussions on faith and order issues • advise the Assembly, its officers and committees on questions of faith and order • listen to concerns raised by Local Churches, Synods and individuals, and to advise as appropriate • publish and disseminate occasional materials relating to questions of faith and order.
Previous relevant documents	None.
Consultation has taken place with...	The Ministries Committee, The Fresh Expressions Enabling Group, The International Reformed Anglican Dialogue, the Methodist/URC Liaison Group.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Continuing fruitful dialogue with ecumenical partners.

1. The Faith and Order Committee's report to General Assembly 2020 highlighted work being undertaken on a series of short pamphlets, which attempted to explain 'What the URC believes about...' ten parts of our faith and order. The ten

documents outline historic Christian doctrines, emphasise a Reformed perspective, and honour the various commitments the URC has made regarding its discourse and the way in which we seek to love and respect each other.

They are not intended to be comprehensive, but instead to be a way of opening conversation and to seek further avenues for exploration. The project was initiated as a result of a suggestion from a URC member that a series of pamphlets on basic doctrines written in non-technical language might help those enquiring about the Church. This work has now been completed.

Communications brought the pamphlets to life, and they are available on the URC website (www.urc.org.uk/believe). We humbly offer them as a resource to the Church, and it is hoped they may be useful both to Church members and to enquirers.

2. We have responded to questions of faith and order that have been posed by officers of the denomination:
 - One concerned consistency over terminology: should we refer to minister of Word and Sacrament, or Word and Sacraments? It seems that both are used. Some favour 'Word and Sacrament', hinting at the sacramental nature of ministry but, taking the lead of the Basis of Union, we responded that the Basis consistently references 'Minister or Ministry of the Word and Sacraments'. We think the reason for this is that those who framed the Basis of Union wanted to emphasise that *not any old word would do*, while also highlighting that the URC acknowledges two sacraments as established by Jesus, namely Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Of course, as our Assembly documents show, different terminology remains in use.

Another concerned the imposition of hands. During lockdown, the URC decided that imposition of hands was not necessary for ordination, it being a *sign* of ordination rather than the *act* of ordination. Ecumenical sensitivity has contributed to feeling that imposition of hands is an important element of an ordination service. Its association with ordination means that it ought not be included in services of induction as it might imply re-ordination. This is especially true if the minister of the Word and Sacraments is being inducted to a Synod or General Assembly role, in order to avoid any implication or inference that the person concerned is entering a new order of ministry (there being only one order of the ministry of the Word and Sacraments in the United Reformed Church).

A third concerned whether or not ordinands could preside at the sacraments while they are on placement in a church or pastorate. Faith and Order advised that what we say about presidency at the sacraments applies to students as to any other lay person, and so the request should be made from the Church Meeting to the relevant committee of the Synod for the Synod to give its approval.

3. What originated as a discussion about the ordination of elders has, following feedback from various sources including ecumenical colleagues, become a wider project to explain the role and theological significance of elders in United Reformed Church polity, alongside the theological and historical reasons for their emergence in the Reformed churches and for our current practice. Ordination is one aspect of this wider discussion. It is hoped that this work will be of use in future ecumenical discussion, and in local churches in existing ecumenical partnerships or about to enter into them, to help explain the URC's understanding of eldership, and why we have consistently believed it to be a gift to bring to the ecumenical table.

4. At the request of the denomination, a Worship Reference Group was established, reporting to the Faith and Order Committee. Its work is currently under review, and it is hoped that the Minister for Digital Worship will be able to assist in reframing the Group's work.
5. Faith and Order also receive reports from groups engaged in ecumenical dialogue, sometimes helping to draw up the denomination's response. Though not asked officially to respond, we have discussed 'Koinonía: God's Gift and Calling: The Hiroshima Report of the International Reformed-Anglican Dialogue (IRAD), 2020'. Members of the Committee found the report an encouragement and an inspiration. The world lacks *koinonía* and it is the Church's task not only to identify that fact but to live more into the *koinonía* that is God's gift to us. The Committee warmly commends the report to the Church for prayerful study.

It seems clear to members of the Committee that the call to live the 'communion' that is God's gift to the Church, as well as deliberately seeking its manifestation in our life, our discipleship, mission, witness, stewardship of the earth, and in our advocacy of God's justice and peace, is something the Spirit is saying to the Churches. We will be looking at what work the Committee might do to advocate commitment to, and encourage expressions of, *koinonía*, and invite members of General Assembly to suggest ways in which we might take this work forward.

Alongside this, members of the Faith and Order Committee are currently continuing work which has emerged as a result of questions being asked by Fresh Expressions, by those engaged in online church, and by those currently in 'isolated membership' about the nature of church. We have established three working parties to look at each aspect, and they will report their findings to the next Committee meeting, building on three principles about what makes a body of people *church*:

- The group concerned forms an intentional worshipping community
- The group is mutually accountable (supports, nurtures and calls each other to account)
- Outward facing with mission/service in the world.

At its last meeting in March, the Committee bade a fond farewell to the Revd Dr Callan Slipper who, for a number of years, has represented the Church of England. Dr Slipper has embodied to us the notion of 'receptive ecumenism'. He has been open and gracious in listening to our perspectives on matters of Faith and Order, and in responding to our work. We thank him for all he has contributed and wish him well.

As ever, the Faith and Order Committee is interested in receiving comments and questions from the whole church, and invites members of General Assembly to suggest ways in which we might take this work forward.

Paper G1

General Report 2021 to 2022

Finance Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Ian Hardie, Treasurer ianzhardie@googlemail.com
Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To report on the central budgets and other finance-related areas of work over the past year.
Main points	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The M&M fund had a smaller than budgeted deficit in 2021. 2. Thanks to generous support from the Synods, the new Ministers' Pension Support Restricted Fund had a substantial balance on hand at the end of 2021. 3. We continue to monitor the impact of Covid-19 effects on our finances at all levels of the church, expecting it to be some time still until we are able to assess what the church's future financial state will be. 4. The financial support given by the Legacy and Church Building funds during 2021 is reported. <p>Separate papers cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • presentation of the URC Trust Report and Financial Statements for 2021 • plans for future URC pension provision • whether to explore establishing a benevolent fund • whether to offer financial support to ministers and lay staff with energy costs.
Previous relevant documents	Finance Committee papers for General Assembly 2021.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod treasurers and trusts; The Pension Committee; DGS (Administration and Resources), Ministries, Pastoral Reference and Welfare.

Summary of impact

Financial	Nothing new in the report itself.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Financial results

The appendix to this paper sets out the 2021 income and expenditure statement for the URC M&M fund, and the 2022 budget agreed at the November 2021 Assembly Executive.

As explained in last year's report, because of the uncertainties caused by the pandemic and its aftermath, the committee had less confidence than usual in the reliability of its 2021 budget forecast. In fact, M&M contributions from local churches and Synods were about £500k below budget, and donation income had been overestimated by £180k.

However, all other income categories (especially investment income) were above budget. This left our total income at £18.857 million – which was £588k below budget.

Expenditure on Discipleship, Mission, Admin and Resources and Governance was below budget in each case, despite some overspends in certain areas within those departments. Of those, the largest was an unavoidable overspend on professional fees of almost £200k, caused in large measure by the cost of successfully defending a complex Employment Tribunal case.

As a result, total expenditure of £18.937 million was £866k under budget: giving a deficit for the year of £80k (£278k less than budget).

The 2022 budget anticipates a drop of over £1 million in M&M giving compared to actual 2021 contributions. Expenditure is forecast to be around £1.5million up on 2021 actuals: giving a projected deficit for the year of £2.681 million. Continuing uncertainties about the financial future of the church are reflected in this budget. However, a large part of the deficit relates to the additional costs of meeting the future service benefit contributions to the Ministers' Pension Fund (MPF). Last year's General Assembly was warned about this cost rise in paper G4, which argued for closure of the current scheme to future accruals as soon as possible. (See an update in the separate paper re URC future pensions in this year's Book of Reports.)

Paper G3 for 2021 General Assembly reported on the discussions then in progress to tackle the MPF deficit. We are pleased to report that all Synods and/or Synod trusts and the URC Trust agreed to set up a new Ministers' Pension Support Restricted Fund, administered by the URC Trust, into which Synods and the URC Trust may contribute up to about £50 million over the years to 2030, and from which all pension deficit recovery payments would be paid.

A number of Synod/Synod trusts made substantial payments into the fund very shortly after agreement was reached and, as a result, the fund balance stood at just over £9 million at 31 December 2021. We are grateful to all Synods for their co-operation and support in dealing with this problem.

Church House refurbishment

While the major works to address the damp problems in the lower ground floor were successful, there is evidence of some damp penetration in two areas that were not treated. Specialists have examined the problem, but a solution has not yet been agreed.

Legacy Fund

Bequests to the United Reformed Church which are not specifically earmarked for other purposes are placed in the legacy fund, administered by the Finance Committee but with

the involvement of the Deputy General Secretary (Mission). Currently, the fund is able to award grants of approximately £150k a year, though only £83,450 was committed or paid to mission projects during 2021. This may be a continuing consequence of the pandemic.

Church Building Fund

Similarly, grants made from the church building fund via the inter-synod resource-sharing process amounted to £61k, although the fund had about £144k available to support churches undertaking certain types of building development.

The URC Pension Committee

This sub-committee of Finance Committee oversees, on behalf of the URC, the Final Salary Pension Scheme, mostly for lay staff, which is under the trusteeship of an external trust company. It also monitors on behalf of the church the actions of the trustees of the Ministers' Pension Fund.

At the time of writing this report, information had been received about a court case involving another client of the trustee which may have implications for the URC scheme. We are in the process of seeking legal advice about this.

The committee has had preliminary discussions with other URC bodies about the possible need for a URC Benevolent Fund, about which there is also a separate paper for consideration by this General Assembly.

Finally, thought has also been given to providing support for our ministers and staff in meeting rising energy bills – again, see the separate paper for consideration by General Assembly.

**UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
URC M&M FUND
For the year ended 31 December 2021**

APPENDIX

TOTAL	Actual 2021	Budget 2021	Budget 2022
	£	£	£
Income			
Income from Churches & Synods	17,203,003	17,742,285	16,148,127
Donations, Legacies & Grants	210,077	390,000	109,950
Income from training & academic activities	1,426	1,000	1,000
Other income	2,489	0	12,000
Income from Investments	1,040,294	934,000	1,199,000
Income from Trading Activities	225,940	210,400	219,500
Property income	173,979	167,300	163,770
Total Income	18,857,208	19,444,985	17,853,347
Expenditure			
Discipleship			
- Ministries	13,447,585	14,101,500	14,421,107
- E&L	1,587,670	1,631,785	1,585,794
- Children & Youth Work	251,778	323,800	339,775
- Safeguarding	130,851	197,800	228,262
- Secretariat	49,163	12,125	84,120
- Digital	507	0	0
	15,467,554	16,267,010	16,659,058
Mission			
- Church & Society	1,315	9,000	10,500
- Ecumenical & Interfaith	93,043	96,200	156,600
- Global & Intercultural	117,365	131,000	81,800
- Mission & Evangelism	16,941	64,200	40,500
- Staff, Committees & Secretariat	454,758	526,900	597,241
- Walking The Way	55,598	73,350	76,086
	739,020	900,650	962,726
Admin & Resources			
- Secretariat	345,002	291,700	349,211
- Communications	689,652	687,600	721,020
- Facilities	309,408	357,700	381,538
- Finance	348,435	377,900	383,612
- Human Resources	93,228	86,800	104,023
- Information technology	223,282	232,000	272,733
	2,009,007	2,033,700	2,345,600
Governance			
- General Assembly (incl Task Groups)	57,357	135,500	121,824
- Assembly Executive (incl Task Groups)	19,528	65,500	17,500
- Professional Fees	317,103	120,000	160,000
- Section O	48,577	30,000	55,000
- Trust & other Committees	50,995	51,600	34,694
	493,560	402,600	389,018
Overheads	228,008	199,000	178,000
Total expenditure	18,937,149	19,802,960	20,534,402
Net expenditure	79,941	357,975	2,681,056

Paper G2

Possible one-off payments to ministers and lay staff

Finance Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Ian Hardie, Treasurer ianzhardie@googlemail.com
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>8. General Assembly resolves that, as a gesture of good will towards those who work for the Church centrally and bearing in mind the recent energy cost increases for many, with the likelihood of further energy price rises to come later in the year, a gross payment should be made together with October 2022 stipend and salary payments amounting to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £800 in the case of each office holder in receipt of a stipend under the URC Plan for Partnership; and • £500 in the case of each 'Church House' employee.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Possible one-off payments to office holders and employees in 2022.
Main points	<p>The 2022 stipend and salary increases were determined when inflation was much lower than it has since become and, particularly, before significant rises in energy costs were expected.</p> <p>The committee wishes to give members of General Assembly an opportunity to indicate whether, in those circumstances, they wish to make a gesture of good will towards both office holders and employees by awarding one-off payments to be made with October stipends/salaries.</p>
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	URC Maintenance of the Ministry Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	The proposal would give rise to additional, unbudgeted, 2022 costs as set out in paragraph 9 of the paper.
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External (eg ecumenical)	
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1. It is appropriate to ensure all members of General Assembly are aware that the members of the Finance Committee include serving ministers and lay staff who would benefit from this proposal, and the committee is supported by other lay staff who would also benefit. However, none of those people were party to agreeing the final form of what is recommended here.
2. Each year, data available at about the mid-point in the year is used in the process of considering whether, and if so by how much, to increase both the stipend and salaries of ministers/CRCWs, and also centrally-funded lay staff and ministers on employment contracts, from the following 1 January. Different data are used for stipends and for salaries but, in both cases, the rate of inflation considered in mid-2021 was significantly lower than it now is. In addition, the rapid and extremely large recent rises in energy costs, with further rises likely from October, is known to be of deep concern to many of our office-holders and employees.
3. The Finance Committee recognises that the energy cost increases will have had varying financial impacts on people in different circumstances:
 - some may be on fixed term energy contracts which are protecting them from increases for a period, while others are not
 - some live in poorly insulated older properties (and some manses may be larger and more energy-intensive than ministers might have chosen for themselves), while others have much more modern and energy-efficient accommodation.
4. Nonetheless, this paper invites General Assembly to consider whether it wishes to make a one-off gesture of good will of a uniform amount to all ministers/CRCWs in receipt of a stipend and, similarly, a one-off gesture to 'Church House' staff of a different uniform amount, in recognition of the financial pressure our people are, or will be, facing in 2022. Any such payments would not have an impact on the normal consideration of stipend/salary increases as describe in paragraph 2 above, nor would they be consolidated for pension purposes.
5. Initially, consideration was given to making the ministers' payments dependent on a claim, and for amounts (up to a ceiling level) which each claimant thought to be appropriate. However, there was concern that different claimants would take differing views of the extent to which it was appropriate to make a claim, and that some of those most in need of assistance might not claim at all. It was thought better, therefore, to suggest a single uniform payment for all ministers, and another for all staff.
6. The primary reason for the suggested difference in amount between the two groups – £800 for ministers/CRCWs receiving a stipend under the URC Plan for Partnership and £500 for ministers on employment contracts and lay staff – is because of the probability that more stipendiary ministers will be living in older, poorly insulated properties that are too big for them as a result of the accommodation standards imposed by the Church through the Plan for Partnership.

7. The Finance Committee considered whether the size of the payment should vary depending on whether the office holder or employee is full-time or part-time. The conclusion was that since energy price rises will have as much of an impact on part-time as on full-time servants of the Church, and because this is simply a gesture of good will towards all our people, there should be no abatement of the amount for part-timers.
8. The Committee also recognised that, in a minority of cases, two ministers or staff members may share the same accommodation. Since the amount is suggested as a gesture of good will to all our people, again it did not seem right to restrict entitlement in such circumstances.
9. The Finance Committee is acutely aware that the budget for 2022 already anticipates an extremely large deficit for the year. During the first quarter of 2022, M&M contributions from local churches were about £246k above budget. It is thought that a significant element of this arose through circumstances that are unlikely to be replicated in all future quarters of the year. Ignoring any end-year uplift in the budgeted M&M figure, the cost of the proposal in this paper is about £313k for stipend payments, and £40k for employee payments.

Paper G3

Does the URC need a Retired Ministers' Benevolent Fund?

Finance Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Ian Hardie, Treasurer ianzhardie@googlemail.com
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>9. General Assembly instructs the Finance Committee to bring together a group, including representatives from the URC Trust, Ministries and Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committees and the General Secretariat, to consult with Synods and/or Synod Trusts, to consider further:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whether a benevolent fund might be the right way to provide support to retired ministers in particular financial difficulties; and if so • in what circumstances might ministers be eligible for support from such a fund; and • what should be its nature and size and how might it be resourced; • with a report of the group's work and/or conclusions to be presented to the 2023 General Assembly.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To invite Assembly to set up a group to consider the need for, and potentially the scope of, a benevolent fund for retired ministers.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	None.
Consultation has taken place with...	Ministries and Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committees, the General Secretary and representatives of the National Synod of Wales and Southern Synod.

Summary of impact

Financial	There may be some travel costs in bringing the group together and in consulting Synods.
External (eg ecumenical)	

1. This paper is intended to raise the issue of certain retired ministers who find themselves experiencing particular financial difficulties as a result of circumstances that might be regarded as beyond their control. Although the work of the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee is confidential, it is understood that that committee has occasionally received requests to provide help to retired ministers in such circumstances.
2. Although the range of those who might require assistance has not been fully identified, during the ongoing discussions about future URC pensions concerns have been expressed on several occasions about one group of ministers whom it is thought are finding, or will find, life hard in retirement. This paper, therefore, refers to them as one illustration of those who might be considered potential beneficiaries of financial help.
3. These people are among the group who have come to the URC from abroad on Certificates of Eligibility, but who work in the UK for a relatively short part of their working lives and wish to continue living here in retirement. In such circumstances, a minister would not have been able to build up a substantial pension entitlement or pot in the URC scheme, and may also not have built up much entitlement to a UK state pension.
4. While a number of those ministers will have considerable pension entitlement or a sizable pension pot from their previous roles overseas, others will have come from situations where it was either not possible for them to build up such entitlement, or where the amount of pension from overseas together with their URC pension and the UK state pension would leave the minister still struggling to meet UK living costs. This is a difficulty that has been recognised for some considerable time, but appears not to have been addressed to date.
5. When considering the decision in principle by last year's General Assembly to close the current defined benefit pension scheme to future accruals, two Synods – the National Synod of Wales and Southern Synod – passed resolutions at their October 2021 meetings inviting consideration of how to underpin a minimum fair pension for ministers at retirement. While some of the concerns of the proposers of those resolutions were much broader, and are properly considered in the context of the paper in the Book of Reports about the generosity of the proposed new defined contribution pension scheme, discussions with representatives of both Synods confirmed that the situation identified above was thought also to be in the minds of the proposers of their resolutions.
6. The members of the Pensions Review Group note that the current defined benefit scheme does not guarantee that ministers will necessarily all have an adequate income in retirement. That depends on many factors, including inflation and, more particularly, the personal circumstances of each minister.
7. The Group believes it is not possible within a defined contribution pension scheme to ensure a minimum pension for all ministers at retirement. To attempt to do this within such a scheme would be likely to lead to the scheme being characterised as, at least in part, a defined benefit scheme, with all the consequences and costs last year's Assembly agreed we should be seeking to avoid.

8. However, the Pensions Review Group does feel that there may be a case for the Church considering the creation of some process or mechanism for addressing the situations of individual retired ministers who find themselves in particular financial difficulty. In the Group's view, such instances are much more likely to be a result of the personal circumstances of the minister, or their history before becoming URC office holders, than to any inadequacies of the proposed new pension arrangements, which the Group regards as more than generous. This led the Group to conclude that some form of welfare or benevolent fund might be required to address such exceptional circumstances.
9. The Pensions Review Group has not explored this idea in any depth, nor considered what alternatives might be developed or already exist. We have undertaken no work to establish how such a fund might be resourced and how it might operate. We did not see that as our task – which has been quite demanding and time-consuming enough.
10. The possibility of setting up a welfare or benevolent fund needs to be explored by those responsible for the assets that might be drawn on to resource such a fund, and those who would be responsible for administering it.
11. What this paper does is ask whether General Assembly considers it is appropriate for a separate group to be set up to explore these issues, and to report back to next year's Assembly with its findings. That is what the resolution is intended to achieve.

Paper G4

URC Trust Accounts 2021

Finance Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Ian Hardie, Treasurer ianzhardie@googlemail.com
Action required	None – for information.
Draft resolution(s)	10. General Assembly notes the Trustees' Report and Financial Statements for the year ending 31 December 2021.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To draw to General Assembly's attention the availability of the audited accounts for 2021 and accompanying Trustees' report.
Main points	The United Reformed Church's central activities are legally accounted for in the name of the URC Trust. With advice from the URC Finance Committee, the Trust directors have received and approved the audited accounts for 2021. Copies of the audited accounts and trustees' report are expected to be available online from early June 2022: www.urc.org.uk/trustees-report-and-financial-statements/ . Anyone requiring a hard copy should contact Bea Minta at Church House (beatrice.minta@urc.org.uk).
Previous relevant documents	Audited accounts for 2020 are available on the website.
Consultation has taken place with...	The URC Trust.

Summary of impact

Financial	Simply noting the availability of the accounts has no financial impact.
External (eg ecumenical)	The report provides a publicly available summary of the Church's activities and financial state.

Paper G5

URC future pension arrangements

Finance and Pensions Committees

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Ian Hardie, Treasurer ianzhardie@googlemail.com
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>11. General Assembly endorses the work done in devising a defined contribution pension scheme to replace both the URC Final Salary Scheme and the URC Ministers' Pension Fund as the recipient of future pension contributions, and authorises formal consultation with members of the existing schemes about the proposals as outlined in the paper and briefing note presented at General Assembly 2022.</p> <p>12. General Assembly approves signing of the contract with Aon referred to in that paper.</p> <p>13. General Assembly authorises Assembly officers to consider the outcome of the consultation with members and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if the officers are satisfied that no (or only minor) changes to the proposals as outlined are required, General Assembly also authorises Assembly officers to finalise the new scheme, and make arrangements for the closure of the existing schemes to future accrual after 31 December 2022, and for the beginning of the new scheme with effect from 1 January 2023, or as soon as practicable thereafter • if not satisfied that only minor changes to the proposals are required, the Assembly officers should ensure that revised proposals are brought back for reconsideration by General Assembly or Assembly Executive acting on behalf of General Assembly as soon as is feasible.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To invite General Assembly to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • endorse the work of the Pensions Review Group in devising a new URC defined contribution pension scheme for ministers/CRCWs and lay staff
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • authorise the required consultation with members of the existing pension schemes about the proposals in this paper; and • make arrangements for considering the outcome of the consultation and bringing the new pension arrangements into effect as presently outlined, or as amended following the consultation.
Main points	<p>General Assembly 2021 agreed in principle to the closure of the existing URC pension schemes to future accrual, which had been proposed primarily on grounds of increasing unaffordability.</p> <p>Over the past year, the Pensions Review Group has developed proposals for a replacement defined contribution pension scheme. The main elements of these proposals are summarised in this paper, and set out in greater detail in an attached briefing note.</p> <p>Subject to Assembly approval, the intention is to begin the legally required consultation with the members of the existing schemes about the proposals as soon as possible.</p> <p>If the consultation throws up no issues, or only ones requiring minor amendment to the proposals, it is suggested that Assembly officers be authorised to finalise the scheme and approve it beginning to operate on 1 January 2023.</p> <p>If major issues arise, reconsideration of the scheme should be referred to either Assembly Executive or General Assembly as soon as is feasible.</p>
Previous relevant documents	<p>Paper G1 for November 2021 Assembly Executive Paper G4 for 2021 General Assembly.</p>
Consultation has taken place with...	<p>It is expected that before Assembly meets, consultation will have taken place with Equalities Committee, URC Youth, Unite, and a DEI specialist.</p>

Summary of impact

Financial	<p>The design of the proposed new arrangements is intended to return the costs of future benefit contributions to 2021 levels, while making good pension arrangements for the Church’s office holders and staff.</p>
External (eg ecumenical)	

1. This paper briefly restates the reasons for the decision in principle by General Assembly 2021 to close both current URC pension schemes to future accrual. It outlines the main features of the proposals by the Pensions Review Group

(PRG), endorsed subsequently by the URC Pensions and Finance Committees, for a new defined contribution (DC) scheme to replace both the current schemes.

2. It explains why the PRG believes the proposed scheme is very generous, with the outcome for most office holders likely to be the same or better than if the current schemes remained in place. It suggests the way forward from this point if General Assembly is willing to endorse the proposals as ready for consultation with members of the existing schemes.
3. Much more detail about the proposals and the process which has been gone through to arrive at them is provided in a briefing note attached to this paper, which will also be used to facilitate briefings with members of Assembly prior to the meeting of Assembly. An attempt has been made to make this as easy to read as possible but, inevitably, it is quite long and some may find it hard going. However, its aim is to provide those who are interested in understanding the full picture with adequate information to do so.

The 2021 decision

4. Last year's General Assembly was presented with a paper that argued the current URC defined benefit pension schemes were no longer the "gold standard" in pension provision they had once been thought to be. Legislation which had enabled 'drawdown' arrangement for DC pension pots, the fact that such pots were assets that could be passed on to others at death, and the greater flexibility in pursuing investment returns in DC schemes, combined to make them an increasingly attractive option. It was also explained how greater prudence on the part of the Pensions Regulator was expected to almost double the costs of the employer contributions for future service benefits of a minister in 2022, with further increases expected later in the decade. Although less dramatic, the cost of providing future benefits in the staff scheme was also affected by the same issues. General Assembly agreed in principle to the closure to accrual of the current schemes. It was accepted that a lot of work needed to be done to devise a good quality DC scheme to replace the current ones. General Assembly therefore suggested that the earliest possible date for introduction of any new pension arrangements would be 1 January 2023.

The PRG proposals

5. The URC has been extremely fortunate over recent years in having several members who are actuaries or retired actuaries, and who have been willing to give their time and expertise in addressing URC pension matters. However, that situation cannot be expected to continue indefinitely. Accordingly, the PRG recommends that the new DC scheme should be established with a third-party Master Trust provider, which has the in-house expertise to oversee our scheme for the long term. (See section 9 of the briefing note for information about master trusts.)
6. The PRG has identified Aon as our preferred Master Trust provider. As well as having a recent record of achieving good financial outcomes for their current pension schemes (though that is no guide to future performance), Aon also demonstrates a strong and developing commitment to Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) issues. They are respectful of the ethos of the Church, and have a suite of funds that will enable scheme members, if they wish, to make

investment choices to meet their own wishes and/or take account of the Church's ethical investment guidelines.

7. Aon is able to support our members with appropriate information and guidance via phone and face-to-face channels, as well as online. Moreover, it has indicated that its phone operators would know about the specifics of the URC scheme – which some other Master Trust providers were not able or willing to undertake.
8. All master trusts will have default funds into which member's money goes, unless the member self-selects a different fund. No master trust offers a totally 'fossil fuel free' default fund: but Aon's Managed Retirement Pathway Funds comes as close as any. (See section 9.3 of the briefing paper.)
9. The Aon Managed Global Impact Fund cannot be a default fund in a master trust because of its cost structure, but it is available as a member self-select fund. It is designed to invest in sustainable businesses, therefore effectively excluding fossil fuel companies but without explicitly naming them, and instead investing in renewable and carbon reduction technology ventures. The fees charged for investing in this self-select fund will be higher than for the default fund.
10. Although we envisage a single URC pension scheme operated by Aon, it will have two sections: one for ministers/CRCWs remunerated under the Plan for Partnership, and the other for lay staff and a few ministers working under contracts of employment.
11. The PRG understands that General Assembly will want to be satisfied that the move to a DC scheme, while attempting to put a cap on rapidly rising costs, is not a cost-cutting exercise, which it often has been in the case of private sector companies. Section 7 of the briefing note seeks to offer this reassurance.
12. In the case of the staff section of the new scheme, we envisage employee contributions being as at present, with employer contributions being set at 16% of salary for all employees. In the ministers' section, we envisage member contributions also being as at present, but the employer's contributions increasing as the minister's age increases. Having different age-related contributions in pension arrangements is specifically provided for under the Equality Act (Age Exceptions for Pension Schemes) Order 2010, if this is done to make the benefits 'more nearly equal'.
13. In our situation, where ministers receive exactly the same stipend irrespective of their time in office, widely different outcomes were produced when the result of using a single level of contributions was modelled (see section 17 of the briefing note). The PRG is satisfied that age-related contributions for ministers do indeed result in more nearly equal benefits for all our ministers. The specific contribution levels recommended in section 10 of the briefing note cost the equivalent of 18% of stipend for every minister. The difference between the contribution rates for staff and ministers reflects the fact that the staff rate is applied to salaries which cover housing costs, whereas the rate for ministers is applied to stipends, which do not.
14. Both rates of employer contribution are well above the norm for DC pensions, which two recent surveys (FTSE: 350 and Aon UK) both suggested ranged

between 6% and 10%. (This fits with the PLSA quality standards set out in section 11.7 of the briefing note.)

15. Currently, both death-in-service and ill-health early retirement arrangements are dealt with within the pension schemes. This is not possible within the DC scheme. Sections 12 and 13 of the briefing note set out in some detail the proposals for dealing with these matters going forward. Initially, the interaction of the current scheme rules and the proposed new arrangement for death-in-service will result in more generous treatment overall for widows/widowers, but this extra generosity will diminish with time.
16. Section 16 of the briefing note sets out the results of one of the modelling exercises done on our behalf, and section 17 refers to the results of some other modelling, but in less detail. It is important to emphasise that such modelling exercises are just a guide to possible outcomes, not a statement of what will actually happen. Nonetheless, the PRG was pleased to note that for all except one of the sample member projections the drawdown result using a conservative “low return environment” assumption, exceeded the amount that would have been received if the existing ministers’ scheme stayed in place, and the shortfall in the other projection was only around £100 per year. Since the projections refer to “at least” the amounts mentioned, the actual gap on the basis of that final projection may be less or non-existent. Aon will be able to support members when it comes to deciding how to use their pension pot and helping them through that process, as will Independent Financial Advisors.
17. To sum up this section, the PRG believes that the proposals outlined here, and in the more detailed briefing note, constitute a generous package backed up by professional support with a good track record, and a good customer-service advisory operation, which is expected to result in good pensions for our staff and ministers, while avoiding the increase in future costs that led last year’s General Assembly to conclude the existing schemes had to close to accrual as soon as possible.
18. Before Assembly meets, the PRG intends to meet with representatives of the URC Equalities Committee, URC Youth, Unite, and with a DEI specialist for discussions about the proposals.
19. The PRG, Pensions Committee and Finance Committee commend the proposals to General Assembly.

The way forward

20. At the time of writing this note, there are a few further loose ends to tie up in completing the final design of the new pension scheme, but these are relatively minor and should be completed by the time General Assembly meets.
21. Accordingly, we invite General Assembly to endorse the proposals, and authorise the formal 60-day consultation on those proposals with members of the current schemes as required by law. If Assembly approves this course of action, this consultation will begin as soon as possible.

22. With Assembly's approval, we will also finalise our contract with Aon following this endorsement.
23. The consultation may throw up no issues for reconsideration, in which case the resolution suggests that Assembly officers be authorised to give final approval on behalf of General Assembly for the new scheme to begin on 1 January 2023.
24. The consultation may raise issues requiring amendment to the proposals. If, in the opinion of Assembly officers, these are minor changes only, the resolution again gives those officers the authority to finalise on General Assembly's behalf the scheme as amended, and to approve its start of operations on 1 January 2023.
25. In the (hopefully) unlikely event that the issues raised by the consultation are not regarded by the Assembly officers as requiring only minor changes, the resolution dictates that the matter should be brought to the Assembly Executive or a future General Assembly as soon as is feasible. That is likely to entail a delay in the start date of the new scheme, which would mean that the significantly increased costs of the current schemes would continue for longer.

A briefing document on the proposals to be made to General Assembly 2022 regarding new pension arrangements for the Church's office holders and staff

This briefing document has two purposes:

- i) to provide detail in support of the related Assembly paper; and
- ii) to support online briefing sessions for Assembly representatives that should improve understanding of these complex matters, and save time at the actual meeting of Assembly.

Part A: Introduction

1. Purpose and scope

- 1.1 The purpose of this note is to summarise work done since Assembly 2021, and make proposals about the future pension arrangements for office holders and staff of the United Reformed Church.
- 1.2 This note does not attempt to cover every detail of the proposals, which will be set out in the formal documentation of the new pension scheme. Some of those details have not yet been finalised. Pensions matters are inherently complex, with their own vocabulary. The note is written in a form that is intended to be accessible, and that provides sufficient information to enable members of Assembly to make good decisions about the Church's future pensions arrangements.
- 1.3 Part B of this paper covers the main elements of the proposed new pensions arrangements, and explains how these have been arrived at. It also identifies issues of detail which remain to be resolved.
- 1.4 Part C provides results of some of the financial modelling which underpins the proposals in Part B. This modelling focuses on office holders who spend their whole working lives in the Church, and shows the estimated income in retirement under various scenarios, including what would have been expected if the existing Ministers' Pension Fund had continued to operate as now.

2. Some definitions and explanations

2.1 Defined Benefit (DB) pension schemes

The United Reformed Church currently has two active pension schemes, and they are both Defined Benefit (DB) pension schemes. The **URC Ministers' Pension Fund (MPF)** is the pension scheme for nearly all office holders (ministers and church related community workers). It is managed by the URC Ministers' Pensions Trust. All the directors of this independent trust company are members of the Church. The **URC Final Salary Scheme (FSS)** is the pension scheme for all staff and a small number of ministers. It is managed by TPT Retirement Solutions through a Master Trust.

A DB pension scheme is one where the method of calculating a member's pension is pre-determined, without reference to actual investment returns. In both the URC schemes, the calculation is based on years of service and salary or

stipend at, or close to, retirement. The fact that the formula for calculating a pension is pre-determined does not mean that its value, in terms of its purchasing power, is known in advance. That depends on a number of factors, including how the person's salary or stipend increases compared to price increases over the same period.

From the perspective of the members, DB pension schemes operate automatically with very little involvement required except through the payment of contributions. On the other hand, there is very little flexibility for each member, except in relation to when the pension will be taken and whether some is taken as a lump sum.

The Church, as the principal employer or sponsor of both the DB schemes, is legally obliged to meet the cost of providing these pre-determined pensions, net of any contributions from the members, whatever that cost is. The Church contributions into these schemes are based on triennial actuarial valuations which estimate what the future costs will be, but these are only estimates.

2.2 **Defined Contribution pension schemes**

The purpose of all pension schemes is essentially the same. Setting aside and investing funds during a person's working life is intended to provide income in retirement. Defined Contribution (DC) pension schemes are currently the only practical alternative to DB schemes. The overall objective is the same, but the operation of DB and DC schemes is very different, making comparisons difficult.

Defined contributions: The employer/sponsor and the members make regular contributions into a DC pension scheme. The level of these contributions is fixed, but is subject to regular review. It is usually possible for members to make additional contributions, above the standard or minimum level.

Investments: These contributions are invested. A DC pension scheme will have default arrangements for the investment of its funds. However, individual members may be able to choose different investment options – for example, to take more or less risk, or to avoid certain types of investment. Typically, a Master Trust is responsible for the assets of many pension schemes. This achieves economies of scale that benefit all parties.

Personal pension pots: Each member of a DC pension scheme has a personal pension pot, which consists of the contributions made on their behalf plus the accumulated investment gains on those contributions. This pension pot is held by the trustee on behalf of the member. When a member dies, their pension pot is available to provide benefits for their beneficiary(-ies), as determined by the trustee.

Choices at and after retirement: Each member of a DC pension scheme has important choices to make as they approach retirement and then regularly afterwards, which are mainly to do with the rate at which the accumulated pension pot is spent. This will depend on personal circumstances, and these can change over time. It is important for members to obtain independent financial advice about these choices as, once a DC pension pot is spent, it is gone.

Annuity or Drawdown: Members with a small DC pension pot at retirement may be able to take it as cash. However, for most members the main choice is

between an annuity and drawdown. Drawdown typically means agreeing once a year on an amount to be withdrawn, leaving the rest of the pension pot invested. The alternative is to use the pension pot to purchase an annuity from an insurance company. The member in effect sells their pension pot but, in exchange, they (and possibly their spouse in the event of the prior death of the member) are guaranteed a monthly income for life. It is possible to use drawdown for a period after retirement and then, later, change to an annuity.

2.3 **Office holders and staff.** In this note, ‘office-holders’ are defined as ministers and Church-Related Community Workers who are working under the terms of the URC Plan for Partnership. Almost all office-holders are currently members of the MPF. ‘Staff’ are those who have employment contracts with the Church, and this includes a small number of URC ministers.

2.4 **Pensions Review Group (PRG).** This is the group that has been working on the development of new pensions arrangements, as explained in section 4.

3. Decisions taken at Assembly 2021

3.1 *Resolution 19 agreed at General Assembly 2021:*

The General Assembly, being representative of Local Churches, Synods and the whole Church, confirms the Church’s commitment to the pensions promises already made, and wishes any consideration of future pension arrangements for the Church’s Ministers of Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers, missionaries and staff to keep clearly in mind:

- a) The Church’s warm gratitude for the commitment, gifts and service of those who work among us and serve in our name;*
- b) The Church’s desire to deal with these people honourably in their retirement;*
- c) The Church’s desire to act as a responsible employer, for the people we employ and for our stipendiary office-holders.*

3.2 The principles contained in this resolution have governed the work on designing new pension arrangements for office holders and staff.

3.3 *Resolution 20 agreed at General Assembly 2021:*

General Assembly, recognising that the significant changes to the legal and regulatory framework for defined benefit pension schemes are making the two current URC pension schemes disproportionately expensive for the benefits they deliver, agrees in principle to the closure to future accruals of both the Ministers’ Pension Fund and the Final Salary Pension Scheme.

3.4 It is worth recapping the scale of the financial challenge that would face the United Reformed Church if it was to stay with the two existing DB pension schemes.

At the time of Assembly 2021, the contributions being paid into the two pension schemes were:

Ministers’ Pension Fund (MPF)	Church	21.95% of stipend
	Members	7.5% of stipend

Final Salary Scheme (FSS)	Church	25.3% of salary
	Members	7.5% of salary

As noted in the resolution, the level of contributions is increasing significantly, mainly because of the extra prudence required by the Pensions Regulator, combined with the fact that the MPF is approaching maturity.

The valuation of the MPF as at 1 January 2021 has now been completed, and as a result, the Church contributions have almost doubled in 2022 to 41.25%. This rate is expected to increase again at each of the next three valuations, by which time the MPF should have reached its long-term funding target.

The cost of Church contributions to the MPF in 2022 will be more than £1.5 million higher than in 2021. This increase is almost 10% of the Church's total budget. The URC Trust has agreed to meet this increase in pension costs in 2022. However, if this level of costs was to continue, then drastic changes would be needed to bring the Church's budget back into balance, including the possibility of having to reduce the number of stipendiary ministers.

The extra prudence required in the valuation of the MPF has also created a sizeable deficit in relation to the benefits already earned by the members. In the 2021 valuation, this deficit was estimated at £23 million. The next three valuations will be increasingly prudent, and the estimated total deficit funding required by 2030 is £40 million. A plan has been agreed with the Synod Trusts and the URC Trust to meet this challenge, but only on the understanding that the MPF will be closed to future accrual, in order to avoid further such costs in the future.

3.5 *Resolution 21 (amended) agreed at General Assembly 2021:*

General Assembly acknowledges the careful work that has already been done on these complex and sensitive matters, authorises further work to be done on developing new pensions arrangements for office holders and staff, and requests that, as part of this work, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) specialists are consulted, with the aim of presenting detailed options to Mission Council in November 2021, and then final proposals to General Assembly 2022, for implementation no sooner than January 2023.

[A note was subsequently inserted in the Record of Assembly 2021 which said: It was understood by all parties that in this resolution equity means fair and just treatment of people, but does not relate to stocks and shares or to mortgages.]

- 3.6 The design of new pension arrangements for office-holders and staff has proved even more complex and time-consuming than anticipated. With hindsight, the suggestion that detailed options would be available in time for Assembly Executive in November 2021 was unrealistic.

4. **Process and personalia since Assembly 2021**

- 4.1 The PRG was set up in 2020 as a working group to consider the future of the Church's pension schemes. The PRG is accountable to the Pensions Committee. Following Assembly 2021, the group was expanded to bring in others with experience and expertise in the design of pension schemes. Rob Seaman was asked to act as secretary of the Group.

The PRG comprises:

Jane Baird (Convenor)	DGS Admin and Resources
Rob Seaman (Secretary)	URC Pensions Manager
David Martin	member of Pensions Committee, retired actuary
Gordon Justham	retired actuary
Ian Hardie	URC Treasurer
John Piper	member of Pensions Committee, formerly URC Deputy Treasurer
Lyndon Thomas	deputy chair of the Ministers' Pensions Trust
Richard Nunn	convenor of Pensions Committee, retired actuary
Tim Lancaster	member of Investment Committee, working actuary
Vaughan Griffiths	URC Deputy Treasurer

John Bradbury, General Secretary, has received all relevant papers, and has contributed to the discussions.

Others have been involved when appropriate.

- 4.2 The whole PRG has met monthly, but much of the detailed work has been done in two sub-groups – one focused on governance and management issues, and the other looking at the design of the new pension scheme.
- 4.3 The PRG has continued to rely on the support of a team from Hymans Robertson, independent pensions consultants with considerable experience of helping organisations migrate to new pensions arrangements, and aware of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion issues that need to be taken into account.
- 4.4 The work on governance and management issues led to the appointment in January 2022, subject to contract, of Aon to operate the new URC pension scheme under its Master Trust. Since then, work with Aon has focused on how the funds of the scheme will be invested, and on the implementation plan.
- 4.5 The work on scheme design began by looking at death-in-service benefits and ill health early retirement. Previously, these were provided as part of the DB scheme arrangements. In future, they will have to be provided separately outside the new DC pension scheme. It was necessary to be able to estimate the cost of these benefits in order to know how much would be available for Church contributions to the new pension scheme. It was not until February 2022 that work could properly begin on possible contribution structures and the benefits that these might deliver.

5. Future process and possible timetable following Assembly 2022

- 5.1 There is a legal requirement for the Church to carry out a formal consultation with the members of both current URC pension schemes before new arrangements are introduced. That is why Assembly is being asked to agree to the proposals set out in Part B below subject to consultation, with authority delegated to the Assembly officers or to Assembly Executive to give final approval to the new scheme.
- 5.2 If Assembly accepts these proposals, then the formal consultation process will begin straightaway, probably concluding in the second half of October.
- 5.3 The results of that consultation will be considered carefully. The PRG will discuss these results with the Assembly officers. If the consultation results in no changes or very minor changes to the proposals, then Assembly officers will be asked to give final approval to the proposals so that the process of implementation can continue. In the extremely unlikely event that the consultation gives rise to some significant issues, then Assembly officers may decide to refer the matter to Assembly Executive. This would almost certainly result in a delay in the implementation of the new pension arrangements, resulting in further significant costs to the Church or to the URC Trust beyond the end of 2022.
- 5.4 In parallel with this decision-making process, planning for the implementation of the new pension arrangements will continue. In particular, the Church and Aon will work closely together to ensure that all members are provided with appropriate information and support before, during, and after the implementation. Members will be signposted to sources of independent financial advice, and will be encouraged to make regular use of such advice.
- 5.5 The PRG continues to plan for an implementation date of 1 January 2023.

Part B: proposals

6. In summary...

6.1 Current Defined Benefit pension schemes:

The benefits earned by members of the two URC Defined Benefit (DB) pension schemes up to the point when they are closed to future accrual are protected, and will be unaffected by these changes.

For example, a minister who has been a member of the MPF for 20 years at this date will, on retirement at normal retirement age, receive a pension from the MPF of 20/80 of stipend. This will be in addition to any income from the new DC scheme.

6.2 Proposed new Defined Contribution pension scheme

One new DC pension scheme for all office holders and staff. See 8.

The new scheme is to be managed by Aon through its Master Trust. See 9.

Contribution rates: See 10.

Members (minimum): 7.5% of salary or stipend (as now)

Church:	Office holders	age related contributions - estimated total cost of 18% of stipends
	Staff	16% of salary
Death-in-service benefits:		See 12.
	Office holders	8 times stipend plus any pension from the DB scheme.
	Staff	5 times salary plus any pension from the DB scheme.
Ill health benefits:		See 13.
	Office holders	Total payments of either 50% of stipend or 25% of stipend depending on level of incapacity and up to normal retirement age. This will include any pension from the existing DB schemes, which are payable for life.
	Staff	No new provision, but a pension may be payable from the DB scheme.

7. Overall approach to scheme design

7.1 As explained in section 2, DB and DC pension schemes are very different in the way that they operate. Therefore, designing a new DC pension scheme to replicate the features of the existing DB schemes was neither possible nor desirable.

The priorities for the PRG have been to design a new pension scheme which:

- is fair to all members whatever their age, previous service, and circumstances
- is as generous as possible, within what is affordable for the Church
- provides excellent support to the members before and after implementation; and
- is as simple and straightforward as possible for the members and for the Church.

7.2 The PRG has taken 'affordable' to mean roughly the same level of Church payments for pensions benefits as there was in 2021 – ie before the most recent valuation of the MPF. The intention is not to reduce costs, but to stop them escalating to unaffordable levels. In this context, 'Church payments' excludes the substantial deficit contributions to the MPT, as these are now being dealt with separately. The Church's future service contributions to the current DB pension schemes are expressed as a percentage of salary or stipend, and those figures for 2021 are set out in 3.4.

The proposed new arrangements for death-in-service benefits and for ill health early retirement are set out in sections 12 and 13 below. These are separate from the new pension scheme, and the Church must pay for them separately.

Deducting the estimated costs of these items from the 2021 level of Church contributions to the current DB schemes is how the proposed Church contribution rates to the new DC pension scheme have been arrived at.

The proposals set out in section 10 below assume **overall Church contributions of 18% of stipends for office holders and 16% of salaries for staff.**

Member contributions are set at the same level as currently, 7.5% of salary or stipend.

It is likely that the costs of administering the new arrangements will be slightly higher than they are presently, but this has been ignored in these calculations.

8. One new Defined Contribution pension scheme

8.1 The Church currently operates two DB pension schemes. The MPF is used for virtually all stipendiary ministers and church related community workers. The FSS is used for all staff and a small number of ministers.

8.2 The only practical alternative to DB pension schemes that is currently available is some form of DC pension scheme.

8.3 It is proposed to introduce one new DC pension scheme for all office holders and staff, but with some differences in the arrangements for each.

9. Using a Master Trust operated by Aon

9.1 Choosing a Master Trust as the legal structure

As explained in section 2.1, one of the current DB pension schemes is managed through a trust company, the directors of which are all members of the Church, and the other is operated by a third-party organisation through its Master Trust. In relation to the new pension arrangements, an important consideration for the PRG was the long-term ability of the Church to carry out its responsibilities, given the increasing difficulty of finding willing volunteers with the appropriate expertise. Various legal structures were considered, but the only practical option was to use a third-party DC Master Trust.

A Master Trust is a legal vehicle which is used, typically, to manage the assets of several different pension schemes together. This achieves significant economies of scale which benefit all parties.

9.2 Choosing Aon as the preferred provider

The priority for the PRG was to identify a provider that could deliver, for the long term, the highest quality of product, service, and member support.

There are only 38 current providers of Master Trusts, and that number is reducing. This is partly because the government is encouraging consolidation, and partly because the economics of operating a Master Trust require heavy investment. However, the larger the provider, the less likely that the Church's particular needs and interests would be taken into account. In all, 13 providers were sent initial invitations to tender and eight expressed an interest. Five were invited to submit formal tenders, and three were shortlisted for interviews.

All three potential providers had interesting, yet different, propositions; all had excellent ESG (Ethical, Social and Governance) credentials in their investment approaches; and all were capable of meeting the Church's needs.

Shortlisted providers were interviewed in mid-December 2021, and Aon was identified as the preferred choice. Two further meetings with Aon were held in

January to explore the Church's needs in more detail. Aon has serviced the Church well for many years as key advisers to the Ministers' Pensions Trust. The team from Aon not only demonstrated a good understanding of the Master Trust market and how this is likely to develop, but also had a clear vision of the needs of the Church and of how Aon can meet them. They showed real enthusiasm for becoming the Church's partners in this new venture.

Providers of Master Trusts get most of their income by levying a charge on the investments they manage. However, Aon is also proposing to charge the Church an implementation fee of £10,000 and an annual service charge of £5,000. Although Aon's service is slightly more expensive than that of the other shortlisted providers, the PRG is clear that the extra cost is worthwhile.

Aon has been appointed as the Master Trust provider, subject to contract.

9.3 **Choosing the default investment fund**

The Church will choose a default investment fund into which all Church and member contributions will be paid, except where a member opts (or 'self-selects') for a different Fund or Funds to receive some or all of their contributions. The management charges on self-select funds are likely to be higher than those on default funds.

The PRG has identified the Aon Target Date Managed Retirement Pathway Fund as its preferred default fund for the new DC pension scheme. With this Fund, as a member approaches and then moves into retirement, the pension pot of that member is gradually transitioned into investments carrying less risk. This Fund is made up of several elements, containing different sorts of investment with their associated risks/rewards. The management of all the Aon Funds takes account of ESG issues, and this one includes a climate transition focus.

For members not close to retirement, 10% of this proposed default fund is invested in the Aon Global Impact Fund. One of the aims of this Fund is sustainability, including carbon reduction. Although this Fund does not explicitly exclude investment in fossil fuel businesses, the emphasis on sustainability makes such investment highly unlikely. This is an almost-identical approach to that of the current MPF equity fund managers, as approved by the URC Investment Committee and the Ministers' Pensions Trust. The Global Impact Fund is one of the funds that will be available to members as a self-select fund.

10. **Contribution levels for the Church and for the members**

10.1 **Member contributions**

Member contributions into both current DB schemes are 7.5% of salary or stipend. **It is proposed that the minimum level of member contributions into the new DC pension scheme will also be fixed at the level of 7.5% of salary / stipend.**

Members may make additional contributions into the scheme. It is planned to offer staff members of the new pension scheme the option of 'salary sacrifice' on a similar basis to that available in the current DB pension scheme.

10.2 **Church contributions – office holders**

As discussed in section 7, it is suggested that an **overall contribution rate of 18% of total stipends** is approximately equivalent to what the Church was

paying in 2021, excluding the items that will be paid for separately which are dealt with in sections 12 and 13.

The argument for age-related contribution rates:

The standard Church contribution rate to the MPF is really an average. In the MPF, a minister who works for a year at age 28 earns the same pension as a minister who works for a year at age 68. However, the pension earned by the older minister will actually be much more expensive for the Church because it will have to be paid out almost immediately, whereas the contributions for the younger minister will be invested for a long time before the pension is payable.

The same point applies to the new DC pension scheme, except here the effect is on the members rather than on the Church. If the same contribution is made for a 28-year-old as for a 68-year-old, then the income in retirement of the 28-year-old will almost certainly be significantly higher than that of the 68-year-old, because the money will be invested for much longer. The way round this problem is to use age-related contribution rates which aim to make the member benefits 'more equal', whatever their ages. Part C of this paper includes some financial modelling based on the age-related contribution rates and, for comparison, provides information on the effect of using a standard contribution rate of 18%.

Proposed age-related Church contribution rates:

<u>Age at 1 January</u>	<u>Church contribution</u>
Under 28	11%
28 to 37	13%
38 to 47	15%
48 to 57	17%
58 and over	19%

A member's age at 1 January will determine the contribution rate for that calendar year.

The spread of these rates has been set by actuaries to try to equalise the impact of the different periods for which the funds will be invested. The level has been set so that the total cost is about 18% of total stipends. The range reflects the fact that the average age of Church office holders is over 55, partly because of the number of people who enter stipendiary ministry in later years after other careers.

10.3 Church contributions – staff

The same argument could be made for age-related contribution rates for staff. However, here there are other factors at play. In particular, whereas all office holders are on the same stipend regardless of age and experience, it is likely that salaries for staff will vary reflecting experience, length of service, and expertise. The value of any level of contribution will be in proportion to those salaries. For this reason, it is proposed to have the same Church contribution rate for all staff.

Church contributions for office holders are based on stipend which takes no account of housing costs, whereas for staff the contributions are based on salaries which are intended to cover all costs, including housing. The PRG is of the view that this justifies a slightly lower contribution rate for staff. The proposed

Church contribution rate is much higher than the rates being paid by most employers operating DC pension schemes (see 11.7 below).

Proposed Church contribution for staff: 16% of salary

- 10.4 It will be appropriate for these pension contribution rates to be regularly reviewed. The frequency of such reviews has not yet been determined.

11. Projected income in retirement

- 11.1 Most individuals will receive income in retirement from several different sources. What will matter to them is their total income, from whatever source. Because everyone's circumstances are different, it is hard to make any comments that will be generally applicable.

- 11.2 **State pension.** The level of state pension receivable is dependent on the number of years for which National Insurance contributions have been paid.

- 11.3 **URC DB pension schemes.** For those who have already retired or left the service of the Church, the pension receivable at retirement from one of the URC DB pension schemes will be unaffected by these changes.

For those who are active at the time when the new pension arrangements become effective, a pension will be payable at retirement from their URC DB pension scheme based on the years of service up to that date.

- 11.4 **URC DC pension scheme.** As already described, a DC pension scheme builds up a pension pot for each member. The purpose of that capital sum is to provide an income in retirement. It will be for each member, having taken appropriate advice, to decide how and when to take that income.

- 11.5 **Other income.** Some members of the URC pension schemes may have other income in retirement, possibly related to other employment before or after their service with the Church.

- 11.6 **Projections.** The projections of income in retirement described in Part C of this paper are for a very particular group of people: office holders (so the stipend is fixed) who spend their whole working lives serving the Church (so there are no other work-related pensions). For office holders with more complicated circumstances and for staff, any projections of income in retirement need to be based on their personal circumstances. It will be important for all members to obtain independent financial advice related to their particular circumstances, especially as retirement approaches.

The projections are based on the age of the member at the date of the change to the proposed new DC pension arrangements. They show estimated income in retirement under three different scenarios:

Left	Assuming the current DB pension scheme remains open.
Centre	Assuming the new DC pension scheme is introduced, and the member opts to receive an annuity at retirement.
Right	Assuming the new DC pension scheme is introduced, and the member opts to use drawdown to obtain their income in retirement.

The projections are based on modelling hundreds of possible outcomes for future investment returns.

The projections suggest that, assuming drawdown is used in retirement and assuming the proposed age-related Church contributions are agreed:

An office holder aged 58 at the time of the change to new arrangements opting for drawdown at age 68, has a 50% chance of achieving total annual income in retirement at least £1,100 more than they would receive if the current DB scheme remained open. They have a 75% chance of achieving total annual income in retirement of at least what they would receive if the current DB scheme remained open less £100. It should be noted that Aon assumes that the pension pot of a person within 10 years of retirement will be progressively de-risked to protect it from potential financial shocks. It would be possible for an individual member to adopt a different strategy.

An office holder aged 28 at the time of the change to new arrangements opting for drawdown at age 68, has a 50% chance of achieving a total annual income in retirement that is £22,099 (95%) higher than the income they would receive if the current DB scheme remained open. They have a 75% chance of achieving total annual income in retirement at least £5,069 more than the income they would receive if the current DB scheme remains open.

The projections using a flat rate Church contribution of 18% suggest that the annual income in retirement of the office holder aged 58 at the time of the change would be about £200 lower than this, whereas the annual income in retirement of the office holder aged 28 at the time of the change would be from £2,000 to £5,000 higher.

- 11.7 **Independent measures of retirement living standards.** The Pensions and Lifetime Savings Association (PLSA) is an independent organisation concerned about living standards in retirement. In relation to DC pension schemes, the PLSA has introduced a Pensions Quality Mark (PQM) and a PQM Plus.

Their website says:

HOW CAN SCHEMES QUALIFY?

To meet the standards the employer must offer employees a minimum contribution of 12% (with at least 6% from the employer) or 15% for PQM Plus (with at least 10% from the employer).

The scheme must have effective governance, an appropriate default investment strategy, an understanding of its members with inclusive engagement strategy, and support for members at retirement.

The PRG views these proposals to Assembly as significantly better than the PQM Plus standard.

12. Death-in-service benefits

12.1 Current benefits from the URC DB pension schemes

Death-in-service benefits are currently provided from the two DB pension schemes.

In relation to the death of a member of the MPF, a lump sum of 3 x stipend is paid plus, where appropriate, a spouse's pension of up to half of the member's prospective pension, depending on when the member joined the MPF.

In relation to the death of a member of the FSS, a lump sum of 2 x salary is paid plus, where appropriate, a spouse's pension of up to two-thirds of the member's pension, based on the past years of service only.

12.2 Continuing benefits from the URC DB pension schemes

Once the new pension arrangements are introduced and the two URC DB schemes are closed to future accruals, there will be no death lump sums payable from the DB schemes, but spouse's pensions will continue to be payable, based on the years of service up to the date of the changeover.

12.3 'Children's pensions'

'Pensions' are currently paid to retired office holders or to the spouses of deceased office holders in relation to dependent children. These are equivalent to the children's allowances paid to serving office holders. In fact, these are not pensions but are grants from Church resources, and there will be no change to these arrangements.

12.4 Lump sums payable in future

An insurance policy will be taken out to provide for the payment of future lump sums on the death-in-service of office holders and staff. These arrangements will be administered through an insurer on behalf of the Church, but totally separate from the new DC pension scheme and under a separate Master Trust.

The proposed multiplier for office holders is higher than that for staff because it is based on the stipend which takes no account of housing costs.

The lump sums payable in future will be:	Office holders	8 x stipend
	Staff	5 x salary

12.5 The DC pension pot of a deceased member is an asset

The pension pot of a member held in the DC pension scheme is an asset of that member held in trust for them. On the death of the member, the assets can be used to provide benefits for a spouse or other beneficiaries.

12.6 It is acknowledged that, initially, these new arrangements will be much more generous than the current ones, with a larger lump sum payable on top of the pension payable from one of the DB pension schemes. However, the latter will become less significant over time. The proposal is intended to keep the insurance arrangements simple, which reduces their cost.

12.7 The estimated annual cost of these proposals is about 2% of stipends for ministers, and less for staff.

13. Dealing with Ill Health Early Retirement (IHER)

13.1 Current benefits from the URC DB pension schemes

In appropriate circumstances, a member of either of the two current URC pension schemes may retire early on grounds of ill health, and they will then receive a pension from that date. The arrangements in the two schemes are different and they are complicated – partly because they have been changed several times.

The maximum IHER pension payable to a member of the MPF is 50% of stipend, based on their prospective years of service to normal retirement date.

The IHER pension payable to a member of the FSS is the pension accrued at the date of their ill health early retirement.

13.2 Continuing benefits from the URC DB pension schemes

Those who have already retired on grounds of ill health will be unaffected by these changes.

It is expected that, after the new pension arrangements have been introduced, someone who was a member of one of the two DB pension schemes will receive a pension from that scheme calculated on the same basis as someone who has a deferred pension having left the service of the Church. However, see 13.3 below.

13.3 Proposed new arrangements for office holders

Office holders who are granted early retirement on grounds of ill health will, up to the normal retirement age, receive payments totalling either 50% of stipend or 25% of stipend. This will depend on whether they are totally unable to work, or if they are able to work in another occupation but are not able to carry out the duties of a Church office holder. This is the total amount that will be received.

Part of this total amount may come from one of the DB pension schemes. As now, this will be a pension for life. If the DB pension is less than the above total, then the balance will be paid through the URC payroll up to normal retirement age and will, for tax and national insurance purposes, be treated in the same way as earnings. Corresponding Church contributions will be paid into the DC pension scheme, but members will not be expected to contribute.

It is not intended to make any new arrangements for staff, in addition to those in the existing Final Salary Scheme.

13.4 Availability of the DC pension pot

Subject to the agreement of the trustees, a member who has retired early on grounds of ill health may be able to gain early access to the funds held in their DC pension pot. It will be for the member to decide whether to do this as, clearly, this will reduce the income available after normal retirement age.

13.5 The estimated annual cost of these proposals is about 3% of total stipends.

14. Existing Additional Voluntary Contributions

14.1 Additional Voluntary Contributions (AVCs) are paid by some members of both the current DB pension schemes. The arrangements in the two schemes for investing those contributions and for calculating the additional pensions payable are different, and they are complex.

- 14.2 There is a range of possible options in relation to these existing arrangements, but the necessary discussions with the trustees of the two DB schemes have not yet taken place.
- 14.3 Whatever happens with the existing AVC arrangements, it will be possible for members of the new DC pension scheme to make additional contributions into that scheme, over and above the minimum 7.5% of salary or stipend.

Part C: Income in retirement – financial modelling for office holders

15. Introduction and explanations

15.1 Purpose of financial modelling

The outcome for an individual member of a DC pension scheme depends on many factors, each of which will vary over time. Financial modelling looks at hundreds of different possible scenarios in order to present the likely range of outcomes with probabilities attached to them.

The Hymans Robertson team has carried out several such modelling exercises. The ones presented below are those that relate to the proposals in Section B.

15.2 Limited scope of the modelling

This modelling is focused on office holders (ministers and church-related community workers), and assumes they all receive the same stipend. The modelling also only considers office holders who spend their whole working lives in the Church. This means they build up their pension entitlement over 40 years in the Church, and they are assumed to have no other work-related pensions.

Modelling for staff on a range of different salaries or for office holders who have had previous careers before working for the Church could only be done separately for each individual.

This modelling is based on an investment strategy that closely replicates the shape of the Aon Fund that is likely to be adopted as the default Fund by the Church, and it assumes Aon's standard approach to each member's retirement timetable. In particular, as explained in section 11, it is assumed that the pension pot of a member approaching retirement will be de-risked over a number of years to reduce the impact of any financial shocks during that time. This has the effect of reducing the expected investment returns, and this can be seen in the modelling results for those aged over 58. It will be possible for individual members to choose a different approach to risk.

The modelling assumes that the State Pension is £9,000 for all members, and uses the current stipend of £28,428. The modelling ignores inflation, so everything is expressed in current prices. The modelling only takes account of the investment gains over and above those needed to offset the effects of inflation.

15.3 Focus on income in retirement

The modelling looks at the likely income in retirement for three different scenarios:

First:

The existing defined benefit pension scheme, were it to continue as it is.

As explained in section 11, there lots of choice is available to members regarding the use of their DC pension pot in retirement. The following scenarios are based on just two of those options.

Second:

Purchase of an annuity at retirement. This is a prudent or low-risk approach, but it is also costly, which means that the returns are likely to be lower than using drawdown. The pension pot of a member is transferred to an insurance company, in exchange for a pension for life.

Third:

Drawdown. Here, the member decides periodically (say, once a year) how much money to take out of the pension pot. The rest remains invested. The income is likely to be higher, but it requires more involvement from the member.

A popular approach is to use drawdown in the early years of retirement, and then convert to an annuity later. The appropriate approach for each member will depend on their own circumstances and their priorities.

16. Financial modelling based on age-related contributions

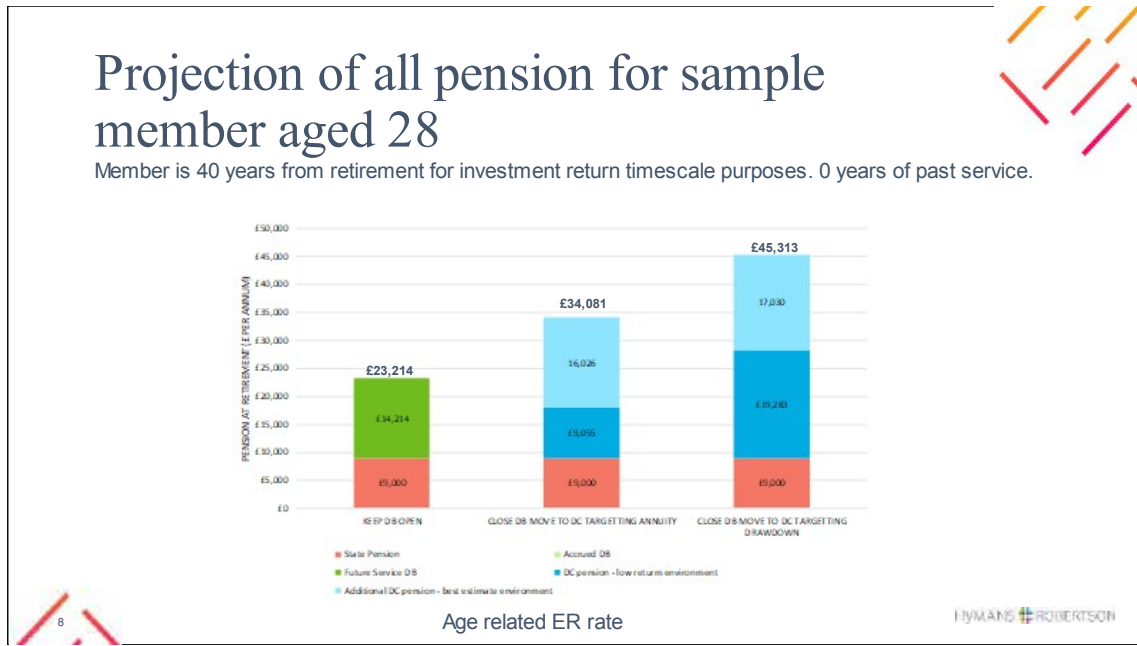
16.1 Contribution rates

Section 10 explains why it is proposed to use age-related Church contribution rates for office holders and sets out the proposed rates, which are:

<u>Age</u>	<u>Percentage of stipend</u>
Under 28	11%
28 to 37	13%
38 to 47	15%
48 to 57	17%
58 and over	19%

Member contributions will, as now, be a minimum of 7.5%.

16.2 Member aged 28 when the new pension scheme is introduced



This person is just starting work when the new pensions arrangements are introduced. Therefore, they have no pension built up in the MPF. It is assumed they will work for 40 years as a member of the new pension scheme. The chart shows estimated income in retirement on three bases. In all three cases, the bottom rectangle represents a State Pension of £9,000.

Existing DB scheme

The left-hand block shows that, if the existing DB scheme continues as now, the member will receive a pension from the MPF of £14,214 plus the State Pension of £9,000, making total income in retirement of £23,214.

Proposed DC scheme with an annuity purchased at retirement

The central block represents the proposed DC scheme, with an annuity purchased at retirement.

The dark blue rectangle indicates a 75% chance of receiving an annuity at retirement of at least £9,055. Total annual income including the State Pension would be more than £9,000 + £9,055 = at least £18,055.

The light blue rectangle indicates a 50% chance of receiving an annuity at retirement of at least £25,081. Total annual income including the State Pension would be more than £9,000 + £25,081 = at least £34,081.

Proposed DC scheme with drawdown used after retirement

The right-hand block represents the proposed DC scheme, and assumes that the member will use drawdown to provide income in retirement. For the purpose of this modelling, it is assumed that drawdown will be used to deliver an annual income for life, which is set at retirement and then increased annually by inflation, and that, if the member dies first, this will be followed by income at half this level to a surviving spouse for the rest of their lifetime. These assumptions are made so that the results are comparable with the benefits receivable from the MPF.

The dark blue rectangle indicates a 75% chance of delivering at least £19,283 per year at retirement. Total annual income including the State Pension would be more than £9,000 + £19,283 = at least £28,283, which is more than 20% above the income in retirement if the current DB pension scheme remains open.

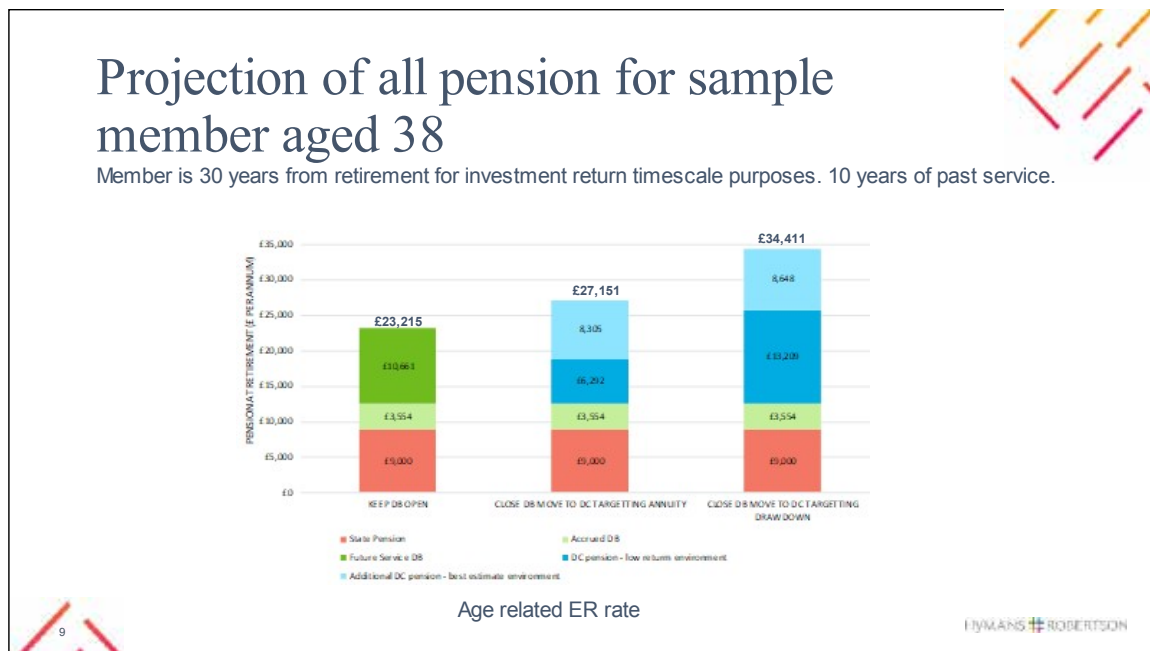
The light blue rectangle indicates a 50% chance of delivering at least £36,313 per year at retirement. Total annual income including the State Pension would be more than £9,000 + £36,313 = at least £45,313.

Observations

Because the expected time to retirement is 40 years, the range of the modelling results is very wide.

However, it will be noted that the results suggest there is a good chance that younger members will receive a much better income in retirement from the proposed new pension arrangements than from the current DB pension scheme.

16.3 Member aged 38 when the new pension scheme is introduced



This person has built up ten years of accrued pension in the MPF. It is assumed they will work for another 30 years as a member of the new pension scheme. As before, the rectangle at the bottom of all three blocks represents a State Pension of £9,000. Now, there is a light green rectangle above this in all three blocks, which represents the pension payable from the MPF for 10 years' service, which is 10/80 of stipend = £3,554.

Existing DB scheme

The left-hand block shows that, if the existing DB scheme continues as now, the member will receive a pension from the MPF of £14,215 plus the State Pension of £9,000, making total income in retirement of £23,215.

Proposed DC scheme with an annuity purchased at retirement

The central block represents the proposed DC scheme, with an annuity purchased at retirement.

The dark blue rectangle indicates a 75% chance of receiving an annuity at retirement of at least £6,292. Total annual income including the State Pension and the MPF pension would be more than £9,000 + £3,554 + £6,292 = at least £18,846.

The light blue rectangle indicates a 50% chance of receiving an annuity at retirement of at least £14,597. Total annual income including the State Pension and the MPF pension would be more than £9,000 + £3,554 + £14,597 = at least £27,151.

Proposed DC scheme with drawdown used after retirement

The right-hand block represents the proposed DC scheme, and assumes that the member will use drawdown to provide income in retirement. The same assumptions are made as before.

The dark blue rectangle indicates a 75% chance of delivering at least £13,209 per year at retirement. Total annual income including the State Pension and the MPF pension would be more than £9,000 + £3,554 + £13,209 = at least £25,763, which is 10% above the income in retirement if the current DB pension scheme remains open.

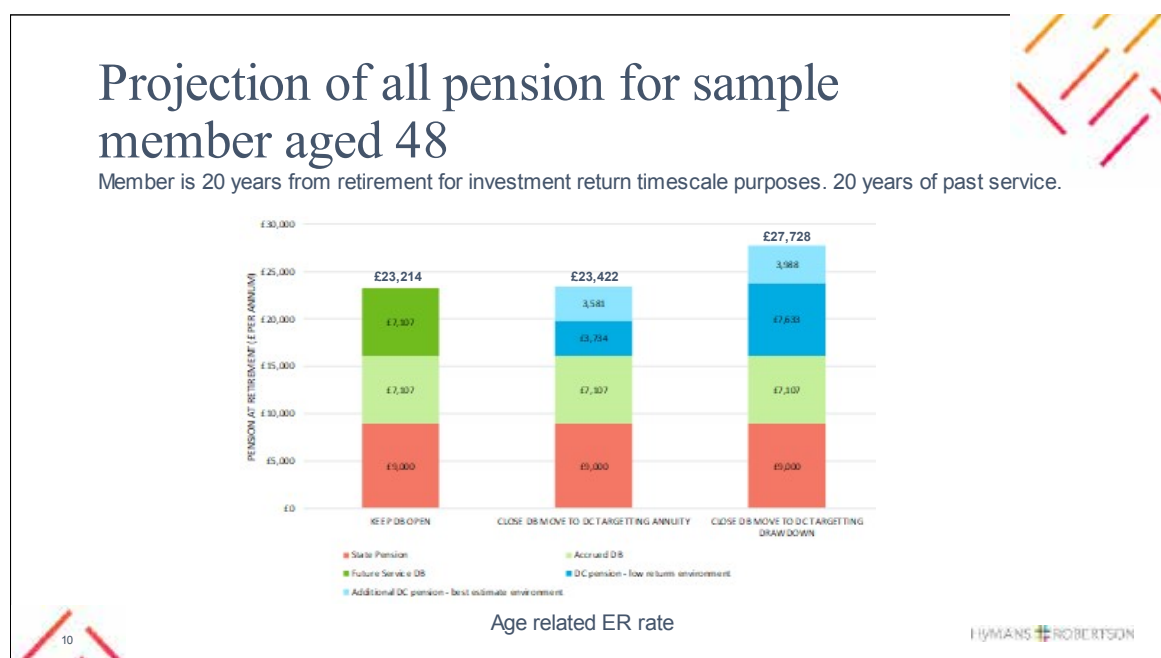
The light blue rectangle indicates a 50% chance of delivering at least £21,857 per year at retirement. Total annual income including the State Pension and the MPF pension would be more than £9,000 + £3,554 + £21,857 = at least £34,411.

Observations

The expected time to retirement is now 30 years. This has reduced the spread of the modelling results, but it is still wide.

It will be noted that the results suggest there is still a good chance of producing a much better income in retirement than from the current DB pension scheme.

16.4 Member aged 48 when the new pension scheme is introduced



This person has built up 20 years of accrued pension in the MPF. It is assumed they will work for another 20 years as a member of the new pension scheme. As before, the rectangle at the bottom of all three blocks represents a State Pension of £9,000. The light green rectangle above this in all three blocks represents the pension payable from the MPF for 20 years' service, which is $20/80$ of stipend = £7,107.

Existing DB scheme

The left-hand block shows that, if the existing DB scheme continues as now, the member will receive a pension from the MPF of £14,214 plus the State Pension of £9,000, making total income in retirement of £23,214.

Proposed DC scheme with an annuity purchased at retirement

The central block represents the proposed DC scheme with an annuity purchased at retirement.

The dark blue rectangle indicates a 75% chance of receiving an annuity at retirement of at least £3,734. Total annual income including the State Pension and the MPF pension would be more than $£9,000 + £7,107 + £3,734 =$ at least £19,841.

The light blue rectangle indicates a 50% chance of receiving an annuity at retirement of at least £7,315. Total annual income including the State Pension and the MPF pension would be $£9,000 + £7,107 + £7,315 =$ at least £23,422.

Proposed DC scheme with drawdown used after retirement

The right-hand block represents the proposed DC scheme, and assumes that the member will use drawdown to provide income in retirement. The same assumptions are made as before.

The dark blue rectangle indicates a 75% chance of delivering at least £7,633 per year at retirement. Total annual income including the State Pension and the MPF pension would be more than $£9,000 + £7,107 + £7,633 =$ at least £23,740. That is about 2% above the income in retirement if the current DB pension scheme remains open.

The light blue rectangle indicates a 50% chance of delivering at least £11,621 per year at retirement. Total annual income including the State Pension and the MPF pension would be more than $£9,000 + £7,107 + £11,621 =$ at least £27,728.

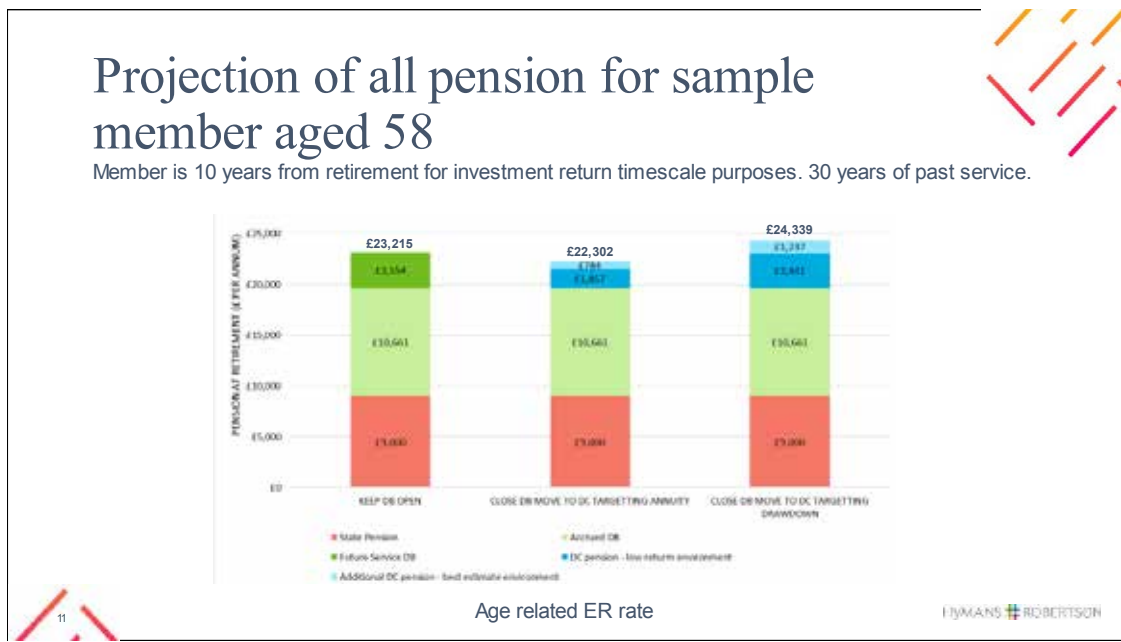
Observations

The expected time to retirement is now 20 years. The spread of the modelling results has reduced further.

It will be noted that the results suggest there is still a good chance of producing a better income in retirement than from the current DB pension scheme.

16.5 Member aged 58 when the new pension scheme is introduced

This person has built up 30 years of accrued pension in the MPF. It is assumed they will work for another 10 years as a member of the new pension scheme. As before, the rectangle at the bottom of all three blocks represents a State Pension of £9,000. The light green rectangle above this in all three blocks represents the pension payable from the MPF for 30 years' service, which is $30/80$ of stipend = £10,661.



Existing DB scheme

The left-hand block shows that, if the existing DB scheme continues as now, the member would receive a pension from the MPF of £14,215 plus the State Pension of £9,000, making total income in retirement of £23,215.

Proposed DC scheme with an annuity purchased at retirement

The central block represents the proposed DC scheme with an annuity purchased at retirement.

The dark blue rectangle indicates a 75% chance of receiving an annuity at retirement of at least £1,857. Total annual income including the State Pension and the MPF pension would be more than £9,000 + £10,661 + £1,857 = at least £21,518.

The light blue rectangle indicates a 50% chance of receiving an annuity at retirement of at least £2,641. Total annual income including the State Pension and the MPF pension would be more than £9,000 + £10,661 + £2,641 = at least £22,302.

Proposed DC scheme with drawdown used after retirement

The right-hand block represents the proposed DC scheme, and assumes that the member will use drawdown to provide income in retirement. The same assumptions are made as before.

The dark blue rectangle indicates 75% chance of delivering at least £3,441 per year at retirement. Total annual income including the State Pension and the MPF pension would be more than £9,000 + £10,661 + £3,441 = at least £23,102.

This total is almost the same as the income in retirement if the current DB pension scheme remains open.

The light blue rectangle indicates a 50% chance of delivering at least £4,678 per year at retirement. Total annual income including the State Pension and the MPF pension would be more than £9,000 + £10,661 + £4,678 = at least £24,339.

Observations

The expected time to retirement is now ten years. The standard approach of the trustees of the DC scheme for a member this close to retirement would be to gradually de-risk the investments held, leading to a reduction in the expected investment returns. This is factored into these modelling results.

It will be noted that, even assuming this de-risking of the investments, using drawdown there is still a good chance of income in retirement being at least as good as from the current DB pension scheme if it remains open. This would not be true if a standard contribution rate was used across all ages – see 17 below.

17. Financial modelling based on a standard contribution rate

- 17.1 The proposals in Section B are based on age-related Church contribution rates for office holders. The reasons for this are explained in 10.2.
- 17.2 If a standard contribution rate is used, then the outcomes for members aged over 48 when the new arrangements are introduced will be slightly worse than those set out above. The outcomes for members aged under 48 when the new arrangements begin will be significantly better than those set out above.
- 17.3 All the detail is not reproduced here. However, the following comparisons of the modelling of income when using drawdown may be of interest:

Age of member at changeover to new arrangements	Income in retirement <u>Age-related contributions</u>		Income in retirement <u>Standard contributions</u>	
	75% prob. at least £	50% prob. at least £	75% prob. at least £	50% prob. at least £
28	28,283	45,313	30,311	49,959
38	25,763	34,411	26,400	35,709
48	23,740	27,728	23,740	27,779
58	23,102	24,339	22,973	24,163

Paper H1

General report

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Paul Whittle moderator@urcscotland.org.uk
Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Main area of focus since General Assembly 2020 and sub-committee reports.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Ministries Report to General Assembly 2020.
Consultation has taken place with...	None.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

Ministries Committee

The committee is responsible for the ministry of Word and Sacraments, Church-Related Community Work, Lay Preaching and Eldership. It is concerned with central care and conditions of service, chaplaincies in industry, higher and further education, prisons, and in the armed forces and 'special category' ministry. It has concern for the pastoral support of ministers, Church-Related Community Workers and Lay Preachers, including pastoral supervision, self-evaluation and counselling. It oversees the Assessment Board, and is assisted by four sub-committees.

Convenor: Paul Whittle

Secretary: Nicola Furley-Smith

Members: Gill Bates, Lesley Moseley, Chris Kellert, Stuart Scott, Sally Willett, Jamie Kissack (Synod Moderator) from 2020), Bill Gould (convenor of the assessment board), David Coote (convenor of the maintenance of the ministry sub-committee), Paul Dean (convenor of the accreditations sub-committee).

1. Resourcing ministry

- 1.1 As Christ's people, we seek to serve God, who is the source, guide and goal of all that we do and are. We are all called to participate in God's work in the world,

through a variety of different ministries.

- 1.2 Ministries Committee has been working closely with other committees across the discipleship team, as well as with the Mission team, to see how we might best shape and resource ministry in and through as many healthy and sustainable churches as possible.
- 1.3 To this end, since the last report in 2020, Ministries has been working with others to develop:
- a) The new course for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, which is reaching the end of its first year. Testimonials from current students attest to the benefit of both online and in-person opportunities as stimulating, thought-provoking, supportive and inspiring. To grow is to learn, and to learn is to teach others.
 - b) Non-Stipendiary Ministry Model 4 training. This is now well-established, with five students in training, and a further four students to begin training in September.
 - c) NS CRCW locally trained, locally commissioned. This has proved harder to establish, which is largely down to meeting the criteria set by the English Standards Board. Ministries is working with Northern College to see how this ministry might be addressed.
 - d) An induction 'pack' for ministers on Certificates of Eligibility and Certificates for Limited Service including a revamped *You're Welcome: Ethos and History of the URC Course*. Ministries is grateful to the Secretary for Education and Learning and Westminster College for running the course. There has been a good take-up of this course, particularly from new staff in Synods and ministers of other denominations. There is an induction day for October at Church House, with the opportunity to meet with Church House staff.

2. **Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers**

In 2020, Ministries Committee reported that, through close working with the Mission Committee and the Education and Learning and Children's and Youth Work Committees, the Fresh Expression Enabling Group was exploring a ministry of lay pioneering that was accredited and accountable. In the light of the pandemic, Ministries Committee considered the pilot scheme of funding other ministries, and concluded that many of the projects had not started or had faltered because of lockdown. It concluded that the monies spent on this could be wisely used to fund a ministry of lay pioneering, given that many of the projects could be identified as pioneering projects. While Ministries Committee realises that some may be disappointed in this decision, the committee hopes that those reading the paper on Assembly Accredited Lay pioneers will be excited by this new and innovative partnership with the Church Mission Society, Seedbeds, and the Congregational Federation during our 50th year.

3. **New pieces of work**

Ministries Committee continues to look at ways in which the denomination can support ministries in their widest sense, and has been working on a call and the withdrawal of call, the Roll of Ministers Policy and Elders in Local Leadership Policy, amongst other work. Along with the policy for Safer Election of Elders

(Assembly Executive November 2021), the committee has been looking at Marks of Ministry for an Elder and an Elders Meeting. A paper will come to Assembly Executive in November.

4. Deployment

- 4.1 In recent years, complex debates about ministerial deployment have become even more complicated by there being different sets of data in use in different contexts and words like 'predicted numbers' and 'target numbers' being used to mean different things in different documents. Ministries has been working on a single set of key data that is as accurate and easy to understand as possible, and can be kept up to date by Ministries for the benefit of the work of the Ministries Committee, the Moderators Meeting and the individual Synods.
- 4.2 One of the sets of data previously produced by Ministries, mainly for the Moderators, was based on data supporting the GA 2016 deployment resolution and showed 'target' figures plus 10% (being a notional vacancy rate), but with target figures being what the URC could afford (rather than the predicted figures of the available ministers to deploy). The basic data rested on a formula about 'affordability'.
- 4.3 However, GA 2021 recognised that the Church should no longer use this affordability formula to determine ministry figures because its original assumptions (from 2012) no longer apply. It therefore generates misleading data. In addition, some other Ministries numbers have continued to rely indirectly on estimates made in 2016, which are now not the best estimates we can produce. As a result, Ministries will, in future, base all its calculations on the latest predicted figures of available ministers, which can be updated annually. These predicted figures of available ministers will now drive the target figures for deployment use.
- 4.4 Once there is a single, clear basis for calculations of minister numbers, the division of the total between Synods will continue to be made on the basis of the formula agreed by GA 2016 as amended by Mission Council in 2017: a 60% weighting for membership and a 40% weighting for number of churches. However, there is a question of what vacancy rate is added to decide the target number of pastorates in each Synod at any particular time. Hitherto, this has been a 10% rate, but it is clear from the small number of available pastorates on the Vacancy List that using predicted numbers of available ministers plus 10% does not allow for sufficient flexibility in the movement of ministers, especially given the reduced total number of ministers and the time-consuming challenges of organising calls to pastorates that now rarely involve only one congregation. The result is a frustration for Synods, and disillusionment from ministers, some of whom are looking outside the denomination for ministry. Therefore, upon taking advice from Finance, Ministries target figures for 2022 and beyond will become predicted figures of available ministers plus 20%, thereafter known as target figures. This would give a vacancy list which allows for the movement of ministers, as well as a positive message to ministers who are disillusioned by the lack of available pastorates that there is movement.
- 4.5 Ministries will continue to use the best latest available data to make predictions about likely future target numbers for Synods to assist forward planning. It is very clear that it only takes one crisis (the pandemic) to make data fluctuate very quickly. Therefore, any attempt to predict beyond a four-year point becomes meaningless when issues such as pensions and early retirements are beyond

our control. Therefore, upon taking advice from Finance, Ministries target figures produced from 2022 onwards will have a rolling four-year planning horizon. To avoid decisions being based on unreliable data, the Ministries Office will no longer attempt to suggest numbers more than four years ahead.

4.6 The Ministries Office will monitor the new figures closely.

5. Ministry in post-pandemic times

5.1 Post-pandemic, churches have emerged to find themselves with an even bigger role in helping people to move forward to 'normal'. Community hubs have always been, and will always be, key places of comfort and refuge in times of crisis. In the midst of change are our dedicated ministers of Word and Sacraments, Church-Related Community Workers, Locally Recognised Worship Leaders and Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, Elders and lay folk, who have risen to the challenge and embraced new ways of being church as we tackle the current crisis.

5.2 Ministries does not underestimate the toll this has taken on many in our churches, acknowledging they will need to find further support and resources to maximise what they can offer communities at this critical time of recovery. Ministries Committee therefore urges those involved in ministry to take advantage of the resources available to them through the denomination.

5.3 Pastoral Supervision has been a lifeline for many ministers who have engaged in it. A light touch review has taken place, with a new and updated policy coming for information to General Assembly.

5.4 Inflation has been at an unprecedented level in 2022, with food and heating costs rising at an alarming rate. Ministries, through the MOM Committee, has been working with Finance and the General Secretariat to find ways of alleviating any hardship.

5.5 Ministries commends the Churches Ministerial Counselling Service support to ministers and their families: www.cmincs.net

6. Thank you

The work of Ministries could not be achieved without the expertise and commitment of the volunteers who make up the Ministries Committee and its sub-committees. Our thanks go to those who will have retired from our committee since General Assembly last met: Martin Camroux, Sam Elliot and Jenny Sheehan. This is the last General Assembly with Paul Whittle as Convenor. Paul's commitment to the Ministries Committee over the past six years, in shaping and supporting the variety of ministries within the United Reformed Church and all the policies and processes that entails, has been unstinting, and we are indebted to him for his care and wisdom in guiding the Ministries Committee in its valuable work.

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. It is responsible for supporting the Church-Related Community Work ministry and programme

under the terms agreed in the Church-Related Community Work covenant. This includes the accreditation of churches-in-community.

Convenor: Paul Dean

Joint Secretaries: Nicola Furley-Smith, Steve Summers

Members: Tim Clarke, Ann Honey, Marie Trubic, Bill Gould (convenor of the assessment board from 2019), Rob Moverley, Dave Herbert (Synod Moderator), Paul Whittle (convenor of Ministries Committee)

1. Introduction

This is the first report of Accreditation sub-committee (CRCW and SCM). The bringing of the two committees together has not been without its challenges, but it has allowed a pattern of closer working practice between the ministries of CRCW and Special Category Ministries.

2. Certificates of Eligibility

2.1 Ministries Committee is responsible to General Assembly for oversight of the projected number of ministers for future years, and for deciding each year, on the basis of those projections, whether certificates of eligibility for both stipendiary and non-stipendiary service may be issued to ministers of other denominations. Such a certificate grants eligibility to receive a call to service in a pastorate or post.

2.2 During the period since last General Assembly there were 19 applications. Six Certificates of Eligibility have been issued in the past 12 months to ministers from the Presbyterian Church of Korea (1), Reformed Church in Zimbabwe (1), United Church of Christ (1), Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (3), and one certificate has been cancelled.

3. Certificates for Limited Service

3.1 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.

3.2 One new certificate has been issued in the last year (Richard James Wood), and three have been renewed or extended (Duhyun Joshua Han, Ian Bloomfield, Julia Elizabeth Bartholomew), and one certificate has been closed because of retirement (Julia Elizabeth Bartholomew).

3.3 For a period of three years (2021-2023), part-time certificates of limited service will not be counted against a Synod's deployment target.

4. Special Category Ministries

4.1 The number of special category ministry (SCM) posts currently stands at 18, with only one post as yet unfilled. Since last General Assembly, there has been one application, which is currently being considered. The Korean Bridge Ministry, Brighthelm, Bristol Korean Church and Saltaire Community Chaplain posts ended. Three SCM posts have been approved for a further term. The committee recognises that Synods are under pressure regarding deployment, which may have resulted in some initial enquiries not meeting the SCM criteria.

- 4.2 It was agreed by Mission Council in 2014 that the number of SCM posts (full-time equivalent) should not exceed 8% of the total number of stipendiary ministers available. This means, at the moment, that there is a limit of 19 FTE SCM posts.
- 4.3 As mentioned by the Church Life Review report to Assembly Executive in November 2021, the SCM scheme will be reviewed, and Terms of Reference are being drawn up.

5. **CRCW**

- 5.1 The number of accredited church-in-communities currently stands at 17, with three posts in vacancy. Since last General Assembly, there has been one application which was approved. Four churches-in-communities have been approved for a further term. The Sheffield Manor accredited post has ended.

6. **The Roll of Ministers of Word and Sacraments**

Admission to the roll of Ministers of Word and Sacraments (from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022).

- 6.1 By ordination and induction: Jonathan David Hill, Adam Mark Woodhouse.
- 6.2 By transfer from other churches: Margaret Nilanajana Ali (Church of North India), Angela Barker (Churches of Christ, Australia), Sujeeth Sampath Kumar (Church of South India) and Ryan Paul Simons (UCC).
- 6.3 By changes within the Roll of Ministers: None
- 6.4 Deletions from the roll by resignation and/or transfer to another denomination or by the disciplinary process: None
- 6.5 Re-admission to the Roll: None

7. **Jubilee Ministers**

Celebrating 70 years of ordained ministry in 2022: None

Celebrating 60 years of ordained ministry in 2022: John William Stewart Clark, Michael Graham Dunford, Donald Wakefield Elliott, Robert James Ellis, Geoffrey Herickx, John Johansen-Berg, Peter Stanley Killick, John William McCrum Miller, Donald L Pines, John Patrick Reardon, John Robinson, Malcolm Shapland, Dorothy Constance Spence.

Celebrating 50 years of ordained ministry in 2021: Susan Kathleen Armitage, Peter Chave, Kathryn M Compston, Jonathan George Dean, Lionel G Jameson, Charles Stephen Martin, Anthony Ronald Ruffell, Brenda Kay Stephenson, John Alexander Stewart, Kevin Patrick Swaine, Pamela Ward.

8. **Retired Ministers**

Ministers who have retired from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022:

Bryan Michael Alderson, Mark Ambrose, David Robert Bedford, Richard Adam Bittleston, Peter Graham Blackband, Colin George Bones, John Miller Campbell, Peter Thomas Clark, James Frederick Coleman, Siân Elizabeth Collins, Samuel Cyuma, Graham Herbert Dadd, Christine Mary Davies, Ruth Dillon, Helen Margaret Drummond, Derrick Dzandu-Hedidor, Richard Eastman, Malcolm Fife, Lynn Fowkes, Roy John Fowler, David Carey Harkison, Elizabeth Anne Kemp, Steven Rowland Knapton, Pauline Frances Main, Gary Stuart McGowan, Colin

Phipps, Kathryn Margaret Price, Raymond Sewananda Singh, Alan John Spence, Colin Peter Thompson, Caroline Helen Vodden, Elizabeth Jane Weedon, Martin Wheadon, David Edwin George Whiting.

9. Church-Related Community workers
Roll of Church-Related Community Workers Admissions to the roll of Church-Related Community Workers (from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022).

9.1 By commissioning: None

9.2 Deletions from the roll by resignation and/or transfer to another denomination or by the disciplinary process: None

10. Roll of Assembly-Accredited Lay Preachers

10.1 The following have received Assembly accreditation between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2021 as a result of having completed a URC course of study or having prior accreditation from another denomination.

04 Yorkshire Chris Mannall

05 East Midlands Maggie Kirkbride

07 Eastern Tina Wilson, Alison Jiggins

10.2 Deletions from the Roll of Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers by resignation, removal and / or transfer to other Churches from 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022: Derek Roger Marsh, Kenneth Ousbey, Helen May Pengelly, John Frederick Shaw, Elizabeth Warrington.

10.3 Lay Preachers Retired from 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022: Roger James Allen, Elizabeth Barnes, Reginald Brian Richard Cockerell, James Reiach Fells, Elizabeth Patricia Fletcher, Philip John Fowles, Constance Mildred E Garrett, Doreen Margaret Hampson, Elaine Harrison, Kathryn Hodkinson, Gordon Campbell McCallum, Guy Stuart Morfett, Jeffrey Newall, Margaret Judith Nicholson, Pauline Jane Oakley, Magnus Ramage, Stephen Geoffrey Smith, Peter Vince, Lindsay Williamson.

Assessment board

Convenor: Bill Gould (3)

Secretary: Nicola Furley-Smith

Members: Liz Mullen (2), Keith Reading (3), Jamie Kissack (4), Dan Morrell (4), Samuel Silungwe (5), Mark Tubby (7), Gerald England (8), John Danso (10), Mercy Namako (10), Bridget Akinyombo (10), Jan Adamson (13), Liz Sharples

1. The flow of candidates

Since the 2021 report, two Assessment Conferences have been held (November 2021, March 2022). After a period of virtual conferences, these were in-person Assessment Conferences in the traditional format. Overall, 14 candidates were considered by the Board, of whom 13 were accepted. Most of these candidates will begin their EM1 training programme in September 2022. However, because of the portfolio nature of their training format, the NSM4 candidates in November were able to formally enter the training programme in January 2022.

Date of Conference		No. of Candidates	Number accepted
November 2021	CRCW	0	0
	Stipendiary Ministry	2	2
	Non-Stipendiary Ministry	0	0
	Non-Stipendiary Ministry 4	2	2
	Transfer from NSM 1-3 to NSM 4	1	1
TOTAL		5	5
March 2022	CRCW	1	Moved to NSM 4
	Stipendiary Ministry	3	3
	Non-Stipendiary Ministry	3	3
	Non-Stipendiary Ministry 4	2	2
TOTAL		9	8
GRAND TOTAL		14	13

2. Training activities

While much of the ministerial formation in the RCLs was of necessity online during 2020 and 2021, the Board has affirmed that all ordinands must be exposed to, and assessed in, at least some in-person format in the course of their EM1 programme, even if it means some delay in completion of the originally prescribed programme, as direct personal involvements must remain a long-term characteristic of any ministry.

3. The Board convened the annual assessment interview training consultation, attended not only by new Assessment Board members (one in 2021), but by synod representatives to satisfy the considerable needs for appropriate training for Synod and local panel members who consider possible candidates earlier in the assessment cycle (18 in 2021). The consultation further strengthens the links between the Board and Synods. This consultation in-person was resumed in November 2021 after a lockdown-necessitated break of one year, again facilitated by the Revd Mary Thomas and, for the final time, the Revd Peter Henderson, to whom many thanks are due. There was also a training session in June for Board members on neurodiversity awareness.

Maintenance of the Ministry sub-committee report

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

Convenor: David Coote

Members: David Gartside, Jean Wyber, Richard Nunn (convenor of pensions committee), Paul Whittle (convenor of ministries committee), Vaughan Griffiths (assistant treasurer)

1. The MoM subcommittee meets twice a year, but conducts much of its business by email as and when a decision is called for concerning stipends or allowances for individual ministers.
2. **Plan for Partnership**
Our main role is to interpret the Plan for Partnership, and to agree such changes as we consider necessary. When situations are referred to us that do not exactly fit the terms of the Plan, we try to apply the Plan fairly and reasonably. The situation is considered carefully, and can lead to amendments to the Plan; sometimes it is decided that the Plan is adequate, or might need a small clarification to make what is intended clearer. Since our last report, changes have been made to the Fixed Car Allowance to take care of a possible situation where a minister/CRCW is unable drive, and is being driven about. There have also been some small tweaks to wording for clarity.
3. **Stipend Increase**
Our proposed for the stipend increase each year is based on a formula using the consumer price index (CPI). When the formula was applied in 2021, the CPI increase was 1.5%, producing a recommended stipend increase of 3.0%.
4. **Long-term sickness absence**
We continue to monitor and improve our care for ministers who, having been on sick leave for six months, have come to the end of their entitlement to full stipend. We know that these can be stressful times for those involved, and we do sometimes have painful decisions to make, but we strive to bring wisdom and compassion to the judgments that are entrusted to us. The past couple of years have thrown up some interesting dilemmas, including Covid-19, and which sometimes added to those difficult decision we have to make. We are grateful for the work of Mary Steele in the MoM office, who pays the stipends, monitors the sickness cases and brings to our attention when decisions need to be made, organises medical and moderator reports, and deals with all the correspondence.
5. **Committee changes**
The committee has, since its last report, seen a change in membership, and there will be changes this time too, as a number of members finish their period of service. We would record our thanks to those who have completed service previously, or will complete their service this year. The above changes in membership of the committee coincide with the completion of the current convenor's time of service as well. This time of dramatic change caused the Ministries Committee to review the membership of the MoM committee, and in

the light of that review, proposed changes to the Committee's make-up .
The resolution from Ministries Committee covering those changes can be found in the main Ministries Report.

The Retired Ministers' Housing sub-committee report

Convenor: Paul Whittle

Secretary: Secretary for Ministries

1. The new committee continues to be the point of liaison between Ministries and RMHS on behalf of the URC and tenants, ensuring that all eligible members are adequately housed and supported in retirement.
2. To assist with a business plan for the next ten or so years, a survey was sent to 226 ministers aged 54 and over. Of these, 151 responded, and the results will help determine the likely need for RMHS properties.
3. The committee is also considering the formula for assessing contributions towards RMHS properties, especially in light of the new pension arrangements.
4. The seminar to promote good practice amongst ministers in making provision for retirement will not take place until after the pension provision has been agreed.
5. The committee is grateful to individual members, churches and Synods who continue to support our work, and especially those who remember RMHS in their wills.

Paper H2

The maintenance of the Ministry sub-committee

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Paul Whittle moderator@urcscotland.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	14. General Assembly adopts the new structure of the Maintenance of the Ministry sub-committee.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To change the membership of the sub-committee.
Main points	With all members of the sub-committee due to stand down at General Assembly, the opportunity has arisen to structure the committee in a different way so that the saving in personnel will ensure the continuity of what is a very important function in the life of the church.
Previous relevant documents	None.
Consultation has taken place with...	None.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

1. The issue

- 1.1 At GA 2022, all four members appointed by GA will stand down, having completed their term of office. In anticipation of not being able to find suitable persons to join the committee, Ministries was challenged to see if it could determine another way for the vital work of the sub-committee to be done.
- 1.2 Consideration was given to disbanding the committee altogether, but it was felt that the work of the committee was, on occasions, too detailed and technical to be placed into the main Ministries Committee meeting.

- 1.3 A further thought was to pass the functions of the sub-committee to the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee (PRWC), but that suggestion was disregarded as the PRWC is the place of last resort for stipend support, and needs to remain outside the business of the sub-committee to avoid conflicts of interest.
- 1.4 A more sensible response to the issue of 'staffing' the committee is for the MoM sub-committee membership to revert to the position as it had been prior to the present committee structure, the rationale being the saving in personnel whilst keeping the continuity of what is a very important function.

2. Membership

2.1 The current membership of the sub-committee is as follows:

- Convenor (appointed by GA)
- URC Honorary Treasurer
- Convenor of Ministries
- Convenor of Pensions Executive
- Up to four other members, appointed by GA to serve for four years
- The immediate Past, Present and next Moderators of GA, and the General Secretary are *ex officio* members, but rarely attend meetings
- The Secretary for Ministries Committee and the Payroll Manager are in attendance.

Minutes are normally taken by a member of the sub-committee.

2.2 The new membership of the sub-committee would revert to the 'officers' of Ministries:

- The Convenor of Ministries (who would convene)
- The Secretary for Ministries
- The DGS (Discipleship).

Plus

- The URC Honorary Treasurer
- The Convenor of Pension Executive
- The Payroll Manager would be in attendance.

To facilitate the change in personnel and to assist in maintaining the functions of the sub-committee, it is suggested that the current convenor extends their term (until GA 2023), and convenes for one year to oversee the transition.

- 2.3 At present, the convenor of the MoM sub-committee is also an *ex officio* member of the URC Minister's Pension Fund and, therefore, a Trustee and Director as well as a member of the Pension Committee. Because of the discussions surrounding the change to the Pension arrangements, the current Convenor has indicated they are willing to attend these until GA 2023. This would give time for us to work out whether either of these roles are required.

Ministries Committee

NB. The Secretary for Ministries is in attendance for that part of the Pensions Committee which deals with the Ministers' Pension Fund.

3. The functions of the sub-committee will remain unchanged.
4. Meetings will be held on Zoom.

Paper H3

Pastoral supervision update

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Paul Whittle moderator@urcscotland.org.uk
Action required	None.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	An update on pastoral supervision for ministers.
Main points	To update General Assembly with changes made to the policy, and to give statistics of how many ministers have engaged with pastoral supervision to date.
Previous relevant documents	URC Pastoral Supervision GA 2020 (resolution 25).
Consultation has taken place with...	Synods.

Summary of impact

Financial	None (money allocated in budget).
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

1. Introduction

The policy for Pastoral Supervision (Mission Council July 2020) stated that the Ministries Committee would liaise with Synods to monitor progress regularly during the implementation period, and recommend any additional actions necessary to promote pastoral supervision further. An interim review has taken place.

2. Statistics

It is clear from the review that engaging in pastoral supervision was not a high priority for some ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers during the pandemic. For others, it offered invaluable support during a difficult time, and Ministries has received a good number of positive comments about engaging in a practice which gave a regular, intentional and bounded space. To date, 159 ministers have engaged in pastoral supervision, which is 26.5% of the total number of active ministers in categories 1-4. As of writing, two Synods have not responded. Pastoral Supervision should be in place by 31 July 2023.

3. Outcomes of the review

3.1 Affiliation

The 2020 policy cited the lack of available accredited pastoral supervisors, yet required ministers to engage with a pastoral supervisor with accreditation to APSE (Association for Pastoral Supervision and Education) and BACP (British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy). Practicalities of available and suitably qualified pastoral supervisors dictates that:

- 3.1.1 the Association of Christian Counsellors is included in the approved list;
- 3.1.2 there is the need to build up an approved list of URC trained pastoral supervisors;
- 3.1.3 the request to use a pastoral supervisor from any other body would need prior approval from the Synod Moderator.

3.2 Training URC pastoral supervisors

- 3.2.1 To meet 3.1.2, Ministries has set up a scheme to train URC pastoral supervisors through the established scheme at Wesley House, Cambridge, taught by the Revd Bill Mullally, Wesley House, Cambridge, and the Revd Rick Mearke, Director of Ministerial Formation at Westminster College, Cambridge.
- 3.2.2 Two Taster Days to learn about becoming a pastoral supervisor were held in September 2021 and January 2022.
- 3.2.3 The first cohort embarked on the course in November 2021. A second course was due to take place in March 2022, but was cancelled because of participants having Covid-19 prior to the course beginning. It has been rescheduled for June 2022.
- 3.2.4 The course has been funded by Ministries. The course is for URC ministers and lay people only.
- 3.2.5 It is expected that ministers and lay folk will not charge for pastoral supervision of URC ministers, and will pastorally supervise no less than six ministers per month when fully qualified.

4. Online pastoral supervision

While General Assembly expects all ministers to have six sessions per annum, Ministries had originally required that half those sessions would be in person. The pandemic meant that this was not possible. While the ideal would be all six sessions in person, Ministries accepts that effective pastoral supervision can be done online. This will also help with the capacity issue in some areas. There is, therefore, now no requirement for in person supervision, though some such sessions are encouraged.

5. Claiming for pastoral supervision

It is still hoped that the local pastorate sees the value of pastoral supervision for their minister and will pay the full cost or, failing that, at least 50% of costs. However, those pastorates which cannot afford the cost may apply for their reimbursement from Ministries. A claim for reimbursement can be made via the Ministries Office in the December of each year.

6. Additional sessions

A question has been raised as to whether a minister have more than six sessions. Funding for further sessions would need to be borne by the pastorate.

Paper H4

URC Confidentiality Policy

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Paul Whittle moderator@urcscotland.org.uk
Action required	To agree the reworded paragraph on prayer support, and the additional wording on references and use of multimedia platforms such as Zoom as requested at Assembly Executive, November 2022.
Draft resolution(s)	15. General Assembly accepts the additional wording on references and use of multimedia platforms such as Zoom as requested at Assembly Executive, November 2022.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Assembly Executive agreed the policy at its meeting in November 2022, but asked for the inclusion of two further paragraphs on references and use of multimedia platforms. This version of the policy has also tidied up the wording on prayer support, after taking legal and compliance advice.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	URC Confidentiality Policy as agreed at Assembly Executive November 2021 (paper H1).
Consultation has taken place with...	URC Legal Adviser URC Compliance Officer.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

1. Assembly Executive agreed the URC Confidentiality policy at its meeting in November 2021, but asked for paragraphs to be inserted on writing references and the use of multimedia platforms.
2. Assembly Executive spent a great deal of time deliberating the wording for prayer support. After further consultation with both the URC Legal Adviser and the URC Compliance Officer, 5.5 of the policy offers new wording as follows:

5.5 Prayer support

In the instances of vocalised prayers during a church service, prayers written in books, hung on prayer trees, and passed on to prayer chain networks, several things must be taken into consideration to ensure compliance of data protection law. Below is an outline of what local churches should consider when offering prayer support to the congregation.

5.5.1 Where an individual might reasonably expect and welcome prayers from the local church, it is not necessary to obtain their consent for processing prayer requests on their behalf. The local church must be able to justify processing an individual's health data (ie having a legitimate reason where health information is shared during prayers). Prior to disclosing information about an individual's health, consideration must be given to the sensitivity of the information, and the impact on the individual and their family if that information was publicised (for example, information about a terminal illness, where it would be expected that expressed consent is sought).

5.5.2 Where there isn't a legitimate reason/interest for processing an individual's health data, it may be advisable to either:

- pray for the individual by mentioning their name only, and nothing else (on the basis they might reasonably expect and welcome prayers)
- pray about the illness, without making mention of the individual (ie anonymisation); or
- try to obtain expressed consent from the individual, as health information is sensitive personal data. Where the individual is unable to give expressed consent, consent can be sought from family members, as they will be able to decide on behalf of the individual.

5.5.3 When processing an individual's personal information, please consider the following, in accordance with the UK GDPR.

- Data minimisation – what is the minimum information needed for a person and their health condition to pray for them?
- Data security – how much personal information is provided verbally, printed, or disclosed in various networks?
- An individual's right of objection – how does an individual get themselves removed from the prayer list/tree, and what would that entail?

5.5.4 When a minister, a Locally Recognised Worship Leader or an Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher invites topics for intercessory prayers, it's vitally important that the individual understands nothing can be shared about them without their expressed consent. However, information that is already in the public domain about someone being prayed for can be shared with others because it is accessible to all. Information publicly known cannot be given personal data protection rights under data protection laws.

3. 5.6 relates to writing a professional reference:

Information given in a reference is usually based on the suitability of an individual for a specific role, as described in a job description and/or person specification. It should be an accurate assessment, to the best of knowledge and

understanding, as to whether the candidate has the qualifications, skills and aptitudes to do the job as described.

As a referee, you owe the subject of the reference a duty to take reasonable care to ensure the information it contains is true, accurate and fair, and does not give a misleading impression. Any opinions should be supported with facts.

It is advisable to avoid referring to any matter relating to any of the protected characteristics mentioned in the Equalities Act 2010 (eg the primary reason for not disclosing information about health record is to avoid any potential claim for discrimination on grounds of disability).

Under the current data protection legislation, individuals are not entitled to access a confidential employment reference written about them. To refuse disclosure, the reference should clearly state that it is confidential, intended for the attention of the recipient only, and that the author does not give permission for it to be disclosed to the subject. With the foregoing statement, the reference would not be accessible to the candidate. That said, any reference being freely given on request should not contain within it any information that you, as the referee, would not stand by.

4. 1.8 of Appendix 2 now reads:

1.8 **Virtual conferencing platforms**

Virtual conferencing platforms (such as Zoom, Lifesize and Teams) are approved software tools for conducting remote/virtual meetings. This document provides basic guidance on how to protect your privacy and the privacy of others when using Zoom:

1.8.1 **Visibility of remote work locations**

Participants should use the platform's virtual background feature, when available, if they do not want to have their surroundings visible.

1.8.2 **Screen Sharing Privacy**

- **Protecting confidential data on your device from being viewed:** Avoid sharing confidential information visible on your other screens. Before screen sharing, close all applications, emails and documents that you will not use in that session.
- **Managing whose screen is visible:** Default settings should be set to limit screen sharing to the host. The host can also allow screen sharing by participants. The host can select the "host only" setting to prevent others from sharing their screens. If the host determines that screen sharing by participants is needed, sharing by "one participant at a time" should be selected. The host should remind participants not to share other sensitive information during the meeting inadvertently.

1.8.3 **Managing participants**

Some basic tips for preventing unwanted attendees or 'bombing' are listed below:

- Don't post meeting IDs in public forums

- Don't reuse meeting access codes. You can generate a new access code for each meeting
- Set a password for the meeting
- Monitor participant list for unwanted attendees
- Set up a waiting room function.

1.8.4 **Zoom recordings**

When recording a meeting, choose Record to the Cloud, and the video, audio, and chat text are recorded in the Zoom cloud. Prior to you recording a meeting, you must obtain consent from all meeting attendees. The recording files can be downloaded to a computer, or streamed from a browser. Recordings can also be password-protected, restricting their visibility to selected people. Cloud recordings allow you to record the meeting in multiple different recording layouts, including active speaker, gallery view and shared screen, and can be configured with a variety of cloud recording storage options. If a meeting host enables cloud recording and audio transcripts, both will be stored encrypted.

1.8.5 **Retention period**

Zoom cloud recordings are retained for 180 days. Any recordings older than 180 days (from the recording date) will be deleted from Zoom's cloud storage service. It is advisable that meetings are downloaded and stored on your servers, in a secure folder, if you wish to retain them longer than 180 days. The onus will then be on you to ensure that you only keep recordings in accordance with your local retention schedule period.

Paper 11

Reinvigorating the ecumenical vision of the United Reformed Church

Mission Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary (Mission) philip.brooks@urc.org.uk Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of URC Mission Committee slanecawte@gmail.com
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>16. a) General Assembly affirms that Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) continue to be central to the ecumenical mission and vision of the United Reformed Church.</p> <p>b) General Assembly reminds Synods and local churches that joint or ecumenical members of LEPs have always been and remain members of the United Reformed Church, not just those who were members of the URC at the formation of the LEP.</p> <p>c) Recognising that the approaches to ecumenism are different in England, Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man, and the Channel Islands, General Assembly affirms the new <i>lighter touch</i> forms of ecumenical co-operation contained in the Churches Together in England documents, <i>A Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission</i> and the accompanying <i>Toolkit</i> and encourages the creative use of these resources.</p> <p>d) General Assembly instructs the Mission Committee to consult with the Ministries Committee, to consider ways in which resource and scoping for LEPs and Ecumenical Areas can be targeted, to address the under-resourcing of our ecumenical commitments at a local level and to report back with recommendations to the 2023 General Assembly.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To reinvigorate the ecumenical vision of the United Reformed Church.
Main points	A review of the place and importance of local ecumenical partnerships to the United Reformed Church. A call to build awareness of new, creative and lighter touch models of ecumenical co-operation

Previous relevant documents	Review of ecumenical relations, November 2011 Mission Council. A Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission (and the accompanying Toolkit), Churches Together in England.
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission Committee; Faith and Order Committee; Ministries Committee; Ecumenical Reference Group; Synod Moderators; the Clerk to General Assembly; members of the Law and Polity Group; Methodist/URC Liaison Group; Baptist, Church of England and Methodist National Ecumenical Officers.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	If the resolutions are adopted, this will demonstrate our continued commitment to ecumenical co-operation at a local level. The report has received positive affirmation from ecumenical partners.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The 50th anniversary of the formation of the United Reformed Church invites the question as to whether this should be a moment to celebrate or lament. The coming together of the Presbyterian and Congregational churches was seen as the start of a process of further unions. We were not expected to be in existence 50 years later.
- 1.2 This ecumenical fervour was not confined to the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists. The URC’s first General Assembly was held at Westminster Methodist Central Hall in the presence of the Archbishop of Canterbury (Michael Ramsey), and the inaugural service took place at Westminster Abbey.
- 1.3 The URC was brought into existence by Act of Parliament, which was only passed at the end of a hotly debated session in June 1972. The prominent Conservative MP and Roman Catholic Norman St John Stevas, who eventually became Leader of the House of Commons in Margaret Thatcher’s time, summed up the ecumenical hope embodied in the formation of the URC: ‘This must be seen as part of a wider move for Christian unity, not only of Congregationalists and Presbyterians coming together, but of Methodists and Anglicans... and Roman Catholics... We are moving into a new era... This is a small stone, admittedly, but a stone of great importance in a new edifice. Let those who are committed to the Christian religion get on with the work of unity to which they are commanded by their Founder.’¹
- 1.4 At the time of union, Arthur Macarthur, former Presbyterian Church of England General Secretary and first URC General Secretary (joint), sounded a note of caution. He warned that without the much-anticipated move to a wider unity with other denominations, ‘Any union between the Congregational Church and the Presbyterian Church would result in a united church *confused* about its purpose and unable to find a role.’²
- 1.5 In the light of the *confusion* which did arise from not having achieved our founding purpose, the 50th anniversary year of the URC would seem an appropriate point

to reinvigorate our ecumenical vision. Now, 50 years on, how do we remain true to our ecumenical DNA, enshrined in the statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church? These are the words we repeat at every ordination and induction service: *We affirm our intention to go on praying and working with all our fellow Christians, for the visible unity of the Church in the way Christ chooses...*

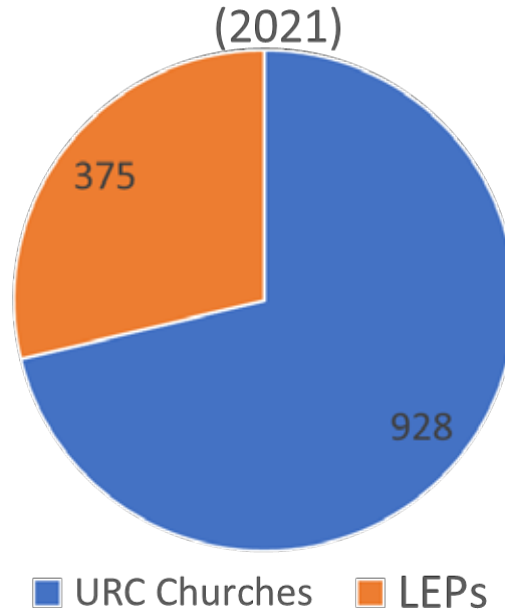
2. Conversations along the way

- 2.1 The last review of URC ecumenical relations was written in the run-up to the denomination's 40th anniversary.³ It was adopted by the November 2011 Mission Council.
- 2.2 The report was the result of a comprehensive process of consultation involving Synod Moderators, Synod and denominational ecumenical officers, members of Synod ecumenical committees and regional ecumenical bodies. The consultation was joined at various points by General Assembly staff, and convenors and members of General Assembly committees, such as Faith and Order.
- 2.3 A decade on, many of the issues raised by the Mission Council report are still more than relevant to the current context.
- 2.4 This review will pick up on two specific aspects of the 2011 report, namely **Local Ecumenical Partnerships** and **new forms of ecumenical co-operation**.

3. Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs)

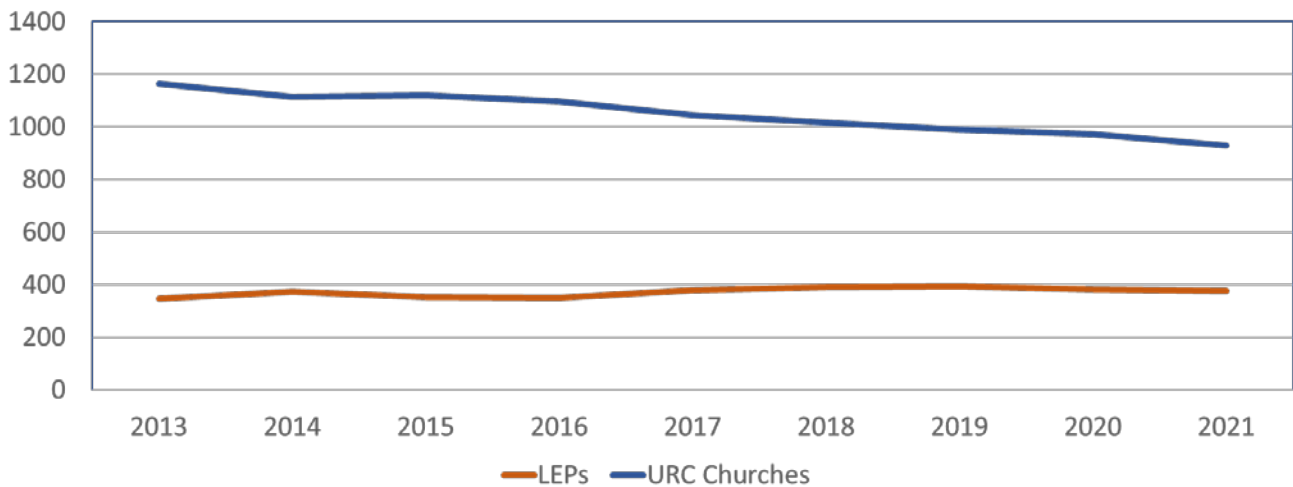
- 3.1 The 2011 Mission Council report affirmed LEPs as *the heartbeat of the ecumenical movement at a local level. At their best LEPs challenge denominations to push the boundaries of ecumenical engagement*. It recommended the creation of new LEPs *out of a sense of mission and purpose* but made it clear that LEPs are **not a lifeboat strategy for dying congregations**.
- 3.2 Despite this positive affirmation, the last decade has seen a neglect of LEPs within the denomination. There have been complaints about their complexity (acknowledged in the 2011 report); a marked reduction in the scoping of ministry for LEPs; and a feeling that either our identity in LEPs has been lost, or the 'URC element' (in terms of members identifying with the URC) has diminished to such a point as to warrant our withdrawal.
- 3.3 There may be a perception that LEPs are complex, with accompanying concerns about the lack of URC identity, but LEPs remain the bedrock of the denomination statistically. The diagram underlines that, in 2021, LEPs represented close to one-third of the total number of our churches.

Proportion of URC Churches to LEPs



An analysis of the URC annual returns for the period 2013 to 2021 reveals that, in contrast to the 20% decline in the number of purely URC local churches, over the same period the number of LEPs grew by 8%.

Decline in URC Churches versus LEPs



- 3.4 Given that LEPs make up such a large proportion of our churches, why do they not feel to be the *heartbeat* of the denomination?
- 3.5 One of the factors is the way we count the URC element of membership in LEPs. Historically, the URC has only recorded a proportion of *ecumenical* or *joint* members in the annual count. In many cases, churches only count the *residual* URC membership, meaning those URC members registered at the inception of the LEP, and who identify solely as URC.
- 3.6 In an established LEP, joint members will usually represent the largest proportion (if not all) of its membership roll. It is an ecumenical principle that joint members are regarded as full members of all the participating denominations. Our

Methodist and Baptist colleagues include **all** joint members in their annual statistics, as opposed to the URC situation where, at best, only a proportion are included and, at worst, none.

- 3.8 This leads to a substantial undercount of the size and relevance to the denomination of our LEPs. At the last available count, we recorded that the average number of members per URC local church was 35, whereas the average per LEPs was just 21. By comparison, the Methodist Church (our closest LEP ecumenical partner) record LEP average membership as 47.
- 3.9 The undercount influences the way we deploy our ministers. To calculate the quota of stipendiary ministers per Synod, the weighting in percentage terms is based on the following ratio: number of members 60, number of churches 40. Put simply, if a Synod has a large number of LEPs and significantly understates the membership in those churches, then the calculation of the proportion of stipendiary ministers for that Synod will be lower than it should be. This, in turn, means that the Synod is more restricted in its ability to provide ministry for these LEPs, and increases the potential to lose URC identity, as well as diminishing the sense of connectedness.
- 3.10 Where an LEP is seen as having minimal URC presence (ie very few identifiable URC members), the tendency is for Synods to divert scarce resources elsewhere, or even to question their involvement at all.
- 3.11 The largest proportion of LEPs are Methodist/URC partnerships. The structured nature of the Methodist Circuit system means that these LEPs will always retain close links to Methodism. URC Synods cover much wider areas, and so their task is harder. For those Baptist/URC LEPs, which have the local resources to pay for their own minister, there is a frequent tendency to opt for Baptist ministry to be able to have one minister for one church, as opposed to a part minister who has to look after a multi-church pastorate. All of the above means that the Synod actively needs to work harder at the relationship with its LEPs.
- 3.12 There is one further factor, which can heighten the sense of separation between the Synod and its LEPs. In the halcyon days of intermediate or county level ecumenism, the denominations delegated the oversight, particularly in terms of regular LEP reviews, to what were termed *sponsoring bodies*. Often, the role of the *sponsoring body* was written into the LEP's constitution. This led the denominations to feel (wrongly) that LEPs were separate to their own structures. In a climate where *sponsoring bodies* and county level ecumenism has, in many areas, simply disappeared or is completely under resourced, this has left a vacuum. In fact, oversight of LEPs was always the responsibility of the parent denominations.
- 3.13 The URC also operates ecumenically through Methodist/URC Ecumenical Areas (sometimes called United Areas). These Ecumenical Areas were set up to share resources between Methodist and URC local churches across areas within Synods. In a sense they are akin to LEPs, but on a much broader scale. Their vision was one of genuine local unity, but many of these Ecumenical Areas are suffering from a lack of resource and clarity of oversight in terms of their constitutional framework. One Ecumenical Area is currently examining how a *lighter touch* model of ecumenical working (as outlined in Section 4 of this report)

could provide an appropriate framework for their mission together, and free them from the difficulties of drafting more complicated constitutional arrangements.

3.14 The irony of these practical issues is that the URC, as the denomination historically most committed to structural unity, both nationally and locally, appears to be the least able to respond to the oversight and nurturing of its LEPs.

3.15 The URC Faith and Order Committee contributed significantly to the work of this report, and offered this summary: *In the light of the URC's 50th anniversary, it is time to revisit the principles which were so important to us 50 years ago, namely ecumenism and unity. The Faith and Order Committee endorses the encouragement to return to these core values. While the past 50 years have not moved us nearer to structural unity, we can see this ethos being expressed in our LEPs. We encourage all the councils of the church, including General Assembly, to ensure the URC becomes a positive and significant part of LEPs again. Such an affirmation of LEPs would be a restatement of our ecumenical vision.*

4. New forms of ecumenical co-operation

4.1 The 2011 Mission Council ecumenical report anticipated a substantial review of ecumenical working which would be overseen by Churches Together in England (CTE), to which the URC was a substantial contributor, as part of the working group tasked with the review.

4.2 The CTE review recognised that ecumenical co-operation did not always need to be framed by establishing LEPs. There are many situations where 'lighter touch' governance models can be used to free up the sharing of resources for mission.

4.3 The first consultation document was issued by CTE in March 2015, and received both a warm welcome as well as some criticism, in many cases from denominations not involved in LEPs. The working group radically revised the document in the light of responses received. They issued a further consultation document and then, in 2016, *A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission* was launched. In April 2019, recognising the document was no longer new, this was changed to the current version, *A Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission*.⁴ Former URC General Secretary, and then CTE General Secretary, David Cornick described it as *one of the most significant practical ecumenical documents of our time*.

4.4 Importantly, *A Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission* offers agreed models of ecumenical co-operation which do not require the setting up of separate legal entities with requirement for complicated constitutions. Constitutional agreements remain part of *Flexible Framework*, but are only intended for the situations where substantial resource sharing is required.

4.5 To help with the interpretation of *Flexible Framework*, during lockdown 2020 the URC, Methodist, Baptist and Church of England national ecumenical officers (building on work from the county ecumenical officers) produced a *Toolkit* to accompany *Flexible Framework*. The *Toolkit*⁵ (designed and published by URC Communications) outlines a process in which churches can select the most appropriate agreement for their joint working. It is a *significant* and *practical* way of enabling local ecumenical co-operation in the lightest touch way possible, while also ensuring that churches are aware of their responsibilities.

- 4.6 Although developed by Churches Together in England and its member churches, *Flexible Framework* is a model of ecumenical working that can be applied beyond the English borders. While local approaches to ecumenism are contextual, *Flexible Framework* has the potential to facilitate initiatives in Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man, and the Channel Islands.
- 4.7 There is a further means of ecumenical co-operation introduced by URC Ministries in 2021, which brought in a change to the system of providing certificates of limited service. It is now possible for a minister of another denomination to take a 50% or less appointment in a Synod without that post being counted against their deployment figures. The ecumenical sharing of ministry brings the advantage of deployment taking place in more localised areas. As the overall number of ministers reduces in all denominations (this an issue shared by all our ecumenical partners, and is not limited to the URC), we face the situation that ministers are stretched across wider geographical areas. If ministry could be scoped ecumenically, this would allow for more local concentration, as happens in the ecumenical county of Cumbria.

5. Summary

- 5.1 In our 50th anniversary year, there will be the inevitable questions about whether we have failed in our ecumenical endeavours. To an extent, this is an unfair critique. Not only did we achieve a successful union between Congregationalists and Presbyterians, but in 1981 the Churches of Christ joined the URC, followed by, at the turn of the millennium, the Congregational Church in Scotland. As can be seen by the endorsement of ecumenical partners at our inception in 1972, the dream of full structural unity was not limited to the Presbyterians and Congregationalists. If there is a failure, then it is a collective one across the wider church.
- 5.2 While full structural unity might not have been achieved, we have still shown our commitment to ecumenism by the fact that we, the smallest of the historic denominations, have consistently shown a willingness to unite at local level. We have a greater proportion of LEPs, in relation to our overall size, than any of our ecumenical partners.
- 5.3 Where some criticism might be attached, is the way in which we appear to have lost confidence in our LEPs, which surely should continue to be the *heartbeat* of the ecumenical movement and of the URC itself. The undervaluing and consequent under resourcing of LEPs deserves to be addressed. LEPs not only should have an important place in the URC, but in terms of their potential they, along with new and more flexible ecumenical ways of working, offer a genuine answer for the denomination's mission at a local level as we look to the next 50 years.
- 5.5 The resolutions to General Assembly reflect a commitment to reinvigorate our ecumenical vision.

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Paper I2

Environmental Policy

Mission Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of Mission Committee slanecawte@gmail.com Rob Weston, Convenor of Environmental Task Group tavistockurcminister@gmail.com Simeon Mitchell, Secretary for Church and Society simeon.mitchell@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>General Assembly:</p> <p>17. a) Resolves that urgent action should be taken to reduce carbon emissions across the whole of church life, with the aim of reaching net zero emissions of greenhouse gases by 2030.</p> <p>b) Adopts the Environmental Policy in Part 2 of this paper, and <i>instructs</i> the committees and bodies under its control, and <i>encourages</i> associated bodies (including Trusts, the Retired Ministers Housing Society, and Resource Centres for Learning), Synods and local churches to adopt as a minimum the practices it sets out.</p> <p>c) Instructs each Assembly committee to develop a Net Zero Action Plan for its area of responsibility, and set and monitor targets for implementing this policy, reporting by March 2023, and annually thereafter.</p> <p>d) Establishes a Net Zero Task Group with membership of one Synod Moderator, one member of the Finance Committee, one representative of the URC Trust, the Secretary for Church and Society, the Deputy General Secretary (Admin and Resources), a representative of URC Youth, a Synod Property Officer, and a Synod Green Apostle. The group's remit shall be to:</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. oversee progress in implementing this policy and report regularly to the Assembly Executive and General Assembly 2. identify, advocate for, and where possible put in place any additional resources, support and expertise that are needed to implement this policy across the Church 3. engage with Assembly committees around their Net Zero Action Plans and support them to develop them further 4. encourage and facilitate the sharing of experiences across the Church, including celebrating achievements.
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Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The Environmental Policy seeks to enable the Church to respond in faith to the urgency of the climate emergency by setting out an ambition for the URC to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2030, and putting in place plans to achieve this.
Main points	Caring for Creation, a just and sustainable use of the world’s resources, and a concern for the environment are fundamental Gospel commitments. This paper reviews developments and progress since the URC’s current Environmental Policy was adopted in 2016, and proposes an updated Environmental Policy, with more ambitious targets for carbon reduction, that is embedded more fully in the life, priorities and structures of the Church. It sets out actions to reduce carbon emissions across the whole of church life, including in relation to travel, meetings, buildings, and how investments and resources are used.
Previous relevant documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Policy for the United Reformed Church (adopted by General Assembly in 2016, updated by Mission Council in May 2019) • Creating a climate of change: a new approach to ethical investment (Mission Council, May 2019) • Environmental Policy progress review (Mission Council, July 2020).
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission Committee, Synod Moderators, General Secretariat, Synod Green Apostles network, URC Youth Executive, Church House Connective group, Chief Finance Officer, Methodist Action for Hope Task Group.

Summary of impact

Financial	Adoption of some of the recommended practices, such as carbon offsetting for travel and energy use, will incur some additional expenses for central budgets, but others such as increased use of videoconferencing rather than physically meeting in person will save money. Work to make our buildings
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	more environmentally efficient can be costly, but these will be decisions for Synods and local churches to make in response to the policy, rather than a direct cost of the policy.
External (eg ecumenical)	Seeking to rapidly reduce the carbon footprint of the Church is a necessary response to the climate crisis. Adopting a 2030 target for reaching net zero emissions would align the URC with close partner denominations, including the Church of England, the Methodist Church, and the Church of Scotland.

The URC's current Environmental Policy was adopted by General Assembly in 2016, and slightly updated in 2019. This proposed updated version is presented by the Environmental Task Group established in 2016, following wide consultation over the last year.

This paper is in two parts. Part 1 sets out the background to the policy: its theological and Biblical basis; developments, learning and progress since the present policy was adopted in 2016; and the rationale for the proposals that follow. Part 2 is the proposed updated Environmental Policy.

Part one: background and rationale

1. Theological and biblical basis

- a) As a Church, we affirm that care for Creation, a just and sustainable use of the world's resources, and a concern for the environment are fundamental Gospel commitments.
- b) We believe that:
 - God created, and continues to create, the whole universe, sustains and nurtures Creation, and wills to redeem the whole of Creation (Romans 8:19-22).
 - the reconciliation of all things to God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus cannot be separated from God's act of creation: that all things have been created through Christ and for Christ – the Word of God incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth – and that, through Christ, God was pleased to reconcile to Godself all things by making peace through the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:16-20).
 - creative and redemptive work also belongs to the work of the Spirit, who swept over the face of the waters in the beginning, and who inspires a groaning Creation as it awaits redemption.

We acknowledge God the Trinity to be the transcendent and immanent source, sustenance and salvation of all Creation.

- c) We acknowledge humanity's interdependence with the rest of Creation, and that the flourishing of humankind cannot be separated from the flourishing of all life. We believe that God calls human beings to live in relationship with the rest of Creation, and to be partners in God's ongoing creative, renewing and redeeming

activity; commands us to act justly and in righteousness not only towards our fellow human beings, but to all Creation; and requires us to care for Creation so that future generations, whom God also loves, can enjoy it and benefit from it.

- d) We know that human activity is responsible for the degradation of the earth, increasing climate change, and a frightening acceleration in the loss of biodiversity. This cannot be the will of God. It is harming the web of life and the balance of nature, and imposing most heavily upon the poorest people in the world. We believe that knowingly to continue in such activities is a sin for which highly industrialised nations must repent, seek forgiveness and make restitution.
- e) We acknowledge our complicity in the sinful structures that are causing wanton damage to Creation, perpetuating injustice, and delaying action to change direction.
- f) We affirm that it is part of Christian mission to strive to safeguard the integrity of Creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth. This involves acknowledging humankind's responsibility, sharing in putting right the relationships within God's Creation that have gone wrong, and working within the Church and with partners outside the Church to pursue justice and sustainability, as envisaged in the biblical vision of the world as it is meant to be. As the Glasgow Multi-Faith Declaration of 2021, to which the United Reformed Church is a signatory, affirms, 'We know that we must change our ways to ensure a quality of life which all can share, and we need to provide hope for people of all ages, everywhere, including future generations.'
- g) We commit to:
 - listen to and intercede for those threatened by climate change and environmental degradation
 - adopt sustainable lifestyles and practices that are consistent with our concern for Creation
 - campaign for change in areas where we need governments and corporations to act.

In doing so, we seek to work towards a restoration of relationship between humanity, Creation and the Creator.

2. Progress to date

- a) Since the last Environmental Policy was adopted by General Assembly in 2016, there has been significant progress to celebrate. A full progress review was carried out and reported to Mission Council in July 2020, and there has been further progress since then. Highlights include:
 - More than 300 local URC churches – more than 20% of the total – have now enrolled in the Eco Church and Eco-Congregation programmes. By the start of 2022, 93 of these had achieved Bronze awards, 38 Silver awards, and three churches had achieved Gold awards

- All Synods in England and Wales are now working towards Eco Synod status, with the West Midlands the first to achieve its Bronze award in March 2021, and at least one active Green Apostle has been appointed in each Synod
 - Assembly Committees have all considered their environmental responsibilities, and a number have developed specific plans in this area, notably the Education and Learning Committee's Environmental Charter
 - Mission Council has agreed resolutions on divestment from investment in fossil fuels (May 2019), single use plastics (November 2020) and recognising the climate emergency (July 2020)
 - Most URC bodies have now divested from investment in fossil fuels
 - Environmental issues have been the subject of much discussion in *Reform*, at Synod and committee meetings, and in other forums around the Church. Much of this would not have been possible without the involvement and leadership of young people.
 - The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated take-up of, and familiarity with, video-conferencing, and many meetings and events are now happening online, with a reduced travel footprint. In July 2021, General Assembly passed a resolution encouraging this shift to online meetings.
 - An enormous body of resources and initiatives has been developed to support local churches and other bodies in their environmental activities, the principal ones of which are listed at www.urc.org.uk/greenerchurch
- b) However, as the 2020 progress review concluded: 'There is a huge variety of levels of engagement with, enthusiasm for and knowledge of environmental concerns across the Church. Some incredible work is going on, but others have not yet actively engaged with these issues... and it has not provided evidence that the URC is yet doing enough to fulfil its environmental commitments. Progress overall is piecemeal and really only just starting in many areas. That provides a challenge to us all.'
- c) While in 2016 an Environmental Task Group was established to 'encourage and assist the United Reformed Church in the implementation of its Environmental Policy and commitment to reduce its carbon footprint', an ongoing challenge has also been about how to ensure mutual accountability for fulfilling the commitments set out in the policy.
- 3. Scientific and political developments: 'code red for humanity'**
- a) Since 2016, there has also been ever-growing evidence and understanding of the urgency of the climate crisis. In August 2021, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's sixth assessment report warned that climate change was now widespread, rapid and intensifying, and that, unless there were immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, it would be difficult to limit global temperature rises to 1.5°C, or even 2°C, above pre-industrial levels, with potentially catastrophic consequences. The UN Secretary-General António Guterres characterised the situation as 'code red for humanity'. Our partners and

neighbours in the global south also continue to bear witness to increasing climate impacts.

- b) Alongside climate change, there is also increasing awareness of the extent and threat of pollution and biodiversity loss. In 2019, an intergovernmental panel of scientists said one million animal and plant species were now threatened with extinction. A 2020 report found global populations of mammals, birds, fish, amphibians and reptiles had plunged by 68%, on average, since 1970.
- c) While there has been growing political acknowledgement of the importance of tackling the climate emergency, and to a lesser extent biodiversity loss, practical and policy responses still fall short in many areas. In the UK, in 2019 a '2050 net zero emissions' target was set in law, and in April 2021 the UK Government committed to cut carbon emissions 78% from 1990 levels by 2035. However, as the government's own independent Climate Change Committee has highlighted, there has so far been a significant gap between the pledges the government has made and the action it has taken to meet them. Internationally, while COP26 in Glasgow in November 2021 resulted in a number of significant new commitments, it ultimately failed to unequivocally support this higher ambition with the funding and policy changes needed to respond meaningfully to the magnitude of the emergency that we face.
- d) It is notable that the most prophetic action and pressure for change around environmental concerns continues to come from non-governmental sectors of society, individuals and communities, including faith groups. Ahead of COP26, faith leaders, including the Moderators of General Assembly on behalf of the URC, committed in the Glasgow Multi-Faith Declaration to 'making transformational change in our own lives and in the lives of our communities through individual and collective action'.

4. Setting the necessary ambition: net zero emissions by 2030

- a) The proposals and policy below arise from our theological understanding, our assessment of recent scientific and political developments, and our reflections on progress since 2016.
- b) We believe the time is right for the United Reformed Church to set a target and develop plans to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030 at the latest, building on current progress and the plans already in place. This would follow the lead set by a number of Synods, and bring the URC into alignment with the net zero target recently set by a number of other denominations, including the Church of England, the Methodist Church, and the Church of Scotland.
- c) Why 2030? If global warming is to be kept to 1.5°C, the budget for further emissions into the atmosphere is very tight, and it is therefore vital that societies, especially developed industrial ones like the UK, manage the transition to low carbon economies as early as possible. Global carbon dioxide emissions need to

be about halved by 2030 to have a good chance of keeping global warming within 1.5°C. While the UK government has set a net zero target of 2050, the independent Climate Change Committee, which advises government on its climate plans, has said that ‘the 2020s must be the decisive decade of progress and action on climate change’. Change must also be front-loaded; we cannot wait until the end of this period to bring our emissions to zero.

- d) How do we define ‘net zero’? It would be possible to define it in ways that cause minimal inconvenience – such as by allowing the purchase of large amounts of carbon offsets to compensate for continuing with carbon-emitting activities – but that would not be the right thing to do (even though it is currently how the UK government intends to reach its target). It would be unjust for those with sufficient wealth to ‘buy’ their way to net zero by offsetting without addressing the actual cuts in carbon emissions that are needed. However, we also need to recognise that we cannot separate ourselves from the infrastructure, habits or technology of the world we live in. As well as doing all we can to achieving net zero emissions by 2030, we need to push for stronger and faster government action in these areas, and use carbon offsetting as a last resort.
- e) While a net zero target may seem ambitious, practically it would have a huge impact if all churches switched to renewable energy, every congregation and synod was engaging with the Eco Church or Eco-Congregation programme, plans were in place to improve the environmental performance of buildings in the Church’s care, funds were not invested in fossil fuels, and there was carbon offsetting of necessary travel and unavoidable fossil fuel energy use. Widespread adoption of these practices over the next eight years would get us a lot of the way to net zero.
- f) The Environmental Policy below sets out the detailed steps we can and should take across the Church to achieve our net zero ambition, alongside our broader environmental concerns. It includes many commitments the Church has already made, but develops them further in key areas.

5. **Accountability, resourcing and support**

- a) The updated policy seeks to embed an environmental agenda more fully in the life, priorities and structures of the Church, and ensure mutual accountability for progress, recognising this is a responsibility that is shared across the Church. The policy therefore asks each part of the Church – local churches, synods, and Assembly committees – to develop plans for reaching net zero, appropriate to their role and context, and to be accountable for their implementation. The resolutions also propose the creation of a Net Zero Task Group, with representation drawn from across the Church, to oversee and report on progress, facilitate sharing and learning, and identify common support needs. This would replace the current Environmental Task Group, whose term of mandate expires in July 2022.
- b) As we consulted on the draft of this policy, a key question was about what resources and support would be necessary to enable the implementation of our

environmental commitments across the Church. In many areas, the policy builds on work that is already underway, or can be built into this, and needs no additional resourcing. For local churches, the Eco Church and Eco-Congregation Scotland schemes provide excellent advice and resources, alongside the further resources and tools recommended at www.urc.org.uk/greenerchurch. Synod Green Apostles and others are also able to provide more tailored advice and encouragement, and share expertise and experience across the Church.

- c) However, one area where it was identified that more specific support would be beneficial was around buildings, which represent the largest proportion of the URC's carbon footprint. There is a need for reliable, bespoke, professional advice about making environmental improvements to property – around energy efficiency measures, what is possible in listed buildings, switching heating systems, procurement advice, how to get EV chargers installed, etc. Recent major increases in energy costs only make this work more urgent and vital. One possibility we considered for responding to this need would be the appointment of a national environmental advisor or retained consultancy firm, but we recognise that this is not a time to add to the central demands on the M&M Fund. A number of Synods are considering the appointment of specialist property advisors, and we would encourage that, though it would be a matter of regret if this provision was only possible in the better-off Synods, and if the learning and advice were not available to the whole church.
- d) We would also urge relevant bodies to refocus or redirect existing funding resources (eg property grant schemes) to support environmental initiatives.

Part two: Environmental Policy for the United Reformed Church

1. Purpose

It is our intent, as a body of people committed by our faith to caring for God's Creation, and who recognise the urgency of the climate emergency, to:

- integrate our concern for environmental issues into the whole of our church life
- act urgently to reduce carbon emissions across the whole of church life in order to reach net zero emissions of greenhouse gases by 2030
- use the earth's resources wisely
- enjoy, protect and where possible renew the natural environment
- protect and increase biodiversity.

2. Implementation

Because of the urgency of the climate emergency, the focus for this policy is on reducing carbon emissions across the whole of church life. The most significant contributors to the URC's carbon footprint are travel, buildings, energy use, and how investments are used. We will therefore adopt as a minimum the following practices:

3. Targets and monitoring

- Calculate and track the carbon footprint of key activities (such as energy use of buildings, travel and transport, and meetings)
- Develop and implement an action plan for making annual reductions in this carbon footprint in order to reach net zero emissions by 2030.

4. Meetings

- a) Consider meeting physically less frequently, and making greater use of video-conferencing
- b) Assess the environmental policies and credentials of the venues used for meetings and events
- c) Prioritise the accessibility of meeting locations for public transport.

5. Travel and transport

- a) Consider the necessity and benefits of all travel with regard to its environmental impact
- b) Give preference to using lower-carbon modes of transport, and offer incentives for doing so
- c) Introduce a carbon budget for international travel, with planned annual reductions
- d) Establish the principle that for travel undertaken within Europe, the default option should now be to travel by train, unless there is a compelling reason not to do so
- e) Bodies which are requiring or funding any travel on behalf of the URC should also cover the costs of offsetting the associated carbon emissions through an appropriate scheme (consult the URC website for recommended ways to do this).

6. Buildings

- a) Build environmental assessments into quinquennial surveys of buildings
- b) Investigate and, where possible, improve the levels of energy efficiency and environmental performance of buildings, including insulation, glazing, ventilation and heating and cooling systems, through refurbishment or replacement
- c) Ensure any buildings purchased have an Energy Performance rating of C or above, or are upgraded immediately after purchase to achieve this rating
- d) Implement measures to reduce energy use
- e) Support the generation of renewable energy – either on our own buildings or by investing in and cooperating with local community projects
- f) Choose green energy tariffs, from suppliers investing in new renewable energy generation, and pay to offset the carbon emissions of any unavoidable use of fossil fuels.

7. Investments¹

- a) Not invest in fossil fuel companies whose total turnover is more than 10% derived from the extraction and/or supply of fossil fuels, including thermal coal, natural gas and oil

¹ These provisions reflect the Church's current agreed Ethical Investment guidelines

- b) Where possible, play a proactive role as investors, by engaging further with companies whose activities foster significant carbon emissions, for example the electricity and automotive industries, and producers of energy intensive products (eg cement)
- c) Support investment in renewable energy and clean technologies.

8. Use and disposal of resources

- a) Reduce the use and consumption of unsustainable resources
- b) Work towards eliminating the use of single-use plastics, given their significant environmental impact
- c) Support and promote the reuse and recycling of materials
- d) Dispose of waste in ways that minimise its impact on the environment
- e) Reduce consumption of intensively produced meat and dairy products, and other food with a high carbon footprint.

9. Worship, teaching and education

- a) Ensure that those serving and being prepared for service in the church are cognisant of the global and spiritual context of the climate crisis, as well as the response required by our faith
- b) Compile, promote and use resources for worship and teaching related to environmental themes
- c) Provide, promote and use resources and campaigns that support churches and church members to reduce their environmental footprint.

10. Advocacy

- a) Advocate for action by government, industry and others to foster a deep, rapid and just transition towards a net zero carbon economy
- b) Urge the UK government to set targets and establish policies that will ensure a rapid reduction in greenhouse gas emissions so that net zero is achieved by well before 2050
- c) Campaign with others at local and national level for policies, targets and actions that take steps towards realising these goals
- d) Advocate for global climate justice and international financing mechanisms to be put in place to enable mitigation, adaptation and compensation for loss and damage.

11. Synods and local churches

The General Assembly of the United Reformed Church also:

- a) Endorses and supports the **Eco Church** and **Eco-Congregation Scotland** programmes
- b) Encourages **Synods in England and Wales** to
 - develop and implement plans to progress through the Eco Synod² award levels, which involves includes adopting an environmental policy, having a certain number of Eco Churches in the Synod, considering the

² See ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/eco-synod

environmental impact of buildings, land and investments, and embedding environmental issues in the life of the synod.

- encourage and support local churches to achieve Eco Church status and progress through the award levels, celebrating successes and sharing stories.
- appoint and empower one or more 'Green Apostles' to act as champions for the issue and offer support across the synod.

- c) Encourages the **National Synod of Scotland** to make equivalent commitments, working with Eco-Congregation Scotland.
- d) Encourages **local churches in England and Wales** to achieve Eco Church status³ and progress through the award levels, which involves considering worship and teaching, management of church buildings and land, community and global engagement, and supporting members to look at their lifestyles.
- e) Encourages **local churches in Scotland** to register and become members of Eco-Congregation⁴ and progress through the award levels, which involves looking at the broad areas of spiritual living, practical living and global living.

³ See www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk

⁴ See www.ecocongregationscotland.org

Paper I3

Korea Peace Appeal

Mission Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of URC Mission Committee slanecawte@gmail.com
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>18. a) General Assembly affirms its support for a lasting peace settlement to end the Korean War and instructs the General Secretary and Moderator to sign the Korea Peace Appeal on its behalf.</p> <p>b) General Assembly commends the Korea Peace Appeal and urges Synods, local churches, and individuals to sign the Korea Peace Appeal in solidarity with ecumenical partners in Korea.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Garnering support for the Korea Peace Appeal, seeking a Peace Treaty to formally end the Korean War.
Main points	The Korean War ended in June 1953 with the signing of an Armistice, but a formal end has never been declared. Deep divisions remain between North and South Korea, compounded by the influence of external forces. The Korea Peace Appeal is a worldwide effort to secure 100 million signatures by June 2023 – the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Armistice – in support of a formal Peace Treaty as a step to bringing lasting peace to the Korean peninsula. Members of the URC are encouraged to sign.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	National Christian Council in Korea (NCCCK); ecumenical partners in Korea; Church of Scotland; Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI).

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	The Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) is a close partner of the URC: the Revd Bo-Hyun Kim, former Special Category Minister serving the URC in Bristol, recently became the PCK General Secretary, reinforcing already close relationships.

	<p>A PCK lay-missioner and several Korean ministers are currently serving with us. The URC also has links with the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK).</p> <p>The URC has long participated in global ecumenical conversations involving the NCCK, World Council of Churches and CTBI, concerned with bridging relationships in Korea and the quest for peace.</p>
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1. The background

- 1.1 70 years ago, the Korean War was raging, ending in June 1953 with an Armistice. Nearly five million people died, more than half – about 10% of Korea's pre-war population – were civilians. Among the military casualties were 1,114 British soldiers.
- 1.2 The war entrenched the division of the Korean peninsula that separated up to 10 million families on either side of the 38th Parallel. The Republic of Korea entered 34 years of military rule, while the Kim dynasty in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) devised the Juche political doctrine that has led to isolation, widespread poverty, and human rights abuses, while at the same time enduring the harshest sanctions regime in the world. Meanwhile, South Korea pays \$1 billion annually for hosting 28,500 United States military personnel.

2. The proposal

- 2.1 At a webinar in January hosted by National Christian Council in Korea (NCCK) and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), churches in Britain were urged to support the Korea Peace Appeal¹ to bring about a Peace Treaty to formally end the Korean War, end sanctions against DPRK, and promote links between North and South Korea and sustainable peace on the Korean peninsula. NCCK is one of more than 370 civil society groups that include each of the country's seven faith communities campaigning to end the Korean War by collecting 100 million signatures by June 2023, the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Armistice Agreement.
- 2.2 The Korea Peace Appeal – and the URC's engagement with and support for this campaign – is of great significance to our global partnerships. By passing the resolutions proposed, it will demonstrate our solidarity with these valued and long-standing partners.

¹ <https://en.endthekoreanwar.net>

Paper 14

Vision2020 report

Mission Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary (Mission) philip.brooks@urc.org.uk Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of URC Mission Committee slanecawte@gmail.com
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	19. General Assembly agrees to the establishment of The Mission Enabling Fund, overseen by Mission Committee, with the permission to provide small grants to local URCs, Synods and mission organisations, with the aim of pursuing the denomination’s mission priorities.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To evaluate the impact of Vision2020 .
Main points	Assessing the engagement with Vision2020, offering film testimony and data relating particularly to the period 2016-2020 To launch a new grants programme linked specifically to the mission priorities agreed by Mission Committee.
Previous relevant documents	Vision2020, planning for growth in the United Reformed Church – Report to General Assembly 2010.
Consultation has taken place with...	Local churches, Mission Committee, Finance Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	The funding is contained within existing budgets, namely the Legacy Fund.
External (eg ecumenical)	The relaunch of a mission grants programme will enable the denomination to reach out to local communities, in many cases involving ecumenical partners.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Vision2020 framework for mission was accepted by General Assembly in 2010. Its aim was to inspire and support mission planning at every level of the United Reformed Church. The framework was designed to create a context through which different levels of the Church could interrelate; it articulated a set of themes within which we could better understand our programmes and plans; and it was intended to provide something of a ‘route map’ to enable us to evaluate

better our journey as a Church. It was offered to the Church as a tool and a resource that could be applied in almost any situation, and it was hoped that over time Vision2020 would become a type of ‘covenant’ between every part of the Church that chose to work within its parameters.

- 1.2 At the centre of the Vision2020 framework is a set of ten statements of our mission and purpose, which describe the kind of denomination we hoped the URC to be in the future. These were:
- Spirituality and prayer
 - Identity
 - Christian ecumenical partnerships
 - Community partnerships
 - Hospitality and diversity
 - Evangelism
 - Church growth
 - Global partnerships
 - Justice and peace
 - The integrity of creation.
- 1.3 Each statement was accompanied by a series of ‘indicators’ – signs or signals of progress along the way. The key idea was that local churches would, on a regular basis, consider these statements, and then prioritise one or two, based on their context and their particular strengths and giftings. They were then invited to make local mission pledges – a short statement expressing their mission priority. Synods could then gather these to guide and direct their own mission planning, and Assembly could use the combined Synod priorities to give direction to its mission work and resourcing. See the *Book of Reports* from General Assembly 2010, pp153-169, for the full Vision2020 report.
- 2. Monitoring and evaluation**
- 2.1 The Vision2020 report states clearly the challenge to every council and committee of the church to work out the implications of the Vision2020 statements of mission purpose for its own work and context. In addition, it outlines ways for regular monitoring and review of how the development and implementation of Vision2020 was progressing. This would happen mainly through annual reporting to Mission Council, and evaluation at each General Assembly until 2020.
- 2.2 While initially there was regular reporting to Mission Committee, this tailed off after a few years. Regular reports from Synods were brought to the Mission Council in November 2011 and November 2013, but thereafter no reports were received. The November 2015 Mission Council, however, saw the first discussion of Mission Discipleship, which later became *Walking the Way, living the life of Jesus today*. The Walking the Way Steering Group regards the ten statements of Vision2020 as the ultimate outcomes of *Walking the Way*.
- 2.3 Mission Committee reported extensively on Vision2020 to the General Assembly in 2012 and 2014, and shaped its reports around the statements. In 2016 and 2018, there were still brief reports on Vision2020, but overall, the Mission reports were now shaped around the team’s areas of work rather than the ten statements. Gradually, the focus has shifted to *Walking the Way, living the life of Jesus today*.

- 2.4 Over the years, we have received very few local mission pledges from local churches, but we do know that there has been engagement with Vision2020 from personal feedback, Vision2020 grant applications and the *It Just Works* workshop which was held in 2015. For a number of years, we also received feedback from the Mission Enablers network about how their synods and local churches were engaging with Vision2020. However, here again the focus has moved to *Walking the Way*.
- 2.5 Now that the ten-year time frame has come to an end, how have we engaged with Vision2020, and what lessons can we learn for the future? How has the framework helped the URC in its mission?

3. Data gathered

Local churches: analysis of Annual Church Returns figures

- 3.1 The data we have about local church engagement with the Vision2020 statements is based on information gleaned from the Annual Church Returns (ACR). A Vision2020 question was asked on the ACR from 2016 onwards. These statistics show how many churches valued the Vision2020 framework in the latter half of the decade, during which time more than half of all our local churches identified Vision2020 priorities for mission.
- 3.2 In all, 97% of churches submitted ACRs during all or some of the years 2016-2020. Of those 1,389 churches, 799 (58%) identified Vision2020 mission priorities. The proportions in each Synod ranged between 70% and 48%.
- 3.3 'On a regular basis ... in a context of prayer and discernment ... churches are invited to identify one or two mission priorities which are particularly pressing or relevant to their context,' reminded a Vision2020 leaflet in January 2012. 'One of the marks of a healthy church is to do a few things and to do them well.' Actually, the churches that responded averaged between three and four priorities per year.
- 3.4 Nearly three-quarters of churches focused on Spirituality and Prayer and Church Growth for some period between 2016 and 2020, and more may well have done so earlier in the decade. About two-thirds of them focused on Community Partnerships. About a half identified Hospitality and Diversity, and Ecumenical Partnerships.
- 3.5 Nearly 40% worked on Evangelism; and from one-in-four to one-in-six churches on Justice and Peace, Identity, Global Partnerships and the Integrity of Creation. The numbers concentrating on community partnerships and global partnerships peaked in 2019, and integrity of creation in 2020, perhaps as those concerns grew in society, or as churches had covered other priorities earlier.
- 3.6 Here are the numbers of churches involved, across the whole church and in each Synod, taken from the ACRs from 2016-2020:

	Yearbook number of churches in 2016	Churches that returned ACRs in all or some of the period 2016-20	Churches that identified priorities for mission from Vision2020 2016-20	Vision2020 churches as % of those that returned ACRs
Whole URC	1426	1,389 ie 97%	799	58
Synods				
01	Northern	69	46	67
02	North Western	131	71	54
03	Merseyside	80	48	60
04	Yorkshire	97	61	63
05	East Midlands	131	66	50
06	West Midlands	115	80	70
07	Eastern	131	68	52
08	South Western	110	54	49
09	Wessex	131	77	59
10	Thames North	118	67	57
11	Southern	143	93	65
12	Wales	88	42	48
13	Scotland	45	26	58
Totals		1,389	799	

3.7 Looking at each church's returns over the five years, the number of churches that said they formally identified priorities for mission from Vision2020 has been counted, and so have the numbers that engaged with each of the Vision2020 statements:

Vision2020's ten statements from which churches were invited to identify mission priorities particularly pressing or relevant to their context	Churches that identified this priority for mission during the period 2016-20	% of the 799 churches that identified mission priorities from Vision2020 2016-20
1. Spirituality and prayer	586	73
2. Identity	177	22
3. Christian ecumenical partnerships	361	45
4. Community partnerships	518	65
5. Hospitality and diversity	438	55
6. Evangelism	306	38
7. Church growth	574	72
8. Global partnerships	141	18
9. Justice and peace	205	26
10. The integrity of creation	124	16
Churches which said on one or more ACR that they had formally identified priorities for mission from Vision2020	716	90

3.8 Many churches will have compelling stories to tell of the way in which God has moved amongst them and their communities through their engagement with the priorities of Vision2020. The lasting legacy will be the way in which churches will have benefited from experience gained in the Vision2020 strategic framework.

3.9 To highlight this impact, we have produced ten short films of particular examples. These bring to life the work of Vision2020 far more than any raw statistics. After General Assembly the ten films will be available on the URC YouTube Playlist 'Vision2020 Review' which can be accessed here:
[youtube.com/playlist?list=PLtV0WY0Q-tkK5TOzE9o1-7sISU1-PIRZe](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLtV0WY0Q-tkK5TOzE9o1-7sISU1-PIRZe)

4. Vision2020 grants

4.1 Since the beginning of the grants scheme (criteria approved in April 2010), we have given out £348,189 in grant funding. This is just under 70% of the budgeted £486,000 over the years (from the Legacy Fund).

4.2 We assigned the funds to 46 special one-off projects, 56 three-year developmental projects and, in the early years, six world church partners grants. A breakdown of grants given reveals that we supported the following kinds of mission projects:

Children's/ youth/ family	Practical/ physical/ creative*	Messy Church	Social/ community action	Sponsoring students	Overseas	Fresh Expressions	Other
13	29	7	24	2	11	4	18

* For example: mission notice board; mosaic on a boarded-up church door; community garden; art project.

Distribution of grants by Synod:

East Midlands	9	Southern	7
Eastern	8	Thames North	8
Mersey	5	Wales	8
North Western	12	Wessex	3
Northern	6	West Midlands	8
Scotland	5	Yorkshire	8
South Western	2	Other	19

4.3 Two types of grants were offered. Development grants operated over a three-year period at £2,000 per annum (as a maximum amount) and were open to any local URC, Synod, or wider mission organisation. One-off special project grants were awarded up to a maximum of £1,000, and were offered to any local URC. They could be used to start a one-off mission project, such as starting a Church Holiday Club, or helping fund a local week of mission.

4.4 A strict process was applied. Applicants had to respond to the following criteria:

- a) Address one or more of the ten Vision2020 statements
- b) Include a process of evaluation, monitoring and sharing of learning with the wider Church
- c) Demonstrate an element of collaboration or partnership
- d) Demonstrate the sustainability of the project
- e) Indicate what other sources of funding or voluntary/in-kind support are available for the project.

A local church, Synod or mission organisation could only apply for one grant per year, and any subsequent applications had to be for a different project. Any organisation or church already in receipt of URC Legacy funding was not eligible for a Vision2020 grant.

4.5 It is clear that local churches (as well as the wider projects funded by Vision2020) have very much appreciated the grants scheme. It has provided opportunities to undertake practical responses to the ten mission priorities of Vision2020, which have subsequently been embedded into *Walking the Way, living the life of Jesus today* and remain even more relevant to the present decade.

5. Conclusions and recommendation

5.1 Although the adoption of Vision2020 across our churches has not been universal, the data demonstrates that 799 churches have engaged with the ten mission priorities set in 2010 over the ensuing decade.

- 5.2 It is always difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of mission from data alone. The Gospel contains stories rather than statistics for good reason. For this reason, we hope the stories presented by the ten films present a snapshot of just part of the impact of the decade of Vision2020. Seeds have been sown, which will continue to bear fruit as a result of Vision2020.
- 5.3 It is encouraging to note that the mission priorities of Vision2020 were embodied into the outcomes of Walking the Way, which itself is moving into a new phase.
- 5.4 The mission priorities of Vision2020 (reference 1.2 of this report) continue to underpin the work of Mission Committee. To enable future success in addressing these priorities, central to the future mission of the denomination, it will be important for Mission Committee to have a continuing grants provision. The availability of small grants will encourage practical engagement in mission, against the backdrop of an extremely challenging start to this new decade.
- 5.5 The recommendation of this report therefore is that the grants scheme should be relaunched under the new name of 'The Mission Enabling Fund'. The new fund would operate to the same parameters as the Vision2020 grants scheme, providing a mission focus to the denomination. It will operate using existing funds of £40,000 per annum, already earmarked in the Legacy Fund. The proposal is that the scheme should operate for an initial five-year period, with a review to take place in 2027. Oversight and precise administration details will be under the auspices of Mission Committee. The proposal comes with the support of the Finance Committee. The resolution in this paper requests that General Assembly support the launch of the new 'Mission Enabling Fund'.

Paper I5

Walking the Way: final report to General Assembly

Walking the Way Steering Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Philip Brooks philip.brooks@urc.org.uk Adrian Bulley adrian.bulley@urc.org.uk
Action required	Everyone in the URC to continue working in accordance with General Assembly resolution 36 of 2021, using the plans detailed in this paper.
Draft resolution(s)	N/A

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To offer an overview of the success of <i>Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today</i> , highlight lessons learned, and share plans for longer-term discipleship development across the URC.
Main points	Looking back on its life thus far, <i>Walking the Way: Living the Life of Jesus today</i> has been, overall, successful as a focus on whole-of-life discipleship for the United Reformed Church, as well as revealed lessons to be learned. In the long term, this focus will truly be a responsibility of the whole Church. As the steering group and project manager prepare to complete their service earlier than hoped, a plan for further development, detailing the roles everyone can play, are included in an appendix.
Previous relevant documents	Mission Council 11/15 papers M1 and M2 Mission Council 03/16 paper M1 General Assembly report 2016, p.11 Mission Council 11/18 paper I2 Mission Council 11/19 paper I3 Mission Council 03/20 paper I3 General Assembly report 2020, p.195 Mission Council 11/20 paper M1 Mission Council 03/21 paper I4 General Assembly report 2021, p.166 Assembly Executive 11/21 paper I1.
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission Communications Education and Learning

	Children’s and Youth Work Finance.
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Summary of impact

Financial	Any financial needs for discipleship development in the URC will, in future, need to be covered through existing budgets and other sources of funding, such as the Discipleship Development Fund.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Consultation on whole-of-life discipleship with ecumenical partners continues, including with Churches Together in England, which is exploring ways to avoid duplication across member churches and organisations in formation for Mission and Discipleship.

1. This is not the end

1.1 *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today* is the long-term focus on whole-of-life discipleship devised by the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom (URC). It launched in November 2017, and has, until March 2022, enjoyed funding from the Mission Support Programme (MSP) of the Council for World Mission (CWM).

1.2 As MSP funding for *Walking the Way* reaches an end, and the steering group prepares to work in accordance with General Assembly resolution 36 of 2021 to relinquish its responsibilities, it is important to reiterate that this is not the end of *Walking the Way: living the life of Jesus today*, but rather the beginning of a new chapter of the journey in which responsibility for long-term discipleship development in the denomination moves firmly away from the steering group into the hands of the whole Church.

1.3 General Assembly resolution 36 of 2021 states that the steering group and project manager will complete their service by the end of 2022. However, the acceptance of the project manager, Mr Simon Peters, for training for the Ministry of Word and Sacraments, along with decreased capacity in the Mission Team and increased workload in the Discipleship Team, mean that both will, realistically, need to complete their service by July 2022, meaning that this will be the final report of this nature from the Steering Group.

1.4 This paper seeks to share some of the successes of *Walking the Way* thus far, some of the lessons to be learned, and some of the plans for longer-term discipleship development in the denomination, which everyone involved with the denomination has a part to play in. A detailed plan can be found in the appendix.

2. Things have gone well

2.1 Looking back on *Walking the Way: living the life of Jesus today*, as it has developed over the years, the steering group notes that:

- a) *The concept of Walking the Way has been received well among whole-of-life discipleship supporters.* Individuals and groups across the URC who are invested

in the concept of God being present in all aspects of everyday life, and are seeking to respond to that presence meaningfully, tend to support the efforts of the steering group. Even if they do not themselves use the branding or resources that *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today* promotes, they are still willing to keep in contact, and share stories and resources on discipleship more widely across the denomination. Given that a key objective of *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today* is collaborative working towards whole-of-life discipleship being a priority across the URC, this has been especially welcome.

- b) *Simple resources which can be used in the context of everyday life are useful and popular.* Despite the global Covid-19 pandemic slowing orders throughout 2020, substantial numbers of orders and requests for information have come in subsequently, as individuals and groups from across the URC have come to use these resources as a means of shaping their response, as disciples of Jesus, to the many struggles of the pandemic. Whole-of-life discipleship is clearly a helpful focus in highlighting the ways in which people can be the presence of Jesus, living the life of Jesus today in these strange times.
- c) *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today has provided an identity, catalyst and/or focus for bespoke resources/approaches.* Every synod in the URC, as well as Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs) and key Church House offices (including Children's and Youth Work, Ministries, Education and Learning, Church and Society, Ecumenical and interfaith and Global and Intercultural Ministries), have something significant, at least in their short to medium-term plans, on whole-of-life discipleship. Some have appointed specialist staff or ministers to help explore discipleship, while others have created or promote existing resources to support congregations on their discipleship journey. It is clear in each case that *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today* has played some role in inspiring or shaping these approaches.
- d) *There is sustained support for network gatherings.* Contacts representing synods, RCLs and other networks across the URC have continually taken up opportunities to share news, experience and good practice through regular online gatherings. This indicates a continuing interest in whole-of-life discipleship amongst those who are responsible for its development across the denomination, as well as a willingness to work collaboratively on this.
- e) *Stepwise continues to grow.* As more local groups participate in the Stepwise programme from Education and Learning, more people become confident in all that this discipleship learning programme has to offer, and are, as such, more willing to recommend the experience to others. This growing enthusiasm is also reflected by many of the synod Training and Development Officers, as well as Mission Enablers, from across the URC.
- f) *Accompaniment for discipleship continues to be an important need.* Following the success of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC) accompaniment programme in Southern Synod, which has been reported in previous General Assembly and Mission Council/Assembly Executive papers from the steering group, the synod has decided to run the accompaniment

programme with the LICC again, at its own cost. Churches in Mersey Synod, which have just commenced the accompaniment programme with the LICC, seem excited to continue this journey. Other synods have also expressed their appreciation for the LICC's resources, alongside others such as 'Holy Habits' resources and the 'Leading Your Church into Growth' programme which, in their own ways, walk alongside churches in their exploration of whole-of-life discipleship at a grassroots level. Wide support for, and use of, such resources, indicates a continuing need for accompaniment and mentoring for individuals and churches on their discipleship journey.

3. Lessons to be learned

3.1 Alongside successes, the steering group remains aware that:

- a) *Still not everyone understands the discipleship message.* Because of longstanding difficulties in communications between the 'centre' of the organisation and local communities, caused by a mix of gatekeepers, lack of joined-up thinking and scepticism (see below), it has been hard to share the message of *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today* as widely across the URC as originally hoped. Even when communicated well, the message itself, namely that the long-term focus of the organisation should be supporting people in living out their faith in everyday life, is a difficult one in itself to digest, as the initial response tends to be to ask 'Isn't that what we do already?' In a sense, it is, in that the denomination seeks to put worshipping God, and the shaping of our lives around God's Mission, first and foremost. However, not everyone has been given the opportunity to consider what this actually means for them in the workplace, at school, with friends, in social clubs, in pubs, looking after children, and everywhere else they might be in the course of their lives. This is a big step for many, and one which will take them as individuals, never mind a whole denomination, a very long time, using many different strategies and tools, to truly take on board. Hence, the long-term holding of whole-of-life discipleship as a priority for the denomination is especially important.
- b) *Branding can be confusing.* The branding of *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today* is evidently easier to digest than the concept of 'missional' or 'whole-of-life' discipleship, and offers a nice banner under which to hold everything to do with everyday discipleship. However, it was clear from the outset that this was not to be a programme or initiative, and having its own branding makes it look like a programme or initiative. As such, the steering group has received, and continues to receive feedback from local churches saying that they do not feel able to participate in *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today* because they are already doing too much, rather than seeing what they are already doing as fitting in with *Walking the Way*, because it is a focus, not a programme in its own right. In future, this will have to be made clearer so that everyone feels able to review everything their doing under a discipleship lens without feeling that this is in competition to anything else.
- c) *Overcoming the perception of conflicting priorities can be challenging.* Connected with this point is the idea, that in order to do discipleship, you need to give up other priorities. This is simply not the case, but must be made clearer.

- d) *There is much resource/programme/project fatigue.* Connected again is the fact that many are simply fed up of Church programmes and initiatives, of which there have been very many over the years, and anything that looks like a Church programme or initiative, including *Walking the Way*, has not always been received well as a result. It is hoped that *Walking the Way's* main legacy, namely a long-term focus on discipleship which reaches across everything the denomination does, will help to alleviate this.
- e) *There is much scepticism/apathy.* The fact alluded to above, that there have been so many programmes and initiatives in the Church over the years, all with varying levels of success but most ending up petering out with little legacy, means there is much scepticism or apathy shown towards anything coming from so-called 'central' Church, whether that be from synods or Church House. *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today* has been no exception.
- f) *There is a need for stronger relationships/collaboration/transferability of approaches to discipleship.* Every success that *Walking the Way* has enjoyed has come from the strength of relationships across different parts of the Church's life and work, which has enabled more collaboration on different resources and events, as well as general good practice. The building and maintenance of such relationships will be unspeakably crucial in developing *Walking the Way's* long-term legacy.

4. **There is more work to be done**

- 4.1 As the steering group prepares to complete its work, it offers a plan in the appendix for the longer-term development of whole-of-life discipleship within the denomination, detailing the role everyone can play. Support for this plan will be offered by the Deputy General Secretaries for Mission and Discipleship.

5. **Thank you**

- 51 As this phase of the United Reformed Church's focus on whole-of-life discipleship transitions into the next, it is important to give thanks for all that has been.
- 5.2 From the outset, the former Deputy General Secretaries, the Revd Richard Church and Ms Francis Brienen, were central in establishing both vision and strategy for *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today*. For that, the steering group expresses its warmest gratitude.
- 5.3 The Revd Elizabeth Gray-King and Mr Simon Peters have both provided project management support to *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today*. The steering group is grateful for all their work.
- 5.4 Warmest gratitude is also expressed to all current and former members of what has become the Walking the Way steering group, as they have offered advice and direction to this focus as it has grown and developed.
- 5.5 Finally, a huge thank you to the United Reformed Church itself for commitment it continues to show in developing whole-of-life discipleship. May the Holy Spirit continue to guide us all, as we Walk the Way, and live the life of Jesus today.



Walking the Way Steering Group Targets for 2022

Background

A disciple is one who seeks, in partnership with others, to recognise and respond to God's presence in every aspect of their life. Put at its simplest, God is there, in everything we are, think, say and do, no matter what age, abilities, background or status we may hold. Being a disciple is about figuring out what to do about that, with help from God and our fellow followers. In terms of discipline in a Christian context, there is much to say about moulding ourselves, individually and collectively, to be more Jesus-shaped, holding each other to account as we journey together. The United Reformed Church's long-term focus on whole-of-life discipleship is truly a responsibility of the whole denomination, including individuals, local congregations, synods, and General Assembly, with some strategic support from the Deputy General Secretaries for Mission and Discipleship.

Primary objective

The whole URC to understand what needs to be done about General Assembly resolution 36 of 2021, and to act on them.

Resolution 36 of 2021

In affirming that whole-of-life discipleship is the primary long-term focus of the United Reformed Church, General Assembly:

- a) requests that those reviewing the future of the URC, as agreed by Mission Council in March 2021, take full account of the importance of whole-of-life discipleship.
- b) instructs the Walking the Way Steering Group to continue its work until the end of the calendar year 2022, whereupon the work of the group in supporting the embedding of whole-of-life discipleship across the denomination will be continued by the Deputy General Secretaries for Discipleship and Mission.
- c) asks those responsible for the finances of the Church to find ways to continue the role of Walking the Way Project Manager until the end of the calendar year 2022. The Project Manager should focus firmly on embedding the whole-of-life discipleship ethos of Walking the Way across the denomination, working closely with the Deputy General Secretaries for Discipleship and Mission in collaboration with the Walking the Way Steering Group, whilst it is in place.

- d) invites all committees and groups connected with the life of the United Reformed Church to hold the whole-of-life discipleship ethos of Walking the Way at the heart of their work.
- e) instructs the Walking the Way Steering Group, through the Project Manager, and in collaboration with other Church House staff, to develop a range of resources and relationships to better embed the whole-of-life discipleship ethos of Walking the Way across the Church.
- f) welcomes collaborative work across the Church to facilitate and resource the whole-of-life discipleship ethos of Walking the Way across the Church's life, work and witness.

Target	Steps to take (what needs to happen for target to be met?)	Who is responsible for each step?	Indicator of process – what will the goal look like when it's complete?	When will this step be achieved by
Individual	It is vital to note that the whole purpose of this plan is to help EVERYONE involved with the URC, in any capacity, understand and take up their own responsibility for living out their faith in discipleship. No one is exempt. Everyone must play their part, otherwise no one else will be able to benefit from the gifts and talents which God has given them. As such, everyone is encouraged to be aware of this plan document, and play their part in making it happen.			Throughout 2022
Local church	Every church member to know that God is present in their lives and consider their own discipleship journey All congregations to demonstrate at least some awareness of or engagement with whole-of-life discipleship All congregations to demonstrate at least	Provide a wallet/prayer card in everyone's hands. Local Church Leadership to feedback regularly to Synod Advocates on congregational awareness and engagement Local Church Leadership to encourage awareness	'Sell' through URC Bookshop – first card free then a fee. Local Church Leadership Local Church Leadership Church and Society	General Assembly 2022 at latest Throughout 2022 Throughout 2022
			Finished inspirational card in every members' hands Submission of local stories and other feedback demonstrating awareness and engagement with whole-of-life discipleship Submission of local stories and other	

	<p>some awareness of connection between everyday discipleship and social justice, especially in face of societal crises (eg cost of living, climate change, etc.)</p>	<p>of social justice issues and encourage the congregation in taking action as part of living out faith, calling on support from synod and Church House (Church and Society and Global and Intercultural Ministries) as needed.</p>	<p>Global and Intercultural Ministries</p>	<p>feedback demonstrating awareness and engagement with social justice as part of whole-of-life discipleship</p> <p>Increased use of Global justice materials, including from Commitment for Life</p>	
	<p>Celebrate the 50th anniversary with discipleship as a core focus</p>	<p>Reflect discipleship throughout URC 50 Resource pack for churches</p> <p>Discipleship and the life of the URC is a theme in 'Let's Celebrate Together' book</p>	<p>Church House</p> <p>Walking the Way Project Manager</p> <p>Communications</p>	<p>Deadlines met and resources provided to churches</p>	<p>Throughout 2022</p>
	<p>Every convenor of local church elders' meetings and/or church meetings to be advocates of Whole-of-life discipleship</p>	<p>Synod Advocate to establish and/or maintain effective methods for open communication between local church leaders and the Synod Advocate</p>	<p>Synod Advocate and Church Secretaries</p>	<p>Established four-way communication between discipleship and mission at Church House, Synods, and local churches</p>	<p>Embedded practice by Nov 2022</p>

	<p>All worship leaders to be equipped to keep discipleship development at the heart of their preaching and practice</p>	<p>Synod Advocate to work with those responsible for the equipping of worship leaders in the synod to ensure strong discipleship provision within their education and training</p>	<p>Walking the Way Project Manager RCLs Education and Learning Ministries Synod Advocates Ministers of Word and Sacraments / CRCWs AALPs</p>	<p>Increased numbers of local church leaders engaging in discipleship learning and training activities. More references to discipleship in worship and mission related activities and events across the Church. More good news stories of discipleship development being shared more widely across the Church.</p>	<p>Embedded practice by November 2022</p>
	<p>More individuals and local church groups, especially Elders' Groups, to participate in Stepwise</p>	<p>Synod Advocate to work with those in synod responsible for promoting Stepwise to share it as widely as possible, especially in situations where people may not have considered it as an option</p>	<p>Synod Advocate Synod Stepwise Promoter RCLs</p>	<p>Increase in numbers participating in Stepwise Reports of more Elders' Groups participating Good news stories of Stepwise participation being shared as widely as possible</p>	<p>Throughout 2022</p>

Synods	Ensure key synod movers and shakers are appointed Synod Advocates	Every moderator to provide the name(s) of advocates	Walking the Way Project Manager Synod Teams	Completed list of Synod Advocates	By end of Jan 2022
	Ensure whole-of-life discipleship is embedded in synod's existing work	Synod Advocate to ensure that all synod's committees are talking discipleship and to feed this back to the Walking the Way project manager/DGS Discipleship and Mission quarterly, with the recommendation to the former report to their own synod twice per year.	Synod Advocates Synod Teams	Established four-way communication between discipleship and mission at Church House, Synods, and local churches	Embedded practice by Nov 2022
	To create a network of local church advocates and equip them for the role	Highlight the importance of each church having a discipleship advocate who feeds back to the Synod Advocate	Synod Advocates	Synod advocate holds a complete list of local church advocates and establishes two-way communication with them, then feeds back regularly to the Walking the Way Project Manager/DGS Discipleship and Mission.	Highlight this at March Synod 2022 synod meeting, have list by Oct 2022 Embedded practice by Nov 2022
	Ensure all relevant synod roles have discipleship as a key priority	Synods to review job descriptions	Line Managers/HR	Job descriptions updated and discipleship included in all new roles wherever possible	In line with synod appraisal timelines

	<p>Synod staff and volunteers with responsibility for social justice to emphasise connection between everyday discipleship and social justice, especially in face of societal crises (eg cost of living, climate change, etc.)</p>	<p>Synod to encourage awareness of social justice issues and encourage the congregation in taking action as part of living out faith, calling on support from Church House (Church and Society and Global Ministries) as needed</p>	<p>Synod Teams Synod Advocates Church and Society Global and Intercultural Ministries</p>	<p>Submission of local stories and other feedback demonstrating awareness and engagement with social justice as part of whole-of-life discipleship Increased use of Global justice materials, including from Commitment for Life</p>	<p>Throughout 2022</p>
	<p>Ensure effective sharing and receipt of good news, practice and information for mutual work and learning with other synods</p>	<p>Opportunities to be identified for the sharing of good news, practice and information on discipleship development as much as possible</p>	<p>Synod Advocates Synod Teams</p>	<p>Synods working together more visibly on resource production, sharing good news, practice and information.</p>	<p>Embedded practice by November 2022</p>
	<p>Stepwise participation to be encouraged and enabled across the synod, including all Elders' groups to be given the chance to do it</p>	<p>Synod Advocate to work with those in synod responsible for promoting Stepwise to share it as widely as possible, especially in situations where people may not have</p>	<p>Synod Advocate Synod Stepwise Promoter RCLs</p>	<p>Increase in numbers participating in Stepwise Reports of more Elders' Groups participating</p>	<p>Throughout 2022</p>

	Synods to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the URC, ensuring discipleship is a core focus	Discipleship stories to be shared with Communications	considered it as an option	Synod Advocate Communications	Good news stories of Stepwise participation being shared as widely as possible	Throughout 2022
					Stories submitted regularly and followed through by Communications and published and shared across the URC networks	

<p>General Assembly</p>	<p>All GA staff and committee members to recognise whole-of-life discipleship as the core of what they're about in terms of their remit</p>	<p>Clear visual map to be created, depicting existing and developing connections across the denomination on whole-of-life discipleship</p> <p>All Assembly Secretaries and Committee Convenors to be provided with three questions to answer at the top of every meeting agenda each meeting to affect change: 'How does your work equip, nurture and make disciples across the whole church?'</p> <p>Walking the Way Project Manager to liaise with Church Life Review Group to ensure whole-of-life discipleship focus at heart of group, analyse, highlight and signpost existing work on discipleship from across the denomination and</p>	<p>Walking the Way Project Manager</p> <p>Communications</p> <p>Assembly Secretaries and Committee Convenors</p> <p>Discipleship Team</p> <p>Mission Team</p> <p>Admin and Resources Team</p>	<p>Whole-of-life discipleship reflected in all work and reports from committees and departments, and in detailed map of cross-denominational connections on whole-of-life discipleship.</p>	<p>Progress by GA 2022</p> <p>Embedded practice by Nov 2022</p>
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			<p>encourage further cross-denominational collaboration</p> <p>Walking the Way project manager to liaise with Ministries and Education & Learning for the same reasons as engaging with the Church Life Review Group, focused specifically on vocations provision across the URC</p> <p>Encourage staff to explore whole-of-life discipleship in team and All-Staff meetings and events</p> <p>Collaborate across church house on whole-of-life discipleship related projects</p> <p>Morning prayers at Church House to reflect discipleship messages</p> <p>LICC and/or similar organisation's resources or provision</p>		
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	<p>More resources to be produced collaboratively across different Church House offices and departments, with a focus on whole-of-life discipleship</p>	<p>Walking the Way project manager to continue supporting such efforts as much as possible until end of role</p> <p>All colleagues at Church House to be encouraged to produce resources collaboratively, and with a discipleship focus, rather than separately.</p>	<p>Walking the Way Project Manager</p> <p>Communications</p> <p>Assembly Secretaries and Committee Convenors</p> <p>Discipleship Team</p> <p>Mission Team</p> <p>Admin and Resources Team</p>	<p>Discipleship to be reflected more explicitly across all Church House resources</p> <p>Usage/downloads figures to grow as a result of fewer individual resources, and more single, collaborative resources being available and easier to navigate</p>	<p>Throughout 2022</p>
	<p>Discipleship Discussion Points document to be produced regularly for distribution across the Church</p>	<p>Deputy General Secretaries for Mission and Discipleship to produce these at regular intervals for distribution to Synod Advocates and, in turn, local churches</p>	<p>Deputy General Secretaries for Mission and Discipleship</p> <p>Synod Advocates</p>	<p>Increased references to discipleship across agendas and minutes from meetings and events across the Church.</p>	<p>Embedded practice by November 2022</p>

	<p>All work on social justice to emphasise connection between everyday discipleship and social justice, especially in face of societal crises (eg cost of living, climate change, etc.)</p>	<p>Any resources, materials, events or opportunities relating to social justice to be formed with a focus on whole-of-life discipleship</p>	<p>Connective Church and Society Global and Intercultural Ministries</p>	<p>Submission of stories and other feedback demonstrating awareness and engagement with social justice as part of whole-of-life discipleship Increased use of Global Justice materials, including from Commitment for Life</p>	<p>Throughout 2022</p>
	<p>RCLs to be firmly involved in discipleship development in all areas of Church Life</p>	<p>Walking the Way project manager to instigate close conversations with all RCLs, Education and Learning and Ministries Synod Advocates to consider, along with local church leaders, how to call on RCLs to provide the education and training they need with regards to discipleship development</p>	<p>Walking the Way Project Manager RCLs Education and Learning Ministries Synod Advocates Deputy General Secretaries for Mission and Discipleship</p>	<p>Increase in numbers of individuals and churches engaging with RCLs More good news stories of RCL involvement in discipleship development being shared more widely.</p>	<p>Embedded practice by November 2022</p>

	<p>All staff to be given the opportunity to participate in and/or promote Stepwise</p>	<p>Stepwise Team to share latest news and information across Church House, and devise ways for Church House groups to participate in Stepwise, should they wish</p>	<p>Stepwise Team Communications Assembly Secretaries and Committee Convenors Discipleship Team Mission Team Admin and Resources Team</p>	<p>Increase in numbers participating in Stepwise Good news stories of Stepwise participation being shared as widely as possible</p>	<p>Throughout 2022</p>
	<p>Ensure all relevant Church House roles have discipleship as a key priority</p>	<p>Line Managers and HR to review job descriptions</p>	<p>Line Managers/HR</p>	<p>Job descriptions updated and discipleship included in all new roles wherever possible</p>	<p>In line with Church House appraisal timelines</p>
	<p>Final report to be prepared for General Secretariat on online discipleship to help them shape denomination's wider response to this developing area</p>	<p>Collate all notes and findings thus far, alongside any incoming notes or findings, on online discipleship, in order to support the General Secretariat</p>	<p>Walking the Way Project Manager</p>	<p>Final report submitted to General Secretariat</p>	<p>Final report to be submitted in September 2022</p>

Paper 16

Legacies of (transatlantic) Slavery

Mission Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of Mission Committee slanecawte@gmail.com Karen Campbell, Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries karen.campbell@urc.org.uk
Action required	Discussion and decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>20. General Assembly adopts the statement of ‘Confession and Apology by the United Reformed Church’ prepared by the Legacies of Slavery Task Group, and commits the Church to sharing the confession and apology widely, both within and beyond the URC, including with our global partners in Africa and the Caribbean.</p> <p>21. General Assembly affirms its commitment to practical actions to address the continuing negative impacts of the legacies of transatlantic slavery on black communities in the UK, the Caribbean and Africa, and instructs the Legacies of Slavery Task Group to bring concrete and costed proposals to General Assembly 2023 for a considered programme of repairing justice.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Update on the work of the Legacies of Slavery Task Group. Adoption of resolutions arising from this work.
Main points	General Assembly is asked to adopt a proposed ‘Confession and Apology’ in response to the legacies of transatlantic slavery; to commit the URC to implementing a programme of ‘repairing justice’; and to instruct the Task Group to bring firm proposals for repairing justice to General Assembly 2023.
Previous relevant documents	Healing: Hope in Action – Mission Committee Paper, September 2019 LoS Consultation Documents 2021/2022 Various past resolutions, including: ‘A Statement of regret and commitment’ – General Assembly 2007

	From 'Not Racist' to Anti-Racist – Mission Council November 2020
Consultation has taken place with...	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Synods and local congregations across the URC 2. URC Youth 3. Cascades of Grace 4. Racial Justice Advocates 5. Council for World Mission (CWM) and our partner churches in the UK, Europe and globally under the CWM umbrella 6. Umbrella Ecumenical Bodies including Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Churches Together in England, the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum 7. Individual ecumenical partners including the Methodist Church and the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

Summary of impact

Financial	No immediate financial implications.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	As noted in the following paper, there is keen interest from various ecumenical partners, including joint working across several churches and Christian entities, with the Methodist Church and Baptist Union particularly seeking to draw on the URC journey.

Legacies of Slavery Task Group

1. What we have done – and what we have learned

- 1.1 Throughout its 50 year history, the URC’s General Assembly has been passing resolutions deploring racism. For instance, in 2007 – the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade – General Assembly adopted a ‘statement of regret and commitment’ which recognised ‘the inhuman treatment of Africans transported across the Atlantic as slaves and forced to work in degrading conditions.’ It went on to say, ‘We are sorry for the legacy of that oppression which still distorts our relations with one another.’

- 1.2 In 2017, the Council for World Mission (CWM) held a series of Hearings which identified racism and deprivation as key legacies of transatlantic slavery impacting African and African descent communities around the globe – a judgment echoed by the 15 member states of CARICOM (Caribbean Community), and recently highlighted during royal visits to the region. Responding to those Hearings, the URC established its own Legacies of Slavery (LoS) Task Group under the remit of the Mission Committee, which produced a lengthy paper entitled ‘Healing: Hope in Action’, considered by Mission Council in autumn 2019. This set out the case for moving beyond ‘regret’ to a direct ‘apology’ for our country’s enslavement of Black peoples and for the way our society – and we, as part of that society – continue to benefit from the prosperity that accrued, and to be poisoned by the racist attitudes that enslavement helped to promote. The 2019 paper also argued

action in the form of reparations or reparative justice for black communities who continue to experience racism and deprivation in Africa, the Caribbean, and the UK.

- 1.3 Mission Council received ‘Healing: Hope in Action’ warmly, but asked the task group to do further work, including wider consultation, bringing proposals to General Assembly 2021. This was rendered impossible by the pandemic. It seemed fitting, then, to consider the issues at General Assembly 2022, given our biblical understanding of jubilee. Meanwhile, the disproportionate damage caused by Covid-19 to black and ethnic minority British communities, as well as the ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement stimulated by the murder of George Floyd, have highlighted the continuing scourge of systemic racism and the need to make the URC actively anti-racist.
- 1.4 Our ecumenical partners are wrestling with these issues, too. Concerns and strategies are shared between member churches of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), Churches Together in England (CTE) and the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum (RJAF).¹ An apology was offered by the Baptist Union in 2007, who are now exploring the issue of reparations in conversation with the URC. The Methodist Church in Britain is also moving firmly in this direction, drawing on materials produced by the URC and showing great interest in our journey to date. Mutual learning continues between churches under the CWM umbrella, including within the UK and Europe, and in conversation with our Caribbean partners in particular.
- 1.5 In preparation for General Assembly 2022, the LoS Task Group consulted with Synods and local churches on the proposals for a URC Apology and reparations, including an invitation to engage with the related issues through ‘Black History Monthly’ online sessions throughout 2021, and the offer of local conversations facilitated by members of the Task Group, Cascades of Grace, or Racial Justice Advocates. Responses have been both verbal and written. Verbal responses have been overwhelmingly supportive. Of approximately 75 written submissions received by 16 May 2022, there is more than two-thirds support for the proposals; there is also deep scepticism in some quarters about their relevance today. Comments such as ‘slavery was a long time ago; it wasn’t my fault; proposals are just wokery’, have been received. It should be noted that several of the negative responses were phrased in a way that caused real hurt to black members of the

¹ The RJAF is an ecumenical Christian entity comprised of representatives from various Christian institutions such as the Ascension Trust, the Baptist Union of Great Britain, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, the Evangelical Alliance, the Methodist Church, the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), the Salvation Army, the Sam Sharpe Project, and the United Reformed Church.

group who were tasked with reading them. They shocked all of us by their tone and content.

- 1.6 The Task Group does not wish to shy away from any of the responses received – all of which will be anonymised and made public before General Assembly meets in July 2022. We further intend to address the issues raised by adding to an FAQ document written in light of the autumn Synod presentations and previously circulated as part of the consultation materials. These documents will be available via the Legacies of Slavery webpage – www.urc.org.uk/legacies-of-slavery.
- 1.7 The LoS Task Group has been convinced by the positive responses and by events of recent years that it is time for our Church to move beyond vague statements of ‘regret.’ We have listened to the concerns expressed by some respondents, and amended the proposed apology in light of this. We also take seriously the voices of those who feel this work is not just timely, but well overdue. We therefore ask General Assembly to endorse the ‘Confession and Apology’ as now drafted, together with the interlinked paper on how to express those words in reparative actions. We are aware that some concerns will remain. We also note that some congregations did not feel able to respond within the timeframe. We therefore encourage continued engagement with the issues beyond the period of the formal consultation. We propose that congregations and synods be encouraged to discuss and contribute to ideas for reparative justice projects within the UK, and/or supporting the work of our partner churches in Africa and the Caribbean. This will help to deepen awareness of the pain that endures and the need to build an anti-racist Church as a legacy of the URC’s Year of Jubilee.

2. Proposed Confession and Apology by the United Reformed Church

- 2.1 We, the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church, mindful of our own history and that of our antecedent bodies, wish to confess and apologise for our role in transatlantic slavery, and the scars which continue to blight our society, our Church, and the lives of black people in our midst and around the globe today. This action is firmly rooted in the gospel call to repentance, and gives life to the commitment in our Basis of Union to be ‘formed in obedience to the call to repent of what has been amiss in the past and to be reconciled.’
- 2.2 As a Conciliar Church, we have listened to one another as we received the report of Mission Committee on the ongoing Legacies of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. We have heard the pain of sisters and brothers who have been hurt, and are still being hurt, by these legacies, including the continuing scourge of racism. We have heard God in Christ speaking to us at what we believe to be a Kairos moment. In a spirit of humility and vulnerability, we are urged on by a movement of God’s Spirit, calling us for a journey of words and actions towards a future built on equity, justice and love.

2.3 To this end, the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church, gathered here in Swanwick in the year 2022:

- humbly acknowledges our share in and benefit from our nation's participation, and that of some of our own antecedent bodies, in transatlantic slavery.
- recognises our failure to honour the efforts of our abolitionist forebears by permitting the legacies of transatlantic slavery to continue shaping our world
- offers our apology to God and to our sisters and brothers in Africa, the Caribbean, and their descendants, for all that has created and still perpetuates such deep hurt, which originated from the horror of slavery.
- repents of the hurt we have caused, our reluctance to face up to the sins of the past and our silence in the face of racism and injustice today.
- admits that these sins are part of our continuing failure to see and hear God in all our neighbours, whoever they may be.
- commits, in a true spirit of repentance:
 - to find constructive ways by which we can move from saying 'I'm sorry' into concrete actions of 'repairing justice' and so contribute to the prophetic work of God's coming kingdom
 - to continue working to promote racial justice as part of our Christian commitment to justice for all
 - to encourage the whole United Reformed Church to be engaged in this journey.

3. The URC's commitment to 'repairing justice'

3.1 The Legacies of Slavery (LoS) Task Group has been consistently clear that 'Confession and Apology' without some form of practical action is an empty gesture, amounting to 'cheap grace'. Our expressions of apology must be accompanied by acts of 'repairing justice' – efforts which attempt some degree of 'putting right' without implying a direct payback, which would be impossible. Repairing justice is needed to show the world – and ourselves – that we are serious about the apology offered and wish to make amends for the injustices of the past which continue to shape the present. It will necessarily require some financial commitment, but is about much more than money.

3.2 The LoS Task Group paper 'Healing: Hope in Action' suggested three possible approaches to repairing justice with a range of possible actions, including:

3.21 For the URC

- **Relationships with CWM Churches.** Strengthening our relationships with our CWM partner churches in the Caribbean, and with the UK Districts of the European Presbyteries of our two Ghanaian partner churches, encouraging us to develop further as a multicultural Church.
- **Education.** An education programme to help us understand the legacies of transatlantic slavery, particularly as they impact our life together today. Such a programme could include topics such as white privilege, racism,

being a multicultural church with an intercultural habit, black self-image, white fragility and guilt, repentance and forgiveness.

3.22 For the UK

There are several objectives that could be sought by adding our voice to campaigns encouraging the UK government to:

- release LoS countries and communities from debt owed to the UK
- increase aid for LoS countries and communities
- support positive black self-image programmes.

3.23 For LoS countries and communities

Work with our partner churches in Africa and the Caribbean, supporting projects shaped by them to address issues identified by them, for example:

- improved literacy and healthcare
- reduction in deprivation
- positive self-understanding.

3.3 As part of the LoS consultation, the Task Group encouraged Synods and churches to suggest proposals to address specific issues in their local areas. Ideas shared include:

- truthful (local) history telling
- arts projects
- a campaign to remove monuments commemorating slave owners or slave traders from public areas – or to have such monuments truthfully labelled
- initiatives to support black youths in danger of offending/reoffending.

The Task Group welcomes all the suggestions received.

3.4 We ask the General Assembly in our Year of Jubilee to endorse this work by committing the Church to a considered programme of 'repairing justice' as part of our continuing journey towards becoming an actively anti-racist Church.

3.5 We further ask that this work be commended to synods and congregations for further discussion during 2022-2023. The Task Group will consider all comments and suggestions, including financial implications, bringing concrete proposals to General Assembly in 2023.

Paper J1

Report to General Assembly 2022

Nominations Committee

Basic information

Contact names and email addresses	Mrs Helen Lidgett hnlidgett@gmail.com Mr George Faris nominations.secretary@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>22. General Assembly extends the Revd Sarah Moore's term of service as Assistant Clerk of General Assembly from 1 January 2023 to the end of General Assembly 2023.</p> <p>23. General Assembly appoints committees and representatives of the Church as set out in paragraph 10.3 of this report, subject to the additions and corrections contained in the supplementary report to Assembly.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To appoint members of various committees and groups.
Main points	As above.
Previous relevant documents	N/A
Consultation has taken place with...	Wide consultation with Synods, local churches and the committees and groups where appointments are needed.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

Introduction

- 1.1 This committee brings to General Assembly for authorisation the names of people to serve as convenors and secretaries of Assembly committees, or as members of those committees for set periods. It also suggests names of people to represent the United Reformed Church on other bodies, and those who make up

appointment and review groups for synod moderators and Assembly-appointed staff.

Nominations Committee

2.1 Every Synod is represented on the Nominations Committee, whose members serve for as long as their Synod determines. They bring extensive knowledge of the skills, experience and interests of ministers and members in their Synods to inform recommendations for nominations to committees and groups. We are also greatly helped by the presence and experience of a former moderator of General Assembly, the General Secretary, the Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries and a representative of the Equalities Committee.

Current work

- 3.1 So that Assembly committees can support the work and mission of the United Reformed Church, Nominations Committee relies on the willingness and commitment of members of the United Reformed Church who generously give their time to serve. It is a challenge to identify new people with relevant skills and experience, but this is done in several ways:
- a) The committee members, through consulting their own synod networks, bring names of people who are then considered, approached, and if they agree, are nominated for Assembly (or Assembly Executive) to appoint as vacancies occur in Assembly committees and groups
 - b) Assembly committees are encouraged to make suggestions, where appropriate, recognising that often they have the clearest understanding of their own needs.
 - c) Individuals are welcome to send their details to the secretary, indicating in which area of the Assembly's work they have an interest.
- 3.2 The Committee seeks to ensure that the membership of all committees is compliant with the equalities guidelines of the United Reformed Church, and to this end collects and records monitoring data. A summary monitoring report for 2021-2022 is included below.
- 3.3 The number and range of church committees and groups is decided by General Assembly and Assembly Executive, and our Committee's role is to serve the requirements of the Church. We warmly welcome the Church Life Review, and hope it will succeed in rationalising the committee structure of the United Reformed Church.
- 3.4 A major piece of work for the Committee over the past year has been the nomination of members to serve on the various panels of the new Disciplinary Process. It has been no easy task to find 39 people with the relevant skills and experience. We are indebted to the Revd Dr Janet Tollington and the Revd Andy Braunston for their tireless work in receiving names of people willing to serve, conducting interviews, obtaining references, bringing names to the Committee for final consideration and nomination, and providing training. This work, much of it conducted within the constraints imposed throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, means that the new Disciplinary Process will be effective from the close of Assembly 2022. Assembly is asked to note that neither the Assembly Commission for Discipline Panel nor the Assembly Disciplinary Investigation Panel yet has their full complement of members, and the committee would welcome further recommendations of people to serve.

- 3.5 Following a discussion at Assembly Executive in November 2021, the committee has given thought to ways in which its work can comply with the United Reformed Church safeguarding policy and procedures and, in particular, the requirement for safer recruitment. We held an extra meeting in February 2022 to which Ms Sharon Barr, the Safeguarding Lead, was invited. The committee agreed to ask Assembly Committee Convenors and Secretaries to prepare role descriptions for each committee/sub-committee convener and member, and to review these annually. They are also asked to identify whether any convenors or members need a DBS/PVG check, and to inform the Nominations Secretary if so. We recognised a particular need for care in appointing committee convenors, and recommended a process of consultation with potential candidates and the committee secretary and, where appropriate, the General Secretary or a Deputy General Secretary. This process has been followed in several of the nominations for convenors and convenors-elect brought to this Assembly.

Monitoring

- 4.1 Those invited to serve on the Church's committees and working groups are asked to complete a monitoring form. The results are shared with the Equalities Committee.
- 4.2 In all, 47 acceptances were received between 3 October 2021 and 5 May 2022. The ordained/lay and male/female figures are:

Ordained	24	51%
Lay	23	49%

Male	27	57%
Female	20	43%

- 4.3 An analysis of 39 responses providing monitoring data shows this age spread:

Under 26	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	Over 65
1	0	2	9	11	16
3%	0%	5%	23%	28%	41%

- 4.4 39 responses gave ethnic origin:

White	Other
37	2
95%	5%

Thanks to all who serve on Assembly committees

- 5.1 The Church continues to be blessed by many willing members who give their time and gifts to serve on its committees, panels and working groups, or who represent it on outside bodies. The formal acceptance of this report and the long list of names that follows is offered with a real sense of gratitude for all who serve in this way.

Nominations Committee membership

- 6.1 The list of those who serve on the Nominations Committee reflects the change of synod representatives since the last General Assembly. Thanks are due to all, particularly those who have recently relinquished their place on the committee.

Thanks to the Committee Secretary

7.1 At this Assembly, Mr George Faris completes his team of service as Nominations Committee Secretary. This is an arduous and time-consuming but voluntary role, which he has filled with exemplary attention to detail, skill and courtesy. He has kept records meticulously, and gently guided Convenors through the complexities. The committee offers him its heartfelt thanks for this work which has touched every part of the church’s life, and wishes him well.

Resignations

8.1 General Assembly is asked to note the following resignations:

<i>Ref</i>	<i>Committee/Group</i>	<i>Name</i>
5.3	Equalities Committee	The Revd Mhari McLintock
9.2	Westminster College Board of Governors	The Revd Jan Adamson

Assistant Clerk of General Assembly – extension of term of service

9.1 The Revd Sarah Moore was appointed to be Assistant Clerk of General Assembly from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2022. General Assembly is invited to extend the end date to the end of General Assembly 2023 to coincide with expected appointment of a new Clerk of General Assembly-Elect:

General Assembly extends the Revd Sarah Moore’s term of service as Assistant Clerk of General Assembly from 1 January 2023 to the end of General Assembly 2023.

Those to be appointed or re-appointed

10.1 General Assembly is invited to resolve as follows:

General Assembly appoints committees and representatives of the Church as set out in paragraph 10.3 of this report, subject to the additions and corrections contained in the supplementary report to Assembly.

10.2 Those agreeing to be appointed for the first time, for a further term, and those returning after a break in service are listed in the table below.

Key: ** = new appointment, † = extension of term of service, †† = further term of service

<i>Ref</i>	<i>Committee/Group</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Years</i>
1.1	Human Resources Advisory Group	Mrs Bridget Fosten	Member [†]	4
1.2	Law & Polity Advisory Group	Mr Neil Mackenzie	Secretary [†]	4
2.2	Nominations Committee	Mrs Margaret Marshall	Secretary ^{**}	4
2.2	Nominations Committee	Mrs Rachel Wakeham (6)	Member ^{**}	-
2.2	Nominations Committee	Mrs Gwen Jennings (8)	Member ^{**}	-
2.2	Nominations Committee	The Revd George Watt (10)	Member ^{**}	-
2.3	Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group	The Revd Steven Manders	Convenor ^{**}	4
2.4	Assembly Commission for Discipline Panel	The Revd Peter Flint	Member ^{**}	-
2.4	Assembly Commission for Discipline Panel	Mr Alastair Forsyth	Member ^{**}	-

<i>Ref</i>	<i>Committee/Group</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Years</i>
2.4	Assembly Commission for Discipline Panel	The Revd Dominic Grant	Member**	-
2.4	Assembly Commission for Discipline Panel	The Revd Martha McInnes	Member**	-
2.4	Assembly Commission for Discipline Panel	The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe	Member**	-
2.6	Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline	The Revd Tessa Henry-Robinson	Minister Member**	5
2.6	Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline	The Revd Nick Mark	Minister Member**	5
2.6	Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline	The Revd Raymond Singh	Minister Member**	5
2.6	Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline	Mr Tim Crossley	Elder Member**	5
2.6	Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline	Mr Dodie Khurshid	Elder Member**	5
2.7	Standing Panel for the Incapacity Procedure	The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe	Member†	4
2.8	Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee	Mrs Hilary Miles	Member**	4
2.9	Safeguarding Committee	The Revd Roger Jones	Convenor**	4
2.8	Safeguarding Committee	Ms Julie Rafferty	Synod Safeguarding Group Representative**	4
2.9	Safeguarding Committee	The Revd Ruth Whitehead	Synod Moderator**	4
2.9	Safeguarding Committee	Ms Ruth Goold	National Synod of Scotland Representative**	4
2.9	Safeguarding Committee	Mr Alex Walker	Nominated Member**	4
2.9	Safeguarding Committee	Mrs Kate Yates	Nominated Member**	4
2.9	Safeguarding Committee	Mr Tim Carter	Independent Member**	4
2.9	Safeguarding Committee	Ms Fi Cisneros	Independent Member**	4
3.1	Mission Committee	The Revd Grant Wilson (1)	Interim Member**	-
3.1	Mission Committee	Ms Lindsey Brown (7)	Member†	4
3.1	Mission Committee	The Revd Branwen Rees (12)	Member†	4
4.1	Ministries Committee	The Revd Mary Thomas	Convenor**	4
4.2	Education and Learning Committee	Ms Pippa Hodgson	Convenor-Elect**	1
4.2	Education and Learning Committee	Ms Pippa Hodgson	Convenor from GA23**	4
4.2	Education and Learning Committee	The Revd Dr Rob Hoch	TDO Representative**	
4.2	Education and Learning Committee	Mr Richard Knott	CYDO Representative**	
5.4	Finance Committee	Mr Bill Potter	Member††	4
5.5	URC Trust	Ms Catriona Wheeler (5)	Member†	4
5.5	URC Trust	Mr David Lathbury (6)	Member†	4
5.5	URC Trust	The Revd John Macaulay (10)	Member**	4
5.6	United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Trust Ltd	Mr Chris Atherton	Trustee**	4
9.1	Northern College	The Revd Mark Bates	Governor†	4
9.1	Northern College	Dr Lesley Coote	Governor**	4
9.2	Westminster College Board of Governors	The Revd Naomi Young-Rodas	Clerk to the Governors**	6

<i>Ref</i>	<i>Committee/Group</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Years</i>
9.2	Westminster College Board of Governors	Mr Andrew Grimwade	Honorary Treasurer [†]	1
9.2	Westminster College Board of Governors	The Revd Stuart Scott	Governor [†]	2
10.4	Milton Mount Foundation	The Revd Derek Lindfield	Governor [†]	4
11.8	Roots for Churches Ltd	The Revd Jenny Mills	Trustee**	-
11.11	URC History Society Council	Mrs Jean Wyber	Member [†]	5

10.3 Assembly committees and other appointments

Notes:

1. The General Assembly Moderator, the Assembly Moderator-elect, the Immediate-past Assembly Moderator and the General Secretary are members *ex officio* of every standing committee. Deputy General Secretaries are members *ex officio* of every standing committee within their department. Any *ex officio* member may arrange for an appropriate deputy, such as any Deputy General Secretary or an officer of Assembly, to attend on their behalf. Any committee may invite other Assembly officers (or their deputies) or staff members to attend in a non-voting capacity where the business so requires.
2. Symbols have been used as follows: ** denotes those whom General Assembly is invited to appoint for the first time; † denotes those who have been invited to extend their periods of service; †† denotes those returning after a break.
3. Numbers in round brackets following names indicate the member's synod: (1) Northern, (2) North Western, (3) Mersey, (4) Yorkshire, (5) East Midlands, (6) West Midlands, (7) Eastern, (8) South Western, (9) Wessex, (10) Thames North, (11) Southern, (12) Wales, (13) Scotland. This numbering is not shown where it is not relevant.
4. When a member of a committee is there as a representative of another body or a particular category, this is indicated in round brackets following the name.
5. Committee membership is normally for a period of four years, though this may sometimes, exceptionally, be renewable. Committee convenors serve an additional preliminary year as convenor-elect. In sections one to five of the report, appointments with a different term are noted.
6. Dates in square brackets following names indicate the date of retirement, assuming a full term.
7. In accordance with the decision of General Assembly 2000, some nominations are made directly by the National Synods of Wales and Scotland.
8. New committee members normally take up their roles at the conclusion of General Assembly.
9. Nominations to Assembly committees and their subcommittees, and to advisory and task groups serving Assembly and Assembly Executive, should be of

members of the United Reformed Church, or youth representatives who meet the criteria for membership of Assembly. A term of service may normally be completed if someone ceases to be a member of the URC during their term.

10. Nominations of URC representatives to external bodies should either be URC members, or youth representatives who meet the criteria for membership of Assembly, or URC staff who have relevant expertise. The nomination of a staff member would automatically lapse if the person concerned ceased to hold a URC post.
11. **This list will be superseded in July 2022. The latest list approved by General Assembly or by Assembly Executive on its behalf is available at: <http://bit.ly/URCNom>.**

1. Assembly Executive

Assembly Executive acts on behalf of General Assembly. It consists of the officers of Assembly, the immediate past and elect Assembly Moderators, the deputies to the General Secretary and treasurer, the assistant clerk, four representatives from each synod, normally, but not necessarily, including the moderator and the synod clerk, together with the convenors of Assembly committees, the chair of the United Reformed Church Trust and three members for URC Youth, including the URC Youth Moderator. In attendance are staff secretaries, Assembly Moderators' chaplain and others as appropriate.

1.1 Human Resources Advisory Group

Convenor: Mr Geoff Shaw [2023]

General Secretary

Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources)

Nominated members:

Mrs Barbara Ellis [2024]

Mrs Bridget Fosten [2026][†]

Vacancy

1.2 Law and Polity Advisory Group

Convenor: Ms Morag McLintock [2024]

Secretary: Mr Neil Mackenzie [2026][†]

General Secretary

Clerk of General Assembly

Assistant Clerk of General Assembly

Synod Clerk representative: Mrs Melanie Campbell [2025]

Property, legal and trust officers' representative: Ms Muna Levan-Harris

Nominated members:

The Revd Steven Manders [2025]

Vacancy

In attendance: Legal Adviser

1.3 Listed buildings advisory group

Convenor: The Revd Dr James Mather [2022] (nominated by the group)

Secretary: Mr Geoff Milnes [2022] (nominated by the group)

General Secretary

Synod Representatives:

Vacancy (1)

Mr Michael Williams (2)

Ms Alison Lee (3)

Mr David Figures (4)

Mrs Judith Booth (5)

Mr Matthew McDade (6)

Mr Peter West (7)

Mr Roger James (8)

Mr Gerry Prosser (9)
Mr Guy Morfett (11)

Mr Christopher Buckwell (10)

1.4 Resource Sharing Task Group

Convenor: The Revd Steve Faber [2024] (Synod Moderator)

Secretary: Mr Chris Atherton

Treasurer: The Revd Dick Gray

Miss Margaret Atkinson

URC Treasurer

Mr Mike Gould

1.5 Environmental Task Group

Convenor: The Revd Rob Weston

The Revd David Coleman

The Revd Trevor Jamison

The Revd Dr Rosalind Selby

Ms Alison Greaves

Mr Tom Veitch

1.6 Review of Church Life Group

The Revd Dr John Bradbury

Mrs Melanie Campbell

The Revd Steve Faber

The Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson

Mrs Muna Levan-Harris

The Revd Lindsey Sanderson

Ms Victoria Turner

The Revd Dr Phil Wall

Dr Gordon Woods

2. General Secretariat

2.1 Faith and Order Committee

The convenor and nominated members normally serve for six years.

Convenor: The Revd Dr Robert Pope [2026]

Secretary: Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

General Secretary

Nominated members:

The Revd Samuel Silungwe [2023]

Ms Diana Paulding [2026]

The Revd Tessa Henry-Robinson [2027]

The Revd Sue McCoan [2026]

The Revd Kristin Ofstad [2026]

2.2 Nominations Committee

Synods appoint and decide terms for their representation.

Convenor: Mrs Helen Lidgett [2025]

Secretary: Mrs Margaret Marshall [2026]**

A past Moderator of General Assembly

General Secretary

Synod Representatives:

Mrs Melanie Campbell (1)

Mrs Rita Griffiths (3)

The Revd Camilla Veitch (5)

Mr Keir Hounsome (7)

Ms Karen Bell (9)

The Revd Russell Furley-Smith (11)

Mr John Collings (13)

The Revd Brian Jolly (2)

Mr Tim Crossley (4)

Mrs Rachel Wakeman** (6)

Mrs Gwen Jennings** (8)

The Revd George Watt** (10)

Ms Helen Stenson (12)

In attendance:

Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries

Equalities Committee representative

2.2.1 Panel for General Assembly appointments

Members usually serve for five years, as training is required.

Retiring 2023

Mrs Barbara Ellis (3)	The Revd Alison Hall (3)
Mrs Helen Lidgett (5)	Ms Helen Stenson (12)
The Revd Ruth Whitehead (8)	Mrs Sheila Davies (3)

Retiring 2024

The Revd Jan Adamson (13)	The Revd Tessa Henry-Robinson (9)
Dr Paul Ashitey (10)	Ms Victoria Paulding (5)
Mr Matthew Barkley (9)	Mr Reuben Watt (11)
The Revd Lucy Brierley (9)	The Revd Sal Bateman (10)
Mr David Gartside (3)	The Revd Peter Henderson (8)
Ms Pippa Hodgson (5)	The Revd George Mwaura (5)
The Revd Paul Robinson (12)	Mr Patrick Sheard (1)
Mr Alex Walker (4)	

Retiring 2026

The Revd Reginald Mudenda (11)	The Revd Mark Robinson (9)
Mrs Darnette Whitby-Reid (10)	Mrs Pat Poinen (1)

2.3 Ministerial incapacity and discipline (Mind) advisory group

Convenor: The Revd Steven Manders [2026]**

Secretary: The Revd Chris Copley [2026]

Synod Moderator: The Revd Clare Downing [2023]

Convenor of the Assembly commission

Secretary to the Assembly Commission for Discipline: Mr Philip Laws [2026]

Convenor of the review commission of the incapacity procedure

Secretary of the review commission of the incapacity procedure

Consultant for ministers and CRCWs: Mrs Fiona Smith [2026]**

Consultant for mandated groups: The Revd Ian Kirby [2023]

Training coordinator: The Revd Andy Braunston [2024]

General Secretary; Clerk of General Assembly; Secretary for Ministries; legal adviser

2.4 Assembly Commission for Discipline Panel

Convenor: The Revd Nigel Adkinson [2028]

Deputy Convenor: Dr David Jones [2028]

Members (not time-limited):

The Revd Nigel Adkinson	The Revd Bill Bowman
The Revd Andy Braunston	Mr Ian Corless
Mrs Barbara Ellis	The Revd Peter Flint**
Mr Alastair Forsyth**	Mrs Cathy Glazier
The Revd Dominic Grant**	The Revd Marcus Hargis
Dr David Jones	Mrs Mary Kelly
The Revd Sue McCoan	The Revd Alan McGougan
The Revd Martha McInnes**	Ms Morag McLintock
The Revd Sarah Moore	The Revd Wilbert Sayimani
Mr Stephen Thornton	The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe**
Mrs Janet Virr	Mr Gordon Wanless

2.5 Disciplinary Investigation Panel

Senior Member: The Revd Dr Janet Tollington [2028]

Deputy Senior Member: Vacancy

Members (not time-limited):

The Revd Martin Ferris	The Revd Derek Hopkins
The Revd Lesley Moseley	The Revd Craig Muir
The Revd George Mwuara	Mr Mark Rigby
Mr Andy Russell	Ms Cathy Simpson
The Revd Martin Spain	The Revd Dr Janet Tollington
The Revd Geoff Wright	

2.6 Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline

Minister members:

The Revd Tessa Henry-Robinson [2027]**

The Revd Nick Mark [2027]** The Revd Raymond Singh [2027]**

Elder members:

Mr Tim Crossley [2027]** Mr Dodie Khurshid [2027]**

Vacancy

2.7 Standing panel for the incapacity procedure

This panel is normally convened by the member with legal experience.

Members serve one or two five-year terms.

Secretary: Vacancy

Synod Moderator: The Revd Simon Walkling [2023]

Past Moderator of General Assembly: The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe [2026]†

Commission officer for the incapacity procedure: The Revd Roy Lowes [2023]

Mr David Nash (legal experience) [2023] Dr Ewen Harley (GP) [2023]

2.8 Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee

Convenor: The Revd David Grosch-Miller [2023]

Convenor-Elect: Vacancy

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)

General Secretary Deputy Treasurer

Synod Moderator: The Revd Brian Jolly [2024]

Nominated Members:

The Revd Bridget Powell [2023] The Revd Dr Irene John [2024]

Mrs Hilary Miles [2026]**

2.9 Safeguarding Committee

Convenor: The Revd Roger Jones [2026]**

Secretary: Designated Safeguarding Lead

Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship) Secretary for Ministries

Training and Development Coordinator

Nominated Members:

Mr Alex Walker [2026]** Mrs Kate Yates [2026]**

Synod Safeguarding Practice Group representative:

Ms Julie Rafferty [2026]**

Synod Moderator: The Revd Ruth Whitehead [2026]**

National Synod of Scotland representative: Ms Ruth Goold [2026]**

URC Advocated Survivors Group representatives (up to 2): group not yet operative

Independent members:

Mr Tim Carter (Methodist Church) [2026]**

Ms Fi Cisneros [2026]**

In attendance:

Head of Children's and Youth Work

Secretary for Education and Learning

3. Mission department

3.1 Mission Committee

Convenor: Sarah Lane Cawte [2024]

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Mission)

The Revd Grant Wilson (1) [interim]**

Mr Aftab Mughal (2) [2025]

The Revd Stuart Nixon (3) [2026]

The Revd Clare Davison (4) [2024]

The Revd Robert Bushby (5) [2023]

Vacancy (6)

Ms Lindsey Brown (7) [2026]†

Vacancy (8)

The Revd Ray Stanyon (9) [2025]

Vacancy (10)

The Revd Martin Knight (11) [2026]**

The Revd Branwen Rees (12) [2026]†

Mr John Collings (13) [2023]

3.1.1 International exchange reference group

Convenor: The Revd Dr Ana Gobledale [2024]

Synod Moderator: Vacancy

Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries

Nominated member:

The Revd Ros Lyle [2023]

3.1.2 Commitment for Life (CfL) reference group

Convenor: Mr Richard Lewney [2024]

At least two CfL advocates

Representative of mission team

Representative of Mission Committee

Representative from Christian Aid

Representative of Global Justice Now

Programme Officer for Global Justice and Partnerships

3.1.3 Interfaith enabling group

The convenor is nominated by the Mission Committee.

Convenor: The Revd Tracey Lewis [2023]

Secretary: The Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer for the National Synod of Scotland

Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer for the National Synod of Wales

Nominated members:

Ms Victoria Turner [2025]

Mr Andy Lie [2023]

Co-opted members:

The Revd Dr Graham Adams [2024]

The Revd Dr Mark Godin [2024]

The Revd Dr John Parry

3.1.4 Joint Public Issues Team strategy and policy group

Deputy General Secretary (Mission)

The Revd Steve Faber

3.1.5 Rural strategy group (United Reformed Church/Methodist)

Future being reviewed by the Mission Committee.

4. Discipleship department

4.1 Ministries Committee

Convenor: The Revd Mary Thomas [2026]**

Secretary: Secretary for Ministries

Leadership in worship advocate: Vacancy

Synod Moderator: The Revd Jamie Kissack [2024]

Convenors of the Accreditations (CRCW and SCM), Maintenance of Ministry and

Retired Ministers' Housing sub-committees

Convenor of the Assessment Board

Nominated members:

The Revd Stuart Scott [2023]

The Revd Sally Willett [2023]

Mrs Gill Bates [2024]

Chris Kellett [2025]

The Revd Lesley Moseley [2025]

4.1.1 Accreditations (CRCW and SCM) sub-committee

Convenor: The Revd Dr Paul Dean [2025]

Secretary: to be confirmed

Convenor of the Assessment Board

Representatives:

Synod moderators:

The Revd David Herbert [2024]

SCMs:

The Revd Tim Clarke [2024]

CRCWs:

Vacancy

Nominated Members:

The Revd Alison Micklem [2025]

Two vacancies

4.1.2 Ministries – maintenance of ministry sub-committee

Under review

4.1.3 Ministries – Retired Ministers' Housing Society sub-committee

Terms of service shall be for four years, with the possibility of a further term of four years. The convenor shall be a member of the Ministries Committee nominated by that Committee.

Convenor: The Revd Paul Whittle [2023]**

Secretary: Secretary for Ministries

Nominated Members:

Two vacancies

Representative Members:

Tenants:

Vacancy

Retired Ministers' Housing Society:

Vacancy

4.1.4 Assessment board

Members usually serve for five years, as training is required.

Convenor: Professor Bill Gould [2024]

Retiring 2023

The Revd John Danso (10)

Mr Dan Morrell (4)

Retiring 2024

The Revd Jan Adamson (13)

The Revd Gerald England (8)

Mr Mark Tubby (7)

Retiring 2025

Ms Mercy Nimako

Ms Liz Sharples

The Revd Samuel Silungwe

4.2 Education and Learning Committee

Convenor: Mr Alan Yates [2023]

Convenor-Elect: Ms Pippa Hodgson [2023]**

Secretary: Secretary for Education and Learning

Nominated Members: (nominated by the Nominations Committee)

Mrs Margaret Marshall [2024] The Revd Tim Meachin [2024]

The Revd Andrew Mudharara [2026]**

Ex-officio members:

a General Assembly moderator (current, past or elect)

General Secretary

Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)

Representative Members: (nominated by the appropriate group)

RCL Principals: The Revd Dr John McNeil Scott [2026]**

Synod Training and Development Officers: The Revd Dr Rob Hoch [2026]**

CYDOs and other Children and Youth Work officers: Mr Richard Knott [2026]**

EM1 students

Non-voting members: (nominated by the appropriate group)

Synod Moderator: Vacancy

RCL Principals: The Revd Dr Robert Pope (Acting)

The Revd Dr Rosalind Selby

Secretary for Ministries

Methodist Church Representative

4.2.1 Education and Learning finance sub-committee

Chair: Mr Alan Yates

Minutes Secretary: Secretary for Education and Learning

Co-opted Member: The Revd Edward Sanniez

Ex-officio: URC Treasurer, Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship),

Convenor of the Education and Learning Committee

Staff in attendance: Chief Finance Officer

The chair and member are appointed by the Education and Learning Committee.

4.2.2 Stepwise development group

Convenor: The Revd Alison Davis

Administrator: Stepwise Programme Assistant

Secretary for Education and Learning Stepwise Programme Manager

Education and Learning Instructional Designer Project Manager for *Walking the Way*

Education and Learning Programme Officer (by invitation)

Convenor of the Stepwise Learning Standards Board

Representatives – serving appropriate terms of service:

Children's and Youth Work Committee: Mr Leo Roberts

Synod mission enablers network: The Revd Stuart Radcliffe

Synod training and development officers: Vacancy

Resource Centres for Learning: a tutor

Together Ethnic and Minority URC: The Revd Zaidie Orr

Co-opted Members:

The Revd Simon Goddard (Fresh Expressions)

The Revd Peter Henderson

Mr Iain Johnston (Faith in Community Scotland)

The convenor and the co-opted members are appointed by the Education and Learning Committee.

4.3 Children's and Youth Work Committee

Convenor: The Revd Paul Robinson [2024]

Acting Convenor: The Revd Samantha Sheehan [May to July 2022]

Secretary: Head of Children's and Youth Work

URC Youth Moderator

URC Youth Moderator-elect

Convenor of the Pilots sub-committee

Pilots representative

Nominated members:

Mr Matthew Barkley [2023]

Mr Reuben Watt [2023]

The Revd Janine Atkinson [2024]

The Revd Samantha Sheehan [2024]

The Reverend Julian Sanders [2025]

Ms Caroline Akinyele [2025]

4.3.1 Pilots sub-committee

Convenor: Mr Derek Goodyear

Members:

Resources:

Ms Liz Harrison

Synod Pilot officers:

Mr Alan Kendall

Vacancy

Representatives:

Children and Youth Development Officer and team: Ms Lorraine Downer [2023]

URC Youth Pilots: Vacancy

Pilots company/Friends On Faith Adventures group: 2 to 4 vacancies

Co-opted:

Resources:

Ms Sandra Ackroyd

Members are nominated by the Children's and Youth Work Committee and serve one or two two-year terms.

4.4 Walking the Way steering group

Co-Chairs: Deputy General Secretary (Mission) and Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)

Secretary: Project Manager for *Walking the Way*

Stepwise Programme Manager

Head of Communications

Communications Officer

Representatives:

Children's and Youth Work:

Ms Ruth White

Global and Intercultural Ministries:

Revd Bachelard Kaze Yemtsa [2023]

Education and Learning Committee:

Mr Alan Yates

Resource Centres for Learning:

The Revd Peter Ball

Training and Development Officers:

The Revd Dr Jim Coleman

Mission Committee:

Mr John Collings

Mission Enablers:

Mr Martin Hayward

General Members:

The Revd Colin Bones [2023]

The Revd Caroline Andrews [2024]

4.5 Worship Reference Group

Convenor: The Revd Sam Silungwe [2024]

Secretary: The Minister for Digital Worship

Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)

Nominated Members:

The Revd Dr Ana Gobledale [2024]

Co-opted Member:

The Revd Anne Sardeson

5. Administration and resources department

5.1 Business Committee

Convenor: The Revd Mark Robinson [2025]

Secretary: General Secretary

Moderator of General Assembly

Moderator-elect and Immediate-past Moderator of General Assembly

Clerk of General Assembly

Assistant Clerk of General Assembly

URC Treasurer

Nominated members:

Mrs Darnette Whitby-Reid [2025]

Mr Reuben Watt [2026]**

5.2 Communications

Convenor: The Revd Dr Peter Stevenson [2023]

Convenor-Elect: Vacant

Secretary: Head of Communications

The Revd Tim Lowe [2023]

Mr Dan Morell [2023]

The Revd Heather Whyte [2023]

Ms Joy Aldred [2023]

Two vacancies

5.3 Equalities Committee

Convenor: The Revd Naison Hove [2026]

Secretary: The Revd David Salisbury [2023]

URC Youth Equalities and Diversity Representative

Nominated members:

The Revd Jayne Taylor [2023]

The Revd Jo Clare-Young [2024]

Mrs Rosie Martin [2024]

Ms Judy Rogers [2024]

Dr Ruth Shepherd [2024]

Two vacancies

5.4 Finance Committee

Convenor: URC Treasurer

Deputy Treasurer: Mr Vaughan Griffiths [2025]

Chief Finance Officer

Chair of the URC Trust

Nominated members:

Mrs Jane Humphreys [2023]

Ms Joana Marfoh [2023]

The Revd Wilbert Sayimani [2023]

Ms Denise Harman [2024]

The Revd Simon Copley [2025]

Mr Gordon Wanless [2025]

Mr Bill Potter [2026]^{††}

5.4.1 Pensions Committee

Convenor: vacancy

Secretary: Pensions Manager

Nominated Members:

Ms Joana Marfoh [2024]

The Revd John Piper [2023]

Co-opted members, maximum of three:

Mr David Martin

Treasurer or Deputy Treasurer

Convenor of the Investment Committee

Convenor of the Maintenance of Ministry sub-committee

Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources)

In attendance:

Chief Finance Officer

Secretary for Ministries (for Ministers' Pension Fund matters)

5.5 United Reformed Church Trust

Members normally serve for four years, and may only serve a maximum of two terms (eight years). The directors of the Trust appoint new directors from those appointed as members. The members of the Trust elect the chair from among their own number, and appoint a secretary and deputy secretary.

Chair: Mrs Val Morrison (to September 2022)

Secretary: Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones

Deputy Secretary: Mr John Samson

Members:

Group one (Synods 1, 2, 3, 4, 13):

The Revd Nick Mark (13) [2024]

Group two (Synods 5, 6, 7, 8, 12):

Mr Clifford Patten (7) [2024]

The Revd James Breslin (5) [2024]

Ms Catriona Wheeler (5) [2026][†]

Mr David Greatorex (5) [2024]

Mr David Lathbury (6) [2026][†]

Group three (Synods 9,10,11):

The Revd Julian Macro (9) [2025]

The Revd John Macaulay (10) [2026]**

There is one vacancy for a group member.

URC Youth appointee: vacancy

Moderator of General Assembly

Clerk of General Assembly

General Secretary

Treasurer

In attendance:

Convenor of the Investment Committee minute secretary

Chief Finance Officer

5.5.1 Church House management group

Convenor: Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources)

General Secretary

Chief Finance Officer

Nominated members:

Dr Ian Harrison [2024]

Mr Adam Lester [2024]

Two vacancies

5.5.2 Remuneration Committee

Convenor: Mr William McVey

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources)

Ms Sushila Jetha (Methodist HR)

URC Treasurer

In attendance: Chief Finance Officer

5.6 The United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Trust Ltd

Terms run until the AGM in September. The directors of the Trust appoint new directors from those appointed as members. The board members elect the chair from among their own number and appoint the company secretary.

Chair: Mrs Bridget Micklem

Deputy chair: Mr Lyndon Thomas

Secretary: Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones

Church Nominated Trustees/Directors:

Mrs Bridget Micklem [2023]

Mr Colin MacBean [2024]

Mrs Faith Paulding [2025]

Mr Chris Atherton [2026]**

Convenor of the Pensions Committee

URC Deputy Treasurer

Convenor of the Maintenance of Ministry sub-committee

Convenor of the Investment Committee

Member Nominated Trustees/Directors:

The Revd Dr Janet Tollington [2023]
The Revd Caroline Vodden [2022]

The Revd Paul Bedford [2022]
The Revd Daniel Cheyne [2022]

5.7 Investment Committee

Convenor: Mr Richard Nunn [2026]

Secretary: Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones

Members:

Mrs Jean Hudson [2023]

Dame Katharine Barker [2023]

Mr Lyndon Thomas [2024]

vacancy

URC Treasurer

convenor, pensions committee

Chair of United Reformed Church Trust or another director

Chair of United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Trust or another director

Treasurer, Westminster College

In attendance: Chief Finance Officer

6. Representatives to meetings of sister churches

6.1	General Synod of Church of England	The Revd Tim Meadows
6.2	Methodist Conference	The Revd Roy Fowler
6.3	Congregational Federation	Mission Committee Nomination
6.4	Church of Scotland	Assembly Moderator and synod representative
6.5	United Free Church of Scotland	Synod nomination
6.6	Scottish Assembly of the Congregational Federation	Synod nomination
6.7	Scottish Episcopal Church	Synod nomination
6.8	Methodist Church in Scotland	Synod nomination
6.9	Baptist Union of Scotland	Synod nomination
6.10	Presbyterian Church of Wales	Assembly Moderator
6.11	Union of Welsh Independents	Synod nomination
6.12	Covenanted Baptists	Synod nomination
6.13	Church in Wales Governing Board	Synod nomination
6.14	Provincial Synod of the Moravian Church	Mission Committee Nomination

7. Representatives on ecumenical church bodies

The following have been nominated as United Reformed Church representatives at the major gatherings of the ecumenical bodies listed.

7.1 World Council of Churches 2022 Assembly

Delegate: The Revd Sarah Moore

7.2 Council for World Mission Assembly

Representatives will be appointed in 2023 for the 2024 CWM Assembly.

7.3 World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) General Council

Representatives are appointed for each meeting of the Council.

7.4 Conference of European Churches Assembly

Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations and one other

7.11 Commission of Covenanted Churches in Wales

Appointed by the National Synod of Wales

7.12 Free Church education committee

Professor Graham Handscomb

Mrs Gillian Kingston

7.13 European Churches' environmental network

The Revd David Coleman

7.14 Churches' committee on funerals and crematoria

The Revd Sally Thomas

7.15 Churches' forum for safeguarding

Designated Safeguarding Lead

7.16 Churches' network for nonviolence

Head of Children's and Youth Work

7.17 Churches Visitor and Tourism Association

Mrs Valerie Jenkins

7.18 Joint liturgical group

The Revd Dr Ana Gobledale

8. Representatives on formal bilateral and multilateral committees**8.1 Methodist/United Reformed Church liaison group**

Co-convenor: The Revd Geoffrey Clarke (Synod Moderator) (five-year term) [2026]

Co-secretary: Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer for the National Synod of Scotland

Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer for the National Synod of Wales

Nominated Members – serving one or two four-year terms:

The Revd Tim Richards [2024]

Mr Tim Hopley [2025]

8.1.1 Methodist/ United Reformed Church strategic oversight group

General Secretary

A General Assembly Moderator

Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

8.2 Church of England - United Reformed Church Contact Group

Co-Chair: The Revd Ruth Whitehead [2024]

Co-Secretary: Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

The Revd Dr Susan Durber [2024]

Mr John Ellis [2024]

The Revd Tim Meadows [2024]

8.3 EMU Partnership (Scottish Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church in Scotland and the United Reformed Church National Synod of Scotland)

[see note 7]

Appointed by the National Synod of Scotland

8.4 Conversations between the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and the Anglican Communion

The Revd Dr Julian Templeton

8.5 Roman Catholic/United Reformed Church Dialogue Group

Co-chair: The Revd Dr John Bradbury

Co-secretary: The Revd Philip Brooks

Members:

Mr John Cornell

The Revd Jason McCullagh

The Revd Dr Sarah Hall

The Revd Lindsey Sanderson

9. Representatives on governing bodies of theological colleges, etc

9.1 Northern College

The Revd Raymond Singh [2023]

Mr Willie Duncan [2025]

The Revd Mark Bates [2026][†]

In attendance: Secretary for Education and Learning

Mrs Margaret Marshall [2024]

The Revd John Grundy [2025]

Dr Lesley Coote [2026]**

9.2 Westminster College: board of governors

Governors serve six-year terms, which may be renewed.

Convenor: The Revd Nigel Uden [2026]

Clerk to the governors: The Revd Naomi Young-Rodas [2028]**

Honorary treasurer (Westminster College): Mr Andrew Grimwade [2023][†]

Acting Principal: The Revd Dr Robert Pope

Mr John Ellis [2023]

Mrs Darnette Whitby-Reid [2025]

The Revd Stuart Scott [2023]

Two vacancies

Note 1: A further six governors are appointed by the Cambridge Theological Federation, the University of Cambridge, Anglia Ruskin University, the college's teaching staff, its students and the Cheshunt Foundation.

Note 2: The Secretary for Education and Learning and the URC Treasurer are normally in attendance.

9.2.1 The Cheshunt Foundation

Mr Guy Morfett

9.2.2 Cambridge Theological Federation

Convenor, Westminster College governors

10. Governors of colleges and schools with which the United Reformed Church is associated

10.1 Caterham School

Southern Synod Moderator

10.2 Eltham College

Mr Martin Fosten

10.3 Walthamstow Hall

Mrs Isabel Heald

10.4 Milton Mount Foundation

Mrs Daphne Bembridge [2023]

The Revd Kevin Swaine [2024]

Vacancy

Mr Ray Dunnett [2024]

The Revd Derek Lindfield [2026][†]

Five URC governors serve four-year terms, which may be renewed.

10.5 Silcoates School

The Revd Jason McCullagh [2024]
Governors serve three-year terms.

Vacancy

10.6 Taunton School

Baptist governor at present

10.7 Bishops Stortford College

Mr Richard Harrison

11. Miscellaneous

The United Reformed Church is represented on a variety of other national organisations and committees as follows:

11.1 Arthur Rank Centre

The Revd Elizabeth Caswell

11.2 Churches Legislation Advisory Service

Ms Muna Levan Harris [2023]

General Secretary

11.3 Congregational Fund Board

Mr Anthony Bayley [2023]

The Revd Janine Atkinson [2023]

Mr Mike Hart [2024]

The Revd Geoffrey Roper [2023]

Mrs Mary Steele [2023]

11.4 Congregational Memorial Hall Trust

Mr John Ellis [2023]

Mrs Margaret Thompson [2024]

The Revd Derek Wales [2025]

Representatives serve four-year terms which may be renewed.

Mr Simon Fairnington [2023]

Mr Philip Bonnier [2025]

Vacancy

11.5 Historic England Places of Worship Forum

Convenor of the listed buildings advisory group

11.6 Lord Wharton's Charity

The Revd Derek Lindfield

11.7 Retired ministers' and widows' fund

The Revd Julian Macro

Ms Liz Sharples

Mr Anthony Bayley

11.8 Roots for Churches Ltd

The Revd Jenny Mills**

Nominated by the Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)

11.9 Samuel Robinson's Charities

Mr Tony Alderman

11.10 Scout Association – URC General Assembly Chaplain

The Revd Keith Morrison

This appointment is made by the Children's and Youth Work Committee.

11.11 United Reformed Church History Society

The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar [2024] Mrs Jean Wyber [2027][†]

The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe [2023]

Council Members serve five-year terms, which may be renewed.

11.12 World Day of Prayer

England, Wales and Northern Ireland: vacancy

Scotland: Synod appointment.

11.13 Westhill Endowment Trust

Two vacancies

Note: this list will be superseded in July 2022. The latest list approved by General Assembly or by Assembly Executive on its behalf is available at: <http://bit.ly/URCNom>.

Paper M1

Ratification of constitutional changes concerning the Ministerial Discipline and Incapacity Processes

The General Secretary

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The General Secretary john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision to ratify the changes adopted at General Assembly 2021, to which no Synod has registered an objection.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution</p> <p>24. General Assembly adopts the following amendments to the Basis of Union and Structure of the URC:</p> <p>Basis of Union of the United Reformed Church Schedule E, Paragraph 4 – delete the word ‘ministerial’ before ‘rights of membership’.</p> <p>The Structure of the United Reformed Church Paragraph 1(4) – Add heading ‘Definitions’ and reword:</p> <p>1.(4) Unless otherwise expressly stated or clearly excluded by the context,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) the expressions ‘minister’, ‘ministers’, ‘ministry’ and ‘ministerial’ when used in the Structure shall refer to the ministry of Word and Sacrament; b) the expression ‘the Disciplinary Process’ shall refer to the Process established by the General Assembly under paragraph 2(6)(xxi), but includes any process so established for similar purposes before the adoption of that provision; c) the expression ‘the Incapacity Procedure’ shall refer to the Procedure established by the General Assembly under paragraph 2(6)(xxiii), but includes

	<p>any process so established for similar purposes before the adoption of that provision.</p> <p>Paragraph 2(1) – in function (ix), insert ‘(subject to paragraph 2(7)(ii))’ before ‘to suspend or remove names’.</p> <p>In the Functions of Synods, delete the initial ‘A’ and the words in brackets.</p> <p>Function (xvii) – delete existing text and replace with the following:</p> <p>‘To discharge the functions required under the Disciplinary Process to be exercised by the synod, either directly, or indirectly through other officers or bodies, as the Process may provide’.</p> <p>Function (xviii) – delete existing text and replace with the following:</p> <p>‘To discharge the functions required under the Incapacity Procedure to be exercised by the synod, either directly, or indirectly through other officers or bodies, as the Procedure may provide’.</p> <p>Function (xxi) after ‘Disciplinary Process’ delete ‘contained in Section O’.</p> <p>Delete section (B) of the Functions of Synods</p> <p>Paragraph 2.(5) – In sub-paragraph (A), after ‘the following functions’, delete the words in brackets.</p> <p>In the Functions of Ecumenical Area Meetings, Function (viii), delete ‘contained in Section O’ and the cross-reference in brackets.</p> <p>Function (xviii) - delete existing text and replace with the following:</p> <p>‘To discharge, concurrently with the synod, such of the functions and duties conferred or imposed by the Disciplinary Process or the Incapacity Procedure upon the synod in respect of a minister or Church Related Community Worker (or former holder of either office) serving or resident within the</p>
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Ecumenical Area, after proceedings involving that person are concluded, as the synod may from time to time request’.

Paragraph 2.(6) – After ‘General Assembly is responsible for exercising the following Functions’ delete the words in brackets.

In the Functions of the General Assembly, Function (xviii), delete the words in brackets.

Functions (xxi) to (xxvii) – delete existing text and replace with the following:

- (xxi) to establish, and from time to time to review, amend or replace a Process for dealing with cases of Discipline involving ministers or Church Related Community Workers;
- (xxii) to discharge the functions required under the Disciplinary Process to be exercised by the Assembly, either directly, or indirectly through other officers or bodies, as the Process may provide;
- (xxiii) to establish, and from time to time to review, amend or replace a Procedure for dealing with cases of Incapacity involving ministers or Church Related Community Workers;
- (xxiv) to discharge the functions required under the Incapacity Procedure to be exercised by the Assembly, either directly, or indirectly through other officers or bodies, as the Procedure may provide.

Renumber the last two functions (xxv) and (xxvi).

Insert new paragraph 2(7) as follows:

‘Restriction on exercise of conciliar functions

- 2(7)(i) As soon as any minister or Church Related Community Worker becomes the subject of a case under the Disciplinary Process or the Incapacity Procedure, no council of the Church shall exercise any of its functions in respect of that person in such a manner as to affect, compromise or interfere with the conduct of that case, save as provided for by the Process or Procedure itself.
- (ii) The function of the Church Meeting to maintain standards of membership shall not be exercised in a disciplinary

	<p>context in respect of any member of the local church who is at that time a minister or Church Related Community Worker; nor shall any such member be removed from the Roll of Members or the membership of that person be suspended by the Church Meeting for disciplinary reasons.</p> <p>(iii) The decision reached in any particular case (whether or not on appeal) under the Disciplinary Process or the Incapacity Procedure shall be made in the name of the General Assembly and shall be final and binding, and once so initiated that case shall be resolved only by the steps for which that Process or Procedure provides.’</p> <p>Paragraph 5 - delete existing opening text and replace with the following:</p> <p>5. The procedure for dealing with references and appeals not concerned with the Incapacity Procedure or the Disciplinary Process is as follows:</p> <p>Paragraph 5.4 – delete final sentence and replace with the following:</p> <p>No procedure governed by this paragraph shall be used to review or appeal against decisions reached under the Disciplinary Process or the Incapacity Procedure.</p> <p>Delete paragraphs 6 and 7 in their entirety.</p>
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Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	These changes provide new constitutional ‘pegs’ upon which the new Disciplinary and Incapacity process hangs.
Main points	These define the constitutional functions of the councils of the church regarding the ministerial disciplinary processes.
Previous relevant documents	Paper T1 for Mission Council November 2018 Paper T1 for Mission Council March 2019 Papers T1-T4 prepared for Mission Council March 2020 Papers appended to the report of Mission Council prepared for General Assembly July 2020. Paper R1 General Assembly 2021.
Consultation has taken place with...	All Synods have had the opportunity to review the proposed changes and none has objected.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

Paper M2

Additions to URC Structure and Rules of Procedure regarding Safeguarding

The General Secretary

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The General Secretary john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Ratification of the decision of Assembly last year, no objections having been received from Synods.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 25. General Assembly resolves to make the following additions to the Structure:</p> <p>Functions of Church Meeting: [numbering to be determined]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) To appoint a Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator. b) To adopt and promote implementation of safeguarding policy in line with General Assembly recommendations. c) To receive regular safeguarding reports from the church Safeguarding Co-ordinator. <p>Functions of Elders' Meeting: [numbering to be determined]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) To satisfy themselves that all necessary procedures are in place to achieve the aims of the church's safeguarding policy. b) To adopt best safeguarding practice for all church activities. c) To report to Church Meeting and to Synod. d) To report to the building trustees, charity regulators and insurers when advised to do so by the Synod Safeguarding Officer. <p>Functions of Synod: [numbering to be determined]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) To appoint a Synod Safeguarding Officer or equivalent. b) To have oversight of, and to support, monitor and report safeguarding related activities and issues within local churches, and amongst ministers, officers and staff of the Synod. c) To take all necessary powers and actions positively to promote implementation of good practice in accordance

with the safeguarding policy statement adopted by the General Assembly.

- d) To adopt best safeguarding practice for all its own activities and events.

Functions of General Assembly: [numbering to be determined]

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

Resolution

1. **General Assembly resolves to make the following additions to the Rules of Procedure:**

Safeguarding Implementation: [numbering to be determined]

1. Church Meeting:
 - a) To appoint a Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator who is cognisant of current safeguarding policy, practice and procedure.
 - b) To receive regular – at least annual – safeguarding reports from the Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator.
2. Elders' Meeting:
 - a) To present an annual safeguarding report to Church Meeting and an annual safeguarding return to synod.
3. Synod:
 - a) To appoint a Synod Safeguarding Officer with the necessary experience, qualifications and current knowledge.
 - b) To arrange for safeguarding training as appropriate.
 - c) To collate church safeguarding returns and forward them to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.
4. General Assembly:
 - a) To appoint a Designated Safeguarding Lead with the necessary experience, qualifications and current knowledge.

Subject and aim(s)	Safeguarding is not currently mentioned in the United Reformed Church Structure. To add new functions will serve to ensure that safeguarding is foundational in our journey towards becoming a safer church, make explicit where various responsibilities lie and give the necessary authority for actions that need to be taken. Likewise, additions are proposed to the Rules of Procedure where they fall outside of the scope of the Structure.
Main points	To embed safeguarding responsibilities in the URC Structure and Rules of Procedure.
Previous relevant documents	Paper T2, General Assembly 2021.
Consultation has taken place with...	All Synods – none of whom have registered an objection.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

Paper M3

Church changes not previously reported to Assembly

The General Secretary

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The General Secretary john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	26. General Assembly notes the Churches which have closed since last they were reported to General Assembly. We give thanks to God for the worship and witness offered by these fellowships across the years.

Synod 1 – Northern Synod

Boldon United Reformed Church, East Boldon, Tyne and Wear, 11 September 2021
 North Broomhill LEP, Northumberland, 24 July 2021
 St Andrew's United Reformed Church, Hebburn, 29 September 2021
 St Paul and St John's United Reformed Church, South Shields, 25 September 2021

Synod 2 – North Western Synod

Accrington United Reformed Church, Accrington, Lancashire, 27 June 2021
 Burnley and Nelson United Reformed Church, Burnley, 27 March 2022
 Chapel Street and Hope United Reformed Church, Salford, 10 October 2021
 Christ Church, Reddish, Stockport, 19 September 2021
 Church of the Epiphany Droylsden, Droylsden, 21 October 2021
 Cleveleys United Reformed Church, Cleveleys, 26 December 2021
 Fulwood United Reformed Church, Preston, 8 January 2022
 Patricroft United Reformed Church, Eccles, 30 June 2021

Synod 3 – Mersey Synod

Hamilton Memorial United Reformed Church, Birkenhead, Merseyside, 27 January 2022
 Minshull United Reformed Church, Minshull Vernon, Crewe, 28 November 2021
 St George's United Reformed Church, Thornton Hough, Wirral, 31 July 2021

Synod 4 – Yorkshire Synod

Christ Church with Trinity United Reformed Church, Kirkella, Hull, 29 September 2021
 Eccleshill United Reformed Church, Eccleshill, Bradford, 8 June 2021
 Pickering United Reformed Church, Pickering, Yorkshire, 11 May 2021

Synod 5 – East Midlands Synod

Anstey United Reformed Church, Anstey, Leicestershire, 30 September 2021
 Badby United Reformed Church, Badby, Daventry, 31 August 2021
 Paulerspury United Reformed Church, Paulerspury, Towcester, 26 September 2021

The Headlands United Reformed Church, Northampton, 31 July 2021
Westcotes United Reformed Church, Leicester, 27 April 2021

Synod 6 – West Midlands Synod

Bridgnorth United Reformed and Methodist Church, Bridgnorth, 31 August 2021
Halesowen United Reformed Church, Halesowen, 2 October 2021
Newent United Reformed Church, Newent, 28 February 2022
Welsh Frankton United Reformed Church, Welsh Frankton, 18 September 2021
Wolstanton United Reformed Church, Wolstanton, Newcastle-under-Lyme,
30 August 2021

Synod 7 – Eastern Synod

Trinity United Reformed Church, Harlow, 7 November 2021

Synod 8 – South Western Synod

Langport United Reformed Church, Langport, 31 August 2021
Newquay United Reformed Church, Newquay, 16 August 2021
Uffculme United Reformed Church, Uffculme, 1 February 2022

Synod 9 – Wessex Synod

Chandler's Ford United Reformed Church, Chandler's Ford, 3 September 2021
Hope Church Freshwater Bay United Reformed Church, Freshwater, Isle of Wight,
31 December 2021
Longfleet United Reformed Church, Poole, 31 December 2021
Walkford United Reformed Church, Walkford, Christchurch, 21 March 2022

Synod 10 – Thames North Synod

Holtspur United Reformed Church, Holtspur, Beaconsfield, 4 May 2021

Synod 11 – Southern Synod

Christ Church United Reformed Church, Leatherhead, 4 January 2021
Speer Road United Reformed Church, Thames Ditton, 30 July 2021

Synod 12 – Synod of Wales

Hebron United Reformed Church, Mostyn, Holywell, 17 July 2021
New Bethel United Reformed Church, Pontllanfraith, Blackwood, 12 December 2021
Talgarth United Free Church, Talgarth, 31 July 2021

Synod 13 – Synod of Scotland

Coaltown-Of-Balgonie United Reformed Church, Coaltown-of-Balgonie, Fife,
24 July 2021
Community Church of St Serf United Reformed Church, Dunning, Perth, 16 May 2021

Paper N1

Church Life Review update

Church Life Review Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The General Secretary john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Consultation.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To update General Assembly on the progress of the Church Life Review, and to consult on ongoing work.
Main points	<p>The Theos research into what makes for flourishing in local United Reformed Church is ongoing, and will conclude in the first half of 2023.</p> <p>The Forensic Accounting research is underway, and Synods and the General Assembly have been providing financial data.</p> <p>There is a range of Governance issues that the denomination needs to address.</p> <p>There is a need for significant assistance to help churches and Synods with the burdens of compliance, and to free them for the worship, witness, service and evangelism that is at the heart of the vocation of the Church.</p> <p>There is a need to be realistic about when a local congregation is struggling to the point they cannot realistically function, to provide options for congregations in that situation, as well as at times recognising when congregations need to bring their lives to an end.</p>
Previous relevant documents	Assembly Executive Report.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (eg ecumenical)	

Tending the vineyard

'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit... I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing' [John 15: 1-2, 5].

The image of the vineyard and the vine runs throughout scripture. Psalm 80 uses the remarkable image of the People of God, Israel as a vine.

'You brought a vine out of Egypt;
you drove out the nations and planted it.
You cleared the ground for it;
it took deep root and filled the land.'

In a vineyard in one of Jesus' parables in Luke's Gospel, we find a fig tree, perhaps a little out of place.

Then he told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'

God has an expectation that the Church will be fruitful. To be fruitful requires digging out, fertilising, and pruning.

The Church Life Review Group has landed on this image of tending the vineyard (in which we find things that we might not think belong, like olive trees!). The call of the church is to be the branches of the vine that is Christ which is tended by God the vinegrower. The fruits of the vine are found primarily in the congregations of the United Reformed Church, the wine they produce being transformative for the communities they serve. The fruits are in making disciples, and nourishing disciples in the life of worship, witness, service and evangelism of the Church.

We do not see our work as telling the United Reformed Church how to make the wine of the Kingdom. That is, rightly, the vocation of our local churches, who know their own contexts and their needs. We do see it as our task to help the Church discern what God the vinegrower requires from us by way of tending the soil, and pruning. Our remit, to examine the life, the structures and the resources of the United Reformed Church, is not a glamorous one. We believe that by tending to issues we frequently prefer to avoid because they are unexciting or difficult, like money, governance and compliance and give ourselves permission to stop some of the less fruitful and more burdensome activities – we should seek not to resist but to actively co-operate with God's pruning.

This report is very much a 'work in progress' report, and a report on which we are seeking to consult the General Assembly while other pieces of work are ongoing, and other consultations taking place.

Key issues for the longer term

There are some key issues that we are very aware of needing to address, and which we are not addressing directly in the first instance, because we believe to do so wisely requires the outcomes of ongoing work first.

Deployment and the Ministry and Mission Fund

There is a sense that the deployment of stipendiary ministry has become dysfunctional. However faithfully we try to respond to the challenges of deployment with mission as the focus, the lived reality for local congregations and for stipendiary ministers is that 'the jam is spread ever thinner'. In the context of a faster rate of the decline of numbers of serving Elders and others in congregations than ministers, there are fewer active volunteers ministering, which places greater pressures on stipendiary ministers, at the same time that ministers face working with ever-greater numbers of congregations. Too many local churches feel they are only just doing the bare minimum to keep going. Too many ministers feel all they can do is help keep churches going, not engage in leading churches in their mission to the world as they promise to do at ordination. There will be no easy answers to this question, but until we have much clearer information about the financial resources available to the family of the United Reformed Church it is hard to directly address the issue. The answers will lie in a combination of increased use of paid workers in church life, and more intentional and deployed use of lay ministry, as well as finding ways to prioritise those places that may most benefit from stipendiary ministry.

Significant changes to patterns of ministry, which may become yet more significant in time, can undermine the current rationale for the way the Ministry and Mission fund works, and the way in which Synods calculate M&M payments. There is a deep commitment in the URC to the idea that we contribute as we are able, and receive as we need. We will need to consider carefully as a church how that principle is most effectively worked out in the current context of deployment, which is vastly different from that which pertained in 1972. When we have a clearer idea of what local churches believe is required for their flourishing through the Theos research and wider consultation (see below), and we have a better understanding of the resources of the family of the United Reformed Church, only then do we believe we will be able to address these issues.

Compliance and property

We are profoundly aware of the way in which the burden of compliance in things such as safeguarding, health and safety, employment legislation, charity commission requirements and the like are becoming an overwhelming burden for many churches, as well as for Synods. We are aware as a group that the local churches we are members of, or engage with in our various roles in church life, struggle with this. Presently, support for local churches in these areas is limited. We have limited national resources by way of guidance, pro-forma documents and the like, and quite a lot of what there is ends up developed 13 times over by the Synods. These things matter hugely – indeed, that people are peaceful and safe, enjoy protection from harm, and are treated fairly and justly are gospel matters – in that sense 'compliance' does an injustice to them. These issues, having manifested through the development of legal requirements over the 50 year history of the URC, has led to them being experienced as a huge burden.

The way the United Reformed Church was conceived, the Councils of the Church are concerned with the functions of being the church: worshipping, discipling, evangelising and serving. Synod Trust Companies were set up primarily to deal with matters of property. In the absence of these compliance matters finding a 'home' within our structures to truly support all the councils of the Church in their work, this leaves local

churches, Synods and, to an extent the General Assembly, floundering under the weight of these issues. There is a need to liberate the roots of the vine from the clay of compliance, allowing the vine to absorb the nutrients of the gospel as a church, while ensuring these matters of safety and justice the law requires of us are tended to. How this can be done can only be fully explored when we have a clear idea of the resources available throughout the United Reformed Church, and have given thought to the structures that might provide it. We have a vision that every local church would receive personalised assistance from someone who was able to come to them, assist in assessing their compliance needs, furnish them with the advice and resources necessary to meet those needs, and work with them on ensuring everything was appropriately in order. For many local churches, this would be liberating – liberating them for the work of growing disciples. It could also be liberating for Synods to be freed from the need to be concerned with these matters, leaving them to support local churches in their worship, witness, service and evangelism – as is their vocation in the structure of the United Reformed Church. Realising such a vision would take a concerted effort, and considerable resources. We believe this will be possible, and that the work we're doing on forensic accounting and governance will help work out how.

Another major issue for many local churches is the management of their property. Some of our most thriving congregations, interestingly, do not have buildings, and this is something some local churches would do well to consider. Many of our buildings are a glorious gift for the purposes of the work of the church, but their upkeep and development can become a real burden. Currently, responsibilities for buildings sit between the Trustees of the buildings, who hold much of the legal responsibility, and local churches themselves, who hold much of the day-to-day management responsibility (delegated to them by the trustees). Many Synods and Synod Trust companies work hard to support local churches in supporting their buildings. What is possible varies from Synod to Synod. We also manage different sorts of property in different ways. Many Synods now have responsibility for the maintenance of manse stock through manse schemes, whereas local churches are largely responsible for the upkeep of places of worship. We believe we need to ask questions about how we best manage the buildings of the family of the United Reformed Church. Again, it is in the light of the outcome of the forensic accounting and our work on governance that we believe that we will best be able to address this.

Initiating new work

We are aware the United Reformed Church family has planted relatively few new mission projects or congregations in the past few decades. The Special Category Ministry scheme was one way in which the Church tried to encourage new work, and while individuals have had ministries that have borne fruit, new communities of discipleship have not often emerged. A review of the outcomes of the Special Category Ministry scheme is underway. We have a vision of a much more integrated approach to church planting that may be able to restore the balance of places where the United Reformed Church is present (our essentially congregational approach to church closures meaning that there has, seemingly, been a significant pull-back of our ministry in areas of deprivation). We might also want to think about a variety of new pieces of work: that might be with young people, or involve us in greater community work, or see a significant gear-change in our response to the environmental crisis. Any new piece of work would require an ability to join up our human and financial resources in ways that are currently difficult. Again, we hope that our ongoing work will enable us to dream dreams, catch visions, and allow the vine to sprout new fruit, but this will only be possible when we much better able to discern what resources we have, to enable us to

make choices about how we use them, and have governance structures that allow us to take decisions we then can follow through with.

Ongoing work

Theos research project

As agreed at Assembly Executive, work is now underway with Theos, who are researching, using primarily qualitative methods, the identity of United Reformed Churches, what flourishing looks like for United Reformed Churches, and what resources are necessary or desirable to enable congregations and members to flourish. This will consist of ten case studies (some of which will be groups of local churches to give a wider spread of data), each consisting of ten qualitative interviews. This will be supported by background data from existing sources, and hopefully some quantitative data too.

This work will be complete by Spring 2023, and emerging outcomes will be available to the Church Life Review Group as they emerge. There is a small steering group, with staff time being given by Steve Summers (the Development Worker for CRCW and SCM Ministries).

Forensic accountancy project

At the time of writing, a template has been drafted of the headings it will be useful to analyse the income and expenditure of the General Assembly and Synods against. This has been refined in two workshops drawing together representatives of the Synods and Assembly finance teams, to ensure that the template will give the results needed, and that it is realistic to work with from the data that everyone holds.

Once the data are in, it will be possible for MKS to analyse it in ways that will tell us, for the first time ever, what we spend as a whole Church on each aspect of Church life. It should enable us as the family of the United Reformed Church to reflect on where our current priorities are in terms of our use of money, and give us the opportunity to reflect on where we would like them to be. It should provide insight into where useful economies of scale could be possible. It may also indicate areas where it would prove useful to do more detailed financial research to benchmark our use of resources against similar charitable organisations to help us gain a sense of where our expenditure may be out of kilter, or resources could be released for new work.

The theology of money

A small group has been appointed to help produce some initial material to enable us, as the family of the United Reformed Church, to think about what scripture and our faith has to say to us about the way in which we used our financial resources. A brief examination of General Assembly reports suggest that while we have given careful thought to our investment policies, and have, at times, paid attention to economic matters in relation to justice issues within society as a whole, we have never reflected ourselves on how our faith commitments shape our own use of the financial resources we have at our disposal. Clearly, as a Church we need to think with wisdom and care about how we wish in the future to use our financial resources. It is hoped this piece of work will enable us to do this in a biblically and theologically informed way.

Thinking about the future in a year of jubilee

Part of our considerations have been about how we consult with the United Reformed Church in the widest way possible. To this end, material is being prepared, that is rooted in some of the worship and reflection we will engage with in General Assembly 2022.

Material is being provided for local churches to use in the autumn. Reformation Sunday (30 October) is being suggested, but we are aware local churches may be marking our Jubilee in various ways locally, and they will want to work this into their activities in a way that makes sense for them. The Daily Devotions Sunday Service that week will focus on helping us think through questions around the future of the church, rooted in the theme of jubilee. We are planning a means by which online feedback will be possible as local congregations consider key questions. Paper feedback will be a possibility, too. We are exploring ways that feedback may be made as widely available as possible to stimulate conversation across the whole church. We will then attempt to collate the feedback to inform our ongoing work. The aim of this is fairly wide-ranging reflection on what we celebrate about the United Reformed Church, what we'd like to be liberated from, and to do some dreaming – if we had £50 million to spend as a Church, marking the first 50 years of the United Reformed Church, what might we spend it on? It is hoped open questions of this variety will stimulate reflection, and give people scope to contribute to the ongoing conversation as they wish.

The minimum requirements for being a Church

The group has been working on the baseline for a local church to meet statutory and denominational requirements as a full congregation of the United Reformed Church but, more importantly, what needs to be in place to see our congregations flourishing with active disciples engaged in mission in the world. In some cases, this could be possible through leaving the burden of buildings or gaining people-resources from other places – such as sharing the role of Treasurer or Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator with another church, or having support provided at Synod level. In other cases, we can expect to see transformative new beginnings through coming under the umbrella of another local church – perhaps something akin to the Methodist system of becoming a 'Class' of another church, maintaining a worshipping presence in a locality but joining with another church to share teaching (discipleship) and in mission.

A draft paper has been written and sent for consultation with the Synod Moderators. On the basis of the feedback received, we will take the work forward, and bring a revised document to a future meeting of General Assembly or Assembly Executive with some recommendations for action.

Governance concerns

The Law and Polity Advisory Group has been working on a range of issues around the formal relationships between Synods and their associated Trust Companies. This has also concerned matters surrounding the interpretation of the United Reformed Church Acts of Parliament concerning the disposal of properties. In the light of more general concerns about governance issues, the United Reformed Church Trust is proactively now working on a range of issues regarding governance. In the light of a protracted legal case in an employment tribunal, a range of governance matters have been advised upon for us by legal counsel. This has highlighted concerns across the board about our ability to securely handle compliance matters, and to ensure that our responsibilities to the relevant charitable legislative and oversight bodies are effectively met. The history of how charity registration was engaged with when Church bodies with a turnover of more than £100,000 were required to register has left us with a legacy of complexity at Synod and General Assembly level (there is greater transparency in arrangements at local level, fortunately). It was determined that Charitable Trusteeship for Synods and the General Assembly should be lodged in the pre-existing charitable trust companies that held the properties of the URC in trust. These, however, are vehicles primarily concerned with the holding of buildings and land in trust, and not charitable trusteeship in terms of the governance of the activities undertaken with charitable funds. It is here

that issues of compliance have often fallen between stools in ways that are unhelpful. The concern has also been flagged that the more assistance the wider councils of the church give to local churches around matters of compliance (see the aspiration stated above about what local churches might wish to experience from the wider Church), the greater the possibility is that the wider councils of the Church expose themselves to liabilities for things that happen in the local context. It would be possible to find ways to give such support to local churches that avoid this, and this needs active exploration. There is a general concern that in places within the life of the United Reformed Church, the authority to act, and the liability for such action, do not rest in the same place, leading to unsustainable risks. This needs careful attention.

Consultation on finance, property and governance issue

The Law and Polity Advisory Group has expressed the intention of holding a consultation between all Synods and Synod Trust Companies to share the results of some of the work on Governance that has been done, and to engage with questions surrounding governance and compliance issues. There is a very high overlap between these issues and the financial issues that are being explored in the forensic accounting, as well as overlap among many of the individuals concerned with these areas of church life in Synods and nationally. At the time of writing this report, it is hoped that a joint consultation hosted by LPAG and the Church Life Review Group will bring together representatives of Synods, Synod Trust Companies, and the URC Trust. We believe it would be fruitful to bring together those in the denomination with specific responsibilities for the oversight of property, finance and governance issues to receive and reflect on the results of the forensic accounting, governance work, and concerns about liabilities. The property and money of the United Reformed Church are held in (at least) 14 main legal entities, the URC Trust and the 13 Synod Trust companies. There has never been any attempt to bring representatives of all of those bodies together to share common concerns, determine areas of common interest, and to explore possible areas for future collaboration. We are already aware of governance issues that require attention, and will by later this year have a more transparent picture of the finances of the United Reformed Church at Synod and General Assembly level. Any attempt to discern what constructive actions we might take will require a high degree of collaboration and consensus among these 14 different legal bodies. It is our hope to hold a 48-hour consultation, with the aim of building relationships and trust, seeking common recognition of the challenges we face, sharing key information arising from the work of LPAG on governance issues to find common ways forward that will leave our governance on a stronger footing and reduce associated risks, and jointly to explore the outcome of the forensic accounting with the aim of exploring commonalities and differences, possible economies of scale through joint working, and the like.

Paper N2

Assembly Committee structures and Church House structures

Church Life Review

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The General Secretary john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Consultation and decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>27. General Assembly welcomes the initial thinking about a General Assembly Committee structure and an associated Church House staffing structure. In the light of comments at Assembly, and the results of further consultation with committees, Synod Moderators and Clerks, it invites the Church Life Review Group to bring finalised proposals to Assembly Executive in November 2022 authorising Assembly Executive to adopt these if it sees fit so to do.</p> <p>28. Assembly resolves to create a Chief Operating Officer post to replace the current Deputy General Secretary Administration and Resources role upon the retirement of the current post-holder. It authorises the Officers of the General Assembly to agree a finalised Job Description and Person Specification, having taken advice from the Human Resources Advisory Group.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To consult Assembly on current thinking about a new General Assembly Committee structure and associated Church House staffing structure.
Main points	<p>To consult Assembly on proposals:</p> <p>To move towards three key strategic committees that serve the General Assembly: Mission, Church Life and Administration and Resources.</p> <p>To move to two staffing departments at Church House, <i>Church Life and Mission</i>, and <i>Administration and Resources</i>, under a Deputy General Secretary and a Chief Operating Officer respectively.</p> <p>From within existing staffing, to create two Team Leader roles for Church Life and Mission.</p> <p>To invite the Church Life Review Group to bring finalised proposals after further consultation to the Assembly Executive.</p>

	To authorise the creation of a Chief Operating Officer post to replace the current Deputy General Secretary Administration and Resources role, and to authorise the Officers of the General Assembly to finalise the Job Description.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Church House staff secretaries. Consultation will be ongoing at the time of Assembly with Committees, Synod Moderators and Synod Clerks.

Summary of impact

Financial	It is expected that there will be an overall reduction in the costs of the new committee structure with reduced numbers attending meetings and reductions in associated travel costs. The reduction in staffing from three Deputy General Secretaries to one Deputy General Secretary and one Chief Operating Officer is expected will result in an overall cost saving.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Church Life Review

Central Committee Structure and Church House Structure

1. Background

- 1.1. The question of the Church House staffing structure has moved up the agenda. Francis Brienen, Deputy General Secretary for Mission, retired at the end of April 2022. We have made a temporary ‘acting-up’ appointment to cover this for an initial two-year period.
- 1.2. Jane Baird, Deputy General Secretary for Administration and Resources, has indicated that she is likely to retire in June 2023.
- 1.3. Two retirements close to one another, and the fact that we have made a temporary appointment at the moment, gives us an opportunity to review the staffing structure at Church House. Given how closely related the staffing structure needs to be to the General Assembly Departmental and Committee structure, this means that we need to review both close at hand.

2. Timetable

- 2.1. To realistically fill a successor to the DGS Admin and Resources (in whatever form that post takes) allowing for a handover period, we need to advertise and run a recruitment process by the latest at the beginning of 2023, but preferably by autumn 2022. To meaningfully allow preparation for this, it is the intention to seek the consent of the General Assembly to the appointment in July 2022. It is impossible in the work of the Church Life Review Group to have an adopted and accepted new committee structure by this point – careful consultation is required

before we take such a piece of business to General Assembly or Assembly Executive. This means we need to move ahead to the appointment of a new DGS Administration and Resources before we have completed the new structure. It is vital, however, to do so keeping in mind prospective changes.

- 2.2. This paper sets out our current thinking on the shape of a new General Assembly Committee structure, which hopefully can inform, in background terms, the decision to seek to recruit a Chief Operating Officer post to succeed the current Deputy General Secretary for Administration and Resources upon her retirement.
- 2.3. This paper is also currently being consulted on by the current committees of the General Assembly, Synod Moderators and Synod Clerks. Particular consultation is taking place with URC Youth and the Children's and Youth Work Committee. We are concerned that whatever new proposals continue to strengthen the place of young people within the work of the United Reformed Church, and not sideline this. We are aware of the tension between drawing young people's voices into our wider work, and having a committee dedicated to Children's and Youth Work. This is one area of our proposals we could imagine being particularly likely to continue to evolve before we reach a final determination.
- 2.4. It is hoped to receive at General Assembly comment and reflection on these proposals, which, along with feedback from other consultations, will allow finalised proposals to be brought back to the Assembly Executive in November 2023.
- 2.5. It is hoped that if Assembly Executive agrees a new committee structure in November 2023, it will come into being in January 2024, allowing time for a new structure to be populated, and for appropriate handover from existing structures to take place. By General Assembly 2024, we would hope the new committee structure would be reporting to Assembly.

3. Purpose of this paper

- 3.1. This paper is to set out the thinking of the Church Life Review Group regarding the future structures of the General Assembly committees, and the related Church House staffing structure. These are intrinsically related, as Church House works to the direction and oversight of the General Assembly through its committees. Currently, however, there is no neat relationship between the two structures.

4. Identifying structural issues

- 4.1. About eight years ago, Church House developed a three-department structure: Administration and Resources, Discipleship, and Mission. Each has a Deputy General Secretary who, with the General Secretary, forms the General Secretariat.
- 4.2. Prior to this, various committees had merged to form the Mission Committee, which means that there is one committee, with one convenor, one Deputy General Secretary, and one staff team. This is a strong model, and brings

coherence of direction across the strategic overview of the committee, and the operational work of the staff team. (See Figure 1.)

- 4.3. The Discipleship department brings together Staff Secretaries in Children's and Youth Work, Education and Learning, Ministries (including community work) and Safeguarding. Each of these staff secretaries work to a different General Assembly Committee. There is a Deputy General Secretary for the department. While there is a strong sense of teamwork among the staff of the department, it has not always been so, and the current structure does not easily enable it. The agendas to which staff work are determined by the various different Assembly Committees. Opportunities for joined-up work can be lost because the committees work independently from one another. The committees, it would be fair to say, have little or no sense of being in a 'department', even if the staff team do. (See Figure 2.)
- 4.4. There are considerable areas of crossover between the Discipleship department and the Mission department. Some areas are obvious, such as Pioneer and Fresh Expression ministry, ministry and evangelism and so on. Children's and Youth Work is concerned with both Mission and Discipleship. While the ideal is that the General Secretariat keeps an overview of the work of the church as a whole, within a conciliar church, strategy and direction is set by the committees, not individual staff members, and there is therefore a limit to the real coordination of strategy that the General Secretariat can offer when policy is rightly determined elsewhere.
- 4.5. The Administration and Resources Department (Figure 3) is made up of staff that cover the areas of Finance, Human Resources, IT, Facilities and Communications, along with the staff of the Retired Ministers Housing Association (which is a separate entity in governance terms, and whose work is governed by the RMHS Board, but the URC provides the staff with which the RMHS undertakes its work). It relates to the Communications Committee, the Equalities Committee (the DGS A&R is the staff member that serves this committee), the Finance Committee, The Church House Management Group, and the Human Resources Advisory Group. It relates to the RMHS Board and the URC Trust, as external legal entities to the URC itself. Whilst the staff members may have a sense of a departmental identity, the committees do not. (See Figure 3.)
- 4.6. The work of the Equalities Committee and the Communications Committee span the whole life of the church. The first has a function of monitoring and promoting equalities across the whole life of the United Reformed Church. The second oversees the work of the Communications department that works closely with all other departments in promoting effective communications throughout the life of the Church.
- 4.7. There is an overriding concern at the scale of our committee structure, and the number of appointments it takes to fill it. The work of the Nominations Committee becomes increasingly impossible, with more than 500 appointments to make. There is a real need to take safer recruitment more seriously, which the

committee is currently working on. This is also about improving the quality of appointments in the round, which is important for the good functioning of the Church.

- 4.8. In our current committee structure, the first place within church life that can take a strategic overview of the whole work of the Church is the Assembly Executive or the General Assembly itself. While there is a relatively informal meeting of committee convenors and secretaries at the end of each Assembly Executive, and the General Secretariat keep an overview along with the Church House Connective (meeting of staff secretaries and equivalents), the number of our committees mean that at times important strategic links get missed, or there is a danger of the repetition of work in different places.

5. Principles for a new structure

- 5.1. Intrinsic to the nature of the United Reformed Church is that we are a conciliar church. We believe that we take decisions better together than any one individual might on their own. We believe that we meet together, in the councils of the church, and discern through our engagement with scripture and under the power of the Holy Spirit. This cascades into our structures, where the same principle holds.
- 5.2. It is also a tradition that believes in individual leadership of the Church in its mission to the world (notice the mission belongs to the Church, the leadership is exercised by individuals). This is one of the tasks that ministers promise in their ordination, and others are called upon at times to exercise that kind of leadership. The reality of the life of the United Reformed Church is that much of the impetus and direction for the work of our committees comes from committee convenors and staff secretaries. This is an important ministry in our midst, and part of what enables good conciliar decision making.
- 5.3. There is a distinction to be drawn between decisions regarding strategy and policy, and operational decisions about the day-to-day running of the life of the Church. It is right within our conciliar policy that major decisions about vision, strategy and policy should be discerned collectively. The operational task of putting into practice vision, strategy and policy is a matter that is more helpfully and effectively left to office bearers and staff to execute.
- 5.4. There is also a distinction between the major 'programmes' and ongoing running of the life of the Church, and more specialist advisory work. It is important within a conciliar church that the former is overseen by a representative spread of people in the life of the Church (Ministers/Elders/Lay) which fully represents the diversity of the Church. It is also important that where highly specialist skills are needed, they can be found.

6. A proposed structure (Figure 4)

- 6.1. It is proposed that there should be three main committees that oversee the main visionary, strategic and policy areas of the life of the United Reformed Church: Mission, Church Life, and Administration and Resources. Alongside these, there

should also be a General Assembly Safeguarding Committee, a Nominations Committee, and a Pastoral Welfare Reference Committee. There would then be a small number of specialist reference groups.

- 6.2. It is proposed that these three committees map onto two departments at Church House, a Mission and Church Life Department (Figure 5), and an Administration and Resource Department (Figure 6). The current Discipleship Department has shown that good teamworking is possible whilst staff relate to different committees.
- 6.3. **The Mission Committee** would essentially continue the work of the existing committee; it would oversee the work covered in staff terms by the Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, the Secretary for Church and Society, the Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries, and the mission programmes of the life of the Church.
- 6.3.1. Under the Mission Committee would sit an Interfaith enabling group to offer specialism in this area.
- 6.3.2. It is intended that International Exchange work will be handled by the relevant staff, who will draw on wider knowledge and expertise from around the church when necessary, and major policy decisions about international exchange links being determined by the Mission and Ministries Committee.
- 6.3.3. It is intended that the relevant staff will, when necessary, consult with relevant partners around the church, and externally to support the work of Commitment for Life, but that this not be formalised into a particular committee, leadership being exercised by the relevant staff member, reporting to the Mission Committee.
- 6.4. **The Church Life Committee** would have oversight of all of the main ministries – lay and ordained. It would bring together what currently is handled by the Ministries Committee, the Education and Learning Committee and the Children’s and Youth Work Committee. The committee would work only at the highest level of vision, strategy and policy, and would be able to take an overview of all of the programmatic life of the church and the ministerial resources (in the widest sense) that support them. Work would be developed by Staff Secretaries and the networks of church life that they interact with, bringing matters for determination to the committee. All operational matters would be the preserve of staff, who would be accountable for their operational decisions to the committee through report.
- 6.4.1. Under the Church Life Committee would sit an Accreditations Committee, which would oversee the roll of Ministers and the granting of certificates of eligibility, the adoption of CRCW ministries, SCM ministries, the accreditation of Lay Preachers, and the roll of Elders.
- 6.4.2. Under the Church Life Committee would sit the Stepwise Development Group, which would oversee the continued development of Stepwise.
- 6.5. **The Administration and Resource Committee**
- 6.5.1. This would oversee, at the level of vision, strategy and policy, the areas of life covered by the Finance Committee, the Communications

Committee, the Human Resources Advisory Group and The Church House Management Group (Finance, Facilities, IT, Communications, HR, Compliance, Archiving, etc). Work would be developed by staff in the relevant areas, who would be entrusted with operational matters and report to the committee.

6.5.2. Under the Administration and Resources Committee will sit a Pensions Committee, and jointly with the URC Trust, a remuneration committee.

6.5.3. The responsibilities of the current Business Committee for the practical arrangements for the General Assembly would sit with the Administration and Resources Committee, though in practice this is largely a matter simply for staff.

6.6. The United Reformed Church Trust and the Ministers' Pension Trust These would continue as legally necessary, and would continue to be served by an **Investment Committee**.

6.7. There would be a **Safeguarding Committee**. Safeguarding necessarily straddles the whole of the life of the church, and it would be inappropriate for it to sit as a subsection within another committee. It also requires specialist members to be responsible for the General Assembly for our safeguarding.

6.8. There will be a **Nominations Committee** which will seek nominations for the various Committees and Advisory Groups of the General Assembly. It is envisaged – as the Nominations Committee itself has already begun to consider – that this will be a much smaller committee than currently. It would have a small core membership, who would, in consultation with Committee Convenors and Staff Secretaries, determine role descriptions for all the roles that were being sought. There will be a network of Synod Nominations Champions (at least one for each Synod) who will have the responsibility for disseminating opportunities for service within Synods, and seeking out names of possible individuals to serve. All roles will also be advertised throughout the Church using social media, News Update, and Digest. Nominations or applications will be sought. Potential candidates will be asked to provide a brief CV outlining their relevant experience, and invited to have a conversation with the relevant Deputy General Secretary, Convenor or Staff Secretary. Nominations will then be brought to the General Assembly or Assembly Executive for appointment.

6.9. There will be a **Pastoral Welfare and Reference Committee**. This committee is the committee of last resort for serious pastoral issues, normally surrounding ministers. It is vital that there is a small, highly confidential, committee that can take decisions about particular cases of hardship or difficulty when they arise. The work of this committee is relatively limited, but very important. It would be inappropriate for the matters it determines to be decided upon by individuals, and neither would it be appropriate for its work to be done as part of a wider agenda of a larger committee for reasons of confidentiality and sensitivity.

- 6.10. The current Equalities Committee has struggled to make a significant impact on the life of the church. The intention in creating a separate committee was to raise the significance of equalities for the life of the church, but has at times felt like in being siphoned off into a silo. Its work has been difficult. It offers representation onto each of the other committees, but there is a limit to the impact a representative for equalities matters can make on each committee. It is proposed, therefore, to make equalities a fundamental part of the terms of reference of each of the major Assembly Committees, requiring them to report on equalities matters in their areas of competence at each Assembly. It is rightly, for the Assembly to hold to account the entire life of the church for our equalities agenda.
- 6.11. In addition to the main standing committees of the Assembly, there would three standing advisory groups.
- 6.11.1. **The Ministerial incapacity and discipline (MIND) advisory group** which would hold responsibility for the disciplinary and incapacity processes of the church, their good operation, and the selection and training of those who serve within it.
 - 6.11.2. A **Faith, Order and Worship** advisory group would offer the church advice in the areas of Faith and Order, worship, prayer and spirituality.
 - 6.11.3. A **Law and Polity Advisory Group** will offer the church expertise in the areas of the interaction between the polity of the church and the law of the land.
 - 6.11.4. The advisory groups would be essentially reactive, carrying out piece of work at the request of the General Assembly, the Committees of the Assembly, or the Officers of the Church. They will provide a reservoir of specialist expertise in their areas.
 - 6.11.5. Committees may, from time to time, appoint specialist task or advisory groups to undertake particular pieces of work for them. The membership of these would be determined by the committees themselves, not by the nominations committee.

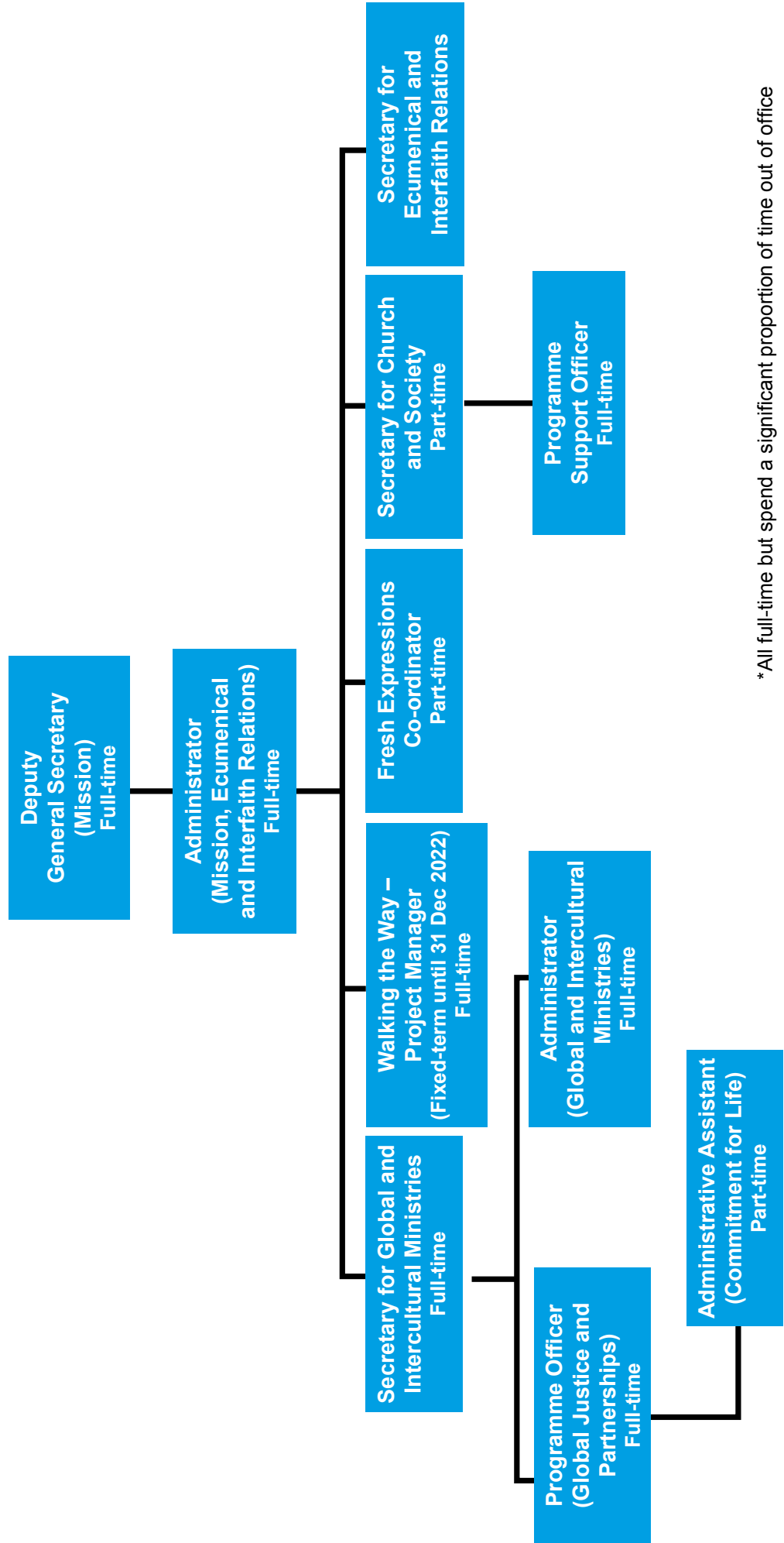
7. **General Assembly staffing structure** (see figure 4)

- 7.1. It is vital that the staffing of the General Assembly more closely map onto the committee structure than is currently the case. It is also important that lessons continue to be learned from problems that have arisen in the past, when too few senior office holders or staff have had line management responsibility for far too many people, leading to inadequate direction in the work of Church House.
- 7.2. It is proposed that under the General Secretary should be two senior members of staff.
- 7.2.1. A **Deputy General Secretary**. They will lead the Church Life and Ministries staff team, service the work of the Mission and Church Life Committees and, where necessary, deputise for the General Secretary.
 - 7.2.2. To ensure that the DGS did not have an unrealistic line management workload, there would be a **Church Life Lead** who would oversee the work of Ministries and Community Work, Education and Learning and Children's and Youth Work, and a **Mission Lead**, who will oversee the work of Ecumenism, World Church and Intercultural Ministries and

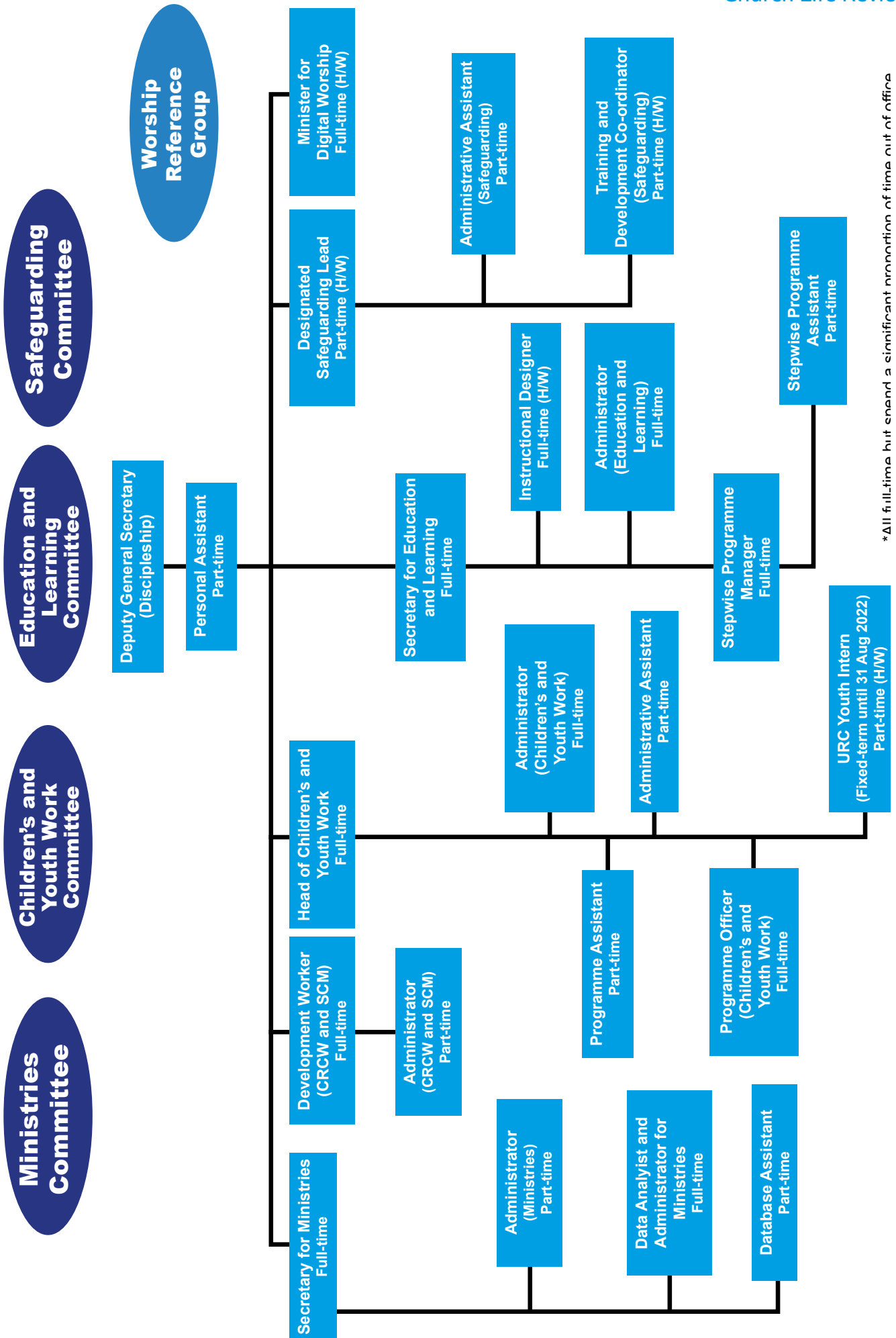
Church and Society. They will both be line-managed by the DGS. It is envisaged that these posts would be a reconfiguration of current posts rather than new roles.

- 7.2.3.** The second senior post working with the General Secretary and the Deputy General Secretary would be a **Chief Operating Officer**. This would replace the current Deputy General Secretary for Administration and Resources. That role is essentially a COO role, and we are more likely to have a successful recruitment if the job title matches similar roles elsewhere. They would lead the work of the Administration and Resources staff team, and service the Administration and Resources Committee. Where necessary, they could, in aspects of the work, deputise for the General Secretary. We are bringing a resolution to Assembly to seek a change in the job title for this role. It is the mind of both the Church Life Review Group and the Human Resources Advisory Group that, when one reviews the Job Description for this role, it does not fall within the category that would legally allow it to be a 'Genuine Occupational Requirement' for the role-holder to be a practicing Christian. An indicative Job Description appears in an appendix to this report. We are asking Assembly for the authority to change the job title, and remove the current genuine occupational requirement (which we don't believe to be sustainable in law), and to empower the Officers of the General Assembly, after taking further advice from the Human Resources Advisory Group, to proceed to make an appointment.

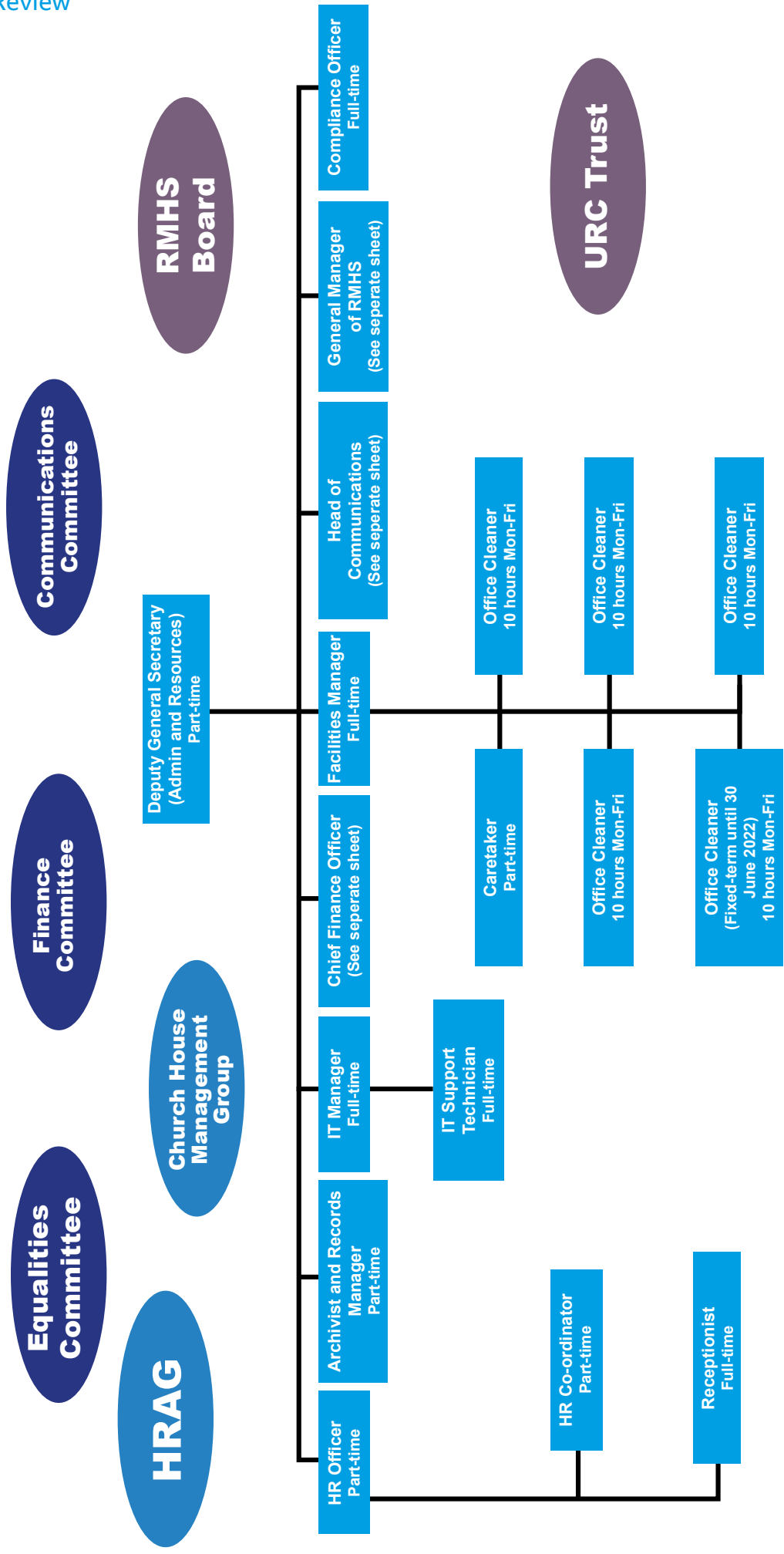
Mission Committee

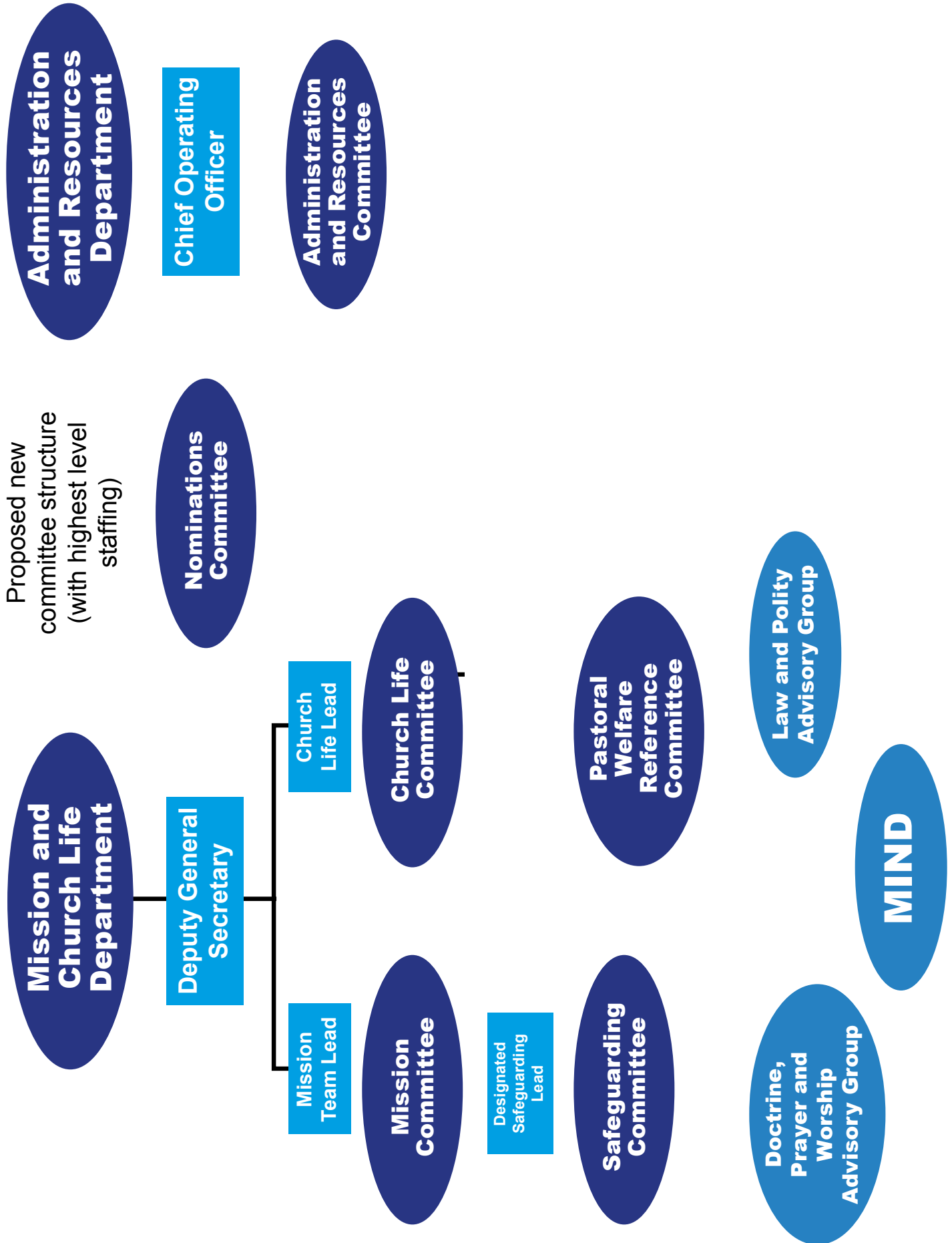


*All full-time but spend a significant proportion of time out of office



*All full-time but spend a significant proportion of time out of office





Indicative job description and person specification

Job Title	Chief Operating Officer
Area/Department	General Secretariat
Reporting to	General Secretary
Direct Reports	Chief Finance Officer; Head of Communications; Compliance Officer; Facilities Manager; HR Lead; Archivist and Records Manager; Head of IT
Location	Church House, 86 Tavistock Place, London, WC1H 9RT
Travel	Occasional travel in UK
Working Hours	Full time
<p>Job Summary: Direct and oversee the functional activities of United Reformed Church House. Contributes to the development of long term operational goals and strategies and ensures their execution. Responsible for effective operational functions: finance; communications; legal; health and safety; compliance; IT; facilities management; records; central properties; Retired Ministers Housing Society. The post-holder is expected to be in sympathy with the ethos and convictions of the United Reformed Church.</p>	

<p>Background This role works closely with the General Secretary and the Deputy General Secretary (Church Life and Mission). As part of the senior staff team, known as the General Secretariat, this role enables the effective and compliant operation of United Reformed Church House, as it seeks to serve the wider United Reformed Church, and resource the worship, witness, service and evangelism of the wider Church. Church House operates with a two department structure: Administration and Resources and Church Life and Mission. The post-holder will head the Administration and Resources Department. All authority for policy and strategy within the United Reformed Church resides in the councils of the Church. The primary councils that the post-holder will relate to will be the General Assembly and the Assembly Executive. The Administration and Resources Committee is the committee of the General Assembly which exercises authority over the areas of Church Life the Chief Operating Officer will be responsible for. The post-holder will work closely with the convenor of the committee in exercising leadership over the agenda and direction of the committee, helping the committee develop appropriate strategy and policy, and enabling the department to deliver the required outcomes.</p>
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Principal responsibilities and duties

Management

1. As a member of the General Secretariat, ensure that the work of Church House is serving the needs of the URC in the implementation of decisions of General Assembly and Assembly Executive.
2. Ensures staff team is managed in accordance with the policies and standards agreed for Church House.

Strategic

1. Develop strategies for the efficient operation of Church House (and other areas of the URC as agreed by General Assembly and Assembly Executive).
2. Lead change management initiatives.
3. Ensure appropriate cross departmental representation on project teams.

Operational

1. Monitor the efficiency of operational processes and take steps to improve them.
2. Ensure quality and legislative standards are met.
3. Participate in the setting and monitoring of departmental budgets.
4. Ensure appropriate HR, IT and other policies for Church House are kept up to date.
5. Ensure staff have appropriate training and equipment to fulfil their jobs efficiently.
6. Ensure office facilities are appropriate, meet legal requirements, and are maintained to a high standard.
7. Support HR to ensure staffing policies and practices meet the needs of the organisation.
8. Ensure that an effective remuneration system is in place for employees.
9. Ensure that IT services and systems are effective and meet the needs of the organisation.
10. Promote effective internal and external communications.
11. Manage sale and acquisition of property.
12. Support the general Manager of RMHS to provide an effective service to tenants and prospective tenants.

Working with committees and volunteers

This section lists the type and level of interaction that this role has with committees and other groups. It will vary from time to time and as directed by the [insert role].

1. The Administration and Resources Committee
2. The General Assembly

3. The Assembly Executive
4. The United Reformed Church Trust.

Expected standards

This section refers to the way in which the job is done rather than the duties/responsibilities.

1. Promote a culture of open and effective communication to enable constructive relationships with colleagues and internal and external stakeholders.
2. Actively foster an environment which nurtures equality and cherishes diversity.
3. Promote, monitor and maintain best practice in health, safety and security.
4. Work collaboratively to develop a customer service culture which fosters continuous improvement.
5. Take responsibility for own personal development and support the development of others to enhance their skills and knowledge.
6. Promote, monitor and maintain best practice in data protection principles and practice.
7. Actively promote, manage and maintain best practice in Safeguarding.

This job description reflects the overall scope and responsibilities of the role. However, it is not an exhaustive list, and the job holder is expected to undertake any other reasonable duties that might be requested. All jobs change or evolve over time in order to meet organisational or departmental needs, and this job description will therefore be subject to periodic review and change if required.

Person specification

Job Title: Chief Operating Officer

Requirements	Essential	Desirable	Measurement
Education and qualifications	1. Business, management or finance degree, or professional qualification		

Experience	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Senior Management 3. Financial and budget management 4. Change Management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR 	
Knowledge	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Company Law 6. Charity Legislation 7. Trust Law 8. Risk Management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • URC Safeguarding • Property management 	
Skills and Abilities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Excellent interpersonal and communication skills 10. Presentation skills 11. Problem solving 12. IT literacy 13. Ability to manage a complex workload and work to deadlines 14. Ability to motivate a team 15. Ability to think strategically and formulate short and long term plans 		
Other	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 16. Willing to work within the Christian ethos of the United Reformed Church 		

Paper P1

Law and Polity Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Neil Mackenzie ravelston20@hotmail.co.uk
Action required	Note.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Following a Constitutional Review, reported to Mission Council in May 2019, detailed guidance on a variety of property matters is being prepared to bring to Assembly Executive 2022.
Main points	<p>Following an Assembly Commission decision regarding a dispute arising from a disposal of church premises and the application of the proceeds thereof, the Law and Polity Advisory Group was tasked to issue practical guidance with regard to disposal of church premises which might be adopted uniformly across the United Reformed Church, but not before consulting widely. With the aid of a consultation paper, which included a questionnaire, a consultation exercise was completed.</p> <p>The interpretation of trusts relating to church premises by Synods and Trust Companies, and the practices adopted with regard to synod funds, vary between Synods to the extent that the Group needed to instruct and receive advice from a barrister of long good standing and experience in charity law. This advice has been received, and will be shared with synod officers, the chairs of Trust Companies, PLATO members and other interested parties.</p> <p>Following the outcome of this sharing of information and views, the group will bring its practical guidance to Executive in 2022</p>
Previous relevant documents	Paper M1 of May 2019.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synods and Trust Companies were consulted and invited to complete a wide-ranging questionnaire. The group also consulted Synod Clerks, Synod Moderators, members of PLATO, and the chairs of Trust Companies. The group also shared instructions to counsel and incorporated amended our instructions accordingly. Consultation will continue as the guidance is drafted, so that when it is presented to Executive

	2022, those most closely involved will have been involved in getting the material to that stage.
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Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	Reduction in risk of reputational damage through fewer problems arising.

Paper R1

Professional investigation within the Discipline Process

MIND Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	andy.braunston@urc.org.uk
Action required	Adoption of resolution.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>29. Assembly resolves to change 8.7 of Section O to read:</p> <p>The costs incurred in the work of an Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline in respect of allegations against a minister serving under oversight of a Synod shall be charged against funds of the United Reformed Church under the control of that Synod. Any other costs incurred by an Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline, by any Commission or Secretary of Commissions in operating the Process, the fees and expenses of any qualified person appointed under Appendix K as an additional member of an Investigation Team, and the reasonable expenses of any witness attending a Hearing shall be charged against funds of the Church under the control of the General Assembly.</p> <p>30. Assembly resolves to insert the following to Appendix K 6.</p> <p>If, from the information available at this stage, the case appears to be onerous due to the likely volume of evidence or the complexity of such evidence and that professional assistance in investigation would be appropriate, the senior member shall refer the matter to the Executive Group of the Disciplinary Process who may appoint a suitably qualified person, whether or not a member of the URC, as an additional member of the Investigation Team.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To allow the appointment of a professional investigator in particularly onerous disciplinary cases.
Main points	Sometimes it is not fair to our volunteer Investigation Team members to manage a complex investigation which may

	involve many witnesses. Currently, it is not possible to appoint a professional investigator; this provision would make that possible if the Executive Group of the Disciplinary Process consider it wise to do so. The change to 8.7 of Section O allows the costs of an investigator to be charged to Assembly and simplifies the language in that clause.
Previous relevant documents	Section O.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	The cost of the investigator would be borne by General Assembly.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

Paper R2

Indemnity

MIND Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	andy.braunston@urc.org.uk
Action required	Adoption of resolution.
Draft resolution(s)	31. The General Assembly indemnifies any role-holder within the Ministerial Disciplinary and Incapacity procedures, who has been duly appointed by the General Assembly or on its behalf, trained, and has acted within the authority vested in them by those processes.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To give those appointed to act within the Disciplinary and Incapacity processes the comfort of knowing the Church will indemnify them if any claims are brought against them as a result of carrying out their duly appointed role within those processes.
Main points	In an increasingly litigious environment, the Church wishes those who take on significant responsibilities to know that the Church will support them, through indemnity, should they face action as a result of actions they take while carrying out the functions assigned to them by the process.
Previous relevant documents	Section O and P.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	There is already a general understanding that the Church stands behind those who act in its name if necessary; this formalises this with respect to the new Disciplinary and Incapacity processes. Any financial impact cannot easily be estimated. No action ever has been taken against anyone fulfilling their role within the old processes, and if that continues, the financial impact will be nil. Were a claim to be brought, it is impossible to realistically estimate the financial impact.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

Paper R3

Authority within the Discipline Process

MIND Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	andy.braunston@urc.org.uk
Action required	Adoption of resolution.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>32. Assembly inserts a new paragraph 8:10 be inserted into the Framework</p> <p>If, in the Investigation Stage, there is any need for an interpretation of the process, the procedure to be followed in a particular case, or if a complaint is raised by any party to the process, such matters shall be referred to the Executive Group of the Disciplinary Process. The Executive Group of the Disciplinary comprising the Convenor of the Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group, the Assembly Commission for Discipline Panel, and the Senior Member of the Disciplinary Investigation Panel or (if the Convenor or Senior Member are involved in the case concerned their Deputies) who, having taken such legal advice as considered necessary, may issue a definitive ruling on the matter. The Executive Group of the Disciplinary Process may also be a source of advice to the Assembly Commission for Discipline who assume all authority for the case in the Hearing Stage or the Disciplinary Appeal Commission during any appeal.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To create an Executive Group of the Disciplinary Process to provide a body to interpret the process as needed.
Main points	The Convenors of the MIND Advisory Group and of the Assembly Commission for Discipline Panel and the Senior Member of the Investigation Team will form an Executive Group of the Disciplinary Process to interpret the various rules in the Process if they are unclear at all stages of a particular case.
Previous relevant documents	Section O.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

Paper R4

Curtailment of a pastoral tie or appointment

MIND Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	andy.braunston@urc.org.uk
Action required	Adoption of resolution.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>33. General Assembly, noting that the Structure [paragraph 2 (6)] recognises that:</p> <p><i>The General Assembly which shall embody the unity of the United Reformed Church and act as the central organ of its life and the final authority, under the Word of God and the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, in all matters of doctrine and order and in all other concerns of its common life...</i></p> <p>And acting under function (xxix)</p> <p><i>to do such other things as may be necessary in pursuance of its responsibility for the common life of the church,</i></p> <p>resolves that an Assembly Commission for Discipline, acting on behalf of General Assembly, may, as part of its decision-making within the Ministerial Disciplinary Process, and with the minister's name remaining on the Roll of ministers of the United Reformed Church, curtail their pastoral tie or appointment.</p> <p>34. Where such a decision is made, the General Assembly, through its Pastoral and Welfare Committee shall grant a period of, normally, between three and six months, from the conclusion of the disciplinary case, for a new Call to be found by the minister.</p> <p>35. General Assembly notes that an Assembly Commission for Discipline may further direct that the minister whose pastoral tie or appointment has been curtailed shall not engage with the pastorate/project, save for the purposes of handover and farewell, despite any suspension being lifted at the conclusion of the case.</p>

36. Further to paragraphs 1-3 ,General Assembly amends the Ministerial Disciplinary process (Section O) as follows:

a) Change section 6:5 to read

At the conclusion of the hearing the Assembly Commission for Discipline is to determine, on the balance of probabilities, whether any or all of the allegations made against the minister have been proved.

In respect of any proven allegation, it must decide either to impose no sanction, or that the accused minister should receive a written warning, **or that any pastoral tie or appointment should be curtailed, or that his or her name should be deleted from the Roll of Ministers.**

If the accused minister is the subject of an earlier written warning which remains current, the Assembly Commission for Discipline must take that into account.

A written warning, **or curtailment of any pastoral tie or appointment, may be accompanied by directions regarding the minister's future ministry, conduct or remedial steps to be taken.**

The Assembly Commission for Discipline may direct that, in the event it curtails a pastoral tie or appointment, the minister does not return to their existing post save for the purposes of farewell and handover.

[Note for Margin: Any extension of housing and stipend, normally for a period of between three and six months, is the concern of the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee.]

b) Change Appendix Q:7 to read

If the Commission does not accede to the minister's desire expressed in the admission notification, the Investigation Stage is to continue to the conclusion of the Hearing. If the Commission accedes to the minister's desire, it may attach Directions to a written warning, **curtail any pastoral tie or appointment, or **make recommendations** in the event of deletion, and the same consequences are to follow as if those sanctions were imposed at the close of a Hearing.**

c) add to Appendix S after Part I:

Part two Curtailment

- 37. A finding of Curtailment has the effect of concluding any office or appointment which a minister may hold in a local church or any Council of the Church.**
- 38. Any extension of housing and stipend, normally for a period of between three and six months from the date when curtailment takes effect, shall be a question for decision by the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee.**
- 39. Directions may be given by the Assembly Commission for Discipline to accompany curtailment in the same way as provided by Part I of this Appendix in respect of written warnings. But the minister remains on the Roll and eligible to be called or appointed to a new sphere of ministry. Pending such call or appointment, the minister will be an associate member of the Synod of the province or nation of residence on the same basis as a retired minister.**

c) Change Appendix T:1 to read

An Assembly Commission for Discipline, whether it directs the deletion of a minister's name from the Roll, gives a written warning, **curtains a pastoral tie or appointment, imposes no sanction or declares that none of the allegations against the minister have been proved, must give a written statement of reasons for reaching its decision.**

d) Change Appendix T:7 to read

It will be the responsibility of the Moderator of Synod, or the Assembly Representative for Discipline as the case may be, to ensure that the fact of any deletion from the Roll, the Directions if any accompanying a written warning, **the curtailment of any pastoral tie or appointment, and any lifting of a suspension or any recommendations made under Paragraphs 2(g) or 2(h) above, are sufficiently communicated to those within the Church who need to be aware of them. The Secretary of the Assembly Commission for Discipline is to give notice directly to any outside organisation with or for whom a former minister is known to work of any recommendations under Paragraph 2(g) relevant to that organisation. The Secretary of the Assembly Commission for Discipline is to remind all recipients of the sensitive nature of the distributed information and the need for care and discretion in how it is used.**

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	General Assembly, exercising its powers under the Basis of Union and Structure of the United Reformed Church confirms by resolution that an Assembly Commission for Discipline, acting in its name, has the authority to curtail a Minister’s office or appointment when making decisions within the disciplinary process.
Main points	<p>In rare cases, a ministers’ behaviour can amount to a breach of vows because of specific circumstances in their appointment or pastorate whereas, in a different context, the breach may not have happened. In such cases, a warning is not sufficient, but deletion from the Roll is draconian. This provision would allow a minister to stay on the Roll, but to work in a different context.</p> <p>There are instances where the extent and severity of a minister’s misconduct has been influenced by local factors connected with their office or appointment. In circumstances where the nature of the misconduct has not been sufficiently severe for a finding of removal of the ministers name from the Roll of ministers of the URC, the removal of the minister from the local situation will be beneficial to enable a fresh start for the minister and those that have been affected by their misconduct.</p> <p>The ability to curtail an office or appointment has not hitherto been a sanction available to an Assembly Commission within the Ministerial disciplinary process. Where appropriate, Assembly Commissions have previously issued a written warning with directions requiring a minister to move from their current call or office.</p> <p>These resolutions formally recognise that an Assembly Commission does have the authority of the General Assembly to curtail a minister’s office or appointment.</p>
Previous relevant documents	Section O.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	Stipend and associated payments would continue to be paid while the minister found a new role – this has no overall impact on expenditure over a situation where the minister remains on the roll.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

Paper R5

Assisting an accused minister

MIND Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	andy.braunston@urc.org.uk
Action required	Adoption of resolution.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>40. Assembly resolves to change Appendix K of Section O to read:</p> <p>6. On receiving the material transmitted by the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline, the Senior Member is to appoint three willing members of the Investigation Panel to form an Investigation Team for that case, and one panel member to assist the accused minister to address the issues and, if required, before the ACD or the DAppC, having regard to geographical proximity to the accused, complainant and likely witnesses as well as to appropriate skills and experience. No Panel member who is related to, belonging to the same local church as, or otherwise closely concerned with the accused minister or the complainant, has any pastoral or personal involvement with the case or is liable to be a witness, may be appointed to an Investigation Team for that case. Subject to these considerations, the Senior Member should also consider the desirability of all members of the Panel having regular involvement with disciplinary cases. The Senior Member may him- or herself serve on an Investigation Team when that appears appropriate.</p> <p>7. Ministers are encouraged to use an Assisting Member of the Disciplinary Investigation Panel to help gather evidence and draw up their own statement/s, and, either to accompany the minister to the hearing before the ACD or the DAppC or to present the minister's case</p> <p>41. Change Appendix L to read</p> <p>5. No interview with any person outside the Team, whether taking place in person, by electronic means or by telephone, may take place unless at least two members of the Team are present; the person being interviewed must also be offered the opportunity to</p>

	<p>have a friend (or, in the case of the accused minister, a colleague, their assisting Investigation Panel member, or Trade Union representative) present. A note of any interview is to be taken at the time or made immediately afterward, and a copy supplied to the person interviewed for comment.</p>
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Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To offer an experienced and trained member of the Investigation Team to a minister accused for a breach of vows in order to help that minister prepare and, if necessary, present their case.
Main points	Ministers can be overwhelmed if placed into the disciplinary process; some may use a Union representative, others may use a lawyer, many use no one to assist them. Believing that the process should be fair to all sides, the MIND Advisory Group suggests the minister is offered the services of a member of the Investigation Team who can help interview witnesses, prepare statements, help the minister challenge evidence presented by the Investigation Team and, if requested, present the minister’s case. Ministers will not be obliged to make use of such a person.
Previous relevant documents	Section O.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	Expenses for the Assisting Investigator.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

Paper R6

Appendix Y – confidentiality, dissemination of information, and retention of records

MIND Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	andy.braunston@urc.org.uk
Action required	Adoption of resolution.
Draft resolution(s)	42. Assembly resolves to delete the current Appendix Y, substituting it with the text below.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To further clarify the balance between openness and transparency in the discipline process with appropriate confidentiality.
Main points	To show who needs to know details of a discipline case at its various stages throughout the process, to ensure complainants are treated as fairly as ministers, and to ensure that confidentiality is not used as a weapon to impede justice or future learning.
Previous relevant documents	Section O.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Appendix Y

Confidentiality, dissemination of information, and retention of records

Part one – principles

1. The Disciplinary Process balances both the need for appropriate confidentiality – as expressed within the policies adopted by General Assembly on confidentiality – and the need for transparency to ensure that justice is both done and seen to be done, held in creative tension with the fact that it may not be helpful to a minister's continuing ministry to publish generally the fact of a past error. This balance requires respecting the privacy of complainants, witnesses and the accused minister whilst, at the same time making it possible for complainants and witnesses to come forward to offer their perspectives.
2. Confidentiality is both important to all concerned in the process yet can, perversely, be a weapon used to escape further scrutiny or to tell only one side of a story.
3. In the interests of all concerned, accused ministers, complainants, witnesses and all who administer the process are expected to maintain appropriate confidentiality regarding the existence and progress of a disciplinary case whose details are not in the public domain.
4. The balance between confidentiality and transparency involves a number of factors:
 - a) the need to share information during the process with those who operate it, who exercise oversight of an accused minister, or who need to be aware of any suspension
 - b) allegations may have to be disclosed as required by law or in order to prevent harm to others
 - c) recommendations made by a Commission regarding a minister whose name has been deleted from the Roll must reach those to whom they are addressed
 - d) compliance with the terms of any agreed caution, or any directions accompanying a written warning or curtailment, must be appropriately monitored
 - e) any curtailment of a pastoral tie or appointment must be communicated to the appropriate officers of the pastorate or appointed role
 - f) if a minister's name is deleted from the Roll, public notice needs to be given that that person no longer acts, speaks, or ministers with the endorsement of the United Reformed Church by virtue of ordination, commissioning or call
 - g) those charged with the ongoing review of the operation of the process will be assisted in their work by full information regarding cases
 - h) if disciplinary allegations become public knowledge through causes outside the Church's control, it may be necessary to counter erroneous assertions or assumptions, and
 - i) the balance between confidentiality and transparency changes throughout the process.

5. If, at any point in the course of a particular case, the Executive Group of the Discipline Process, after consulting and taking advice as necessary, deem it proportionate, just, wise, and in accordance with the URC Confidentiality Policy, it may, having received safeguarding advice, allow the disclosure of information about the case.

Part two – disclosures required by law or to prevent harm

6. Information must be shared with a court or any public authority which is legally entitled to demand it, or to which there is a legal duty to report allegations. Even where there is no absolute legal duty, information may be shared with appropriate public authorities when this is required by the Church's safeguarding policy.

Part three – response to media interest

7. Enquiries by the media into any case pending under this process are to be referred to the Press Officer, who is to respond with tact and discretion, taking account issues of confidentiality, and after consulting and receiving authority from the General Secretary or a deputy whenever practicable, having regard to the interests of the Church, the minister, and all others involved in the case, and taking care in particular not to make any statement which appears to prejudice the outcome of a case still pending. The Press Officer is to seek the authority of the body with currently responsible for the stage of the case reached at that time before revealing specific information, the stage reached in the case or the identity of any complainant.
8. If the Press Officer, after consulting and authorised in accordance with paragraph 7 above, believes it will be necessary, under this provision, to release into the public domain information not previously given to the local churches served by an accused minister, they may communicate that information to the Church Secretaries, making them aware of issues of confidentiality, of those churches at the same time as (or, if possible, before) making the information public. Each notified Church Secretary is, under guidance from the Press Officer or from the Moderator of the Synod, to share the information with other members of the Elders' Meeting, who will together decide whether and when to inform the Church's wider membership.

Part four – sharing of information within and following the process

9. It is assumed that those involved in the administration or review of the process – eg the Assembly Standing Panel on Discipline, the Consultant for Ministers, the Investigation Team, the Disciplinary Investigation Panel member assisting the minister, any pastoral carer appointed to care for the minister or complainants, the Legal Advisor, the members of the Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group, the secretaries of the Assembly Discipline Commission and the Disciplinary Appeal Commission and the Church's safeguarding staff are given details of any cases as needed.
10. If a notification is given verbally, it must be confirmed in writing. It must contain a warning regarding the sensitive nature of the information imparted, and the need to exercise care and discretion as to how it is used. If electronic software is available which enables information to be shared in a written form to which only those entitled under these rules will have access, that software is to be used. The Church's professional safeguarding staff, whether appointed in the name of a

synod or of the General Assembly, are considered entitled for this purpose. Unless otherwise stated, the specific allegations are not disclosed.

11. Notification of developments in the process is to be given, as follows.

Disclosure table		
	<i>What happens</i>	<i>Who is told</i>
A	<p>A minister under the oversight of a Synod is suspended, or that suspension is lifted.</p> <p>A statement, if possible agreed with the minister, is prepared outlining, in general terms, the allegation. The statement might indicate the minister disputes the allegations.</p> <p>The statement would be shared with the people/bodies outlined on the right by the Moderator of the Synod exercising oversight of the accused Minister.</p>	<p>The accused minister.</p> <p>The complainants.</p> <p>The Elders of any church the accused minister serves or the Elders of the home church of the accused minister if not serving in pastoral charge.</p> <p>The oversight bodies of any ecumenical charge the minister serves.</p> <p>The Moderator of the Synod if the suspension happens at Hearing or Appeal Stages.</p> <p>The appropriate committee or officer of any institution or community, other than a church, in which the accused minister exercises a ministry as such, or of any organisation outside the Church in which the accused minister has any involvement that could give the organisation a reasonable and proper expectation of being made aware of disciplinary steps.</p> <p>The General Secretary, the Secretary for Ministries, the Press Officers and Designated Safeguarding Lead.</p>
B	<p>A minister under direct oversight of the General Assembly is suspended, or that suspension is lifted.</p> <p>A statement, if possible agreed with the minister, is prepared. The allegation would be outlined in general terms. This statement might indicate the minister disputes the allegations. The statement would be shared with the people/bodies outlined on the right by the General Secretary.</p>	<p>The accused minister.</p> <p>The complainants.</p> <p>The Moderator of the Synod where the accused minister resides.</p> <p>The Synod Clerk – if the accused minister is the Moderator.</p> <p>The Eldership of the accused minister’s home church.</p> <p>The appropriate committee or officer of any institution or community in which the accused minister exercises a ministry as such, or of</p>

		<p>any organisation outside the Church in which the accused minister has any involvement that could give the organisation a reasonable and proper expectation of being made aware of disciplinary steps.</p> <p>The Officers of the General Assembly.</p> <p>The Secretary for Ministries, the Press Officers and Designated Safeguarding Lead.</p>
C	<p>Allegations against a minister are struck out as patently frivolous, vexatious or unrelated to the expectations.</p> <p>The Moderator or General Secretary, as the case may be, draws up a statement, if possible agreed with the minister, reflecting the case has been struck out.</p>	<p>The accused minister.</p> <p>All those informed in sections A or B above.</p>
D	<p>Allegations against a minister under the oversight of a Synod are passed to the Investigation Stage without suspension.</p> <p>The Moderator or General Secretary serving on that Assembly Panel for Discipline, unless another member of the Panel agrees to give the notification informs those on the right.</p>	<p>The accused minister.</p> <p>The complainants.</p> <p>The General Secretary, the Secretary for Ministries, the Press Officers and Designated Safeguarding Lead.</p>
E	<p>Allegations against a minister under the oversight of the General Assembly are passed to the Investigation Stage without suspension.</p> <p>The Moderator or General Secretary serving on that Assembly Panel for Discipline, unless another member of the Panel agrees to give the notification informs those on the right.</p>	<p>The complainants.</p> <p>The Synod Clerk, if the accused minister is the Moderator.</p> <p>The Officers of the General Assembly.</p> <p>The Secretary for Ministries, the Press Officers and Designated Safeguarding Lead.</p>
F	<p>Allegations against a minister under the oversight of a Synod are passed to the Hearing Stage or enter the Appeal Stage.</p> <p>The Secretary of the Assembly Commission for Discipline or the Secretary of the Disciplinary Appeal Commission (as the case may be) informs those on the right.</p>	<p>The accused minister.</p> <p>The complainants.</p> <p>The General Secretary, the Secretary for Ministries, the Press Officers and Designated Safeguarding Lead.</p>
	<p>Allegations against a minister under the oversight of the General Assembly are passed to the Hearing Stage or enter the Appeal Stage.</p>	<p>The accused minister.</p> <p>The complainants.</p> <p>The Moderator of the Synod where the accused minister resides.</p>

G	<p>The Secretary of the Assembly Commission for Discipline or the Secretary of the Disciplinary Appeal Commission (as the case may be) informs those on the right.</p>	<p>The Synod Clerk if the accused minister is the Moderator.</p> <p>The Officers of the General Assembly.</p> <p>The Secretary for Ministries, the Press Officers and Designated Safeguarding Lead.</p>
H	<p>A minister under the oversight of a Synod receives an agreed caution (see also lifting of suspension).</p> <p>The Moderator or General Secretary serving on that Assembly Panel for Discipline, unless another member of the Panel agrees to give the notification informs those on the right.</p>	<p>The Complainants are given the details of the agreed caution.</p> <p>All those notified in either A or D above where an outline of the breach of vows and the warning about that breach are shared in general terms.</p> <p>The General Secretary, the Secretary for Ministries, the Press Officers and Designated Safeguarding Lead where the specifics of the case are shared.</p> <p>The terms of an agreed caution are notified to councils, committees or Officers at any level within the Church, or of any organisation outside the Church, which the Panel imposing the caution directs to be so notified on the ground that they are in a position to monitor compliance with those terms or directions.</p>
I	<p>A minister under the oversight of the General Assembly receives an agreed caution (see also lifting of suspension).</p> <p>The Moderator or General Secretary serving on that Assembly Panel for Discipline, unless another member of the Panel agrees to give the notification informs those on the right.</p>	<p>The Complainants are given the details of the agreed caution.</p> <p>All those notified in either B or E above where an outline of the breach of vows and the warning about that breach are shared in general terms.</p> <p>The Moderator of the Synod where the minister resides, or the Synod Clerk, if the minister is the Moderator, the Officers of Assembly, the Secretary for Ministries, the Press Officers and Designated Safeguarding Lead where the specifics of the case are shared.</p> <p>The terms of an agreed caution are notified to councils, committees or Officers at any level within the Church, or of any organisation outside the Church, which the Panel imposing the caution directs to be so notified on the ground that they are in a position to monitor compliance with those terms or directions.</p>

J	<p>A minister under the oversight of a Synod receives a written warning (see also lifting of suspension).</p> <p>The Secretary of the Assembly Commission for Discipline or the Secretary of the Disciplinary Appeal Commission (as the case may be) informs those on the right.</p>	<p>The accused minister, all those notified in A or D above with the fact that a warning has been issued.</p> <p>The complainants are given details of the warning and any conditions.</p> <p>The directions accompanying a written warning, are notified to Councils, Committees or Officers at any level within the Church, or of any organisation outside the Church, which the Commission imposing the warning directs to be so notified on the ground that they are in a position to monitor compliance with those terms or directions.</p> <p>The next meeting of the General Assembly is informed that a disciplinary case against a minister has completed the Hearing Stage or the Appeal Stage, as the case may be. If a decision remains subject to appeal the report shall so state. If a decision is not so subject, it shall state what sanction, if any, was imposed, but shall not name the minister.</p> <p>The General Secretary, the Secretary for Ministries, the Press Officers and Designated Safeguarding Lead where the specifics of the case are shared.</p>
K	<p>A minister under the oversight of the General Assembly receives a written warning (see also lifting of suspension).</p> <p>The Secretary of the Assembly Commission for Discipline or the Secretary of the Disciplinary Appeal Commission (as the case may be) informs those on the right.</p>	<p>The minister, all those notified in A or D above with the fact that a warning has been issued.</p> <p>The complainants are given details of the warning and any conditions.</p> <p>The Moderator of the Synod in which the minister resides (or the clerk if the minister is the Moderator).</p> <p>The next meeting of the General Assembly is informed that a disciplinary case against a minister has completed the Hearing Stage or the Appeal Stage, as the case may be. If a decision remains subject to appeal the report shall so state. If a decision is not so subject, it shall state what sanction, if any, was imposed, but shall not name the minister.</p> <p>The directions accompanying a written warning, are notified to Councils, Committees or Officers at any level within the</p>

		<p>Church, or of any organisation outside the Church, which the Commission imposing the warning directs to be so notified on the ground that they are in a position to monitor compliance with those terms or directions.</p> <p>The Officers of the General Assembly.</p> <p>The Secretary for Ministries, the Press Officers and Designated Safeguarding Lead are given details of the case.</p>
L	<p>A minister under the oversight of a Synod receives a curtailment of pastoral tie or appointment (see also lifting of suspension).</p> <p>The Secretary of the Assembly Commission for Discipline or the Secretary of the Disciplinary Appeal Commission (as the case may be) informs those on the right.</p>	<p>The minister.</p> <p>The complainants are given details of the curtailment and any directions.</p> <p>The Moderator of the Synod in which the minister resides (or the clerk if the minister is the Moderator.)</p> <p>The next meeting of the General Assembly is informed that a disciplinary case against a minister has completed the Hearing Stage or the Appeal Stage, as the case may be. If a decision remains subject to appeal the report shall so state. If a decision is not so subject, it shall state what sanction, if any, was imposed, but shall not name the minister.</p> <p>The terms of the curtailment, and any directions, are notified to councils, committees or Officers at any level within the Church, or of any organisation outside the Church, the Commission imposing the curtailment directs to be so notified on the ground that they are in a position to monitor compliance with those terms or directions.</p> <p>The Officers of the General Assembly.</p> <p>The Secretary for Ministries, the Press Officers and Designated Safeguarding Lead are given details of the case.</p>
M	<p>A minister under the oversight of the General Assembly receives a curtailment of pastoral tie or appointment (see also lifting of suspension).</p> <p>The Secretary of the Assembly Commission for Discipline or the Secretary of the Disciplinary Appeal Commission (as</p>	<p>The minister.</p> <p>The complainants are given details of the curtailment and any directions.</p> <p>The Moderator of the Synod in which the minister resides (or the clerk if the minister is the Moderator.)</p>

	<p>the case may be) informs those on the right.</p>	<p>The next meeting of the General Assembly is informed that a disciplinary case against a minister has completed the Hearing Stage or the Appeal Stage, as the case may be. If a decision remains subject to appeal the report shall so state. If a decision is not so subject, it shall state what sanction, if any, was imposed, but shall not name the minister.</p> <p>The terms of the curtailment, and any directions, are notified to councils, committees or Officers at any level within the Church, or of any organisation outside the Church, the Commission imposing the curtailment directs to be so notified on the ground that they are in a position to monitor compliance with those terms or directions.</p> <p>The Officers of the General Assembly.</p> <p>The Secretary for Ministries, the Press Officers and Designated Safeguarding Lead are given details of the case.</p>
<p>N</p>	<p>A minister under either the oversight of a Synod or General Assembly is deleted from the Roll.</p> <p>The Secretary of the Assembly Commission for Discipline/Secretary of the Disciplinary Appeal Commission (as the case may be), the Moderator of the Synod concerned or the General Secretary decide which of them informs those on the right.</p>	<p>All those notified in A, B, D or E above.</p> <p>The complainants.</p> <p>The Elderships of either the churches where the minister served or their home church, with any advice given on how the former minister might be involved in the life of the church in the future with such details of the case as are needed to understand that advice.</p> <p>The Moderator of the Synod where the minister served or resided.</p> <p>The Press Officer publishes the name of a former minister with the date of the deletion a) on the denominational website for six months, and b) if so instructed by the General Secretary, also in a statement to the media.</p> <p>If the minister was under the oversight of a synod whose Moderator so decides, similar publication may also take place by the synod.</p>

		<p>The next meeting of either General Assembly is informed the former minister’s name has been deleted from the Roll.</p> <p>The Officers of the General Assembly, the Secretary for Ministries, the Press Officers and Designated Safeguarding Lead are given details of the case.</p>
O	<p>The Process against a minister under the oversight of a Synod is terminated without sanctions being imposed (see also lifting of suspension).</p> <p>The Secretary of the Assembly Commission for Discipline or the Secretary of the Disciplinary Appeal Commission as the case may be informs those on the right.</p>	<p>All those named in A or D above.</p> <p>The complainants with details as to why this decision was reached.</p> <p>The next meeting of the General Assembly is informed that a disciplinary case against a minister has completed the Hearing Stage or the Appeal Stage, as the case may be. If a decision remains subject to appeal the report shall so state. If a decision is not so subject, it shall state what sanction, if any, was imposed, but shall not name the minister.</p>
P	<p>The Process against a minister under the oversight of the General Assembly is terminated without sanctions being imposed (see also lifting of suspension).</p> <p>The Secretary of the Assembly Commission for Discipline or the Secretary of the Disciplinary Appeal Commission as the case may be informs those on the right.</p>	<p>All those named in either B or E above.</p> <p>The complainants with details as to why this decision was reached.</p> <p>The next meeting of the General Assembly is informed that a disciplinary case against a minister has completed the Hearing Stage or the Appeal Stage, as the case may be. If a decision remains subject to appeal the report shall so state. If a decision is not so subject, it shall state what sanction, if any, was imposed, but shall not name the minister.</p>

Part five – Permanent records, monitoring continuity and review of the Process

12. A full set of papers relating to concluded cases, whether allegations were found proven or not, is to be retained in the custody of the Secretary of the Assembly Commission for Discipline. For this purpose, Moderators of Synods or the Assembly Representative for Discipline are to forward to the Secretary of the Assembly Commission for Discipline copies of papers relating to cases discontinued at the Investigation Stage or resolved by an agreed caution, and the Secretary of the Discipline Appeal Commission is to return to the Secretary of the Assembly Commission for Discipline any papers relating to cases disposed of at the Appeal Stage.

13. ‘Papers’ in this context may include recordings. It may also include documents held in electronic form, which are to be preserved separately through appropriate

electronic media. Any hard copy material is to be kept securely in a safe or locked cabinet in the offices of the General Secretariat, to which only the Secretary of the Assembly Commission for Discipline, the Secretary of the Ministries Committee and the General Secretary have access. These officers shall also have exclusive access to the secure electronic media. An index to this material may be compiled by the Secretary of the Assembly Commission for Discipline and kept securely in his or her custody.

14. All other copies of papers generated during the Process and still existing at its conclusion in the hands of any council or officer of the Church are to be destroyed or deleted, except for material placed in the confidential files regarding individual ministers kept by the Ministries Committee or by Moderators of Synods, and for terms of cautions, directions accompanying written warnings, and Commission recommendations.
15. This does not preclude copies of the material held securely by the Secretary of the Assembly Commission for Discipline being made available for the purposes of any subsequent Process, for example cases generated by allegations against the same minister or by the same complainant.
16. Within one month of the conclusion of any case, reports to assist the General Assembly's Advisory Group on Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline, or any group or committee succeeding to its functions in keeping this Process under review, are to be prepared and transmitted to the Secretary of the Assembly Commission for Discipline (a) by the Investigation Team and (b) by the Panel or Commission which last dealt with the case. The Secretary of the Assembly Commission for Discipline is to pass these reports on to the Secretary of the Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group.
17. If a minister subject to an agreed caution or to directions accompanying a written warning or curtailment undertakes a different sphere of ministry which entails transfer to the oversight of a different Synod, or from the oversight of a Synod to the direct oversight of Assembly or *vice versa*, it is the duty of the Moderator and Clerk of the Synod relinquishing oversight (or of the General Secretary, if the minister is passing from Assembly to Synod oversight) to transmit to the corresponding officers of the council assuming oversight the text of the caution or the monitoring notification which they received and any information in their possession about the minister's compliance (or otherwise) with the caution's terms or the directions.

Paper R7

The Assembly Representative for Discipline

MIND Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	andy.braunston@urc.org.uk
Action required	Adoption of resolution.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>43. Assembly deletes section 2 of Appendix H and replaces it with:</p> <p>The Assembly Representative for Discipline will normally be the General Secretary or their duly appointed deputy. Where a disciplinary case is brought against the General Secretary the line manager of the General Secretary (or if for any reason that is inappropriate, such person as the Officers of the General Assembly shall appoint without reference to the General Secretary) shall act as Assembly Representative for Discipline.</p> <p>44. Assembly resolves to appoint the General Secretary as the Assembly Representative for Discipline – or the Line Manager of the General Secretary if the case in question concerns the General Secretary.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To appoint the General Secretary to serve as the Assembly Representative for Discipline.
Main points	The Assembly Representative for Discipline is the person appointed to act in the case of a General Assembly minister who comes into the disciplinary process. The General Secretary stands in relationship to most General Assembly Ministers in a way which parallels the pastoral oversight Synod Moderators have of Ministers. MIND, therefore, thinks it is logical for the General Secretary to be the Assembly Representative for Discipline save in the event that the General Secretary is accused of misconduct – in which case the General Secretary’s line manager (or if, for any reason that is inappropriate, a person appointed by the Officers of the Assembly excluding the General Secretary) would act as Representative for Discipline in that case.

	Because it is the Assembly Representative for Discipline who Synod Moderators must request the appointment of Assembly Standing Panel members from, this also offers assurance that the General Secretary always knows at the outset of any potential discipline case. The previous process made it possible for the wider church to have no knowledge of a case that might have been begun in a Synod, and at times this has led to complications. Appointing the General Secretary as the Assembly Representative for Discipline ensures that there is always one person who has knowledge of every current case from its inception.
Previous relevant documents	Section O.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

Paper R8

Transitional arrangements from the ‘old’ to the ‘new’ disciplinary process

MIND Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	andy.braunston@urc.org.uk										
Action required	Adoption of resolution.										
Draft resolution(s)	<p>45. Assembly resolves the following transitional arrangements from the ‘old’ to the ‘new’ Ministerial Disciplinary Process.</p> <p>‘The Relevant Time’ means 12pm on the day before the scheduled opening of the General Assembly in 2022 (ie at the date of writing, 7 July 2022).</p> <p>No action is to be taken under the old Process from that time until the close of Assembly, unless exceptional and urgent circumstances call for a minister to be suspended from ministry by the Moderator of the Synod having oversight.</p> <p>If decisions taken by the Assembly have the effect that the new process does <u>not</u> come into effect at the close of Assembly, then the old process will remain in force (subject to any directions the Assembly may give), and the days of the sitting of Assembly are to be discounted in any calculation of time under its rules.</p> <p>No rule as to the confidentiality of the process shall prevent Synod Appointees or the members of a Mandated Group from providing an Investigation Team which is to replace them in their function with the full information necessary for that purpose.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Stage reached at the Relevant Time</th> <th>Transitional Provision</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td colspan="3" style="text-align: center;">CAUTION STAGE (OLD PROCESS)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A</td> <td>Synod Appointees have been appointed for a case (AA.2) but have not yet concluded</td> <td>The Moderator invites the ARC to form an ASPD the day after the close of Assembly, to take collective oversight of the case.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			Stage reached at the Relevant Time	Transitional Provision	CAUTION STAGE (OLD PROCESS)			A	Synod Appointees have been appointed for a case (AA.2) but have not yet concluded	The Moderator invites the ARC to form an ASPD the day after the close of Assembly, to take collective oversight of the case.
	Stage reached at the Relevant Time	Transitional Provision									
CAUTION STAGE (OLD PROCESS)											
A	Synod Appointees have been appointed for a case (AA.2) but have not yet concluded	The Moderator invites the ARC to form an ASPD the day after the close of Assembly, to take collective oversight of the case.									

	their enquiry in one of the ways set out in AA.5.	An Investigation Team is appointed in accordance with Appendix K and takes over from the former Synod Appointed Mandated Group. The case continues with no distinction between the former Caution Stage and the former main Process; though of course when the Investigation Team reports, it may suggest that the case is suitable for the new Agreed Caution procedure.
B	Synod Appointees have recommended no further action (AA.5.1, 6.4.1 or 7.4.1).	The case is taken to be at an end.
C	Synod Appointees have recommended the calling in of a Mandated group (AA 5.3.1, 6.4.3.1, 7.4.2), but the Moderator has not yet taken a decision on that advice.	The Moderator asks the ARD to call together an ASPD the day after the close of Assembly, to take collective oversight of the case. The ASPD considers the recommendation as though it were the report of an Investigation Team under Framework 5.3.
D	Synod Appointees have administered either an Initial or a Final Caution, the currency of which has not yet expired (AA.6 or 7) but which is not the subject of a pending appeal (AA.8).	In this case the rules of the old Process are followed during the period of monitoring for which only the old Process provided. Thus the persons who were Synod Appointees monitor compliance with the caution under the rules of the old Process (AA.6 or AA.7) and review the position under AA.6.3.1, 6.4, 7.3.1 or 7.4. However, there will no longer be any transition from an Initial to a Final Caution, since those are not concepts for which the new Process provides. Instead, following their review, the Synod Appointees present a report to the Synod Moderator recommending either that the minister be discharged from the

		<p>Process, or that the case proceed to the Hearing Stage under the new rules.</p> <p>The Moderator then invites the ARD to call together an ASPD, which considers the recommendation as though it were the report of an Investigation Team under Framework 5.2 or 5.3. If the case continues beyond that decision, it does so under the new Process rules.</p>
E	<p>Synod Appointees have administered either an Initial or a Final Caution, which is the subject of a pending appeal (AA.8).</p>	<p>The appeal is discontinued and the caution discharged. Instead the Moderator invites the ARD to call together an ASPD the day after the close of Assembly, to take collective oversight of the case. An Investigation Team is appointed under Appendix K and takes over from the former Synod Appointees. As soon as it is familiar with the case, the Investigation Team makes a fresh report to the SSPD under Framework 5.3. Thereafter the new Process rules apply.</p>
<p>PRE-COMMISSION AND COMMISSION STAGES (OLD PROCESS)</p>		
F	<p>The Moderator has called in a Mandated Group, which has not yet issued a Referral Notice.</p>	<p>The Moderator invites the ARD to call together an ASPD the day after the close of Assembly. The ASPD, with safeguarding advice, considers whether the minister should be suspended or whether any suspension should continue. An Investigation Team is appointed in accordance with Appendix K and takes over from the former Mandated Group. The case proceeds under the rules of the new Process.</p>

G	A Referral Notice has been issued but the Assembly Commission has not yet been sent papers under E2.1.	The case proceeds under the rules of the new Process, the Commission being appointed in accordance with Appendix N (<u>not</u> following para C of the old Process). An Investigation Team is appointed in accordance with Appendix K and takes over from the former Mandated Group.
H	A Referral Notice has been issued and the Assembly Commission has been sent papers under E2.1, but has not yet heard the case.	The case proceeds under the old rules.
J	An Assembly Commission has heard the case but not yet given its decision; or has given its decision, but the time for an appeal has not yet expired.	The Assembly Commission gives its decision under the rules of the old process. Any appeal proceeds under the rules of the new process, but alleged procedural failures are to be judged according to the rules in force at the relevant time.
APPEAL STAGE		
K	Notice of appeal has been given, but the Appeal Commission has not yet been sent papers under G8.	The case proceeds under the rules of the new process. The existing Mandated Group will function for the case as the Investigation Team. The senior member of the investigation panel is to appoint an assisting member in accordance with appendix K. The DAppC is appointed in accordance with Appendix V (<u>not</u> following para G of the old process). The admissibility of any ground of appeal is judged by the rules in force

		when the notice of appeal was lodged.
L	Notice of appeal has been given, the Appeal Commission has been sent the papers under G8 but has not yet heard the case.	The case proceeds under the old rules.
M	An Appeal Commission has heard the case but not yet given its decision.	The Appeal Commission gives its decision under the rules of the old process.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	<p>To ensure clarity around the transition from the ‘old’ to the ‘new’ process. The basis upon which this is done is that where possible, all cases should ideally be handled under the ‘new’ process as quickly as possible. Therefore, cases where paperwork has not been issued to a commission, and therefore where no party will be prejudiced through changes mid-process, will transfer to the new process, and an Investigation Group will be appointed to continue the investigative work, and a ‘new’ style Assembly Commission will hear the case – and ministers will be provided with a member of the investigation team to assist their preparation.</p> <p>Where papers have been served on a commission, and therefore parties have prepared their representation to a commission on the basis of the ‘old’ process, the process will conclude under the terms of the ‘old’ process.</p>
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Section O.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

Paper T1

Annual Safeguarding report 2021

Safeguarding Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sharon Barr 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	See overview below.
Previous relevant documents	Annual Safeguarding Report 2021.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Safeguarding Officers.

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (eg ecumenical)	

Overview

This report will give the following:

- Background information
- Highlights
- Risk areas
- Summary
- Areas for development.

Background information

Annual Safeguarding Returns are usually sent to churches every year with a request that they are returned by the end of January, in time for the Synod Safeguarding Officers (SSO) to collate the information captured in the returns and write their Annual Synod Safeguarding Return. All the data from the synod reports then form the basis of the Safeguarding Report that is received by General Assembly.

This year, as a result of the digitalisation of the annual returns, the timescales for reporting have been extended and, as a consequence, it has not been possible to produce this report based upon the data from the church and synod returns. It should be noted here that in the Safeguarding Report for General Assembly 2021, it was commented that electronic annual returns would be ideal to both make the process

slicker and easier to administer, so it is positive that this has been the process for this year, and once the teething problems of the first year have been resolved, then it should be a much smoother process. An option for paper returns was still available this year.

Because of the delay in timing of the new digital platform, the SSOs and the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) have drawn together this much shorter than usual report as a snapshot of safeguarding in the URC during 2021, and looking forward to 2022. It should be noted that in 2021 all three members of the safeguarding team at Church House left their roles for a variety of reasons, and therefore the DSL and training roles were vacant for the majority of 2021.

An additional report will be completed by the DSL, and shared with the Safeguarding Committee for analysis once the synod reports have been submitted.

Highlights

There has been a consensus across SSOs and SAG that the papers and resolutions that were passed at General Assembly 2021 are a huge leap forward in the cultural change and shift to giving safeguarding the prominence it needs in all areas of the URC. Further discussion in the Summary section of this report gives an update on the implementation of these documents.

In December 2021, appointments were made to the Designated Safeguarding Lead role and the Training and Development Coordinator (TDC) post, the latter being a two-year role. Sharon Barr (DSL) and Carrie Kaunda (TDC) both started in early 2022, and the roles appear to be having a positive impact both with rebuilding relationships within General Assembly teams and across the wider church and developing practice and training.

SSOs are commenting that many Synods are committing to having Safeguarding Reference Groups to steer safeguarding in Synods, to be a critical friend and support the implementation of safeguarding policy and the strategic plan. Things are clearly heading in the right direction for safeguarding with the skilled and experienced staff in synod roles and denominationally. This momentum needs to be maintained to support local churches that struggle to engage with safeguarding to seek support, so that the URC is as safe as possible for those worshipping in the URC or using URC facilities.

In the Synod of Scotland, safeguarding is managed with The Church of Scotland, there have been a number of changes due this year to the Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) scheme which have been implemented across the Synod. The training modules and policy have also been revised.

Risk areas

With the lack of key safeguarding personnel in role throughout 2021, the review of Safeguarding Good Practice 5 (GP5) document has been pushed back, and its completion is expected in early-to-mid 2023. This could lead to the documents being out of date as a result of legislative or best practice changes. As a result, any immediate amendments that are needed will be collated into an Addendum document, which will be on the safeguarding page of the URC website.

There is still real concern that not all areas of the church understand or give value to the importance of Safer Recruitment. There has been emphasis through training, webinars and newsletters to reinforce the purpose of safer recruitment, and the relevance of it for all areas of the church. Safer recruitment will continue to be covered in all levels of

safeguarding training, along with the trustee training and a stand-alone safer recruitment course for those with recruitment responsibility and leaders in churches. This needs to be balanced with not overwhelming people with the task, or deterring applicants because of the process that will be followed. The approval of the Safer Election of Elders process was warmly welcomed by all involved in safeguarding.

Another area of concern is the Ministerial Incapability and Disciplinary processes, and the understanding of safeguarding within this. However, the Ministerial Incapacity and Disciplinary Advisory Group brought proposals to General Assembly 2021, which hopefully will be ratified during General Assembly 2022. These embed the taking of safeguarding advice at every stage of the process. The SAG and the SSOs look forward to working with those responsible for the new Ministerial Disciplinary process to ensure that safeguarding is fully integrated throughout its operation. The Assembly Standing Panel will complete safeguarding training, and as part of their induction will receive input from the DSL, along with safeguarding related case studies.

Areas for development

With the DSL, TDC and Assistant Administrator now in role focus will be on recruiting a Policy Development Co-ordinator, whose initial focus will be on working with a steering group to review and update GP5. The review of GP5 will incorporate the additions to the URC structure and rules of procedure related to safeguarding and safeguarding policy statement, all presented at General Assembly 2021.

Development and roll-out of the safeguarding training in line with the Training Framework agreed at General Assembly 2021 will continue, consulting with the necessary personnel and professionals for relevant training areas. SSOs are also looking at their own professional development, with peer-led and specialist trainer-led sessions.

Summary

General Assembly 2021 updates, not covered in previous sections.

West Midland Synod brought resolutions 51 and 52, related to Modern Day Slavery Policy. The SAG is working towards devising a Policy and incorporating this into the review of GP5 and the current training that is being developed.

Following the decision that SAG would be dissolved after General Assembly 2022 and a Safeguarding Committee commence, recruitment to that committee is now complete, with members bringing a wealth of experience on safeguarding, both from internally and externally.

Conclusion

Throughout 2021, the pandemic continued to have a significant impact on all those involved in church life, and safeguarding did not avoid this. We had to adapt our ways of working, and gain an understanding of the different aspects of safeguarding that a pandemic brought. Synods and many churches remained dedicated to safeguarding those who worship with them, and thanks and recognition should go to all those who played a part in safeguarding in this period.

As we move through this period with changes in key personnel, roles and the implementation of various resolutions agreed at General Assembly 2021, it is an exciting time for safeguarding, and a real opportunity for the URC to continue to build on the

Safeguarding Advisory Group

foundations of a safer church, and creating a culture of safeguarding where everyone has a safeguarding responsibility.

Abbreviations

DSL	Designated Safeguarding Lead
SSO	Synod Safeguarding Officer
TDC	Training and Development Coordinator
SAG	Safeguarding Advisory Group
GP5	Good Practice 5

Resolutions

Children's and Youth Work Committee

Resolution 1

page 34

- a) General Assembly resolves that nominations for Moderator of the General Assembly may be received from Youth Assembly in addition to Synods.
- b) General Assembly instructs the Business Committee to work with representatives of URC Youth to establish a proper process for these nominations.

Resolution 2

page 34

URC Youth Assembly reaffirms its commitment to tackle the stigma surrounding mental ill health. Youth Assembly strongly encourages individuals to take part in Mental Health First Aid training and for local churches, Synods and General Assembly to look into ways to help individuals access this training. Youth Assembly asks General Assembly to join it in recommending that local churches strive to ensure that at least one member of the leadership team has undertaken this training.

Resolution 3

page 34

Children's and Youth Work Committee asks General Assembly to dissolve the Pilots Subcommittee as a formal structure in recognition of the changes within Pilots following General Assembly 2021. Children's and Youth Work Committee will continue to engage with and support Pilots through their network of companies and informal gathering, alongside other such networks for Children's and Youth Work.

Resolution 4

page 34

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.

Ministries, Children's and Youth Work, Education and Learning and Mission Committees

Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers and the Newbigin Pioneering Hub

Resolution 5

page 42

General Assembly agrees to use the Newbigin Pioneering HUB to train and support its lay pioneer ministers.

Resolution 6

page 42

General Assembly recognises the ministry of Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers as a ministry of the United Reformed Church and instructs the Ministries Committee to bring 'Marks of Ministry of a Lay Pioneer' to the Assembly Executive for adoption.

Equalities Committee

Affirmative action towards an anti-racist Church

Resolution 7

page 49

General Assembly endorses the report of the Affirmative Action Task Group. It instructs the task group to continue consulting with other URC committees and groups, bringing firm proposals to General Assembly 2023 to ensure the URC takes positive action towards becoming an anti-racist church in terms of its recruitment and representation.

Finance Committee

Possible one-off payments to ministers and lay staff

Resolution 8

page 79

General Assembly resolves that, as a gesture of good will towards those who work for the Church centrally and bearing in mind the recent energy cost increases for many, with the likelihood of further energy price rises to come later in the year, a gross payment should be made together with October 2022 stipend and salary payments amounting to:

- £800 in the case of each office holder in receipt of a stipend under the URC Plan for Partnership; and
- £500 in the case of each 'Church House' employee.

Does the URC need a Retired Ministers' Benevolent Fund?

Resolution 9

page 82

General Assembly instructs the Finance Committee to bring together a group, including representatives from the URC Trust, Ministries and Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committees and the General Secretariat, to consult with Synods and/or Synod Trusts, to consider further:

- whether a benevolent fund might be the right way to provide support to retired ministers in particular financial difficulties; and if so
- in what circumstances might ministers be eligible for support from such a fund; and
- what should be its nature and size and how might it be resourced;
- with a report of the group's work and/or conclusions to be presented to the 2023 General Assembly.

URC Trust Accounts 2021

Resolution 10

page 85

General Assembly notes the Trustees' Report and Financial Statements for the year ending 31 December 2021.

Finance and Pensions Committees

URC future pension arrangements

Resolution 11

page 86

General Assembly endorses the work done in devising a defined contribution pension scheme to replace both the URC Final Salary Scheme and the URC Ministers' Pension Fund as the recipient of future pension contributions, and authorises formal consultation with members of the existing schemes about the proposals as outlined in the paper and briefing note presented at General Assembly 2022.

Resolution 12

page 86

General Assembly approves signing of the contract with Aon referred to in that paper.

Resolution 13

page 86

General Assembly authorises Assembly officers to consider the outcome of the consultation with members and:

- if the officers are satisfied that no (or only minor) changes to the proposals as outlined are required, General Assembly also authorises Assembly officers to finalise the new scheme, and make arrangements for the closure of the existing schemes to future accrual after 31 December 2022, and for the beginning of the new scheme with effect from 1 January 2023, or as soon as practicable thereafter
- if not satisfied that only minor changes to the proposals are required, the Assembly officers should ensure that revised proposals are brought back for reconsideration by General Assembly or Assembly Executive acting on behalf of General Assembly as soon as is feasible.

Ministries Committee

The maintenance of the Ministry sub-committee

Resolution 14

page 114

General Assembly adopts the new structure of the Maintenance of the Ministry sub-committee.

URC Confidentiality Policy

Resolution 15

page 119

General Assembly accepts the additional wording on references and use of multimedia platforms such as Zoom as requested at Assembly Executive, November 2022.

Mission Committee

Reinvigorating the ecumenical vision of the United Reformed Church

Resolution 16

page 123

- a) General Assembly affirms that Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) continue to be central to the ecumenical mission and vision of the United Reformed Church.
- b) General Assembly reminds Synods and local churches that joint or ecumenical members of LEPs have always been and remain members of the United Reformed Church, not just those who were members of the URC at the formation of the LEP.
- c) Recognising that the approaches to ecumenism are different in England, Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man, and the Channel Islands, General Assembly affirms the new *lighter touch* forms of ecumenical co-operation contained in the Churches Together in England documents, *A Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission* and the accompanying *Toolkit* and encourages the creative use of these resources.
- d) General Assembly instructs the Mission Committee to consult with the Ministries Committee, to consider ways in which resource and scoping for LEPs and Ecumenical Areas can be targeted, to address the under-resourcing of our ecumenical commitments at a local level and to report back with recommendations to the 2023 General Assembly.

Environmental Policy

Resolution 17

page 131

General Assembly:

- a) Resolves that urgent action should be taken to reduce carbon emissions across the whole of church life, with the aim of reaching net zero emissions of greenhouse gases by 2030.
- b) Adopts the Environmental Policy in Part 2 of this paper, and *instructs* the committees and bodies under its control, and *encourages* associated bodies (including Trusts, the Retired Ministers Housing Society, and Resource Centres for Learning), Synods and local churches to adopt as a minimum the practices it sets out.
- c) Instructs each Assembly committee to develop a Net Zero Action Plan for its area of responsibility, and set and monitor targets for implementing this policy, reporting by March 2023, and annually thereafter.
- d) Establishes a Net Zero Task Group with membership of one Synod Moderator, one member of the Finance Committee, one representative of the URC Trust, the Secretary for Church and Society, the Deputy General Secretary (Admin and Resources), a representative of URC Youth, a Synod Property Officer, and a Synod Green Apostle. The group's remit shall be to:
 1. oversee progress in implementing this policy and report regularly to the Assembly Executive and General Assembly
 2. identify, advocate for, and where possible put in place any additional resources, support and expertise that are needed to implement this policy across the Church
 3. engage with Assembly committees around their Net Zero Action Plans and support them to develop them further
 4. encourage and facilitate the sharing of experiences across the Church, including celebrating achievements.

Korea Peace Appeal

Resolution 18

page 142

- a) General Assembly affirms its support for a lasting peace settlement to end the Korean War and instructs the General Secretary and Moderator to sign the Korea Peace Appeal on its behalf.
- b) General Assembly commends the Korea Peace Appeal and urges Synods, local churches, and individuals to sign the Korea Peace Appeal in solidarity with ecumenical partners in Korea.

Vision2020 report

Resolution 19

page 144

General Assembly agrees to the establishment of The Mission Enabling Fund, overseen by Mission Committee, with the permission to provide small grants to local URCs, Synods and mission organisations, with the aim of pursuing the denomination's mission priorities.

Legacies of (transatlantic) Slavery

Resolution 20

page 169

General Assembly adopts the statement of 'Confession and Apology by the United Reformed Church' prepared by the Legacies of Slavery Task Group, and commits the Church to sharing the confession and apology widely, both within and beyond the URC, including with our global partners in Africa and the Caribbean.

Resolution 21

page 169

General Assembly affirms its commitment to practical actions to address the continuing negative impacts of the legacies of transatlantic slavery on black communities in the UK, the Caribbean and Africa, and instructs the Legacies of Slavery Task Group to bring concrete and costed proposals to General Assembly 2023 for a considered programme of repairing justice.

Nominations Committee

Report to General Assembly 2022

Resolution 22

page 175

General Assembly extends the Revd Sarah Moore's term of service as Assistant Clerk of General Assembly from 1 January 2023 to the end of General Assembly 2023.

Resolution 23

page 175

General Assembly appoints committees and representatives of the Church as set out in paragraph 10.3 of this report, subject to the additions and corrections contained in the supplementary report to Assembly.

The General Secretary

Ratification of constitutional changes concerning the Ministerial Discipline and Incapacity Processes

Resolution 24

page 197

To save paper, this resolution has been printed only on page 197.

Additions to URC Structure and Rules of Procedure regarding Safeguarding

Resolution 25

page 201

To save paper, this resolution has been printed only on page 201.

The General Secretary

Church changes not previously reported to Assembly

Resolution 26

page 204

General Assembly notes the Churches which have closed since last they were reported to General Assembly. We give thanks to God for the worship and witness offered by these fellowships across the years.

Church Life Review

Assembly Committee structures and Church House structures

Resolution 27

page 213

General Assembly welcomes the initial thinking about a General Assembly Committee structure and an associated Church House staffing structure. In the light of comments at Assembly, and the results of further consultation with committees, Synod Moderators and Clerks, it invites the Church Life Review Group to bring finalised proposals to Assembly Executive in November 2022 authorising Assembly Executive to adopt these if it sees fit so to do.

Resolution 28

page 213

Assembly resolves to create a Chief Operating Officer post to replace the current Deputy General Secretary Administration and Resources role upon the retirement of the current post-holder. It authorises the Officers of the General Assembly to agree a finalised Job Description and Person Specification, having taken advice from the Human Resources Advisory Group.

MIND Advisory Group

Professional investigation within the Discipline Process

Resolution 29

page 232

Assembly resolves to change 8.7 of Section O to read:

The costs incurred in the work of an Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline in respect of allegations against a minister serving under oversight of a Synod shall be charged against funds of the United Reformed Church under the control of that Synod. Any other costs incurred by an Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline, by any Commission or Secretary of Commissions in operating the Process, the fees and expenses of any qualified person appointed under Appendix K as an additional member of an Investigation Team, and the reasonable expenses of any witness attending a Hearing shall be charged against funds of the Church under the control of the General Assembly.

Resolution 30

page 232

Assembly resolves to insert the following to Appendix K 6.

If, from the information available at this stage, the case appears to be onerous due to the likely volume of evidence or the complexity of such evidence and that professional assistance in investigation would be appropriate, the senior member shall refer the matter to the Executive Group of the Disciplinary Process who may appoint a suitably qualified person, whether or not a member of the URC, as an additional member of the Investigation Team.

Indemnity

Resolution 31

page 234

The General Assembly indemnifies any role-holder within the Ministerial Disciplinary and Incapacity procedures, who has been duly appointed by the General Assembly or on its behalf, trained, and has acted within the authority vested in them by those processes.

Authority within the Discipline Process

Resolution 32

page 235

Assembly inserts a new paragraph 8:10 be inserted into the Framework:

If, in the Investigation Stage, there is any need for an interpretation of the process, the procedure to be followed in a particular case, or if a complaint is raised by any party to the process, such matters shall be referred to the Executive Group of the Disciplinary Process. The Executive Group of the Disciplinary comprising the Convenor of the Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group, the Assembly Commission for Discipline Panel, and the Senior Member of the Disciplinary Investigation Panel or (if the Convenor or Senior Member are involved in the case concerned their Deputies) who, having taken such legal advice as considered necessary, may issue a definitive ruling on the matter. The Executive Group of the Disciplinary Process may also be a source of advice to the Assembly Commission for Discipline who assume all authority for the case in the Hearing Stage or the Disciplinary Appeal Commission during any appeal.

Curtailment of a pastoral tie or appointment

Resolution 33

page 237

General Assembly, noting that the Structure [paragraph 2 (6)] recognises that:

The General Assembly which shall embody the unity of the United Reformed Church and act as the central organ of its life and the final authority, under the Word of God and the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, in all matters of doctrine and order and in all other concerns of its common life...

And acting under function (xxix)

to do such other things as may be necessary in pursuance of its responsibility for the common life of the church,

resolves that an Assembly Commission for Discipline, acting on behalf of General Assembly, may, as part of its decision-making within the Ministerial Disciplinary Process, and with the minister's name remaining on the Roll of ministers of the United Reformed Church, curtail their pastoral tie or appointment.

Resolution 34

page 237

Where such a decision is made, the General Assembly, through its Pastoral and Welfare Committee shall grant a period of, normally, between three and six months, from the conclusion of the disciplinary case, for a new Call to be found by the minister.

Resolution 35

page 237

General Assembly notes that an Assembly Commission for Discipline may further direct that the minister whose pastoral tie or appointment has been curtailed shall not engage with the pastorate/project, save for the purposes of handover and farewell, despite any suspension being lifted at the conclusion of the case.

Resolution 36

page 238

To save paper, this resolution has been printed only on page 238.

Resolution 37

page 239

A finding of Curtailment has the effect of concluding any office or appointment which a minister may hold in a local church or any Council of the Church.

Resolution 38

page 239

Any extension of housing and stipend, normally for a period of between three and six months from the date when curtailment takes effect, shall be a question for decision by the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee.

Resolution 39

page 239

Directions may be given by the Assembly Commission for Discipline to accompany curtailment in the same way as provided by Part I of this Appendix in respect of written warnings. But the minister remains on the Roll and eligible to be called or appointed to a new sphere of ministry. Pending such call or appointment, the minister will be an associate member of the Synod of the province or nation of residence on the same basis as a retired minister.

Assisting an accused minister

Resolution 40

page 241

Assembly resolves to change Appendix K of Section O to read:

6. On receiving the material transmitted by the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline, the Senior Member is to appoint three willing members of the Investigation Panel to form an Investigation Team for that case, **and one panel member to assist the accused minister to address the issues and, if required, before the ACD or the DAppC**, having regard to geographical proximity to the accused, complainant and likely witnesses as well as to appropriate skills and experience. No Panel member who is related to, belonging to the same local church as, or otherwise closely concerned with the accused minister or the complainant, has any pastoral or personal involvement with the case or is liable to be a witness, may be appointed to an Investigation Team for that case. Subject to these considerations, the Senior Member should also consider the desirability of all members of the Panel having regular involvement with disciplinary cases. The Senior Member may him- or herself serve on an Investigation Team when that appears appropriate.
7. **Ministers are encouraged to use an Assisting Member of the Disciplinary Investigation Panel to help gather evidence and draw up their own statement/s, and, either to accompany the minister to the hearing before the ACD or the DAppC or to present the minister's case.**

Resolution 41

page 241

Change Appendix L to read

5. No interview with any person outside the Team, whether taking place in person, by electronic means or by telephone, may take place unless at least two members of the Team are present; the person being interviewed must also be offered the opportunity to have a friend (or, in the case of the accused minister, a colleague, **their assisting Investigation Panel member**, or Trade Union representative) present. A note of any interview is to be taken at the time or made immediately afterward, and a copy supplied to the person interviewed for comment.

Appendix Y – confidentiality, dissemination of information, and retention of records

Resolution 42

page 243

Assembly resolves to delete the current Appendix Y, substituting it with the text below.

The Assembly Representative for Discipline

Resolution 43

page 254

Assembly deletes section 2 of Appendix H and replaces it with:

The Assembly Representative for Discipline will normally be the General Secretary or their duly appointed deputy. Where a disciplinary case is brought against the General Secretary the line manager of the General Secretary (or if for any reason that is inappropriate, such person as the Officers of the General Assembly shall appoint without reference to the General Secretary) shall act as Assembly Representative for Discipline.

Resolution 44

page 254

Assembly resolves to appoint the General Secretary as the Assembly Representative for Discipline – or the Line Manager of the General Secretary if the case in question concerns the General Secretary.

Transitional arrangements from the ‘old’ to the ‘new’ disciplinary process

Resolution 45

page 256

Assembly resolves the following transitional arrangements from the ‘old’ to the ‘new’ Ministerial Disciplinary Process.

‘The Relevant Time’ means 12pm on the day before the scheduled opening of the General Assembly in 2022 (ie at the date of writing, 7 July 2022).

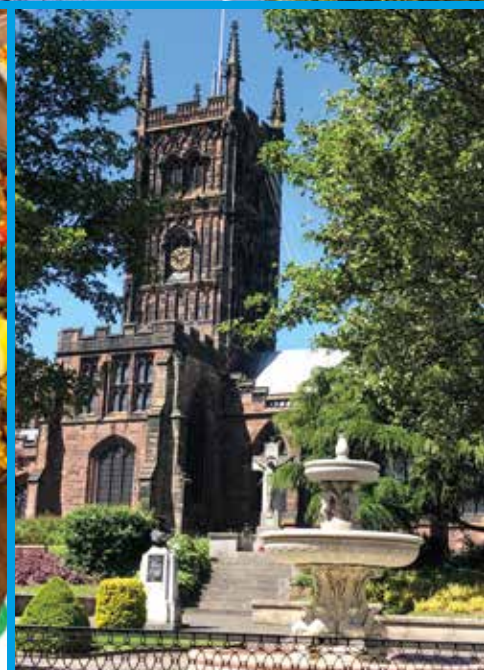
No action is to be taken under the old Process from that time until the close of Assembly, unless exceptional and urgent circumstances call for a minister to be suspended from ministry by the Moderator of the Synod having oversight.

If decisions taken by the Assembly have the effect that the new process does not come into effect at the close of Assembly, then the old process will remain in force (subject to any directions the Assembly may give), and the days of the sitting of Assembly are to be discounted in any calculation of time under its rules.

No rule as to the confidentiality of the process shall prevent Synod Appointees or the members of a Mandated Group from providing an Investigation Team which is to replace them in their function with the full information necessary for that purpose.

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