

Paper A2

General Assembly 2021

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Adrian Bulley adrian.bulley@urc.org.uk
Action required	None.
Draft resolution(s)	

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To update Mission Council on arrangements for the meeting of General Assembly in July 2021.
Main points	Updating Mission Council on the thinking behind the decision of Assembly Officers not to continue to plan for a physical meeting of General Assembly in July, and the decision of the Business Committee to plan for a virtual meeting in its place.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Officers of General Assembly Business Committee Head of Children's and Youth Work Head of Communications.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

1. At the time of writing, we are hearing of major events planned for this summer which have been cancelled or postponed, including RHS Chelsea (May), Glastonbury (June) and Royal Welsh Agricultural Show (July).
2. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland will take place virtually this year (from 22 May).
3. Vaccines are being rolled out with speed. The most vulnerable, by age or underlying illness, should receive the first dose of a vaccine by the end of spring, with the second dose following twelve weeks later. Others will be vaccinated in the following months. We should not expect that the vaccination programme will be completed by early July. It is also worth noting that some people in the lower categories of eligibility for vaccination are cautious about general relaxations before they eventually receive both doses of their vaccine.
4. The UK Prime Minister's roadmap for easing lockdown in England is such that a decision as to whether a gathering such as General Assembly might go ahead will not be made until the second half of June; too late for our meeting in July.
5. Our own General Assembly necessitates bringing 290 people together for close interaction over four days.
6. We cannot ensure social distancing at The Hayes; indeed, very few venues could allow adequate social distancing for that number of people.
7. Bearing all these factors in mind, the Officers of General Assembly have decided that it is no longer prudent to plan for a physical meeting of the General Assembly in July 2021.
8. Our booking with the Christian Conference Trust (CCT), owners of The Hayes (and High Leigh) for July 2021 has now been cancelled. CCT have agreed to apply all the monies paid to them for our July 2021 booking to the July 2022 booking. The same is true of our booking with Travelodge for overflow accommodation, so there has been no financial cost to the United Reformed Church of cancelling.
9. The Business Committee has now agreed that we should switch our efforts into planning to hold a virtual meeting of General Assembly over the same long weekend in July, using Zoom and building on the experience which has been gained from hosting three virtual meetings of Mission Council as well as that of our ecumenical partners.
10. URC Youth and the Head of Children's and Youth Work are considering options for a gathering for What Do You Think.
11. The Clerk has given some thought to the mechanism for electing a Moderator of General Assembly in a virtual meeting, and the Business Committee is exploring how this might happen during the meeting using an online portal.