

Paper D3

Revising the Discipleship Development Strategy and the Discipleship Development Fund policy and operation

Education and Learning Committee

Basic information

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Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council accepts the revised discipleship development strategy and its complementary discipleship development fund policy and operation.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Working in conjunction with the Walking the Way steering group, the Education and Learning Committee have simplified and updated the discipleship development strategy (DDS) and provided greater access to the discipleship development fund to further the aims of the DDS.
Main points	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The DDS has been simplified and updated and provided enhanced accountability.2. The DDF process has been split into two; one for small grants and one for large grants. This will provide access to funding for 'big ideas'.
Previous relevant documents	Paper D2 – Education and Learning Committee – Walking the Way of Jesus as disciples: 'They who learn as they follow', Mission Council, March 2018 Paper D1 – DDF, Mission Council, May 2019.
Consultation has taken place with...	For the DDS element: the Ministries secretary, Walking the Way Programme Officer and the Stepwise Development Group. For the DDF element: the General Secretary, the present and past convenors of the Synod Resource Sharing Task Group and the Ministries secretary.

Summary of impact

Financial	No additional administrative costs. The DDF is expected to be exhausted within a decade.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Since March 2018, the Education and Learning Committee has followed a Discipleship Development Strategy (DDS) to keep its work focussed firmly on the development of whole-of-life discipleship. The strategy document itself, while offering a strong indication of our commitment to whole-of-life discipleship, is too long and unwieldy for many to easily understand or use. As such, a more integrated approach is being offered. This involves reducing the strategy document in size and condensing the thinking in a more concise document that can be used to help build whole-of-life discipleship as a focus in all of our work and give direction for the Discipleship Development Fund (DDF) process.
- 1.2 The revision of the DDS, along with some teething issues, has driven the revision of the policy and operation of the DDF, and the revised approach is included in this paper.

2. Background to the changes

- 2.1 Since 2016, the emphasis on missional discipleship has been evident and active in the URC from local churches through all the councils of the church. In the past year, the world has changed in many ways, including the closure of our church buildings, but the work of God has continued in many, varied and often amazingly creative and imaginative ways. So much came from our churches – audio, video, printed word – efforts to engage, encourage, support and love our communities. We can no longer simply accept ‘what we have always done’ but need to be prepared to step up and step out into the new reality which is emerging.
- 2.2 The last year has shown us that God is bigger, mightier, more welcoming, and inclusive, faithful, and enduring than we can ever imagine! And we want to take this opportunity to enable lay faith development, learning, action, and growth in more creative and radical ways. We want to empower and inspire faithful, missional people who can dream dreams and see visions and join in with the amazing things that God is already doing in the world. We want to resource, encourage, and enable people who want to share the abundant and life-giving love of God with the communities they encounter.
- 2.3 In the light of all of this, we felt it time to review and revise the 2018 DDS which drives the DDF process (decided in May 2019 as an interim measure) to be revisited.
- 2.4 The strategy has been reviewed and revised in the light of the changes brought by the pandemic, the previous work carried out in 2018-2020 through the whole of the United Reformed Church in relation to lay training and development, and the need for a different, more creative and wide-reaching process for accessing the DDF. The essence of the previous DDS has been maintained but its aims amalgamated and developed to be relevant to the new reality that is emerging.

3. Discipleship Development Strategy – Revised January 2020

- 3.1 The main aims of this revised DDS are to:

- Create opportunities for everyone to encounter the living God, whether they already identify themselves as followers of Christ or not.
- Encourage everyone in their prayer life and relationship with God to enable them to live as disciples of Jesus.
- Encourage everyone to make the most of educational opportunities that are relevant and appropriate for them in their discipleship journey.

3.2 These aims can be achieved through cooperation to:

- Help people see that doing theology is about learning from all of life's opportunities as we support each other in living out our faith, rooted in the Word of God.
- Continue to monitor discipleship development needs across the denomination, along with resources available from across the URC and beyond, to help meet these needs.
- Champion the need for access to education beyond geographical boundaries, signposting all that synods, RCLs and the wider URC has to offer.
- Encourage diverse forms of learning, including face-to-face and online (blended), and learning that is prepared in advance, watched and then discussed (flipped).
- Encourage people of all ages, abilities and cultural backgrounds to consider their own leadership potential as disciples and educators.
- Encourage sharing of news, information, data and feedback on discipleship development across the URC.
- Promote and review the Stepwise programme as a discipleship development tool for people of all ages, abilities and cultural backgrounds.
- Encourage conversations around equal access to financial resources at all levels of Church life.
- Develop a process for equitable access to the Discipleship Development Fund.

3.3 In the coming months we will be adding clarity to the HOW and WHO and WHEN of this strategy so that the Education and Learning Committee (E&LC) can be held accountable for their focus on missional discipleship. We also want to encourage joined up thinking and cooperation with other committees and groups going forward; consultations around this working more closely together have already begun.

3.4 This background is offered as the grounding and directional document for the DDF, which needs to be made more freely available as soon as possible to support lay discipleship development, as per the commitment made at Mission Council in May 2019.

4. The DDF journey

4.1 In May 2019 Mission Council agreed to the E&LC proposals for the use of the proceeds of the sale of the Windermere Centre. The specific resolutions passed were:

4.2 Mission Council resolves:

1. To accept the principles and processes for a discipleship development fund put forward in this paper by the Education and Learning Committee, in alignment with the strategy accepted by Mission Council in March 2018.
2. To operate the discipleship development fund through the existing inter-synod resource sharing mechanism.
3. To allocate £100,000 to the first year of operation of the fund (June 2019 to May 2020), to be disbursed according to the policy laid out in appendix A of this paper as an initial step.
4. To appoint the resource sharing task group (RSTG) to design the permanent DDF processes, in consultation with the finance and education and learning committees, and present this to Mission Council for approval no later than March 2020.

4.3 In essence the E&LC was responsible for the policy controlling access to the fund and the synods and their Resource Sharing Task Group were responsible for administering the

fund. The policy set expectations that the fund would be used usually to provide grants of up to £200 pa for discipleship development, specifically excluding MWS, CRCW and Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers (because they can access other funds).

- 4.4 John Samson reported at the end of 2020 that “there has only ever been one claim from the fund since it was set up and that was towards the end of 2019 when the Yorkshire Synod claimed £1,265. The current DDF fund is £861,000 and is earning £18,000 a year in income.” The E&LC is aware of at least one other application in the pipeline.

5. DDF process issues

- 5.1 In part due to difficulties of operating during lockdowns the Mission Council resolutions have not been fully implemented and nor has much use been made of the fund. Concerns have been raised with the E&LC that the DDF has become an over complicated two-stage process, which deters applicants. Also, synods try not to access RSTG finance as they aim to ‘balance their books’ with the money they have. In addition, when the policy was discussed at Mission Council several concerns were raised concerning the ability of the fund to finance ‘big ideas’.
- 5.2 Consequently, the E&LC is taking this opportunity afforded by the revision of the DDS to address these issues by suggesting changes to both the process and the policy. The wish is to start spending significant amounts of this money to help the URC to flourish through discipleship development!

6. DDF proposals

- 6.1 **Process.** The aim is to replace the two-step process with two, simpler, parallel processes. One process will support the small grants (normally less than £200) provided by our synods and the other will support large grants (typically up to £5000) to our synods and Committees.
- 6.2 **Small grants.** It is suggested that at the beginning of each year the income from the capital from the previous year is shared equitably between the synods and distributed in full. This money would supplement the synods’ existing budgets for discipleship development grants. Any synod is at liberty to decline the grant. If one or more synods do decline the grants their portions would be added to the sum allocated to the large grant awarding group. The existing synod processes would be used to award grants, with no added administration required for the deployment of the additional funds.
- 6.3 As a simple way of sharing the DDF income equitably it is suggested each synod is given 1/13th of the income [note – other suggestions for the equitable distribution of this income are welcome]. This means that the smaller synods (typically the less wealthy synods) will get more than a per capita allocation, and the big synods will get less than a per capita allocation. As an example, for 2021 the allocation would be about £1385 per synod. It is recognised that this money will only support a limited number of additional grants. However, if synod funds for discipleship development grants are exhausted, the synod would be able to apply for a ‘large grant’ to fund further awards.
- 6.4 **Large grants.** Large grants, aimed at discipleship development in its broadest sense, would be made from the DDF capital. A number of people have been urging us not to save this money for ‘a rainy day’ as it is already raining! With that in mind it is recommended that up to £85,000 (about 10% of the present capital) is awarded in grants every year. The grants would be open to any synod, Assembly Committee or other similar URC body to apply for. The grants would not be expected to cover the cost of ‘normal’ operations or activities (so not a way of bypassing the denominational budgeting processes) but to be used, mainly, for big ideas, creative projects or enabling events.

6.5 The suggested process will be initiated by a simple form used to explain the purpose of the grant, what it will achieve, outlining the plans and defining how its impact will be measured. The form will be assessed by a group organised by the E&LC with representatives from the Synod Moderators and the Ministries, Equalities, Mission and Children and Youth Work Committees. The group will be convened by the Deputy General Secretary, Discipleship and will meet virtually at least four times a year. Conflicts of interest will be avoided by group members with an interest in a grant application being excused from the debate and the vote. A quorum of four is suggested.

7. DDF policy

7.1 The existing E&LC policy for DDF grants has been updated to reflect the changes suggested in this document, and is given in Appendix A. The original policy is given in Appendix B for comparison. The new policy for small grants focusses on the distribution of the DDF income to the synods and does not aim to change synod policy for grant making in this area. The main focus of the new policy is the provision of large grants to URC synods, committees and groups.

8. DDF reporting and reviewing

8.1 The assessment of the policy and operation of the DDF will be carried out in two ways; by an annual report and a tri-annual review.

8.2 The E&LC will prepare an annual report for General Assembly based on:

- Synod statistics of small grants made in the previous year, provided to the E&LC by the end of May;
- Large grant awards made in the previous year; and
- Completion reports provided to the E&L Secretary once the events have been completed.

8.3 The E&LC, in conjunction with the large grants awarding group, will conduct a review of the policy and operation of the DDF to establish if the DDS objectives are being met, if value is being delivered and if any changes are needed for the next three years.

Appendix A – Revised Policy for the Discipleship Development Fund

1. Small grants

- 1.1 The income from the Discipleship Development Fund (DDF) in one year will be shared equitably between our synods at the beginning of the next year. This award is intended to supplement the funds synods use for giving small grants (typically less than £200 per annum) to encourage 'lay' (i.e. not including Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers) discipleship development.
- 1.2 The equitable distribution of income will provide more, relative to their membership, to synods with a less than average income and relatively less to synods with a more than average income. As the larger synods typically have the larger incomes, the simplest way to achieve this equitable split is to give 1/13th of the DDF income to each synod.
- 1.3 Any synod is at liberty to decline the grant. If one or more synods do decline the grants their portions would be added to the sum allocated to the large grant awarding group.

2. Large grants

- 2.1 Large grants will be given using the DDF capital. The URC is prepared to deplete the DDF within a decade. Consequently, the total value of grants in one year will be limited, on average, to 10% of the present value of the fund i.e. £85,000. The expectation is that most grants would not exceed £5,000.
- 2.2 **How will the grants be awarded?** An application form detailing purpose, outcomes, plans and assessment will be assessed by a group convened by the Deputy General Secretary, Discipleship. The group will consist of representatives from the Synod Moderators and the Education and Learning, Ministries, Equalities, Mission and Children and Youth Work Committees and will meet virtually at least four times a year. Conflicts of interest will be avoided by group members with an interest in a grant application being excused from the debate and the vote. The decision of the group will be final. A quorum of four, including the convenor, is suggested.
- 2.3 **Who is eligible to claim this support?** Any recognised group in the URC, including local churches, synods or Assembly Committees, can apply. Should a group that isn't a synod or Assembly Committee apply they will need to have their application endorsed by the relevant synod or Assembly Committee. For example, if the Youth Executive wanted to apply for a grant, they would need to get the endorsement of the Children and Youthwork Committee.
- 2.4 **What is provided?** A grant will be made to cover the expected costs for the lifetime of the project. Grants for partial projects will not be made. For multi-year projects the total grant will be made in principle but will be paid out annually, according to the plan.
- 2.5 **What can this money be used for?** The DDF is intended to contribute to the development of lay people and therefore the purposes for which it can be used are as broad as can be generated by creativity and vocation, in line with the aims of the URC's Discipleship Development Strategy (DDS), which are to equip the people of the United Reformed Church to:
 - Create opportunities for everyone to encounter the living God, whether they already identify themselves as followers of Christ or not.
 - Encourage everyone in their prayer life and relationship with God to enable them to live as disciples of Jesus.
 - Encourage everyone to make the most of education opportunities that are relevant and appropriate for them in their discipleship journey.

- 2.6 The eligible learning events and activities would include, without being restricted to:
- Courses (at any level) at any of the United Reformed Church Resource Centres for Learning or other suitable learning providers;
 - National or denominational learning events, conferences or programmes developed in-house.
- 2.7 In addition, eligible costs include:
- Books and resources related to a particular topic or event;
 - Attendance at synod learning events; and
 - Travel costs for attending learning events.
- 2.8 **What criteria should each request fulfil?** The support requested must be used for enabling those included in the scope of the request to enhance their understanding or practice of discipleship. The request must include the following elements:
- the purpose of the grant,
 - who the project, programme or event (the '*event*') is targeted at;
 - what the *event* will achieve,
 - a simple plan covering the full lifecycle of the *event*; and
 - a statement of how its impact will be measured and reported.
- 2.9 The *event* can be within the church, the community or an institution in which they are serving. *Events* can be face-to-face or virtual, live or recorded, or a combination of the above.
- 2.10 **Are there any restrictions?** The grants would not be expected to cover the cost of 'normal' operations or to replace money that would usually be provided through the usual denominational or synod budgeting processes.
- 2.11 **How are applications made?** Applications will be made using a simple form and sent to the Secretary for Education and Learning.
- 2.12 **How are grants paid?** For an *event* which has a plan of less than a year the grant will be paid in full at the beginning. Once the *event* has been concluded a report of the *event* [aims, outcomes, participant feedback and expenditure, including receipts] must be sent to the Secretary for Education and Learning. For multi-year events the grant will be paid annually. The second and subsequent tranches of the grant will be paid once the end-of-year account has been received by the Secretary for Education and Learning.

Appendix B – Existing Policy for the Discipleship Development Fund (Approved May 19)

(Note this was authorised for a year, so expired in June 2020)

1. Who is eligible to claim this support?

1.1 Applicants will be committed member or adherents, including young people of a congregation within the United Reformed Church who are exercising, or want to exercise, a form of lay ministry which is endorsed by their Church Meeting and their synod. This is intended to be permissive rather than restrictive, and so it could be ministry exercised locally (e.g. eldership or children's work etc.) for a particular pastorate, or regionally. It could also be used to enable someone to develop their discipleship in their life beyond the church. The DDF is not open to Ministers of Word and Sacraments, CRCWs, or Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers as there are other designated funds available for those groups.

2. What is provided?

2.1 What is needed, although this would normally be restricted to £200 per calendar year per application. It will be for the applicant's synod to decide whether or not to offer a higher level of funding from the DDF.

3. What can this money be used for?

3.1 The DDF is intended to contribute to the development of lay people and therefore the purposes for which it can be used are as broad as the purposes generated by creativity and vocation, in line with the URC's Discipleship Development Strategy (DDS). The eligible learning activities would include, without being restricted to:

- Courses (at any level) at any of the United Reformed Church Resource Centres for Learning;
- Courses and learning events through other learning providers;
- Books and resources related to a particular topic;
- Attendance at synod learning events; and
- Travel costs for attending learning events

4. What criteria should each request fulfil?

4.1 The support requested must be used for enabling the individual's learning for discipleship, so the applicant making the request should be able to say what they expect to learn and how they will use this learning in their area of service for God. This can be within the church, the community or an institution in which they are serving. The application will need to define how and when the outcomes will be assessed.

5. Are there any restrictions?

All eligible lay people will have access to the funds, although priority will be given to those who:

- a. cannot get sufficient funding from any other source, e.g. from their church, synod, employment, and their own funds; and
- b. would not be able to make use of the development opportunity without a grant.

6. How are applications made?

6.1 Applications are to be made to the synod using a standard form designed by the URC's Education and Learning Committee. Applications should be made well before the beginning of the course or learning event. Retrospective applications will not necessarily be met. Application forms will be obtainable through the synod office and should be sent for authorisation to the designated synod officer. The synod office will be able to advise on who

this is, although it should normally be made clear on the application form.

7. How are grants paid?

- 7.1 Grants authorised by the designated synod officer are usually paid by the synod by reimbursement to the recipient upon presentation of proof of payment relating to expenditure made. Where necessary the synod can pay the training provider directly.