

Paper D4

Integration consultation: initial findings

Education and Learning Committee

Basic information

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Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To present the initial findings from the Education and Learning Committee consultation on integration.
Main points	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The initial consultation is still ongoing.2. There is an appetite for change; only one response has argued for no change.3. The resulting 'definition' of integration is very broad.
Previous relevant documents	Paper C1: Education and Learning integration, Mission Council, November 2020 Education and Learning Committee Way forward, General Assembly, 2020.
Consultation has taken place with...	The General Secretary for the report. Consultation about integration has taken place with most, but not all, of the targeted groups.

Summary of impact

Financial	None identified, as yet.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	The desire to retain, or enhance, the ecumenical involvement in the provision of education and learning remains strong.

Integration consultation: initial findings

1. Introduction

1.1 The November Mission Council approved our plans to hold a denomination wide consultation: *'Mission Council accepts the plan to consult with named bodies to develop a view of how education and learning within the URC can achieve the integration envisioned in the 2005 General Assembly.'*

1.2 The named bodies were:

- RCLs
- Assembly Committees, notably Education and Learning, Children and Youth Work, Ministries and Mission;
- The Education and Learning staff team;
- The General Secretariat, and the Deputy General Secretary Discipleship; and
- Synods, particularly Moderators and their staff / committees with Education and Learning responsibilities;
- EM1 students and EM2/3 ministers;
- Those involved in managing, developing, and participating in Stepwise;
- URC Youth; and
- Global and Intercultural Ministries.

1.3 Following conversations in Mission Council two further groups were added: the Safeguarding Advisory Group and Lay Preachers.

1.4 The findings given below cover the responses received up to and including 12 February 2021. The consultation is not yet complete as there are a number of people and groups who have not yet been able to respond; most are already planned to take place in the next month or so.

2. Summary

2.1 In summary:

- The consultation is not complete, but a significant number of responses have already been received
- There is an appetite for change; only one response has argued for no change
- The resulting 'definition' of integration is very broad
- There is a desire for education and learning to better reflect the intergenerational nature of our church
- Communication (or lack of it) appears to be a significant issue
- Concerns are voiced that our size and structure are becoming incompatible.

3. Analysis

3.1 Each response received has been reviewed and the key points extracted and entered into a database together with categorisations of the topic and the person or group responding. So far, the database includes:

Respondent	Number
Committees or groups	9
CYDO	1
EM2/3	28
Lay Preachers	12
RCLs	2
TDOs	3
Other	1
TOTAL	56

3.2 We have had a total of 56 responses from which we have derived 276 statements.

4. Themes

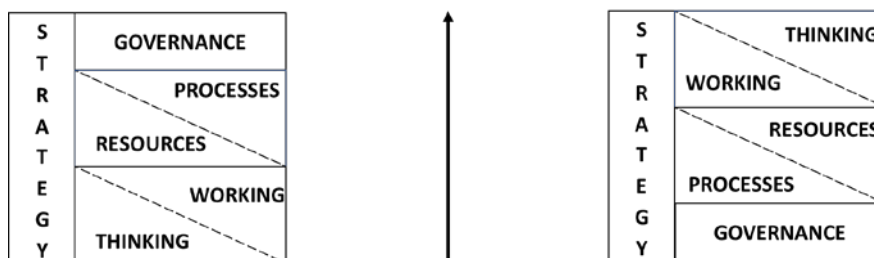
4.1 The themes identified below are representative, at a high level, of the responses that have been received to date. They are indicative and should not be seen as definitive at this stage. This paper will be updated once all of the responses have been received. Only then can the complete set of second phase consultations be identified. Please note that the order in which the themes are presented is not an indicator of their importance or priority.

4.2 **Appetite for change.** Only one response has suggested that change is not necessary or desirable. A further eight statements have urged caution, but typically from the point of view of imparting wisdom rather than trying to prevent change happening.

4.3 **Communication.** Communication, or lack of it, would appear to be an issue. For example, a number of respondents were not aware that:

- all five Stepwise streams are fully available;
- Education and Learning use blended learning; or
- Education and Learning have embraced the digital world throughout many aspects of its operations and services.

4.4 **Defining integration.** In the consultation proposal it was intentional that 'integration' was not defined – one purpose of the exercise was to do just that. A broad range of integration ideas have been provided; all around the concept of being 'joined-up'. This overall concept of integration could be presented diagrammatically in the following ways:



Organic integration

Planned integration

4.5 Note that these elements of integration have a loose 'hierarchy' and build on each other. For example, having 'joined-up resources' would not be effective without 'joined-up processes'. The corollary is also true; 'joined-up processes' are not needed to begin 'joined-up thinking'. The diagram is shown in two ways representing respondents' views that the journey of integration can occur in two different ways which, for the sake of this paper, are called 'organic' and 'planned'.

4.6 Organic integration happens when people start talking, thinking and working on common problems. This can be relatively painless, but also can be dependent on individual working styles and may, therefore, be difficult to embed in an organisation.

4.7 Planned integration typically starts with the strategic intent to integrate closely followed by a governance which shapes processes, roles and working practices to embed integration within the organisation.

4.8 Mapping integration in this manner also allows us to recognise where integration is already practiced. For example, while there are no joined-up processes or resources within the Discipleship committees there is plenty of evidence of joined-up thinking and working between the three committees, evidenced by the recent Lent packs and the latest lay preaching paper.

- 4.9 **Broader integration.** A number of respondents have pointed out that any integration within Education and Learning needs to be done in the context of the whole denomination, and may bring up issues of integration beyond Education and Learning. A typical remark is *'The process is also wider than integration within the committees and should be part of the URC's whole strategy'*.
- 4.10 **RCL Consolidation.** There is broad consensus around the need for, and benefits of, consolidation within our RCLs. It is worth noting that these remarks come from the RCLs as well as others not directly connected to the RCLs. The term consolidation is not used here as a euphemism for closure or cost reduction. What has been suggested ranges from sharing resources all the way through to developing a single RCL operating on three sites. A typical remark in the middle of this range is *'If we retain three Resource Centres for Learning could the staffing of these be managed centrally?'*
- 4.11 **Size matters.** Quite a few respondents are concerned that the URC is, or is getting, too small to afford the luxury of in-house, distributed and diverse provision of Education and Learning. Often mentioned at the same time is the need to look for closer working with the providers of education and learning in other partner denominations, and beyond, as is already the case for EM1. The call to work ecumenically is loud and clear. A typical remark is *'The URC is now too small for us to do very much alone - and so we have to find ways of integrating with other churches and traditions'*.
- 4.12 **Access and Pathways.** Respondents are generally looking for easy access to learning opportunities that are better communicated. A typical remark is *'Can we offer opportunities that are easy to access and avoid unnecessary hurdles?'* In a similar vein, respondents are looking for clear and straightforward development pathways that fully take account of their development portfolio. A typical remark is *'People should know which courses will be a step towards which kinds of lay or ordained ministry'*. Additionally, equitable access is seen as a core requirement. A typical remark is *'Make learning access equitable in terms of finance and geography'*. Finally, there is the question about pathways for Children and Youth ministry. A typical remark is *'C&Y needs to be a recognised ministry ... but we do not want additional bureaucracy'*.
- 4.13 **Education and Learning within synods.** Respondents warmly welcome the role of Synods in identifying and delivering Education and Learning, but in general, call for more collaboration within the TDO network and between synods and RCLs. A typical remark is *'Synod training officers do a good task. But what is offered seems to vary enormously between synods, and I fear that we are missing out by failing to cross-pollinate good ideas more widely across the denomination'*.
- 4.14 **The whole people of God.** Quite a few respondents asked for better integration of Education and Learning for the whole people of God. Two issues were highlighted. Firstly, about integrating lay and ordained training. A typical remark is *'More integration in the training of ministers, elders and lay preachers in preaching, leading worship, pastoral care, leadership and change management'*. Secondly, about integrating across generations. A typical remark is *'Focus needs to shift towards whole church learning and value training that is truly intergenerational and address the priority imbalance that exists towards training for Ministry'*.
- 4.15 **Assembly committees.** There are a number of comments that either directly or indirectly question if the Assembly committees should work more closely together, particularly, but not exclusively, the Discipleship committees. A typical remark is *'What potential is there for co-ordinating and co-delivering training between EL&C and C&YW?'*

5. **Conclusion**

- 5.1 There are some key stakeholders who have not yet responded. Consequently, this paper only contains some initial findings that should not be taken as definitive. However, even before the initial consultation has finished some actions have become clear. This is not a complete list of actions, but it is worthwhile listing these so that further consultation can start without having to wait for another council meeting.
- 5.2 It is proposed that more detailed consultations take place between the three RCLs, the synods and RCLs, and between the core committees with a stake in Education and Learning: Ministries, Mission, Children and Youth Work, Safeguarding Advisory Group and Education and Learning.
- 5.3 Other actions will be considered once the initial consultation has been completed.