

Mission Council

15-17 March 2021
Via Zoom



March 2021

Dear Colleagues,

Mission Council Monday 15 to Wednesday 17 March 2021

This is the second and final mailing for this month's Mission Council. The first mailing included a covering letter, a list of members, and 'What we are about in Mission Council.' If you are missing any of these, please contact Samantha Bircham: samantha.bircham@urc.org.uk.

1. Registering

If you have not already done so, please register now by using the following link: <http://urcassembly.tv/>. Once registered, the Zoom link will be sent to you by e-mail.

2. Mission Council papers

Most of the papers for Mission Council are now available here: <https://urc.org.uk/march-2021>. Others may follow over the coming days, so please check this page regularly.

3. En Bloc

At General Assembly and Mission Council meetings we take certain business *En Bloc*. These are items where the Moderators think that decisions might be reached responsibly without further discussion. You will see that the agenda includes a slot when these items will be voted on.

I suggest you read the *En Bloc* papers first. This will give you time to contact the author of a paper if you have questions. Authors' names and email addresses are noted on the cover sheets. If you think any of these papers needs discussion at Mission Council, particularly if you disagree with a proposed resolution, you may ask that a piece of business be removed from *En Bloc*. You must put that request to the Clerk (michael.hopkins@urc.org.uk) **by 11:00 on Wednesday 10 March**. If three people ask to remove an item, it will be withdrawn from *En Bloc* and added to our agenda.

I need to remind you too that we really rely on every Mission Council member to read the papers and take note of information to relay back to their synods. In using the *En Bloc* method of decision-making there is no wish to bury information or to avoid discussions which Mission Council ought to have. We must all ensure the appropriate flow of information from Mission Council to the synods.

Here are the papers the Moderators presently expect to take in *En Bloc*:

- C1:** Communications Committee update
- C2:** URC digital charter

- C3:** Social media guidelines
- D1:** Education and Learning Committee update
- D2:** Education and Learning Committee sizing
- D4:** Integration consultation update
- D/H1:** Marks of Ministry of a Worship Leader and Lay Preacher
- F1:** Faith and Order update
- G1:** Pensions update
- H1:** Capability Policy
- I1:** Mission Committee update
- I2:** Anti-racism update
- I3:** Jubilee update
- J1:** Nominations
- J2:** Nominations supplemental (excluding Mersey Mod)
- O1:** Human Resource Advisory Group update
- P1:** Law and Polity Advisory Group update
- T1:** Safeguarding Advisory Group update

4. Welcome to Mission Council

There will be an introductory session at **14:00 on Wednesday 10 March** aimed at new Mission Council members, although all who wish to attend are welcome too, to outline processes and procedures, introduce the Assembly Officers, and explain some items of business. This session will be led by the Revd Michael Hopkins, Clerk of the General Assembly. Please use the same Zoom link as for the main meeting.

5. Practice sessions

There will be practice sessions at **16:00 on Friday 12 March** and **09:00 on Monday 15 March** using the same Zoom link as for the main meeting. Please try to attend, even if you are familiar with Zoom. If you want help with Zoom, please look at the short guides on this webpage: www.urc.org.uk/information-guides.

Please make sure that pop-up windows in your web browser are allowed. If not, you may not be able to vote.

Please also add a V or N before your name in Zoom to show whether you are a voting member.

6. Standing Orders

A full version of our rules for doing business is in the 'Standing Orders' (which are also used at General Assembly). These can be found on the URC website at www.urc.org.uk/about-mission-council.html. Note that we will be using the Standing Orders for virtual meetings on this occasion.

7. Observers and staff

Observers and URC staff who are not members of Mission Council do not participate in decision-making. Staff members are welcome to speak on their own areas, or at other times with permission from the moderator.

8. Breakout and buzz groups

We will be making use of groups on two occasions during this meeting, and the table of groups can be found on the website as above and attached to this mailing.

The Moderators may also ask for small 'buzz groups' to be created to discuss something. In both cases, the technical team running the meeting will create these groups. Please be patient while they are created – they can only work as fast as Zoom allows!

9. Social media

We must not post on social media sites during business sessions. This restriction only applies when Council is in session; members may join in online debates during breaks, about business that is completed (although not on business that has only been adjourned to a later session of the meeting). As ever, everything shared on these sites is the responsibility of the author and subject to the same defamation laws as any other written communication.

The report of the business will appear on the URC website and social media channels after each session.

As always, please come to share, listen, reflect, and discern together, and to support each other in fellowship outside the formal timetable.

Let us treat one another with grace as we seek the guidance of God.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "J. P. Bradbury" with a stylized flourish underneath.

John Bradbury
General Secretary

Each group is invited to elect a note-taker for each session

<p>A</p>	<p>Fran Kissack <i>Leader</i></p> <p>Melanie Campbell Paul Franklin Richard Lockley Lythan Nevard Robert Pope Nigel Uden George Watt Paul Whittle</p>	<p>B</p>	<p>Martyn Coe <i>Leader</i></p> <p>Fiona Bennett Derek Estill Russell Furley-Smith Joan Grindrod-Helmn Graham Hoslett Jamie Kissack Shirley Miller Paul Whittle</p>
<p>C</p>	<p>Steve Faber <i>Leader</i></p> <p>Jason Askew Jane Baird Karen Bell Tim Crossley Elaine Hutchinson Sarah Lane Cawte Myra Rose Maureen Shepherd</p>	<p>D</p>	<p>Simon Fairnington <i>Leader</i></p> <p>Ray Adams Francis Brienan Rosie Buxton George Faris Tessa Henry-Robinson Tim Hopley Keir Hounsome Adella Pritchard Bill Robson</p>
<p>E</p>	<p>Val Morrison <i>Leader</i></p> <p>Chuka Agbasiere Richard Bradley Geoffrey Clarke Rosie Martin Charles Mather John Piper John Samson Sandra Wallace Reuben Watt</p>	<p>F</p>	<p>Ian Hardie <i>Leader</i></p> <p>Ruth Dixon Philip French David Greatorex Joanna Harris Morag McLintock Andrew Prasad Paul Robinson Kirsty Thorpe Simon Walkling</p>
<p>G</p>	<p>Peter Stevenson <i>Leader</i></p> <p>Bridget Banks Nicola Furley-Smith Ken Howcroft Gwen Jennings Timothy Meadows Victoria Turner Camilla Veitch Alan Yates</p>	<p>H</p>	<p>Ruth Whitehead <i>Leader</i></p> <p>Richard Eastman Rita Griffiths David Herbert Anne Lewitt Andy Middleton Jenny Mills Maria Mills Pamela Tolhurst</p>

Mission Council

Monday 15 to Wednesday 17 March 2021

Agenda

Monday 15 March

Session one

- 11:00 to 12:30** Welcomes
- Opening Worship and Bible study
- Introduction and administration
- Minutes of November 2020 meeting
Matters arising from the minutes
- Voting on En Bloc business
- Introduction to proposal for a review A1
- 12:00** Groupwork on proposal for a review
- 12:45 to 13:45** *Break*

Session two

- 13:45 to 15:15** Resolution regarding review A1
- Presentation followed by questions and discussion about the new URC website
- Daily Devotions Sunday Service M1
- Closing prayer

Tuesday 16 March

Session three

09:30 to 11:00 Opening prayer and Bible study

Introduction to future pensions discussion G2

10:30 Groupwork on future pensions

11:00 to 11:30 *Break*

Session four

11:30 to 13:00 Safeguarding staffing update

Walking the Way update I4

Ministries: Discipleship Development Fund D3

Ministries and Education and Learning: D/H2
Worship Leaders and Lay Preachers

Closing prayer

Wednesday 17 March

Session five

09:30 to 11:00	Opening prayer	
	General Assembly 2021	A2
	Appointment of Mersey Moderator	J2
	Matters removed from En Bloc	
11:00 to 11:30	<i>Break</i>	

Session six

11:30 to 13:00	Remaindered business
	Thanks
	Closing worship

Paper A1

Toward the future of the United Reformed Church

Business Committee

Toward the future of the United Reformed Church

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The General Secretary: The Revd Dr John P Bradbury john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council invites the Officers of the Assembly, in consultation with the Nominations Committee, to appoint a small group (of no more than 6) to oversee a review of the structures, resources and work of the United Reformed Church to enable us to respond faithfully to the challenges present in paper A1. The review group is asked to report to each Mission Council and General Assembly and to bring recommendations and resolutions when appropriate. It invites the group to bring a proposed remit and timescale for work to General Assembly 2021.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To initiate a review of the life of the United Reformed Church.
Main points	To initiate a group to oversee a denominational review, who will report to future Mission Councils and General Assemblies, and bring a remit for their work to General Assembly 2021.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Business Committee, Officers of the Assembly.

Summary of Impact

Financial	To be funded from the Central Secretariat Budget.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

Background

God's call for the Body of Christ to be faithful is one which invites us to face every new time and occasion with renewed vision. To engage in faithful worship, witness, service and evangelism in the way God calls us to today may not be the same as what was faithful for those who went before us. Ours is a living God, whose Spirit calls us on.

As the United Reformed Church approaches its 50th year of Jubilee, it is right that we discern once again what it means to be faithful. Jubilee is classically a moment of 're-set'. Are we called in this moment to 're-set' the life of the United Reformed Church better to enable us and those who will follow after us to respond to the call to be faithful?

When thinking about the future of the Church we are instinctively drawn to visions and dreams – and they are vital to our Spiritual health. But visions and dreams need rooting and grounding in what can seem like more mundane institutional matters. The people Israel dreamed of forms of glory but were called to walk in the wilderness for 40 years, and spent 70 years in exile. Some of those who followed Christ and shouted 'Hosanna', had to get their heads around the fact that the way of Christ led not straight to glory, power and might, but the self-emptying of the cross. Do we, perhaps, need to dwell with the thought that our time and place might be one where we are called to faithfulness in the wilderness, or to take up our cross? Any dream or vision rooted in returning to past glories rather than staring long and hard at the reality of the place God has brought us, might well be us being led astray. Our decline seems inexorable – and our task is to ask what it is to be faithful in this immediate context. Ironically, perhaps, our dying to the forms of church life that once were thriving, releases resources which, with careful discernment, will allow the seeds of new, resurrected forms of church life for the future to be sown.

It has become very clear, in a whole range of areas of church life, that carrying on as we have been is no longer an option. It is a moment to face squarely the reality of the place to which God has brought us, and to ask what is required of us in terms of the shape of the body and the necessary Spiritual gifts of governance and administration to fit us to respond to the call of God which is eternal. This call comes to us in a variety of seemingly mundane ways, but if we do not heed it, we will fail to respond faithfully. It would be helpful just to reflect on a few of the challenges facing us:

COVID 19

The ongoing Coronavirus pandemic has been revelatory of many things. It has shown us the most extraordinary creativity and adaptability as we've responded faithfully to God's call to worship, witness, service and evangelism in a radically transformed context. It has also revealed to us huge frailty: we recognise that many of our congregations may never return to in-person worship again. There will be a wave of church closures, posing us questions about how we pastorally care and enable worship for those who won't again return to in-person worship within their church communities, and what we faithfully do with the resources released.

Deployment and M&M

It is quite clear that our deployment of ministers of stipendiary Word and Sacrament has reached breaking point. Synods struggle to keep up with ever decreasing target figures, despite creating ever larger pastorates. We talk about the need to work in new ways, and new patterns and forms of ordained ministry which may well be true, but equally we need to name the entirely unrealistic expectations we place upon stipendiary ministers and the serious limitations on what ministry can achieve in many congregations. Per person, what the Church requires for the Maintenance of the Ministry fund goes up and up, and it is only through extraordinary grace and generosity that we are able to support the stipendiary ministry that we do have. We rejoice in the gifts and graces of many Elders and lay people who minister in church life and are excited by the possibilities of NSM Model 4. But, we all know that in informal conversation when we are not

required to put a brave face on it, the system is stretched beyond breaking point and congregations and ministers are suffering because of it.

The pension fund deficit

The reality of a deficit in the ministerial pension fund of up to £45 million has revealed to us something of the extent and complexity of the financial resources that the United Reformed Church has at its disposal. This figure represents less than five recent years growth in the combined cash wealth of our synods. In this sense, we are a church with some serious resources. It also reveals the complexity of our financial arrangements. Currently, the family of the United Reformed Church holds its assets that support the work of the wider church in 14 different Trusts; in each synod and the national United Reformed Church Trust. These vary hugely in wealth, the wealthiest few synods holding most of the wealth of the whole URC, whilst other synods live with perpetual financial precariousness. The complex nature of our conversations about the pension fund have revealed how difficult it is to plan financially in strategic and joined up ways.

The risk our structures pose

The last Mission Council heard in anguished terms the challenge that the Nominations Committee has in filling all the necessary vacancies to keep the current machinery of the United Reformed Church operating. It requires over 500 volunteers just to keep the committees, advisory groups and working groups of the General Assembly functioning – that is before one thinks about the extraordinary levels of volunteer work and ministry it takes to enable the life of congregations and synods. The risk of failure to vital elements of our life together because we can no longer support this work is huge.

Who we are called to be?

Who we are is the body of Christ. As disciples our identity is rooted in Christ. In Christ, we find ourselves rooted in the very being of God, joined to one another in witness and service to the world. Baptised into Christ, Christ's story becomes our story. Death and resurrection become our story. God never abandons God's people, and Christ will always, this side of the Kingdom, have a Church. What shape are we called to be? If we shepherd our resources with wisdom and care, what new worship, evangelism, witness and service might become possible? What do we need to let go of – what does 'death to self' look like for the United Reformed Church? How do we prune and plant and tend that out of death the shoots of new life might emerge? How do we prepare ourselves to recognise the new shoots of resurrection life when we see them?

It is clearly time to ask ourselves some difficult questions about what we are called to leave behind, put down, allow to go the way of the cross, to fit ourselves to be faithful in this moment. This will also release new resource and energy for new work in the future and we need to discern with wisdom where the seeds of resurrection are planted. We need to catch a vision of the possible, live into resurrection hope, and face with wisdom the tough challenges of the present.

Paper C1

Update March 2021

Communications Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Peter Stevenson (Convenor) revdpete@btinternet.com Andy Jackson (Head of Communications) andy.jackson@urc.org.uk
Action required	To note.
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council commends the new Digital Charter and revised Social Media Guidelines to all that engage with the Church digitally.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To update Mission Council on the work of the Communications Committee including <i>Reform</i> magazine.
Main points	An update of the work of the Communications Team in 2020.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Consultation has taken place with the Communications Committee, Publishing Board, General Secretariat, Finance, teams at United Reformed Church House, Synod Moderators, members and friends of the URC on social media.

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Increased engagement with families through the sale and distribution of kits; Coronavirus advice and information guides on many subjects; research and development of a new URC website; a free digital version of <i>Reform</i> during lockdown.

The communications department exists to promote effective communication and celebration of the Gospel in and beyond the URC by:

- Giving voice to good news
- Facilitating regional / national communications
- Supporting the communications of Church House departments and General Assembly
- Resourcing the local churches

Coronavirus advice and information guides

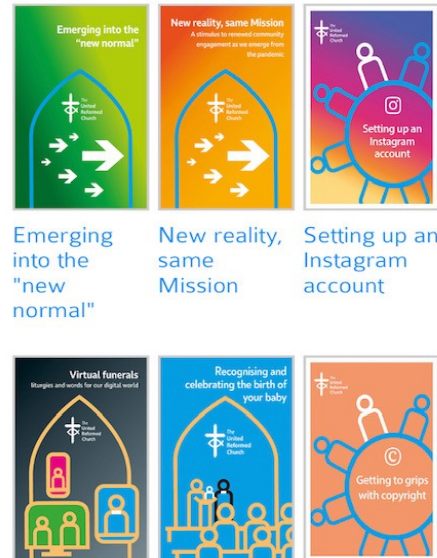
When this annual update was written a year ago, no-one knew how devastating the impact of Coronavirus would be. Communications had just begun to roll out a programme of new information guides about how to use social media channels, when church buildings closed.

Therefore, help was needed and fast – not just with copyright and the new licence that came out from CCLI, which is a staple for our department – but with all aspects of communications as churches quickly adapted to engage with dispersed congregations.

The Revds John Proctor, John Bradbury and Steve Faber quickly established a group to publish advice about what churches could and couldn't do, and the URC owes Steve a huge amount of thanks for turning hurried, mixed and complex government advice into clear and understandable counsel from the URC.

Steve later went onto write and compile *Ready for the New Normal* and *Emerging Into the New Normal* with others, which were very well received not only in the URC but by ecumenical and interfaith partners. The Muslim Council of Britain and others recommended the document because it was one of the first comprehensive guides produced by a mainstream faith organisation.

Other advice and information guides followed, along with a range of downloadable items and goods to purchase for the reopening of church buildings. The Communications Team was agile and speedy in the way it designed and delivered all sorts of digital and physical resources for the church, and I would like to thank them all for their contributions in 2020.



Community Awards

The 2020 Community Awards were postponed when it became clear that visits to projects were not going to take place, not only because it was unsafe to do so but also because many projects that submitted an entry were closed because the church buildings were.

Projects that were shortlisted in 2020 were allowed to transfer their shortlisting to the 2021 awards. Thanks to the generosity of Congregational, the sponsor of the awards, funds for the three prizes of £2,000 were carried over to 2021. It is hoped that three awards for 2020 and three for 2021 will be presented at this year's General Assembly. Naturally, that depends on church buildings reopening and projects restarting.



Digital Content Officer

Catherine Kelliher joined the team on the day when the Prime Minister announced the first national lockdown. Catherine has worked in digital content for Scope, Action Against Hunger, Barking and Dagenham and Islington Councils, The Fostering Network and Christian Aid.

Her remit is to help with the launch of the new URC website, a presentation about which will be made at Mission Council, to produce and improve digital content (eg the dropdown menus on the Coronavirus advice page) and to help with social media and other digital projects.

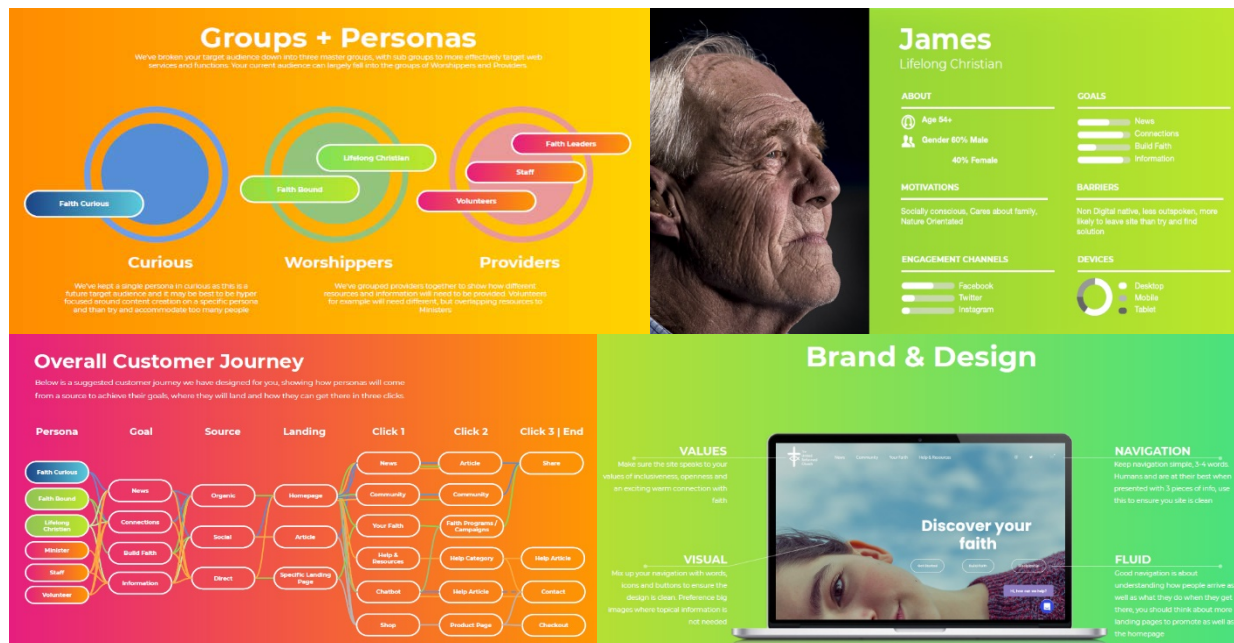
New URC website

In 2020, the pages on the URC website were viewed 616,738 times. Just 72 pages of the 5,000+ on the website accounted for 70% of these page views.

There will be a presentation about the first phase of research work undertaken about the new website at Mission Council along with discussions about the next development phase.

Those who volunteered to help with the online focus group last year will be involved as will all staff who create and publish content on URC websites and social media channels.

The new website should be launched later this year.



Advent and Lent kits

The Head of Communications had a long-held idea about a kit to engage with families. Many churches have families that use the church but there is a lack of resources that bridge the gap between the Christian purpose of the building and the people and groups that use them.

Thanks to the wonderful work by the Children's and Youth Work and CYDO+ teams, *Advent Hope & Joy* was launched on October 9, and 10 days later close to 2,000 had been sold. We thought we might sell 300!

In total, 2,157 kits were assembled and despatched from Church House, given to families to tell them that their local URC remembers them, cares for them and wants to connect with them.

Over the six weeks from the start of Advent to Epiphany, six aspects of the Christmas story were explored. Each week had an envelope packed with ideas for quick to complex activities.

Each box included a copy of the new *Colours of Christmas* story book, an A3 colouring sheet and Christmas story 'spot the difference' puzzle, weekly activity envelopes, colouring pencils, a gold pen, labels, a cookie cutter, a tea light candle, JPIT action postcards, a wooden star and crown, a Walking the Way foot and cord, a stained glass window to decorate and display, craft ideas, reflective activities and prayer practices.

Because these kits sold out so quickly, all of the elements and suppliers were added to the URC website. Families on Faith Adventures@Home online resources for deeper faith-focussed engagement were also added to the website.

Lent

After the success of Advent, and with Lent just around the corner, another collaboration between Children's & Youth, Communications, Education & Learning and Ministries resulted in Walking

towards Easter together, a kit containing an A3 poster, a journal book containing daily reflections and stories, stickers and a recipe booklet.

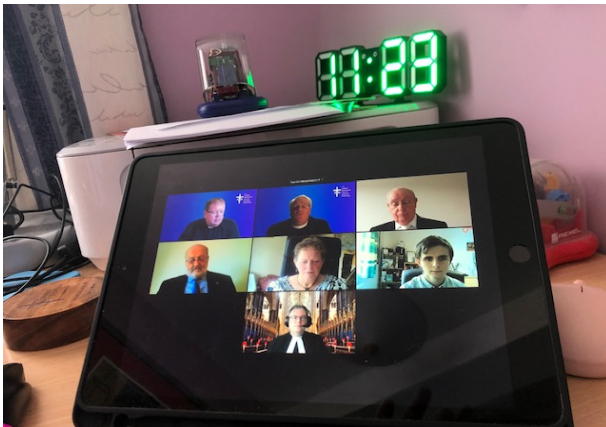
5,000 have been sold although 255 were gifted to armed service and higher education Chaplains.



Digital Mission Council and General Assembly

After the URC's March Mission Council was cancelled, the Mission Council followed by the General Assembly met via Zoom on July 10 and 11. There was some doubt about whether the work of both meetings could be done digitally, but both meetings were successful.

Feedback from those meetings resulted in changes to the November meeting of Mission Council, and then again to this meeting of Mission Council. Our thanks to all who contributed in the run up to, and during, the meetings, especially those who acted as Zoom co-hosts and Affinity Events.



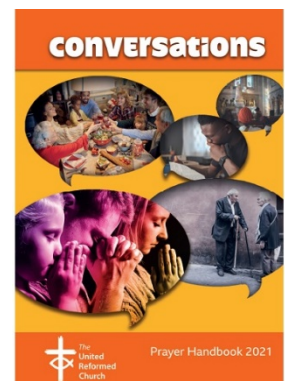
House style

The URC's new House Style was confirmed by the committee and can be found at www.urc.org.uk/house-style. The committee encourages all in the URC to use it.

Prayer Handbook

The *2021 Prayer Handbook, Conversations*, the second prayer handbook to be edited by Karen Campbell and the Revd Ian Fosten, added prayers for everyday and extraordinary situations to the regular prayers that follow the pattern of Lectionary-based Bible readings. The feedback has again been exceptionally positive.

The *2022 Prayer Handbook* will reflect on the meaning of jubilee in our biblical texts and has the theme '*Jubilee: Free to live...*' Contributors have been invited to consider the ways in which jubilee is experienced in everyday life through the knowledge of God and the relationships that are shared with God.



Graphics

In 2020 the team produced, amongst other items:

- Further improvements to the *URC Yearbook*, making it even easier to use
- The 2021 Prayer Handbook, *Conversations*, edited by Karen Campbell and Ian Fosten, and a Lectern (large print) edition of the handbook
- The design of the URC Information Guides
- The Coronavirus advice guides
- The *What We Believe* series for the Faith & Order Committee
- A new range of URC certificates
- A Christmas card from the General Secretariat
- RMHS newsletters and handbook
- Infant feeding sign
- A new range of Enquirer's Conference resources
- *Common Ground*, the URC Children's and Youth resource for 2020
- *They've asked me to be* series – written by Gill Nichol and relevant URC bodies, such as the Faith and Order Committee and CRCW Coordinator. are free to download and explain a variety of paid and voluntary roles in the URC. These are free to download from www.urc.org.uk/ask. Other suggestions are always welcome
- Child Friendly Church certificates, plaques and leaflets
- Legacy of Slavery resources and web pages
- Walking the Way materials
- The Advent Hope & Joy kit
- Coronavirus resources for churches
- The *URC Yearbook* – a major collaboration with Ministries
- Updates to The Manual
- Digitisation of older *Books of Reports* and *Assembly Records*
- Safeguarding newsletters and *Good Practice 5* appendices
- Commitment for Life Prayer Partners
- Flexible Framework Toolkit for Churches Together in England – a new resource for churches looking to form LEPs
- Local Preacher pin badges
- Pilots' resource about Fiji
- General Assembly resources
- A redesign of *Old Grey Prayers* by the late Bernard Thorogood
- Zoom backgrounds and advice guides
- A digital palm cross, which became one of the most shared pieces of content from the URC Facebook page and website
- Wooden paperweight
- Community Awards resources and leaflets.



Future work

Different versions of the *URC Worship Book 1 & 2* are being considered, as are cards to media outlets to help get our name right, prayer request and welcome cards, 50th anniversary materials, 2022 diaries, marketing materials for *Reform* distributors as well as the usual support for Mission Council and the General Assembly.

Social media

The growth in Facebook and Instagram, in terms of those who Like or Follow the URC channels, has helped to get our key messages and campaigns to even more people. The reach of Twitter has decreased slightly by 3%, which indicates it is at its peak for the URC, and the type of content shared on the channel will be reviewed in the digital and communications strategies.

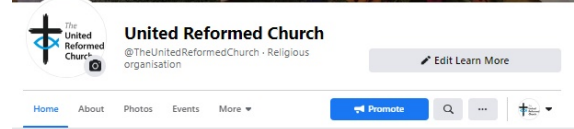
Facebook: www.facebook.com/TheUnitedReformedChurch

Likes (1 January to 31 December): there were 3,040 people who have liked our Facebook page, up from 2,247 last year. Reach, the number of people who saw content from the URC's page or about the URC, was 1,075,548, an increase of 4% on 2020.



Twitter: www.twitter.com/UnitedReformed

There are 4,426 people following the URC on Twitter and our tweets were seen 809,100 times. These Twitter impressions (the number of times a tweet appears in a user's timeline) are slightly down on 2020.



Instagram: www.instagram.com/unitedreformed

This was launched in 2019 and currently has 734 followers, up from 396 in the last year's report. The content is usually the same as that shared on Facebook and Twitter but there will be greater definition of the content for this channel as the digital and communications strategies are developed.

Communications and media relations

The URC Social Media Guidelines (Paper C3) have been revised to encourage online conversations that reflect the values of the URC. These apply to all content posted on social media accounts at all levels of the Church, including all using the name, logo and brand of the URC.

These guidelines go along with a new Digital Charter (Paper C2). This is a voluntary pledge encouraging people and churches to make to help make all United Reformed Church's social media channels, and the web in general, a positive place for respectful conversations to happen. Sadly, this doesn't always happen which is why we would like Mission Council to adopt these guidelines so that should any members, ministers or friends of the URC receive online abuse, action can be taken.



News Update email

At the start of 2020, there were 2,531 subscribers which increased to more than 6,550 by the end of the year, thanks to NU being classed as a work-based email and ministers and office holders being added. Anyone can unsubscribe, as always, but few people have since being added to the list. NU is sent out every month and has news from around the URC. To subscribe and to find out how to contribute, visit <https://urc.org.uk/nu> or email press.office@urc.org.uk.

Reputation management

There were a number of reputation management cases ranging from a community incident,

access to a graveyard, the closing of churches and church halls, and historical sex offences. All reputation management files continue to be kept up-to-date digitally and retention periods are being investigated with Andy Middleton, the URC's legal adviser.

Press releases

A number of press releases were issued in 2020, now targeted to media channels – magazines, newspapers, digital, radio and TV stations – rather than sending all releases to all channels regardless of content. This gives what we share to the media a greater impact.

The subjects included URC Youth climate emergency action at Mission Council; our new General Secretary; Church Without Walls accepted as a new URC congregation; Church leaders urging the UK government to help deter the annexation of West Bank; URC leaders saying we must be 'anti-racist' following the killing of George Floyd; UK pension funds investing billions in nuclear weapons; our Moderators saying Dominic Cummings should 'consider his position'; the URC Moderators' shock and sadness at reactions to BBC Friday prayers broadcasts on local radio, to name a few.

Songs of Praise

The Revd John Bradbury was interviewed for *Songs of Praise* in August for the episode about the Pilgrim Fathers, in which Steve Tomkins also appeared. Our thanks for Palmers Green URC and the Revds Melanie Smith and Mark Meatcher for letting us use the church for the filming.

Soon after that episode aired, *Songs of Praise* visited the Victorian village of Saltaire near Bradford, the vision of Christian industrialist Sir Titus Salt, The programme looked at how he was motivated by his faith to build what is now Saltaire United Reformed Church, the Grade-I listed church that was damaged by storms Dennis in 2020. The programme also interviewed the Christian architect in charge of the restoration and a member of the congregation who kneels in prayer outside the church each week.



Publishing board

The Publishing Board, a sub-committee of the Communications Committee, is chaired by the Revd Heather Whyte.

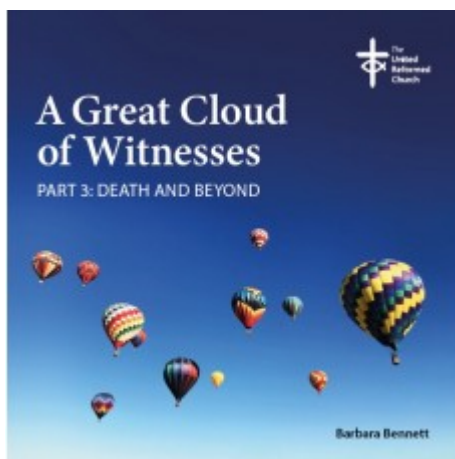
The board's remit is to assess publishing proposals from URC writers and unsolicited manuscripts and synopses and to decide if they are publishable in line with the URC's publications policy (Paper C1, Mission Council 2016).

The Board has been involved with the following:

- *Constance: Pioneer, Pastor, Preacher* – a collection of essays about Constance Coltman, the first women to be ordained into Trinitarian Christian ministry, edited by the Revd Janet Wootton. This is due for publication by Easter this year, generously supported by the Council for World Mission
- Publications to mark the 50th anniversary of the United Reformed Church. The Revds David Cornick and Robert Pope are writing one book, Steve Tomkins, Editor of *Reform*, is writing another, and the Revd Anne Sardeson is looking at a book about the music and hymnody of the URC. There is also a joint publication with the Congregational Federation, which also celebrates its anniversary in 2022, a series of positive reflections

that reflect back but also looks forward, and contributions from URC members and ministers are welcome. The Revd Peter Brain is co-editing the book.

- *A Great Cloud of Witnesses Part 3, Death and Beyond* by the Revd Barbara Bennett, which was published in January
- *Hook* – A five-week course of spiritual journeying based on the film 'Hook', reflections by the Revd Heather Whyte.

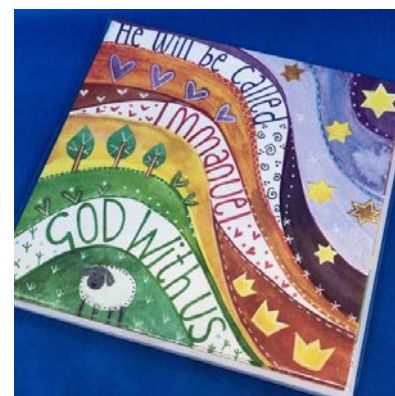


Bookshop

The URC Bookshop had another good year with figures close to the £70,000 turnover mark. The final figures will be confirmed once the financial year end and preparations for the auditors have finished.

2020 saw the introduction of coronavirus products, including Keep 2m apart badges, Clean hands badges, floor tape, floor signs, vinyl and roller banners, reusable stickers and other resources for churches. These complemented the wide range of free downloadable resources for churches on the URC website.

Christmas cards and other festive items were popular last year with the sending of cards boosted by the pandemic. Steve Tomkins' book *The Journey to the Mayflower* was also a good seller for the bookshop, as were goods designed by Caroline Flint of Heartistic – art with a heart. Caroline is the daughter of Linda Mead, the URC's former Commitment for Life programme officer.



New bookshop website

Because most spring and autumn Synods meetings were cancelled or changed to digital meetings, the bookshop website, www.urcshop.co.uk took many more orders for diaries, prayer handbooks and other resources usually sold by Synod offices. The age of the website (six years) showed and so a new bookshop website has been designed and should have been launched by the time the Mission Council meets.

Christian Resources exhibition

As part of an ongoing arrangement with the organisers of the Christian Resources Exhibition, the URC offers advertising in *Reform* in exchange for a presence at the national Christian Resources Exhibition (CRE). The spring show took place in March at the Arthur Rank Centre at Stoneleigh just before the first lockdown and the Esher show was cancelled.

The stand was extremely popular and many staff and volunteers helped throughout the show. Our thanks to them.

The national CRE will take place on October 12 to 14 2021, at Sandown Park in Esher, Surrey, and the CRE South West will now take place from February 23 to 24 2022 at Westpoint, Exeter.



Reform

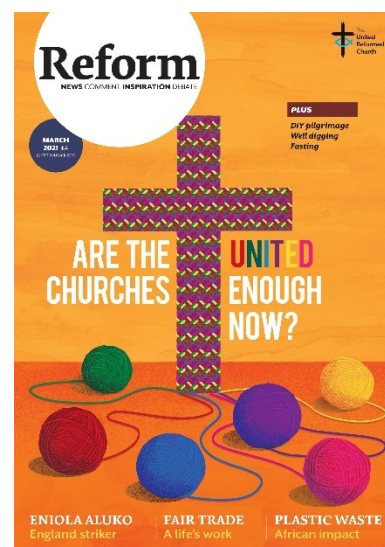
Reform has kept going smoothly throughout the continued pandemic, despite several challenges. Because many copies of *Reform* are usually distributed through churches, the team and subscription management company Esco had to reorganise the delivery system and get the magazines directly to subscribers. This had an impact on the magazine's finances during a time when it was trying to reduce costs.

Some late cancellations of interviews and articles were also caused by coronavirus, but the gaps were plugged. Advertising also fell soon after lockdown started but picked up again from September. Income has reduced as a result but it is hoped an increase in revenue this year will make up for that unexpected loss.

Free access to the digital edition of the magazine was given soon after the first lockdown started, and more than 1,850 visits were made. Digital subscriptions reached their highest ever point in 2020 accounting for 10% of subscribers.

The result is that *Reform* has been one of the ways that the Communications Team has helped different parts of the URC stay in touch and reflect on the situation we find ourselves in, and we have been glad to hear how this is appreciated. Articles discussing the challenges and opportunities of online church seem to have particularly engaged readers.

Soon the magazine will move away from its plastic wrapping, something which the team and mailing house have been wanting to do for a while using a solution that wouldn't add additional subscription costs. Subscriptions have gone down by a few percentage points as they have in previous years.



Charissa King

Charissa left the URC a few weeks ago, after 12 years' service with *Reform*, to become an Editor of a magazine in the Marc Allen group. We want to thank her for her years of loyal and dedicated service, and when it's safe to do so, we look forward to a non-Zoom leaving do.

iChurch

iChurch is the low-cost website platform for churches to set up and maintain websites quickly and easily. Dan Morrell and Reuben Watt have been helping iChurch web managers with technical queries as well as offering training, support via email and on Facebook. This is in addition to the part-time staff member.

The billing remains at £9.99 per month, cheaper than other church website providers, and the basic website set up cost is £150. Visit www.interactivechurch.org.uk for details

Related papers

C2 – URC Digital Charter

C3 – URC Social Media Guidelines

Paper C2

Digital Charter

Communications Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Peter Stevenson (Convenor) revdpete@btinternet.com Andy Jackson (Head of Communications) andy.jackson@urc.org.uk
Action required	To note.
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council commends the new Digital Charter and revised Social Media Guidelines to all who engage with the Church digitally.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This is a voluntary pledge to encourage everyone engaging with the United Reformed Church digitally, on all channels and at all levels, that the digital environment is a positive place for conversations to happen, and that those conversations should be positive, safe, respectful and dignified.
Main points	To be an example of a denomination that can be safe, respectful, and dignified at all times, even when there are differences of opinion.
Previous relevant documents	Paper C1 and C3, Mission Council, March 2021.
Consultation has taken place with...	Consultation has taken place with the Communications Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

This is a voluntary pledge to encourage everyone engaging with the United Reformed Church digitally, on all channels and at all levels, that the digital environment is a positive place for conversations to happen, and that those conversations should be positive, safe, respectful and dignified.

The conversations we have on our social media accounts can positively help change someone's newsfeed (what they see on social media).

Whether you're a member of clergy or a churchgoer, we all have different views and areas of interests that affect what we find interesting and engage with online. Comments made and posts shared online have the potential to go viral in this country and around the world very quickly.

We want people to enjoy online conversations and be safe and respectful. There are a number of ways the digital world can be as fruitful as when we speak in person.

- Safeguarding – social media and the internet needs to be a safe place for all. If you have any concerns about the wellbeing of children, young people or vulnerable adults, please contact your local safeguarding coordinator, or your [Synod Safeguarding Officer](#).
- Honesty and truth – check what you post is fair and factual.
- Considerate – the world and its diversity can be both interesting and challenging. We are not going to agree with everyone, nor will everyone agree us. But let's be constructive in how we engage online.
- Welcome – let's be welcoming in the language we use and not use words that exclude others or use those that people outside the Church might not relate to.
- Inspiration – use social media in way that engages and attracts others to our faith. After all, we represent Christ.
- Community – as one Church, we have many brothers and sisters. Let's treat those around us as such.
- Agree to the United Reformed Church's social media guidelines – see Paper C3, Mission Council, March 2021.

Paper C3

Social media guidelines

Communications Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Peter Stevenson (Convenor) revdpete@btinternet.com Andy Jackson (Head of Communications) andy.jackson@urc.org.uk
Action required	To note.
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council commends the new Digital Charter and revised Social Media Guidelines to all that engage with the Church digitally.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To update the URC's social media guidelines.
Main points	Updating the guidelines that have been published in the past to ensure respectful engagement by all who use social media in the URC.
Previous relevant documents	Paper C2, November 2014 meeting; Paper C1, March 2021 meeting; Paper C3, March 2021 meeting.
Consultation has taken place with...	The Communications Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

Our guidelines for social media have been updated to provide encouragement and guidance for the appropriate use of social media.

Its aim is to encourage online conversations that reflect the values of the United Reformed Church (URC) and apply to all content posted on the national social media accounts run by the Church, and those that use the URC name, logo and brand.

When used well, social media is an effective tool in communicating the Gospel, our work as Christians, and the life of the URC. It's interactive, immediate and offers the opportunity for forming and deepening relationships locally and globally.

The URC has national social media accounts on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

These guidelines are written specifically for all who engage using the social media channels managed by the URC Communications Team, those run by its synods – Northern, North Western, Mersey, Yorkshire, East Midlands, West Midlands, Eastern, South Western, Wessex, Thames North, Southern, the National Synod of Wales and the National Synod of Scotland, and those managed by our local congregations.

By engaging with URC national social media accounts, you agree to:

- **Be safe.** The safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults must be maintained. The URC has an [online safety policy](#). If you have any concerns, ask your local safeguarding coordinator, or your Synod safeguarding officer.
- **Be respectful.** Never make any comments, create or share posts, that are sexually explicit or could be considered racist, sexist or homophobic.
- **Be kind.** As said in Matthew 7:12, treat people how you would wish to be treated. If making a criticism or critique, consider your words, tone, and how you would speak in person. If receiving criticism or critique, make a judgement call between an expressed view and an abusive comment.
- **Be honest.** Be credible, fair and honest.
- **Take responsibility.** You are accountable for the things you say, do and write. If you're not sure, don't post it.
- **Be a good ambassador.** Personal and professional life can easily become blurred online. You are a representative of the URC, and for Christ. Think before you post. If managing an account that includes the URC name or logo, eg a church, think about appointing at least two people to monitor and manage your social media account.
- **Credit others.** Acknowledge the work of others by giving credit where it is due. Many things, like pictures, are subject to copyright and permission to use needs to be sought. The Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) website is an excellent source of information on copyright law. Take care in what you publish and question the source of any content you are considering posting.
- **Follow the rules.** Social media platforms have their own terms and conditions. Abide by them and report anything you believe breaks the policies of the respective company by using the method it has outlined.

How will we respond to people who breach our social media community guidelines?

The URC Communications Team, which manages the national social media accounts, may take action towards any post deemed unsuitable, offensive or inflammatory. This may include deleting comments, blocking users or reporting comments as inappropriate.

Who do I speak to for further advice?

If you have a safeguarding concern, please follow these [policies and procedures](#), or use these [contacts](#).

The URC Communications Team can be contacted [here](#).

Paper D1

Update on current work

Education and Learning Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Secretary for Education and Learning: jenny.mills@urc.org.uk Education and Learning Programme Officer: elizabeth.gray-king@urc.org.uk Stepwise Programme Manager: david.salsbury@urc.org.uk Instructional Designer: anne.hewling@urc.org.uk
Action required	None.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Update on the work of the Education and Learning team.
Main points	Focus areas of work for this Mission Council: EM2/3 redesign Church Leadership Programme Education and learning Hub Elders' training Safeguarding training Stepwise update.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	Already covered in budget.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

Education and Learning update

1. Areas of work for this Mission Council

- 1.1 All these areas of work are being brought to Mission Council: Locally recognised worship leaders and Assembly Accredited lay preachers proposals working with the Principals of the Resource Centres for Learning and Ministries Committee; reviewing the Discipleship Development Strategy and envisioning a permanent process for the Discipleship Development Fund; the Integration Consultation and the Committee sizing paper.

- 1.2 The Secretary for Education and Learning has spent the first three months of her new role involved meeting with groups, individuals and committees, developing relationships and making links with key contacts and groups.

2. Education for Ministry phases two and three: continuing ministerial development

- 2.1 EM2/3 continues to assist ministers in individual and collective ways to address the changing facets of ministry.

The pandemic has necessitated a re-design of many of the activities and learning events for all ministers. Many synods have been creative and supportive to ministers in awareness of the change in church culture and practice, offering excellent training and information. The Assembly programme has likewise taken a creative and innovative direction. EM2 is redesigned to have a chaplain for each cohort, accompanying each year's EM2 intake through to transition to EM3; new EM2ers forming small network sets for peer support; webinars on a range of ministry, discipleship and mission topics being arranged by Education and Learning and Ministries for all EM2ers to join with EM3 colleagues; and an annual summer retreat to be held for the whole EM2 cohort. New minister's conference continues each late autumn, physically or digitally.

- 2.2 For EM3ers and established lay leaders, **the Church Leadership Programme (CLP)** academic year 2019/20 week two was held as blended learning with extensive use of Zoom meetings and remote study. The next academic years will be a combination of blended and physical learning with far more connection between the beginning and end of the academic year than was possible when the CLP was only a physical learning event. As the **CLP** was designed as two residential weeks each academic year, the original materials were not specifically designed for blended learning. However, the advent of the new learning Hub has provided an opportunity for revising resources in order to offer a fully blended on/offline programme. Work revising and developing these materials is just beginning with a view to running the 21-22 programme through the learning Hub from the autumn.

- 2.3 Many ministers were not able to take up learning opportunities in much of 2020. In acknowledgement of this, the Education and Learning Committee raised the EM3 grant ceiling from £350 to £700 for 2021. The committee will review this at the end of 2021. Some sabbaticals needed to be postponed a year, yet in recognition of these complex times, ten year sabbatical entitlement dates were not changed from the original sabbatical planning.

- 2.4 Though not in EM2/3, it is important to report that the grant on offer to Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers was also increased, for 2021, from £200 to £300 for the same reason and understanding that they have needed to develop skills or purchase resources to help the changing times.

3. EM2/3 and Safeguarding

- 3.1 Continuing the good practice advocated from the Past Case Review, The Education and Learning Programme Officer is a member of the Safeguarding Advisory Group and works in close liaison with the URC Safeguarding Officer and Safeguarding Training Officer to ensure a cohesive approach to safe boundary

issues across the URC. Education and Learning has worked with Ministries to establish the mandatory safeguarding training for all ministers, a distinct discipline from Safer Sacred Space boundary training, rolling out in 2021. The monitoring of Safer Sacred Space training has moved from Education and Learning to ministries, with the initial training cycle complete and refresher training well underway.

4. URC Learning Hub

- 4.1 Work has begun on creating this learning Hub which, based on the successful Stepwise Hub format, will house all new and revised Education and Learning programmes going forward. The new Hub will be launched in spring 2021 and will initially house all of the Stepwise streams as well as some programmes and material transferred from URCLC. URCLC is being decommissioned as it is no longer able to meet current and anticipated Education and Learning needs; technology availability and requirements have moved on beyond its limits. Peer networks involved in Learning, such as the Training and Development Officers' network, will also move to the Hub.

The Church Leadership Programme is one of the programmes previously housed in URCLC which is being updated and will find a new home in the URC Learning Hub. The other programme currently being updated and also to be housed in the new Hub is the 'Exploring Eldership' programme. One further programme, a foundation course for Safeguarding, is also destined to join the new Hub. Launch dates for these programmes will be in the late spring and summer 2021.

When fully commissioned the Hub will not only allow access to individual programmes but will also enable participants on all programmes to view what is available in the way of other courses and programmes. It is anticipated that this will encourage participants to venture to continue their personal discipleship journeys beyond the programmes for which they enrol initially. Thus the new Learning Hub will encourage a joined-up approach to all of the programmes offered by Education and Learning and provide a one stop shop for those looking for education opportunities in the URC.

- 4.2 **Exploring Eldership** will be the first full programme to join Stepwise in the new Hub. Currently resource materials for serving and future elders are provided in printed form via downloads from the URC website. The revised materials are interactive and fully updated to allow for recent developments for Elders in terms of practice and of governance. A particular feature of these new materials will be especially commissioned video content from currently serving Elders. Situating this material in interactive form in the new Hub will allow Elders from churches right across the URC to access valuable and practical support from their home location and will supplement that provided in synods – of particular significance and importance in these pandemic times.
- 4.3 **Foundation level Safeguarding training** is presently provided face-to-face, but limited because of travel restrictions. It could be provided interactively and the already endorsed material is now being developed for delivery through the new Hub. This format will permit individuals to undertake essential foundation level training at any time regardless of whether there are others available to form a face-to-face group. This will speed efforts to ensure that all those requiring safeguarding training are able to receive it when needed.

5. Stepwise update

- 5.1 With all five Stepwise streams now available, the focus in the early part of 2021 is to advocate the programme and encourage greater participation. The Stepwise team have been hosting a series of 'Taste and See' webinars, with an open invitation to anyone to come and learn more about the programme and see how it can help them to develop their journey of Christian discipleship and faith. The five webinars have focussed on each of the five Stepwise streams and have enabled potential Stepwise participants to find out more about each stream.
- 5.2 The Stepwise pages of the URC Website have also been updated with further details about the five streams and downloadable stream outlines for those who are looking for more information. <https://urc.org.uk/introducing-stepwise.html>
- 5.3 Despite the Coronavirus pandemic and a number of lockdowns affecting people's ability to meet in person, last year saw a steady number of Stepwise groups working through Faith-filled Life using Zoom. This trend has continued and even increased in the early part of 2021 with a number of new groups starting the year by registering for Faith-filled Life. It is testimony to the flexibility of the Stepwise material and the creativity of group facilitators that they have been able to adapt the group session material to suit online delivery. Some of the groups who have completed Faith-filled Life are beginning to enquire about progressing to other streams – again using Zoom to meet together online.
- 5.4 Looking ahead, work is being done on creating a robust evaluation framework for Stepwise, the aim of which is both to assist the further development of the programme and to provide feedback to the denomination through Education and Learning that Stepwise is working as intended. The Stepwise Development Group and Learning Standards Board have also been part of the conversations relating to Locally Recognised Worship Leaders and Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers. Stepwise, through Faith-filled Worship in particular, forms a major part of the recommended training of Locally Recognised Worship Leaders so it is important that the programme is able to deliver this and meet the expectations of participants and the wider church.

Paper D2

What is the right size for the Education and Learning Committee?

Education and Learning Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Alan Yates alan.yates@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council accepts the revised membership of the Education and Learning Committee and agrees with the transition planning.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	A report from the task group established to review the membership of the Education and Learning Committee, together with their recommendations.
Main points	The recommendation is to: 1. Reduce the size of the committee from 25 to 18; and 2. Update the terms of reference for all the roles.
Previous relevant documents	Education and Learning Committee Way forward, General Assembly, 2020.
Consultation has taken place with...	The General Secretary, the Clerk of General Assembly and Nominations Committee (Convenor, Secretary and Convenor Elect).

Summary of impact

Financial	A reduction in the costs associated with physical meetings of the committee.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None as the ecumenical representative (from the Methodist Church) remains a key role.

What is the right size for the Education and Learning Committee?

1. Introduction

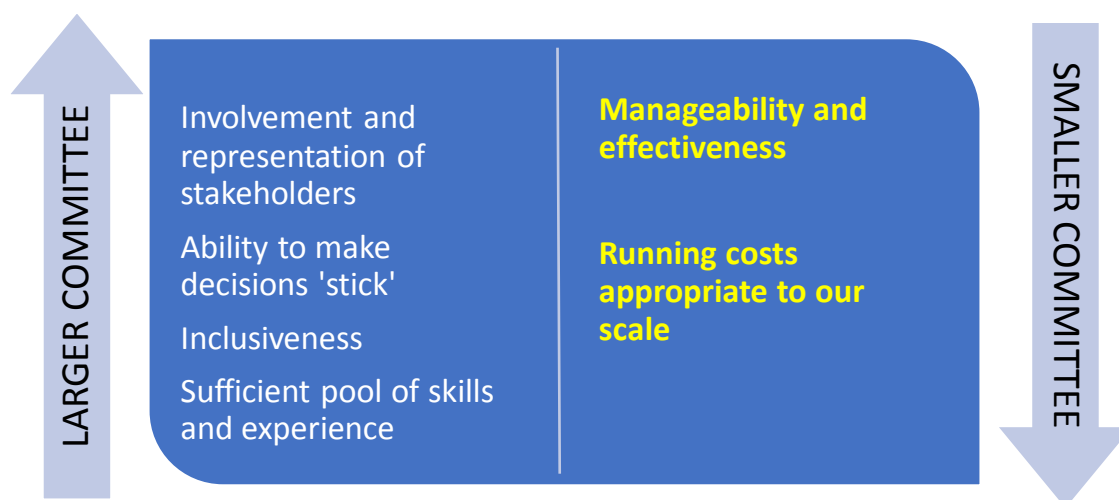
1.1 One of the tasks in the Education and Learning Committee’s strategic plan (The Way Forward, agreed by General Assembly in 2020) was to develop proposals for the size and composition of the committee. During the Education and Learning Committee meeting in May 2020, a task group was commissioned to consider the size and make-up of the committee. Chris Atherton, Mary Thomas, Martin Truscott, Sam White and Alan Yates were asked to report back to the committee with proposals as soon as practical. Following discussions in the September 20 and January 21 committee meetings the following proposals were agreed by the committee.

2. Trade-offs involved in determining the best size of the committee

2.1 The Education and Learning Committee is tasked by Assembly to enable the URC to be a *church committed to life-long learning where there is integrated education and training offered to the whole people of God*. For the committee to deliver that brief it needs:

- Authority: delegated to us by General Assembly;
- Accountability: for our decisions and actions;
- Involvement: by those we serve (*the whole people of God*); and
- Trust: from the denomination, both from the leaders and the members.

2.2 Achieving these conditions, particularly Involvement and Trust, are made easier the larger the committee is. However, the larger the committee is the more difficult it is to manage and the more resources it consumes. Clearly, there needs to be a trade-off between these opposing influences. The diagram below summarises the key trade-offs involved. The drivers in white all encourage the use of a large committee of 20+ people. The ones in yellow lead us to use a small committee of less than ten people, say. In simple terms, manageability and effectiveness are traded off against involvement and communication.



3. Deliberations

3.1 The group were agreed that executive committees (ie committees that make decisions, not simply coordinate other bodies) work best if they have no more than about ten members. Not only are they easier to manage, but the members also get sufficient ‘air-time’ and

therefore feel fully involved in, and committed to, their decisions. Ten was put forward as a starting point for the discussions.

- 3.2 The committee currently consists of three groups of people:
1. Ten members recommended by Nominations Committee and appointed by General Assembly (including the secretary and convenor);
 2. Eight committee-invited, non-voting members; and
 3. Seven staff and ex-officio members.
- 3.2 The task group explored the possibility of reducing duplicated roles (such as RCL Principals), on the basis that this retains a level of communication while reducing the size of the committee. However, the three RCLs are significantly different, and they represent one of the major investments made by Education and Learning. The other significant area of duplication on the committee are the six Assembly-nominated members 'without portfolio' (in other words, members who represent Assembly and have no other Education and Learning role). The task group believe that with improved role descriptions the effectiveness of this group of members can be maintained with half their number. The recommended key elements of the role descriptions for Education and Learning Committee members is given in Appendix A.
- It was decided that *all three RCL Principals* should remain on the committee, with only one being a voting member (as is currently the case).
 - Our recommendation is to *reduce the number of without portfolio members from six to three.*
- 3.3 The use of the term 'without portfolio' should not be viewed as a negative description but is used to signal how their role differs from other Assembly appointed members who represent specific interests, such as the CYDO representative. In the words of the Nominations Convenor:
- They [without portfolio members] are the main voting members, their role and responsibility being to act in the interest of General Assembly, to exercise good judgement and perspective, especially when competing priorities are argued by 'portfolio' members of the committee. While they may not have specified responsibilities within the committee, they are nominated according to their experience in some area of Education and Learning according to the specific needs of the committee at the time. The Nominations Committee makes a point of looking for people with relevant skills and experience.*
- 3.4 In conjunction with this it is recommended that a number of the committee invited roles should be Assembly appointments. These are the *CYDO and EM1 Student representatives*. Being Assembly appointees would confer voting membership on these roles, which indicates their importance.
- a. Communication with synod leadership teams remains vital so a *Synod Moderator representative* will continue to be invited as a non-voting member.
 - b. Ministries and Education and Learning Committee are working very closely together, and therefore it is wise to continue to invite *the Ministries Secretary* as a non-voting member.
 - c. Similarly, we cherish the relationship we have with *the Methodist Church* and will continue to invite a *representative* as a non-voting member.
- 3.5 It should be noted that with the reduction in members recommended by the Nominations Committee it could make it more difficult for the Nominations Committee to achieve the desired balance of gender, ethnicity etc. To alleviate this issue the Education and Learning Committee will liaise with Nominations to seek the best possible balance when new 'non-portfolio' members are to be identified.

- 3.6 The final area of change is the involvement of staff and ex-officio officers. All of the ex-officio officers (the *General Secretary, the Deputy General Secretary Discipleship and the GA Moderators – elect, current and immediate past*) have the right to attend Education and Learning Committee meetings and we will uphold that right.
- 3.7 It has been the practice recently to invite, as non-voting members, the EM2/3 Programme Officer, the Stepwise Programme Officer and the Instructional Designer to the meeting.
- The recommendation, following consultation with the staff, is to only invite them to join for particular agenda items where they have a specific contribution to make. Our experience with video conferencing will enable limited participation to be managed efficiently.
 - *The Education and Learning Secretary's PA* will continue to be invited to the meeting as a minute taker.
- 3.8 The length of service for all Assembly appointed members remains four years, except for:
- The RCL Principal with voting rights whose term will be one year; and
 - The EM1 student whose term will also be one year, with the possibility of being reappointed for a second year if appropriate.
- 4. Transition**
- 4.1 The only transition issue that needs managing is the reduction of the six without-portfolio Assembly appointees down to three. One position is unfilled at present and would be removed if this resolution is agreed. Of the five filled positions one will end in 2021, two in 2022 and two in 2024. The three positions that will come to an end by 2022 will be asked (with no pressure) if they would like to leave the post early. If two or more would like to retire early that will be taken into account in the transition planning. Otherwise, the committee will take its final shape by GA in 2022.
- 5. Conclusion**
- 5.1 The table in Appendix B provides a summary of the changes recommended. In total, the membership of the committee will reduce from 25 to 18. We do not anticipate any significant reduction in denominational involvement, communication, expertise or Assembly scrutiny from these changes.
- 5.2 The Education and Learning Committee put forward the following resolution for the consideration of Mission Council:

Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council accepts the revised membership of the Education and Learning Committee and agrees with the transition planning.

Appendix A: Key elements of the Education and Learning Committee member role description

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The booklet 'They've asked me to be a committee member' (https://urc.org.uk/images/Churches/Theyve_asked_me_to_be_a_committee_member.pdf) provides a full and accurate description of the role and responsibilities of a typical member of our Assembly Committees. The specific additional responsibilities for the Education and Learning Committee are described below.

2. Education and Learning Committee member responsibilities

- 2.1 The Education and Learning Committee has a total of seven Assembly appointed members. Four of whom have distinct job or post-related responsibilities:
- RCL Principal representative: only one of the RCL principals is invited to be a voting member, the others are non-voting members;
 - TDO Network representative: whose role includes ensuring the interests and concerns of the teams who are involved with training and development in the synods are considered;
 - CYDO representative: whose role includes ensuring the interests and concerns of the teams who are involved with children and youthwork in the synods are considered;
 - EM1 student representative: whose role includes ensuring the interests and concerns of all EM1 students studying in our RCLs are considered.
- 2.2 Note that the Nominations Committee will be guided in their recommendations for these positions by the networks the positions represent.
- 2.3 The remaining three Assembly appointed members have been classified 'without portfolio'. In other words, they are appointed not because of a present job or position within the URC but are appointed to look after the interests of the United Reformed Church as a whole. These members are expected to:
- Use all their gifts to support the aims of the Education and Learning Committee;
 - To accept collective responsibility for all Education and Learning Committee decisions;
 - To adopt fully the 'blended' working practices of the committee, such as the use of email and video conferencing;
 - To ensure the interests and concerns of the denomination as a whole are considered.

Appendix B: Summary of the proposed membership changes.

PRESENT MEMBERSHIP	PROPOSED MEMBERSHIP	NOTES
Assembly appointed members:	Assembly appointed members:	
Convenor	Convenor	
Secretary	Secretary	
RCL Principal representative	RCL Principal representative	Nominated by the RCL Principals
Synod Training & Development Officer	Synod TDO Network representative	Nominated by the TDO+ Network
Six nominated members, 'w/o portfolio'	CYDO representative	Nominated by the C&YW Committee
1 Mrs Adella Pritchard (2022)	EM1 student representative	Nominated by the RCL Principals
2 Revd Martin Truscott (2022)	Three nominated members, 'w/o portfolio'	To ensure the interests of Assembly are met and voices of the wider URC are heard
3 Mr Rudolph Wontumi (2021)	1 ?	
4 Mrs Margaret Marshall (2024)	2 ?	
5 Revd Tim Meachin (2024)	3 ?	
6 Vacant		
Invited (non-voting) members:	Invited (non-voting) members:	
Inter Synod resource sharing task force rep.		Invited for specific agenda items as required
Synod Moderator rep.	Synod Moderator representative	
CYDO rep.		'Converted' into Assembly appointee
The other two RCL Principals	The other two RCL Principals	
EM1 student rep.		'Converted' into Assembly appointee
Ministries secretary	Ministries secretary	
Methodist Church rep.	Methodist Church representative	
Staff members:	Staff members:	
E&L PA & minute taker	E&L PA & minute taker	
EM2 & 3 Programme Officer		Invited for specific agenda item as required
Stepwise Programme Officer		Invited for specific agenda item as required
Stepwise Instructional Designer		Invited for specific agenda item as required
Ex-officio members	Ex-officio members	
General Secretary	General Secretary	
Deputy General Secretary Discipleship	Deputy General Secretary Discipleship	
GA Mods: usually only one attends)	GA Mods: usually only one attends)	
TOTAL ATTENDEES = 25	TOTAL ATTENDEES = 18	

Paper D3

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

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	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.

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

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.

Summary of Impact

- 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.

Paper D4

Integration consultation: initial findings

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	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

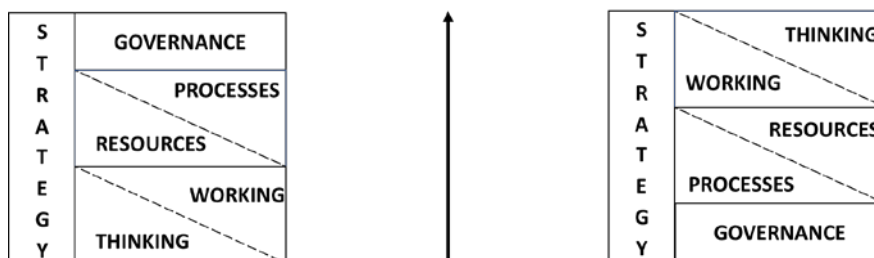
4.1 The themes identified below are representative, at a high level, of the responses that have been received to date. They are indicative and should not be seen as definitive at this stage. This paper will be updated once all of the responses have been received. Only then can the complete set of second 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.

Paper D/H1

Marks of Ministry of a Worship Leader and Lay Preacher

Ministries and Education and Learning Committees

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Paul Whittle moderator@urcscotland.org.uk Mr Alan Yates alan.yates@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council adopts the Marks of Ministry of a Worship Leader and Lay Preacher.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The paper gives a concise and comprehensive description of what the church can expect of those called to be a Worship Leader or a Lay Preacher.
Main points	The paper follows the principle set down for other ministries of defining competencies for the particular roles of Worship Leading and Lay Preaching.
Previous relevant documents	None.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Lay Preaching Commissioners, Synod Moderators, Education and Learning and Ministries Committees.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

1. The following is a concise and comprehensive description of what the United Reformed Church can reasonably expect of people who are called to be a Worship Leader or a Lay Preacher. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list and it is not expected that every Worship Leader or Lay Preacher will exhibit all of these marks. It is acknowledged that what this will look like in each Worship Leader or Lay Preacher will vary depending on the context, the individual, and the specific ministry to which they are called.

Both a Worship Leader and a Lay Preacher in the United Reformed Church (URC) seeks to be:

- **A faithful disciple of Jesus Christ:** caught up in the joy and wonder of God's will and work; seeking always to live a holy life in public and in private; sustained by their own rhythm of prayer, Bible reading and worship; open to journeying as a disciple with others.
- **A person of accountability:** committed to serving as a lay preacher within the conciliar oversight of the church; willing to engage in systems of support and mentoring for Worship Leaders and Lay Preachers; willing to engage in mandatory training including safeguarding; ready to collaborate with others for the mission of God.
- **A crafter of worship:** sensitive to the many traditions and styles within the church yet confident to create and advocate new forms as appropriate by combining theological and liturgical knowledge and understanding with technical and practical skills; able to administer the Sacraments if authorised to do so.
- **A preacher:** passionate and effective in breaking open God's Word in preaching; to be relevant in the world whilst retaining their prophetic edge to equip God's people in their mission and discipleship to share the Gospel and to live God's Kingdom of justice and peace to the full.
- **A lifelong learner:** self-aware and committed to lifelong learning reflecting and reexamining the message they communicate; aware of their own strengths, gifts and limitations and thus willing to seek support when and where necessary; making use of the URC provision for on-going training for lay preachers.
- **A contextual theologian:** delighting in Scripture rooted in the Reformed tradition; able to communicate their own faith and its implications; able to encourage others to discover how these rich resources inspire and sustain faithfulness.
- **A pastor:** demonstrates pastoral care through preaching and prayer; confidently adapts when pastoral circumstances dictate.
- **A public figure:** reliable and effective in representing the Church in preaching and/or service leading.
- **A reformer:** able to help congregations to discern and respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit as new chapters open in the life of the Church and others close.

Draft Standards for Worship Leaders and Lay Preachers in the United Reformed Church

The following is a concise and comprehensive description of what the United Reformed Church can reasonably expect of people who are called to be a Worship Leader or a Lay Preacher. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list, and it is not expected that every Worship Leader or Lay Preacher will exhibit all of these marks. It is acknowledged that what this will look like in each Worship Leader or Lay Preacher will vary depending on the context, the individual, and the specific ministry to which they are called.

This should be read alongside Marks of Ministry for Worship Leaders and Lay Preachers.

Marks of Ministry for Lay Preachers	Worship Leaders	Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A faithful disciple of Jesus Christ: caught up in the joy and wonder of God's will and work; seeking always to live a holy life in public and in private; sustained by their own rhythm of prayer, Bible reading and worship; open to journeying as a disciple with others. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. is able to speak of their Christian experience; 2. has a real sense of calling to explore leading worship and preaching. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. is able to express their Christian experience; 2. has a real sense of calling and commitment to preach the Word of God; 3. is able to give an account of their Christian faith and how they have grown to this point with reference to challenges faced and insights gained.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person of accountability: committed to serving as a lay preacher within the conciliar oversight of the church; willing to engage in systems of support and mentoring for Worship Leaders and Lay Preachers; willing to engage in mandatory training including safeguarding; ready to collaborate with others for the mission of God. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. is a member of good standing within the United Reformed Church; 2. seeks to be a faithful disciple through regular habits of worship and prayer; 3. is willing to undertake Safeguarding training for Worship Leaders; 4. is willing to be involved with a mentor or tutor and with others involved in leading worship. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. is a member of good standing within the United Reformed Church; 2. seeks to be a faithful disciple through regular habits of worship and prayer; 3. demonstrates enthusiastic commitment to the URC through the wider councils of the church; 4. is willing to undertake Safeguarding for Assembly-Accredited Lay Preachers; 5. is willing to be involved with a mentor or tutor and with others involved in leading worship.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A crafter of worship: sensitive to the many traditions and styles within the church yet confident to create and advocate new forms as appropriate by combining theological and liturgical knowledge and understanding with technical and practical skills; able to administer the Sacraments if authorised to do so. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. has a willingness to explore leadership in worship; 2. attends the “presiding at the Sacraments” course organised by the synod, if authorised to do so. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. is open to trying new worship styles whilst respecting the breadth of diversity of ages, theology and ecclesiology across the church; 2. takes regular opportunities to attend synod and Assembly lay preaching events to refresh skills and insights; 3. attends the “presiding at the Sacraments” course organised by the synod, if authorised to do so.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A preacher: passionate and effective in breaking open God’s Word in preaching; to be relevant in the world whilst retaining their prophetic edge to equip God’s people in their mission and discipleship to share the Gospel and to live God’s Kingdom of justice and peace to the full. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. has a willingness to share in the journey of faith; 2. is an effective communicator in sharing the gospel. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. has a good grasp of the Gospel to be proclaimed; 2. is passionate about leading worship of quality in a range of settings; 3. is skilled in deepening the faith and worship of others; 4. is an effective communicator in sharing the gospel.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lifelong learner: self-aware and committed to lifelong learning reflecting and reexamining the message they communicate; aware of their own strengths, gifts and limitations and thus willing to seek support when and where necessary; making use of the URC provision for on-going training for lay preachers. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. has a desire to grow in understanding of the Christian faith; 2. takes opportunities to continue learning and growing in the attitudes, skills and knowledge relevant to the role of a worship leader; 3. is open to receive and reflect on feedback. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. takes opportunities to continue learning and growing in the attitudes, skills and knowledge relevant to the role of lay preacher; 2. is aware of their own strengths, weaknesses and potential of self-development; 3. is open to receive and reflect on feedback.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A contextual theologian: delighting in Scripture rooted in the Reformed tradition; able to communicate 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. has the ability to see God at work in the world. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. has the ability to see, and to draw the attention of others to, God at work in the world.

Paper D/H1

<p>their own faith and its implications; able to encourage others to discover how these rich resources inspire and sustain faithfulness.</p>	<p>2. Has knowledge of the place of the United Reformed Church within our contemporary world.</p>	<p>2. demonstrates faithfulness to how and why our reformed tradition is important for the contemporary world; 3. has sympathy with the Basis of Union and the ethos of the United Reformed Church.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A pastor: demonstrates pastoral care through preaching and prayer; confidently adapts when pastoral circumstances dictate. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. treats all people with respect; 2. is committed to ongoing and appropriate training in safeguarding. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. is able to relate to a variety of people and contexts; 2. has the ability to see God in others; 3. is committed to ongoing and appropriate training in safeguarding.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A public figure: reliable and effective in representing the Church when preaching and / or service leading. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. is aware of contemporary world events and is able to give a Christian response. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. is mindful of representing the URC when leading worship and preaching in ecumenical situations; 2. is aware of contemporary world events and is able to give a Christian response.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reformer: able to help congregations to discern and respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit as new chapters open in the life of the Church and others close. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. understands how worship can play a part in positive change in congregational life. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. is open to the prompting by the Holy Spirit and is willing to go where the Spirit leads; 2. understands how worship can play a part in positive change in congregational life.

Paper D/H2

Locally Recognised Worship Leaders and Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers

Ministries and Education and Learning Committees

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Paul Whittle moderator@urcscotland.org.uk Mr Alan Yates alan.yates@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council adopts the process for becoming a Worship Leader or Lay Preacher as detailed in this paper.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Paper D2 Mission Council March 2020 withdrawn.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Lay Preaching Commissioners, Synod Moderators, TDO network, Resource Centres for Learning, Education and Learning and Ministries Committees.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	The training pathways for both Locally Recognised Worship Leading and Assembly Accredited Lay Preaching would be recognised ecumenically.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The ending of TLS left the denomination with a gap in provision of an adequate course for worship leading and lay preaching.
- 1.2 In exploring Stepwise as a replacement, it became apparent that Stepwise as non-accredited and unassessed. To make it a programme to be accredited and assessed would change the purpose of Stepwise.
- 1.3 Therefore, both Education and Learning and Ministries were left with the dilemma of needing to provide

- a) an immediate response and
 - b) a clear solution which could be embraced by synods and the wider URC.
- 1.4 Until Mission Council endorses a new direction of travel, and whilst there is a gap in provision, the current suggestion for anyone wanting to train to be a Lay Preacher is that they embark on Stepwise Faith Filled Life as a way of beginning the learning journey. If there is a desire for something more, we would encourage the synod to speak to the Resource Centres for Learning and ask for them to access some of their modules.
- 1.5 Discussions with a variety of people including the Synod Moderators, the RCL Principals, those in the TDO Network and the Lay Preaching Commissioners as well as the Education and Learning and Ministries Committees. The representative of the Methodist Church on Education and Learning Committee fully supported the new approach. Much good thinking has come from our conversations and the following is offered as the proposed direction of travel.

2. General Principles

- a) There is a need for locally based, locally trained worship leaders to serve in their local context (one Church, multi-Church pastorate or mission partnership) as evidenced at the Enquirer's Event in October and at the end of February where we have several people wishing to engage with Worship Leading but not Lay Preaching.
- b) In a denomination the size of the URC questions have been asked about whether we need two 'sorts' of lay preachers raising questions of why would anyone wish to become Assembly Accredited? Our consultation has led us to believe what is needed at this time in the life of the URC is support and training for worship leading and lay preaching.
- c) The outcome of thinking has led us to develop proposals for training that, we believe, show how much we value 'good' training that takes time to engage with, and allows for growth over a period of time.
- d) The processes below also allow for building on previous learning and, in studying to become a Lay Preacher, the course can be tailored to the individual, bearing in mind previous learning and individual needs.
- e) The training of lay people is more vital than ever as our deployment conversations continue. But equally there is a need for ecumenical parity. The Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher process stated below means we have a course that is comparable with our mainstream ecumenical partners and would, therefore, hold a status that is recognisable.
- f) The proposed structure for training those called to a ministry of worship leading encourages personal discipleship development alongside worship leading experience and learning. The ministry will be exercised within the United Reformed Church and so using existing URC learning and education provision is important.
- g) Using Stepwise as the learning platform for Locally Recognised Worship Leaders has its advantages as it is a URC developed foundational learning programme that encourages discipleship development; it is ecumenical and is designed as an intergenerational learning resource. This means that we can enable disciples of all ages, and all stages, to develop their worship leading skills and talents. Many synods are already engaged with Stepwise and have people trained to facilitate the learning streams. During 2020 when everything went online, Stepwise came into its own and can be accessed by people scattered geographically, which increases its reach and accessibility.
- h) Using the Resource Centres for Learning means utilising the skills and expertise of those already offering ministerial training and encourages lay training alongside those training for ordained ministry.

Appendix 1

Locally Recognised Worship Leaders

1. Some people wish to offer themselves to lead prayers, to preach, to lead services in their own church community. They are a vital resource for our churches both now and in the future in a denomination with its deployment issues and reducing numbers of Ministers of Word and Sacraments (MWS). There is an increasing number of people who feel called to offer themselves for this service and, as such, it needs to be recognised and valued as a ministry in its own right and a place to grow from.
2. To support this ministry, it is important that we provide good opportunities for developing lay discipleship and would be named: Locally Recognised Worship Leaders.
3. Training (using the process offered below which accesses Stepwise streams OR following a synod developed course) would offer the exploration of worship leading, reflecting on this learning, provide opportunities to practice skills developed and apply learning. This process would be synod based and accredited and participants would become Locally Recognised Worship Leaders.
4. Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers would remain a formally recognised ministry within the URC. These are people who feel a call to wider service in the synod by offering themselves as a more itinerant preaching resource and one that is more widely recognised and transferable if a person moves within the United Reformed Church. We offer below the suggestion for this training, to be offered URC wide, emanating from, and working, with the Resource Centres for Learning.
5. It is becoming clear that we are moving towards a variety of opportunities for service that allow for progression and accounting for prior learning, if appropriate:

Locally Recognised WL ► Assembly Accredited LP ► NSM Model 4 ► NSM ► SM MWS and CRCW* (MWS and CRCW)

6. **Recommended training: Locally Recognised Worship Leaders (LRWL):**
 - 6.1 Definition: Worship Leaders, leading worship in their local context where they are a member, individually or as part of a team.
 - 6.2 Study can be done as part of a group or joining other individuals to create a study group, from different church contexts.
 - 6.3 The training recommended, for synods to offer and assess, to those wishing to deepen their engagement with Scripture and the leading of worship opportunities, would be:

Completion of

 - **Stepwise Faith Filled Life**
 - **Stepwise Faith Filled Worship**
 - **A portfolio** that is created as an ongoing part of study (reflections, journaling, resources, worship material and other evidence using a variety of media, as preferred)
 - **A final presentation** (using technology, art or other format) or **1000 word essay**
 - **An assessed service** (as a group or individual).

- 6.4 The service would be assessed by the Synod Lay Preaching Commissioner / Advocate or someone deputising for them, with appropriate recognition and a commissioning service.
- 6.5 This would take approximately 18 months to two years and allows time for growth and development.

Proposed process:

1. Potential Worship Leader (or group from a local church context) contact(s) the Synod Lay Preaching Commissioner or Advocate or TDO (or equivalent);
2. Church meeting gives approval for training;
3. The synod ensures that everyone has a DBS / PVG check and completes a Safeguarding course before starting training;
4. The person / group register(s) for Stepwise and embark(s) on their learning journey, supported by the synod through the Lay Preaching Commissioner / Advocate, with regular contact. Cost is between £5 - £30 per stream on a "pay what you can" basis.
5. A portfolio is developed during the learning journey, including Stepwise extension tasks.
6. Final presentation, or 1000 word essay, is given / submitted and assessed service takes place.
7. This leads to Synod Recognition or a recommendation made to continue with a further time of study to continue to develop skills.
8. For Locally Recognised Worship Leaders there will be a Commissioning service in the local context.

OR Recognising that some synods have their own synod recognised worship leading course (ideally with similar content and similar time span of 18 months to two years to allow for development and growth).

Appendix 2

Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers

1. **RECOMMENDED TRAINING: Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers (AALP): Training would take place through the Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs) and needs to be accessible, inclusive and thorough, taking account of prior learning and individual needs.**

This suggested programme led by the Resource Centres for Learning (which would take approximately two years and would have specific times of the year for beginning study) covers:

Section one – personal development

- 1a: Learning skills
1b: Personal devotional life

- 1c: Understanding reflective practice
- 1d: Different spiritualities, linking in with the Reformed tradition
- 1e: Personal resilience and finding God in difficult times.

Section two – crafting worship

- 2a: What is worship? Putting an order of service together
- 2b: Reformed tradition of worship
- 2c: Leading public prayer
- 2d: Hymns and music in worship.

Section three – the word

Audit (complete and have assessed) the level 4 Biblical Module from Common Awards

- 3a: The Bible in worship
- 3b: What is a sermon? What are the alternatives to a 'one-15-minute-sermon slot'?
- 3c: Putting together a sermon. Alternative 'models' for the 'one-15-minute-sermon slot'

Section four – the theology of the URC

Undertake the Ethos and History of the URC course.

- 4a and 4b: Sessions based on The Nature Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church
- 4c: Working ecumenically.
- 4d: Our inter-faith context.

Section five – contextualising

- 5a: Contextualising worship and preaching.
- 5b: Taking account of different learning styles and personality types.
- 5c and 5d: Two sessions with input from C&YW: C&Y / URC today; inter-generational worship.
- 5e: Pastoral care and confidentiality around worship.

2. Delivery

We believe that mixed-mode will be best. That might mean some sessions by Zoom and some pre-recorded with work to be done around them by the student. We feel that two weekends a year (or a 'summer school' / equivalent) would be helpful both for community-building and for personal 'assessment' purposes by the RCL.

3. Additionally:

Check that there is an up to date / DBS or PVG certificate and Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk course completed.

Safe Boundaries in Pastoral Practice (RCL version of SSS)

Equality and Diversity training

Worship and the Art of Public Speaking (including speech therapist, and being videoed and 'critiqued')

Regular assessed worship (or elements of worship building up to full act) – Synod Mentor regularly feeds back; RCL Tutor to visit twice a year. Student needs to demonstrate growth and response to comments from Mentor and Tutor.

This additional learning will be tailored to individual needs and will be offered as appropriate and potentially alongside other students (not just Lay Preachers).

(Many lay preachers may already have attended training in leading funerals and in presiding at Sacraments, so we did not wish to make this compulsory. However, RCLs could provide such training at the request of the student if they register that interest at the beginning of their course.)

4. Proposed process: the role of the synod

We note that this programme is for General Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers whose ministry will not only be focussed on their existing synod. However, we anticipate synods would wish to be involved, and the RCLs would wish them to be a partner in this training. The following is suggested:

- 4.1 A candidate approaches Synod Lay Preaching Commissioner / Advocate and / or the TDO (or equivalent) and meets with them to explore call and complete paperwork, if appropriate. LP Commissioner/Advocate contacts Secretary for Ministries. (Exact process tbc once training process is agreed by Mission Council.)
- 4.2 Church Meeting gives approval for training.
- 4.3 The synod offers a Mentor, ideally an experienced LP to meet regularly with the student to:
 - a) reflect with them on their course
 - b) be present when they lead worship (parts of worship) and feed back to them.
 - c) reflect on extracts from journal with student to help them develop as reflective practitioners.

Lay Preaching Commissioner / Advocate to be responsible for arranging, or taking on, this role.
- 4.4 The synod ensures that everyone has a DBS / PVG check and completes a Safeguarding course before starting training
- 4.5 The candidate attends the History and Ethos course.
- 4.6 The Lay Preaching Commissioner / Advocat liaises with RCL about Safeguarding, Funerals and Sacraments training either already provided to the student, or the synod may prefer to offer such training if they already have training planned.
- 4.7 Synod Lay Preaching Commissioner / Advocate to keep in contact with Lay Preacher in training.

Portfolio includes: journaling, book reviews, reflection, preparation of prayers, worship material, service preparation, work with mentor, written assignments, intergenerational experience, optional reflection on sacraments and funerals. (More detail in document).

5. Assessment

The Mentor to talk to the RCL Tutor on a six-monthly basis and to raise any concerns with the RCL, if necessary, in between times.

- 5.1 Student to meet with the Mentor every two months, and with RCL Tutor once a term when the Tutor will ensure any concerns raised by the Mentor are discussed and future 'action points' noted.
- 5.2 Annual assessment of portfolio at a meeting of student, Mentor and Tutor. Mentor and Tutor agree:
- at the end of Year one, what progress needs to look like in Year two; (advice may be given that the student is not suitable for General Assembly accreditation and the synod will offer pastoral and vocational support)
 - at the end of Year two, what, if anything, is further needed before the RCL signs off on Assembly Accreditation. (Advice may be given that the student is not suitable for General Assembly accreditation and the synod will offer pastoral and vocational support).
- 5.3 Tutor and College Principal (or another Tutor if the personal Tutor is the College Principal) to make the final decision on signing off on Assembly Accreditation. The Lay Preachers' Leaving Certificate should then be granted (with or without funerals' 'permission').
- 5.4 Recognition within the Lay Preacher's Church and synod through a Commissioning Service.

6. Other relevant considerations:

- Prior learning will also be considered during the training.
- This programme of study will take individual needs into consideration, particularly in relation to specific needs or previous education.

7. Costings

- 7.1 In terms of showing the 'workings' of real costings we have included:
- Tutor's preparation, delivery and assessment
 - Administration costs
 - Registry costs.
- 7.2 The sums have been done on the basis of a cohort of six and using as the basis the fee paid to an external tutor for taking responsibility for a module (preparation, delivery and marking) which is, at present, £1,400 per module. We felt that, in terms of the work involved, this programme was the equivalent of two modules. There are 16 sessions to a module and the sessions above are more than that, plus the time spent on being a personal tutor, liaising with the Mentor and synod, and visiting and assessing services. The year's library fee is needed because undertaking an audited course in one year would give free access to the library, but not in the other year.

That gives us a costing of (at 20-21 costs – they are reviewed each year) **for a two-year course:** £2,800 / 6 = 470 (slightly rounded up)

+ audit fee per student	200 (fixed cost)
+ notional admin and registry fee per student	60
+ one year's external library membership per student	60
+ allowance in case of external speakers' expenses	50
Total	£840 - £1000

Additional costs: travel, accommodation, mentor and tutor's travel

- 7.3 The costings are not the charge to the student. Although costings are higher than TLS we believe this gives extremely good value for money. Should the cost be prohibitive for a student, a grant may be made available.

Paper F1

Faith and Order Committee report

Faith and Order Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Robert Pope rpp20@cam.ac.uk Philip Brooks 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 current areas of work for the Committee.
Previous relevant documents	None.
Consultation has taken place with...	URC Communications, URC Youth, Fresh Expressions Enabling Group, Walking the Way Steering Group and ecumenical partners.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Ongoing discussions with ecumenical partners about the role of eldership in LEP's.

Since submitting our last report to Mission Council, the Faith and Order Committee has met twice: once on 8 October 2020 and then on 2 to 3 February 2021. On both occasions we met via Zoom, though the latter meeting at least approximated the pattern of our pre-Covid meetings. At our meeting in February we were delighted to welcome the Revd Tessa Henry-Robinson as a new Committee member nominated by the United Reformed Church, and also to welcome back the Revd Catherine Ball as a co-opted member, with a specific brief for our work on Fresh Expressions.

The Committee is pleased to report to Mission Council that the series of ten booklets on aspects of Christian teaching, written under the common heading 'What do we believe about ...?', have now been designed and published on the URC Website. Initially suggested by a member of the Church, the Committee enthusiastically took up the challenge and, through a corporate effort involving all its members, finally completed the task last year. 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. 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. The booklets are available on-line at <https://urc.org.uk/believe>. We offer our sincere thanks to Communications for bringing the text we supplied to life.

On-going discussions are leading the Committee towards at least two significant pieces of work.

- 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 of ordination. Robert Pope will lead on taking this forward.
- A number of conversations – including dialogue with URC Youth about ‘isolated membership’, with the FX Enabling Group regarding what makes church *church*, with various people reflecting on experiences during lockdowns arising from the pandemic – have converged and lead us to consider our ecclesiology. A sub-group has been established in order to think particularly about the theological significance of our polity, about what it means to gather and about what it means to be a ‘member’, thinking again about belonging, commitment and mutual care and accountability alongside other matters. The hope is that we can find ways of supporting new and exciting expressions of Christian community life which might meet particular needs and might be appropriate for the Church’s mission and ministry in a post-pandemic world. Philip Brooks, Diana Paulding and Catherine Ball will take the work forward initially. This is part of a wider piece of work alongside other Assembly Committees and co-ordinated by the Fresh Expressions Enabling Group.

The Committee expects to meet again in April or May in order to review progress and to widen discussion on these items.

Questions regarding EM1 students presiding at the sacraments and the nomenclature of the minister of ‘Word and Sacrament[s]’, mentioned in our last report to Mission Council, have now received a response which at this stage does not require any action from Mission Council.

At our February meeting, we 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.

The commitment to *koinonía* was supported by the receipt of a report of the Conference of European Churches held in December 2020 which took as its theme ‘The Hope of Communion from 1920 to 2020’. The conference focused on responding to two documents published one hundred years ago which emphasized *koinonía*, namely *The Patriarchal Encyclical Letter to the Churches of Christ Everywhere*, composed by the Patriarchate of Constantinople in January 1920, and *The Appeal to all Christian People* issued by the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops in October 1920. The Committee is grateful to the Revd Fleur Houston for writing and submitting the report.

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 Mission Council to suggest ways in which we might take this work forward.

Paper G1

URC Pension schemes – dealing with current challenges – a conversation still in progress

Pensions Committee and Finance Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	John Piper john.piper30@ntworld.com Ian Hardie ianzhardie@googlemail.com
Action required	None at this stage.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The paper provides an update on the complex process of consultation across the URC family that is currently underway.
Main points	This paper is just an update on the ongoing process, so there is nothing new of significance to report at this stage. A separate paper deals with the future of the two URC pension schemes.
Previous relevant documents	Paper G3 for November 2019 Mission Council. Paper titled 'URC Pension Schemes – facing up to some serious challenges' written for General Assembly 2020 and considered by Mission Council in July 2020. Paper E2 for November 2020 Mission Council.
Consultation has taken place with...	The Integrated Risk Management project group, the directors of the URC Ministers' Pension Trust, and the directors of the synod trusts and the URC Trust.

Summary of impact

Financial	None at this stage, but will be substantial.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

Contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Final Salary Scheme (mainly for lay staff)
- 3 Ministers' Pension Fund

(The subject of future pensions is dealt with in a separate paper.)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The United Reformed Church has two defined benefit pension schemes where the basis of calculating pensions is predetermined. The URC Ministers' Pension Fund (MPF) covers most ministers and Church Related Community Workers. The URC Final Salary Scheme is mostly for the Church's lay staff. The pension at retirement for the ministers' scheme is based on final stipend and years of service. For the final salary scheme, the pension at retirement is based on the highest 12 months' salary in the three years up to retirement and years of service.
- 1.2 Stipendiary ministers and Church Related Community Workers are not employees but office holders. However, for pensions purposes the treatment is the same. The Church and the members make regular contributions to these pension schemes, and the level of these is set after each actuarial valuation. However, the final cost can only be estimated. The Church as 'employer' or sponsor is legally obliged to provide any further funding that is required.
- 1.3 The corporate trustee of the Ministers' Pension Fund is the URC Ministers Pension Trust Limited (MPT). Its directors are all members of the Church.
- 1.4 The URC Final Salary Scheme is managed by an external body, TPT Retirement Solutions, which acts as trustee. The central URC, in relation to the staff at Church House and at Westminster College, is the principal employer. Most of the synods and Northern College are also participating employers in this scheme.
- 1.5 The significant pension issues and the associated costs facing the Church, which mainly relate to the MPF, were described in the pensions paper written for General Assembly 2020 and considered by the meeting of Mission Council in July 2020. Those issues have not changed materially and they are not all spelt out in detail again here. It remains the case that the Church family is having to deal with these costly issues at a particularly uncertain time for Church finances at every level, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.6 The purpose of this paper is to update Mission Council on the complex conversations that are in progress across the URC family, and on the likely process and timetable going forwards.

2. Final Salary (lay staff) Scheme

- 2.1 There is nothing new to report on the Final Salary Scheme. The last actuarial valuation as at 30 September 2019 showed a small surplus. The overall costs from January 2021 have stayed more or less the same with the saving on deficit contributions off-set by increases to the future service contributions.

3. URC Ministers' Pension Fund

- 3.1 Actuarial valuation as at 1 January 2021 and Long-term Funding Objective.

Work on the latest actuarial valuation of the MPF has just begun. 1 January 2021 was a good day for the value of the assets of the MPF. The estimated value of the liabilities of the Fund will not be available for some time. It is possible that the 2021 valuation will be slightly

better than we have been estimating, but this is unlikely to have a major effect on the overall funding situation.

We know that the basis of the 2021 valuation will have to be much more prudent than the 2018 valuation, which means that there will be a sizeable deficit. We also know that subsequent valuations will have to take account of the assumed de-risking of the assets of the MPF over the period to the date of the Long-Term Funding Objective which is estimated to be only nine or ten years away. That will result in further deficits, because of the lower returns expected on the less risky assets.

Our best estimate for the total cost over this period remains about £45 million.

3.2 Consultation with synod trusts and the URC Trust.

Apart from the funds held by local churches, the financial assets of the United Reformed Church are held by 13 synod trusts on behalf of their synods and by the URC Trust on behalf of General Assembly. That is why, up to now, the main focus of our consultation has been with the directors of those trust companies.

Meetings with representatives of all these trusts were held in November and December 2019. Since then, the consultation has proceeded through a series of written briefings including questions to which the trusts have responded.

There is now a shared understanding of the nature and size of the challenge that we face and there is a general willingness to help deal with it. We recognise that the directors of the synod trusts have a difficult job juggling their responsibilities towards their local churches, their synod, and the denomination. This job is even more difficult in the context of the pandemic, with all its risks and uncertainties.

Factors that make the consultation challenging are that each synod operates in a different way; the accounts of each synod trust are presented differently; and there is great disparity in the wealth of the different synods. As a result, it is a lot easier to agree that the burden needs to be shared fairly than to define what “fairly” means. Also, the consultation is taking place under the restrictions of lockdown.

Our intention over the next few months is to hold a series of virtual meetings with the directors of individual trusts in February / March; with representatives of groups of synod trusts together in April / May; and then with representatives of all the trusts together. Our goal is to reach agreement on at least the framework of an agreement by June or July 2021. If this is achieved, it will be possible to take any necessary decisions at synod meetings and at Mission Council in the autumn of 2021. Legally, the Church is required to sign an agreement with the trustee of the MPF about dealing with the 2021 deficit by March 2022.

Paper G2

URC Future Pensions

– a document for discussion

Pensions Committee and Finance Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	John Piper john.piper30@ntworld.com Ian Hardie ianzhardie@gmail.com
Action required	There will be group discussion of the questions in 1.3
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The purpose of this paper is to facilitate a discussion at Mission Council. This will inform our approach to General Assembly 2021 where we hope a decision in principle will be taken about the future of the two URC pension schemes.
Main points	In June 2020, Mission Council re-affirmed the Church's commitment to provide good pensions to its ministers and staff. Pension costs have risen substantially since 2008 because of low interest rates. Costs will rise further because of the Regulator's requirement for increased prudence. This raises questions about not just affordability but also value for money – for the Church and for the members. Any change would only affect the future accrual of pensions. Pensions already earned from past service are legally protected. Changing pension arrangements would be a complex and costly process, so we are trying to take this one step at a time.
Previous relevant documents	Paper titled 'URC Pension Schemes – facing up to some serious challenges' written for General Assembly 2020 and considered by Mission Council in July 2020.
Consultation has taken place with...	The Integrated Risk Management project group. External consultants who have helped with some financial modelling.

Summary of impact

Financial	None at this stage. Any change to URC pension arrangements would have one off implementation costs, and would affect the ongoing costs to the Church and the benefits to members.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

1. Introduction, including questions for discussion

- 1.1 In June 2020, Mission Council on behalf of General Assembly passed the following resolution:

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.*

This was by no means the first time that General Assembly, or Mission Council on its behalf, has reaffirmed its commitment to provide good pensions to office-holders and staff in the United Reformed Church. This understanding is the starting point for any discussion about the future of the two URC pension schemes.

- 1.2 General Assembly has always been the body to take decisions regarding changes to the terms of the Ministers' Pension Fund. General Assembly has also more than once decided that the two URC pension schemes should be kept in line with one another. We assume that both these things are still the case.

Our short-term objective is to enable General Assembly in July 2021 to have an informed discussion about the future of the two URC pension schemes and to make a decision in principle about the future direction of travel. That decision in principle is necessary before we incur significant costs in developing detailed proposals about possible future arrangements.

This paper for Mission Council does not make any recommendation about what future pension arrangements should be. It sets out the issues as we currently understand them and provides estimates of costs and benefits of some alternatives. Its purpose is to facilitate a discussion at Mission Council which will help us prepare the members of General Assembly for its consideration of these matters.

1.3 Questions for consideration at Mission Council:

- i) In our view, this issue needs to be considered urgently by General Assembly, though doing so carefully will take a little time. Do you agree? If not, why?
- ii) Which parts of this paper do you not adequately understand?
- iii) What questions have you got that are not answered by this paper?
- iv) Do you have a view on the examples of possible rates of Church and member contributions used in the modelling in section 5.4 and section 6?
- v) Do you have any other suggestions about how we should prepare the members of General Assembly for its discussion of these matters?

These questions will be considered in group discussions at Mission Council. Responses from those groups and from individuals are requested **by 31st March**.

2. Some definitions and background information

2.1 Existing URC pension schemes

The United Reformed Church is currently operating two pension schemes. The Ministers' Pension Fund (MPF) covers most ministers and Church Related Community Workers. It is

[United Reformed Church – Mission Council March 2021](#)

managed 'in house', albeit through an independent trust company, the URC Ministers' Pensions' Trust Limited (MPT). The URC Final Salary Scheme is mostly for Church House staff plus some at most of the synods, at Westminster College, and at Northern College. This Scheme is managed externally, by TPT Retirement Solutions. The URC is the principal employer.

2.2 Defined Benefit pension schemes

Both the existing pension schemes are Defined Benefit (DB) schemes. This means that the method of calculating the pension payable is pre-determined. The pension payable at retirement is 1/80 for each year of service of final stipend (for the MPF) or the highest salary earned in the final three years of service (for the 'lay' scheme).

The fact that the calculation is pre-determined does not mean that the amount of the pension is known in advance. It depends on the increases in salary / stipend that have taken place prior to retirement. The real value of that pension will, therefore, also depend on what has happened to inflation during that period.

The pension payable is not dependent on the performance of the assets of the scheme. As sponsor or 'employer', the Church is legally obliged to meet the total cost of these pensions, less the member contributions, whatever that cost is. So, all the risks associated with investment performance are carried by the employer.

2.3 Defined Contribution pension schemes

The main alternative to a DB arrangement is a Defined Contribution (DC) pension scheme. Such a scheme would also be managed by a trust company. Here, the levels of contributions by the Church and members are fixed (but may be changed after due notice). These contributions are invested on behalf of the members. At retirement, each member has a pension pot which is used to pay them a pension.

The risks associated with investment performance are transferred to the members. The pension that is payable will depend on that investment performance.

There are, also, potentially significant advantages for the members. There is now considerable flexibility in the operation of DC schemes. There is more personal choice around investment policy than in the increasingly restricted world of maturing DB schemes, and flexibility in terms of how and when the pension pot is used. Also, any residue in the pension pot following the death of a member and their spouse is an asset that passes to their beneficiaries (possibly subject to tax).

2.4 Status of members and role of the Church

Stipendiary ministers and Church Related Community Workers are office holders, not employees. In relation to them and the MPF, the Church is sponsor, rather than employer. However, for pensions purposes this difference has no effect.

3. Why consider the future of the URC pension schemes now?

3.1 Given that we are in the middle of a serious pandemic, which means there is great uncertainty about so many aspects of Church and personal life, it might be reasonable to ask 'why consider the future of our pension schemes now?'

It is our view that there are many compelling reasons for doing so:

- a) this matter was last considered by General Assembly in 2012, when some changes were made to reduce costs and thereby avoid the need for a more strategic review;
- b) the costs of the current pension schemes have risen significantly since 2012;

- c) the costs of the MPF, in particular, are predicted to rise further because the Pensions Regulator (tPR) is expecting pension schemes, and especially those like ours that are approaching maturity, to be valued much more prudently;
- d) some of the synod trusts wish to link the funding of the deficit on the Ministers' Pension Fund (MPF) with the closure of that scheme to new accruals; and
- e) there are some who think that the flexibility of a defined contribution scheme might deliver better value for members.

3.2 It is also important to be clear that, if the Church decides to retain the two existing DB schemes, that does not mean that things will stay as they are. In particular:

- i) as the schemes become more mature, tPR and the trustees are likely to require more prudent valuations of the schemes (meaning higher contributions) and more security from the Church against the possibility of future losses on investments (this issue relates mainly to the MPF as the Final Salary Scheme is already valued on a much more prudent basis); and
- ii) the costs of managing the MPF in the medium term are likely to increase as work currently done by volunteers has to be transferred to paid professionals.

3.3 But it is also important to recognise that there are uncertainties in the current situation, even from a narrow pensions perspective. The much delayed Pensions Act has just received royal assent. This will provide the general framework for the future. It is, however, for the Pensions Regulator (tPR) to spell out how the legislation is to be applied. The recent thinking of the IRM group, which has been shared with the Church, has been based on the stance of tPR in its 2019 consultation. A definitive new Code of Practice from tPR is not now expected until 2022 at the earliest. There have been some signals during the parliamentary debate of the Pensions bill (now Act) that a few aspects of the approach presented in that 2019 tPR consultation may be slightly modified in the Code of Practice.

Given the level of maturity of the two current URC pension schemes, it would not be realistic to expect a radical change in how these schemes are viewed by tPR or by the schemes' trustees. However, it is possible that there may be more flexibility than we are currently assuming regarding future investment strategy or regarding the timetable to and beyond the 'long term funding objectives' of the two schemes.

4. Enabling Mission Council to have an informed discussion

4.1 Limited scope of the work done so far, reflected in this paper

The cost of developing any new pension arrangements would be high. Our aim up to now has been to do or pay for enough work to enable Mission Council, and then General Assembly, to have an informed discussion but not to do or pay for work that might not be necessary unless and until General Assembly makes a decision in principle about the future. This means that there are many unanswered questions and some of the information provided represents only best estimates at this stage.

4.2 Ministers' Pension Fund (MPF)

The rest of this paper focuses on the MPF and what could replace it. This is mainly to try to simplify what is being presented. It is also on the working assumption, as previously stated, that what is done regarding the MPF and its members will probably be mirrored in what is done with the Final Salary Scheme.

From the perspective of the Church, the MPF is by far the bigger and, therefore, more costly of the two schemes – approximately four times the size – and more like seven times

the size, if the involvement of the other employers in the Final Salary Scheme is ignored. The Final Salary Scheme is already valued on a more prudent basis.

From the perspective of the members, it is unlikely that there will be any significant issues in relation to the pensions of staff which do not apply to the pensions of ministers. The main difference is that stipends, and therefore accruals of pensions, are the same for all ministers whereas the levels of staff salaries, and therefore the pensions earned, are different depending on the job being done.

4.3 Comparing the current DB scheme with a 'good' DC scheme

Again, mainly to simplify what is a very complex matter, the rest of this paper compares the options of either staying with the existing DB schemes or moving completely to one or two new DC schemes with a fixed rate of contribution.

Of course, there are other options.

The Church could decide to stay with the DB scheme but to reduce its future benefits or increase the future level of contributions required from members. It is our view that this would not adequately manage the costs and risks to the Church without reducing the benefits to members to an unacceptable degree.

The DC employer contribution rate could be varied according to age.

The Church could decide to go for a more complex arrangement, such as a reduced DB scheme alongside a new DC scheme, but complexity may well mean more cost.

4.4 Benefits already earned in the existing DB schemes are protected

It is important to emphasise that benefits already earned by members of the DB schemes are protected. Any changes can only apply to pension benefits earned in the future.

5. What might a good Defined Contribution scheme look like?

5.1 Objective

The heading of this section is, clearly, a subjective question. Based on the resolution quoted in 1.1 above, it is assumed that a good DC pension scheme must deliver a reasonable pension to members at a cost that is affordable for the Church.

5.2 What is happening in other denominations?

Our understanding of the current policies of other denominations is as follows:

C of E: Have a relatively new DB arrangement for clergy but not for lay staff who have switched to DC. The employer contributions to the DC scheme are age related, ranging from 8% to 15% plus matching member contributions up to 3%.

Methodist: Have a DB scheme for ministers but have just closed their staff DB scheme to future accrual and are putting a DC plan in place.

Baptist: Closed all DB schemes and only offer DC. Members contribute 8%. The employer contributes 6% to pension and 4% towards life cover.

Congregational Federation: Only offer DC. Employer contribution is 15% for those in service before 2016, but only 2% above the government minimum for those entering service after that.

Church of Scotland: Only offer DC. Contribution rates not available.

Salvation Army: A DB arrangement for officers but DC otherwise. The DC scheme offers a range of options to staff. Essentially, the employer contribution is up to 12% calculated as twice the member contribution up to 6%.

5.3 What is happening elsewhere?

Comparison of the financial circumstances of ministers with those of people in secular employment is not straightforward.

Virtually all DB schemes outside the public sector have closed to accruals since 2008, because of rising costs, and have been replaced by DC schemes.

The Pensions and Lifetime Savings Association (PLSA) is an association of providers which aims to raise standards. It issues Pensions Quality Mark (PQM) accreditation to pension schemes. In relation to contribution levels, its PQM accreditation requires a minimum of 12% of which at least 6% is from the employer. Its PQM Plus accreditation requires a minimum of 15% of which at least 10% is from the employer.

5.4 Contribution levels

The financial modelling reported in 6.3 below was carried out based on a URC DC pension scheme with **employer contributions of 17.5% and member contributions of 7.5%**. The member contributions are set at the current level. The level of employer contributions is, clearly, significantly higher than the PQM Plus minimum rate referred to in 5.3.

Projections are also given in 6.4 below based on **employer contributions of 12.5% and member contributions of 7.5%**.

6. Comparison of benefits for members

6.1 Some 'health warnings'

Any change of pension arrangements would affect each member differently depending, among other things, on their age, marital status, dependents, previous employment and associated pension entitlement, household income, and length of service. This section focuses on three theoretical and simpler individuals. If this exploration of alternative pension arrangements proceeds to the next stage then proposals will be modelled against the actual members of the current DB schemes.

Comparing a DB scheme with a DC scheme is comparing an apple with an orange. They are very different. In particular:

- a DB scheme pays a pre-determined pension which is fixed at retirement and then subject to inflation, whereas a DC scheme creates a pension pot for each member which is used to provide them with income during retirement;
- a DB scheme pays a pension to the member and then to their spouse for life, whereas a DC scheme creates a pension pot for each member and it is up to the member to decide how and when to use that pension pot – and when it is gone, it is gone;
- in a DC scheme, the size of the pension pot of a member at retirement is dependent on the performance of the investments and this, in turn, is dependent on the investment choices of the member and on the financial markets;
- this means that the outcomes of a DC scheme can only be estimated; and
- in a DC scheme, there is a lot of flexibility and choice for each member, though there is usually a default arrangement based on a reasonable investment strategy for a typical member.

6.2 Choice of examples and other assumptions

Financial modelling has been carried out for three sample people. All three are people who it is assumed will spend their whole working life in stipendiary ministry, from age 28 to age 68. These may well be the people most affected by any change to URC pension arrangements. These examples therefore exclude the effects on the total income in retirement, which will be different for each individual, of previous or subsequent employment and any pensions earned in those other roles.

The first example is aged 28 with 40 years of service ahead of them.

The second example is aged 43 with 15 years of existing and protected pension entitlement from the existing DB scheme and 25 years of service ahead of them.

The third example is aged 58 with 30 years of existing and protected pension entitlement from the existing DB scheme and 10 years of service ahead of them.

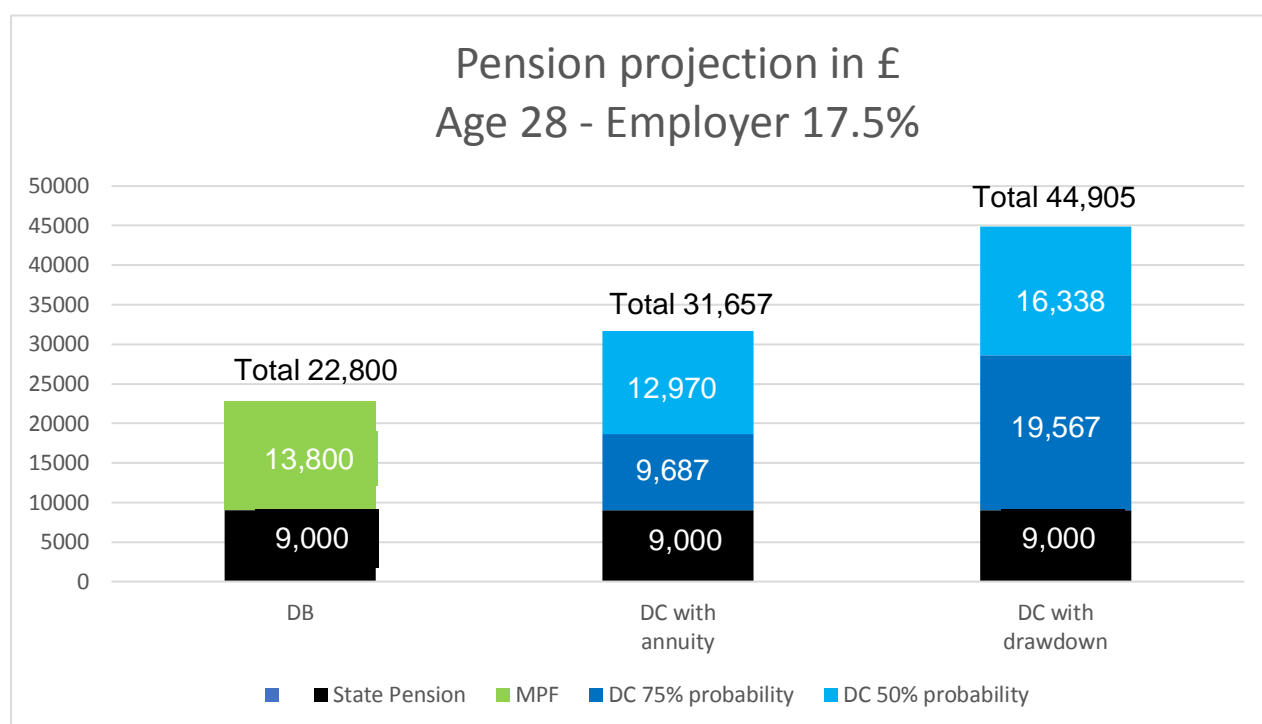
All the figures are expressed in current prices. It is assumed that inflation will have the same effect on stipend levels, on DB pensions in payment, and on DC investment returns which will be reflected in DC pensions. Of course, this may not be true but it is a reasonable working assumption.

The impact of taxation and the option of a tax-free commutation are ignored.

6.3 Comparison of the current Ministers' Pension Fund DB scheme and a DC scheme with 17.5% employer contributions and 7.5% member contributions

6.3.1 Example 1: 28 year old, just entering stipendiary ministry

In the initial financial modelling it was decided, as a 'starter for ten', to set the contribution levels as employer: 17.5% and member: 7.5%. The intention was to provide a generous pension at a cost to the Church at roughly the present level.



This chart shows the estimated income in retirement on three different bases. In all three cases, the bottom dark rectangle represents the state pension of £9,000.

Existing DB scheme

The left-hand block represents the continuation of the existing DB scheme. The annual pension from the DB scheme at retirement in 40 years' time would be 40/80 of stipend = £13,800 so **total annual income would be £9,000 + £13,800 = £22,800**. So, income before tax in retirement is estimated to be just over 80% of stipend.

Suggested DC scheme with an annuity purchased at retirement

As stated previously, the outcome of a DC scheme can only be estimated.

The central block represents a DC scheme as described above, and assumes that at retirement the member's pension pot will be used to purchase an annuity.

An annuity feels a bit like a pension from a DB scheme in that it is guaranteed at a certain level for life, often increased annually in line with inflation, with a spouse's pension payable. However, in recent years annuities have delivered very poor value for money and are used less often – at least in the early years of retirement.

The reason is that annuities are provided by insurance companies which have to take a very prudent approach to investment policy, as they are carrying all the risks, and they also plan to make a profit.

The dark blue rectangle indicates that there is a 75% chance of receiving an annuity at retirement of at least £9,687 so total annual income including the state pension would be $£9,000 + £9,687 = £18,687$.

The light blue rectangle indicates that there is a 50% chance of receiving an annuity at retirement of at least £22,657 (£9,687 + £12,970), so **total annual income including the state pension would be £9,000 + £22,657 + £31,657**.

Suggested DC scheme with drawdown used after retirement

The right-hand block represents a DC scheme as described above, and assumes that the member will use drawdown to provide income in retirement.

Drawdown is commonly used by members of DC schemes. Here, each member decides on the amount of cash to be taken from their investment pot to provide income in retirement – this decision is usually made annually. The rest of the pension pot remains invested. The decisions of each member will depend on such things as other income, housing costs, state of health, and lifestyle choices.

For the purpose of this modelling, it is assumed that the drawdown will be managed to deliver a pension for life fixed at retirement, increased annually by inflation, and followed by half a pension to a surviving spouse for the rest of their lifetime. These assumptions make the results more comparable with the current DB scheme.

The dark blue rectangle indicates that there is a 75% chance of delivering a pension at retirement of £19,567, so total annual income including the state pension would be $£9,000 + £19,567 = £28,567$.

The light blue rectangle indicates that there is a 50% chance of delivering a pension at retirement of £35,905 (£19,567 + £16,338), so **total annual income including the state pension would be £9,000 + £35,905 = £44,905**.

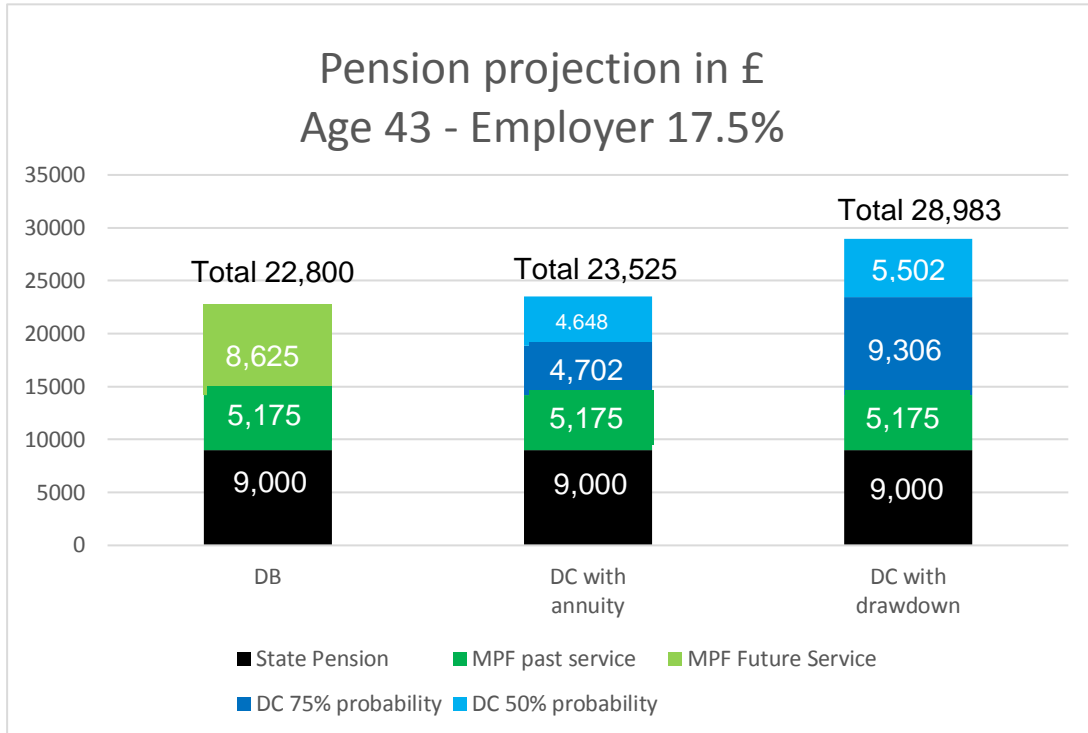
6.3.2 Example 2: 43 year old, with 15 years of past service

The chart is on the next page.

As before, the dark rectangle at the bottom of all three columns represents the state pension of £9,000. Now there is a dark green rectangle above this in all three columns which represents the pension payable from the DB scheme for the past 15 years. The value of this defined pension is fixed at $15/80$ of stipend = £5,175.

Existing DB scheme

Again, the left-hand block represents the continuation of the current DB scheme and shows the total pension payable at retirement after 40 years' service of £13,800 (£5,175 + £8,625) and that the **total annual income including state pension would be £9,000 + £13,800 = £22,800.**



Suggested DB scheme with an annuity purchased at retirement

The central block represents a DC scheme, as described above, and assumes that the member's pension pot will be used to purchase an annuity at retirement.

The dark blue rectangle indicates that there is a 75% chance of receiving an annuity at retirement of at least £4,702 resulting in total annual income including the state pension and the DB pension of £9,000 + £5,175 + £4,702 = £18,877.

The light blue rectangle indicates that there is a 50% chance of receiving an annuity at retirement of at least £9,350 (£4,702 + £4,648) meaning **total annual income including the state pension and the DB pension would be £9,000 + £5,175 + £9,350 = £23,525.**

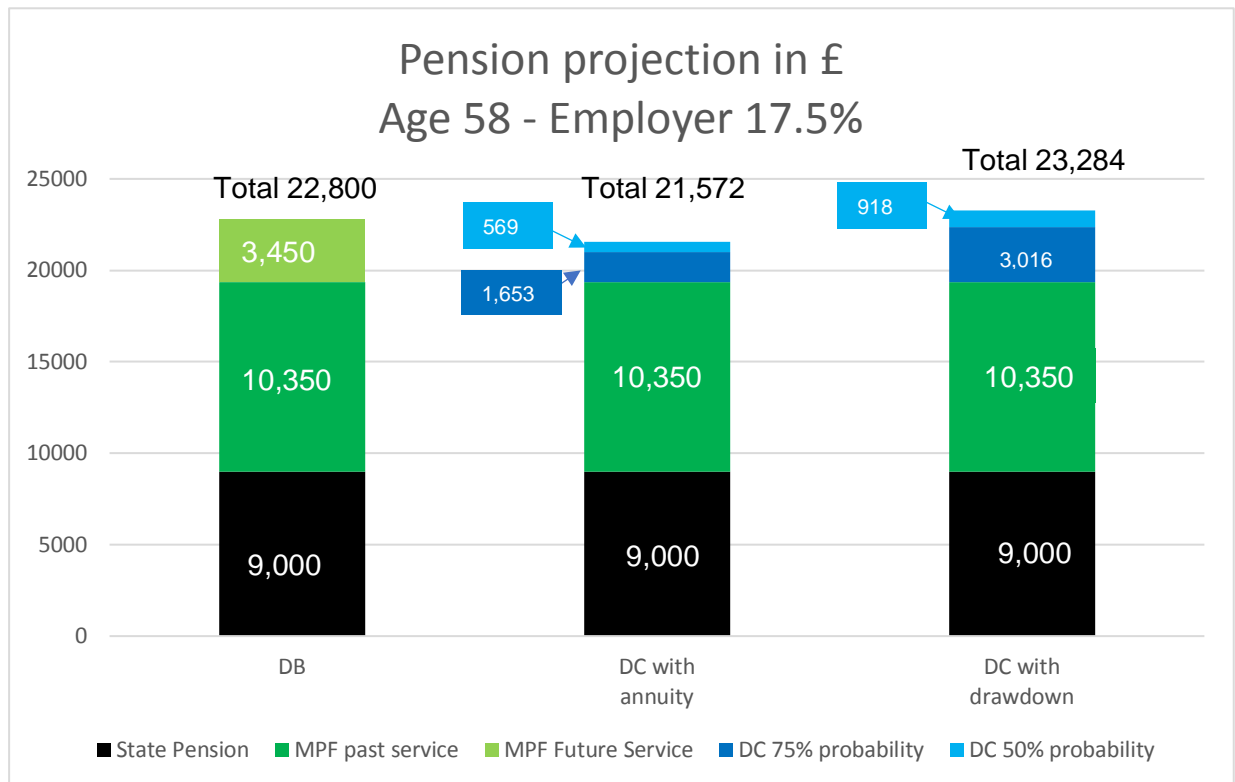
Suggested DC scheme with drawdown used after retirement

The right-hand block represents a DC scheme as described above, and assumes that the member will use drawdown to provide income in retirement.

The dark blue rectangle indicates that there is a 75% chance of receiving an annual pension at retirement of at least £9,306 meaning that total annual income including the state pension and the DB pension would be £9,000 + £5,175 + £9,306 = £23,481.

The light blue rectangle indicates that there is a 50% chance of receiving an annual pension at retirement of at least £14,808 (£9,306 + £5,502) meaning that **total annual income including the state pension and the DB pension would be £9,000 + £5,175 + £14,808 = £28,983.**

6.3.3 Example 3: 58 year old, with 30 years of past service



Once again, the dark rectangle at the bottom of all three columns represents the state pension of £9,000. The dark green rectangle above this in all three columns represents the pension payable from the DB scheme for the past 30 years. The value of this defined pension is fixed at 30/80 of stipend = £10,350.

Existing DB scheme

Again, the left-hand block represents the continuation of the current DB scheme and shows the total pension payable at retirement after 40 years' service of £13,800 (£10,350 + £3,450) and that the **total annual income including the state pension would be £9,000 + £13,800 = £22,800.**

Suggested DB scheme with an annuity purchased at retirement

The central block represents a DC scheme, as described above, and assumes that the member's pension pot will be used to purchase an annuity at retirement.

The dark blue rectangle indicates that there is a 75% chance of receiving an annuity at retirement of at least £1,653 resulting in total annual income including the state pension and the DB pension of £9,000 + £10,350 + £1,653 = £21,003.

The light blue rectangle indicates that there is a 50% chance of receiving an annuity at retirement of at least £2,222 (£1,653 + £569) meaning **total annual income including the state pension and the DB pension would be £9,000 + £10,350 + £2,222 = £21,572.**

Suggested DC scheme with drawdown used after retirement

The right-hand block represents a DC scheme as described above, and assumes that the member will use drawdown to provide income in retirement.

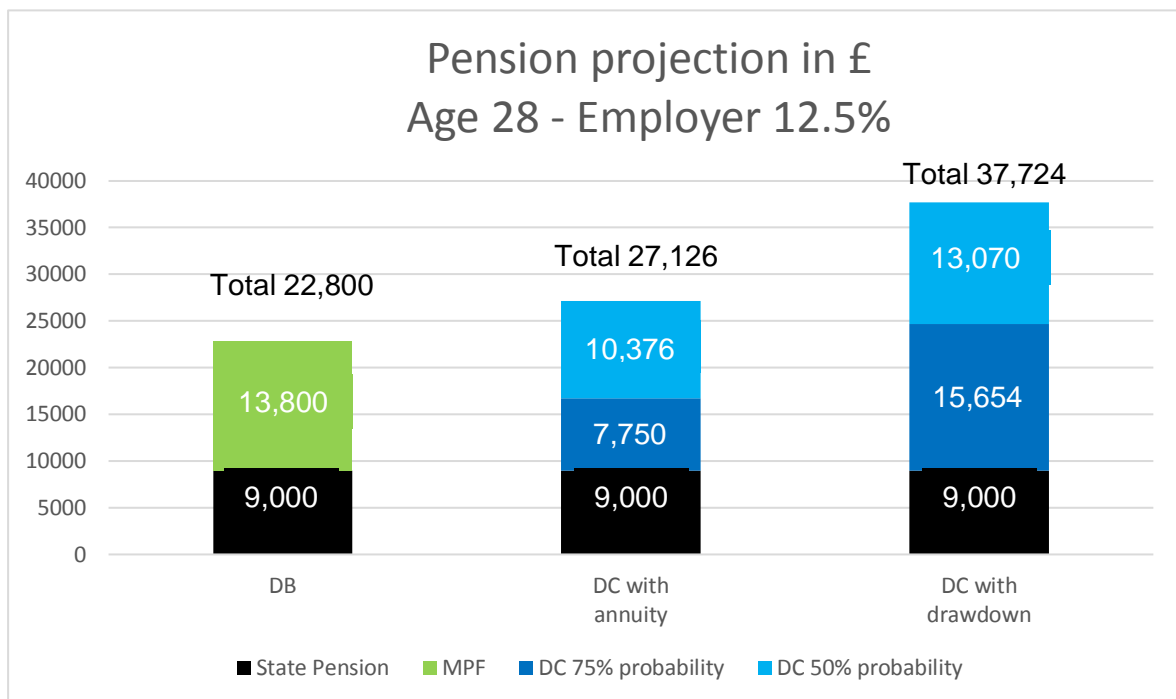
The dark blue rectangle indicates that there is a 75% chance of receiving an annual pension at retirement of at least £3,016 meaning that total annual income including the state pension and the DB pension would be £9,000 + £10,350 + £3,016 = £22,366.

The light blue rectangle indicates that there is a 50% chance of receiving an annual pension at retirement of at least £3,934 (£3,016 + £918) meaning that **total annual income including the DB pension and the state pension would be £9,000 + £10,350 + £3,934 = £23,284.**

6.4 Comparison of the current Ministers’ Pension Fund DB scheme and a DC scheme with 12.5% employer contributions and 7.5% member contributions

6.4.1 Example 1: 28 year old, just entering stipendiary ministry

The results of the initial financial modelling were more generous than expected and at a significantly higher cost to the Church than expected. So, a second set of figures is provided, with the employer contribution reduced from 17.5% to 12.5%. This is still above the level for PQM Plus accreditation.



Again, this chart shows the estimated income in retirement on three different bases. In all three cases, the bottom dark rectangle represents the state pension of £9,000.

Existing DB scheme

The left-hand block represents the continuation of the existing DB scheme. The annual pension from the DB scheme at retirement in 40 years’ time would be 40/80 of stipend = £13,800 so **total annual income including the state pension would be £9,000 + £13,800 = £22,800.**

Suggested DC scheme with an annuity purchased at retirement

As stated before, the outcome of a DC scheme can only be estimated.

The central block represents a DC scheme as described above, and assumes that at retirement the member’s pension pot will be used to purchase an annuity.

The dark blue rectangle indicates that there is a 75% chance of receiving an annuity at retirement of at least £7,750 so total annual income including the state pension would be $£9,000 + £7,750 = £16,750$.

The light blue rectangle indicates that there is a 50% chance of receiving an annuity at retirement of at least £18,126 ($£7,750 + £10,376$), so **total annual income including the state pension would be $£9,000 + £18,126 = £27,126$** .

Suggested DC scheme with drawdown used after retirement

The right-hand block represents a DC scheme as described above, and assumes that the member will use drawdown to provide income in retirement.

The dark blue rectangle indicates that there is a 75% chance of receiving a pension at retirement of £15,654, so total annual income including the state pension would be $£9,000 + £15,654 = £24,654$.

The light blue rectangle indicates that there is a 50% chance of receiving a pension at retirement of £28,724 ($£15,654 + £13,070$), so **total annual income including the state pension would be $£9,000 + £28,724 = £37,724$** .

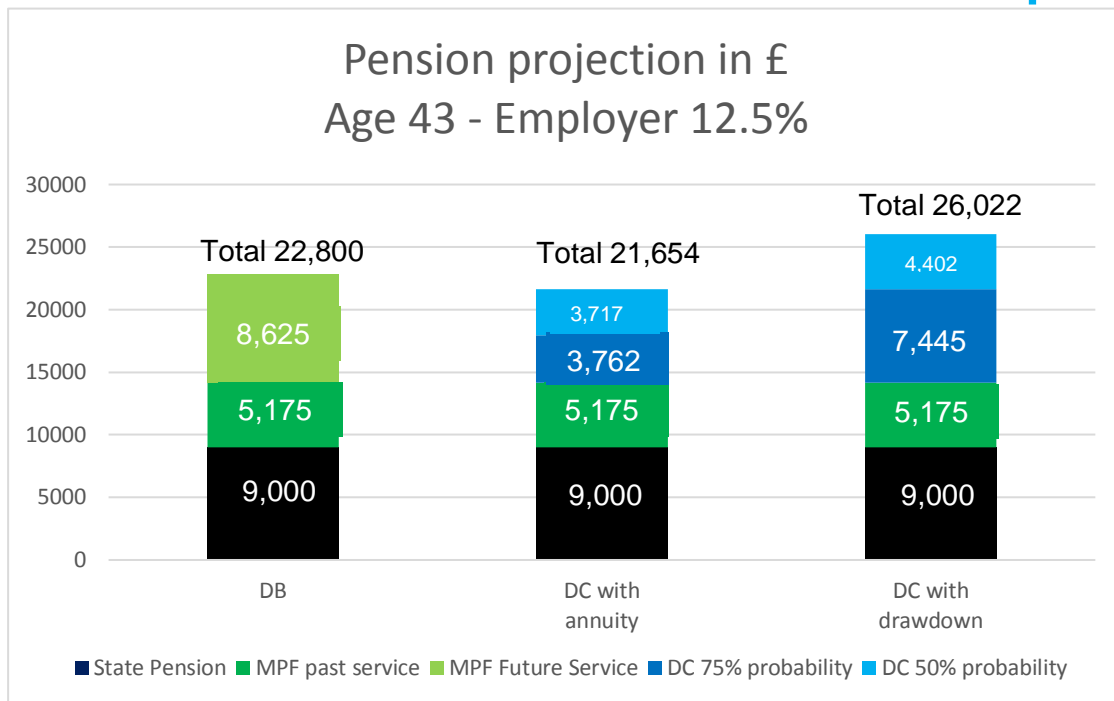
6.4.2 Example 2: 43 year old, with 15 years of past service

The chart is on the next page.

As before, the dark rectangle at the bottom of all three columns represents the state pension of £9,000. Now there is a dark green rectangle above this in all three columns which represents the pension payable from the DB scheme for the past 15 years. The value of this defined pension is fixed at $15/80$ of stipend = £5,175.

Existing DB scheme

Again, the left-hand block represents the continuation of the current DB scheme and shows the total pension payable at retirement after 40 years' service of £13,800 ($£5,175 + £8,625$) and that the **total annual income including state pension would be $£9,000 + £13,800 = £22,800$** .



Suggested DB scheme with an annuity purchased at retirement

The central block represents a DC scheme, as described above, and assumes that the member’s pension pot will be used to purchase an annuity at retirement.

The dark blue rectangle indicates that there is a 75% chance of receiving an annuity at retirement of at least £3,762 resulting in total annual income including the state pension and the DB pension of $£9,000 + £5,175 + £3,762 = £17,937$.

The light blue rectangle indicates that there is a 50% chance of receiving an annuity at retirement of at least £7,479 ($£3,762 + £3,717$) meaning **total annual income including the state pension and the DB pension would be $£9,000 + £5,175 + £7,479 = £21,654$** .

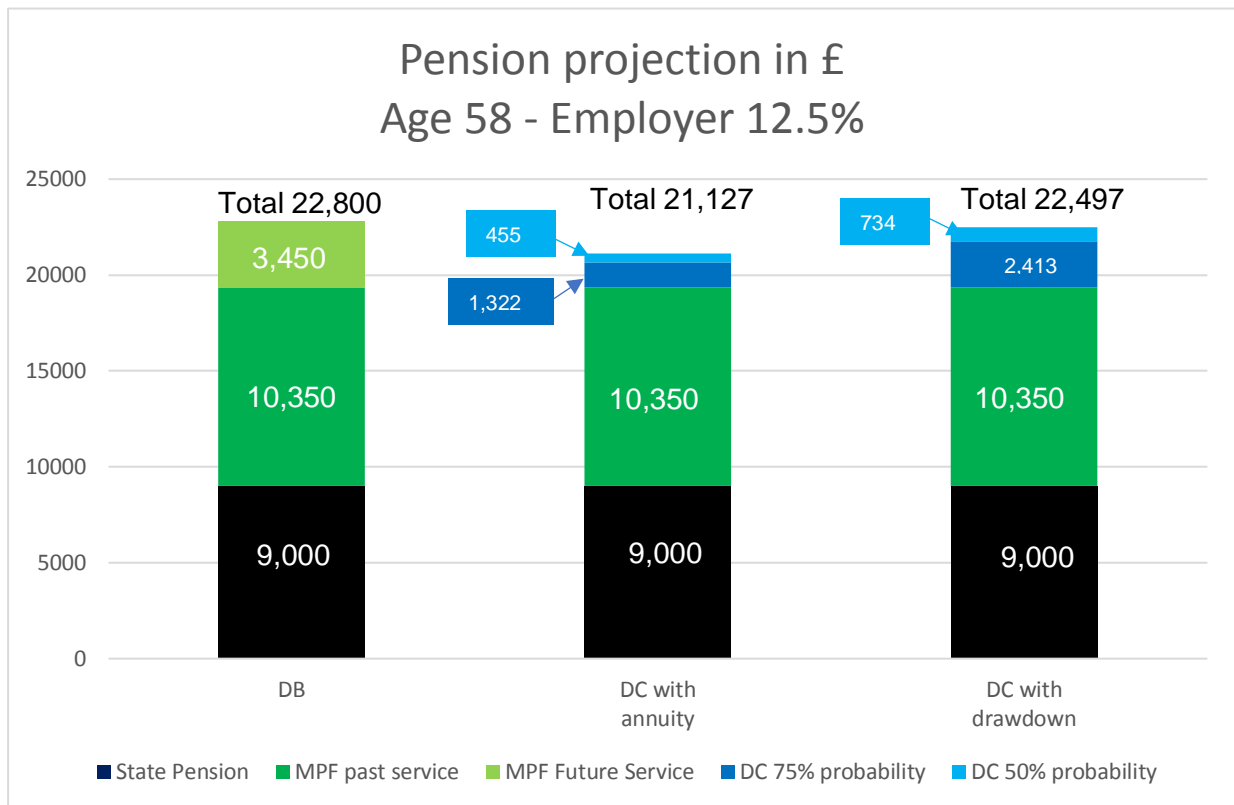
Suggested DC scheme with drawdown used after retirement

The right-hand block represents a DC scheme as described above, and assumes that the member will use drawdown to provide income in retirement.

The dark blue rectangle indicates that there is a 75% chance of receiving an annual pension at retirement of at least £7,445 meaning that total annual income including the state pension and the DB pension would be $£9,000 + £5,175 + £7,445 = £21,620$.

The light blue rectangle indicates that there is a 50% chance of receiving an annual pension at retirement of at least £11,847 ($£7,445 + £4,402$) meaning that **total annual income including the state pension and the DB pension would be $£9,000 + £5,175 + £11,847 = £26,022$** .

6.4.3 Example 3: 58 year old, with 30 years of past service



Once again, the dark rectangle at the bottom of all three columns represents the state pension of £9,000. The dark green rectangle above this in all three columns represents the pension payable from the DB scheme for the past 30 years. The value of this defined pension is fixed at 30/80 of stipend = £10,350.

Existing DB scheme

Again, the left-hand block represents the continuation of the current DB scheme and shows the total pension payable at retirement after 40 years' service of £10,350 + £3,450 = £13,800 and that the **total annual income including the state pension would be £9,000 + £13,800 = £22,800.**

Suggested DB scheme with an annuity purchased at retirement

The central block represents a DC scheme, as described above, and assumes that the member's pension pot will be used to purchase an annuity at retirement.

The dark blue rectangle indicates that there is a 75% chance of receiving an annuity at retirement of at least £1,322 resulting in total annual income including the state pension and the DB pension of £9,000 + £10,350 + £1,322 = £20,672.

The light blue rectangle indicates that there is a 50% chance of receiving an annuity at retirement of at least £1,777 (£1,322 + £455) meaning **total annual income including the state pension and the DB pension would be £9,000 + £10,350 + £1,777 = £21,127.**

Suggested DC scheme with drawdown used after retirement

The right-hand block represents a DC scheme as described above, and assumes that the member will use drawdown to provide income in retirement.

The dark blue rectangle indicates that there is a 75% chance of receiving an annual pension at retirement of at least £2,413 meaning that total annual income including the state pension and the DB pension would be $£9,000 + £10,350 + £2,413 = £21,763$.

The light blue rectangle indicates that there is a 50% chance of receiving an annual pension at retirement of at least £3,147 ($£2,413 + £734$) meaning that **total annual income including the DB pension and the state pension would be $£9,000 + £10,350 + £3,147 = £22,497$** .

6.5 Observations, other assumptions and other options

It is important to re-state that the above projections are just examples not recommendations, and they are only estimates of what might happen.

In DB pension schemes, like the current URC schemes, a year of service at age 30 earns the same pension accrual as a year of service at age 60. The same pension contributions are paid for both years. However, the contributions paid at age 30 are invested for 38 years up to retirement whereas those at age 60 are only invested for 8 years. So, the real cost of the pension accrual at age 60 is much higher than the cost of the accrual at age 30. The rate of contribution payable, which is the same at all ages, is a calculated average. In a DC pension scheme, the pension contributions are invested on behalf of the members. If the same contribution rate is used at all ages then younger members are likely to get a much better return on the sums invested than older members. This is the reason why some DC pension schemes have variable contribution rates depending on age.

The modelling indicates that younger members are likely to benefit most from a move from the current DB scheme to the suggested DC scheme. This is because their pension pot will be invested for longer with a higher proportion of growth assets than in the DB scheme, and so the returns will be greater.

For older members moving from the current DB scheme to the suggested DC scheme, there is a greater risk that the change will have a negative impact on their future accrual of pension. However, any such negative impact will be over a shorter period of time with a larger promised pension coming from the DB scheme based on past service. So, there is comparatively little effect on total income at retirement.

The modelling assumes a typical approach to investment strategy. In broad terms, this means investing in equities until 15 years from retirement and then moving towards a position at retirement age of 50% diversified growth funds, 25% medium term corporate bonds, and 25% cash. The default arrangement in a DC scheme would be likely to be something like this. For comparison, the MPF is expected to have no more than 20% of its funds invested in growth assets when it reaches its Long Term Funding Objective in around 2030.

Members of a DC scheme may choose to take more risks with their investments or may choose to be more prudent.

The three examples are only that and they are somewhat artificial in order to make comparisons easier. The member of a DC scheme has considerable flexibility. For example, a member may choose to receive a smaller annual income and then take out lump sums from time to time to meet particular spending needs. Similarly, it would be possible to convert from a drawdown arrangement to an annuity at any time after retirement. This would almost certainly reduce future income but it would deliver certainty and remove the need for any active involvement in investment decisions from that point on. Some members of DC schemes may choose to do this at age 75 when the tax rules change.

6.7 Issues that have not yet been addressed

Other benefits

The current DB schemes provide for benefits to be paid on the death of a member in service and for death before normal retirement age for those who have left service. They also provide for pensions to be paid to members who have to retire early on the grounds of ill health.

If the Church moves to DC pension arrangements, and wants to continue to provide benefits for death in service and for those retiring early on the grounds of ill health, then these benefits will have to be provided separately from the DC scheme(s). It is currently being assumed that such benefits would be provided in a way that gives members of the DC scheme(s) roughly the same financial protection as they receive from the existing DB schemes.

Support for members

It has hopefully been made clear that the members of a DC pension scheme have a lot more personal responsibility for, as well as flexibility in, the way they plan for retirement and then plan their income during retirement. The Church will want to ensure that members of any such scheme are well informed. This issue is likely to be addressed primarily through the choice of a governance model that ensures the necessary information is provided. The Church will also want to encourage members to take appropriate independent and regular financial advice during their working lives and, especially, just before retirement and during retirement.

7. Comparison of costs for the Church as sponsor or employer

7.1 Costs of continuing with the current DB scheme

The actual cost of a DB scheme will only be known when the last beneficiary has died. In the meantime, we have to focus on the annual contributions, which are the best current estimate of those costs. The level of these contributions is increasing partly because of persistent low interest rates and increased longevity, and partly because the Regulator is expecting a more prudent approach to funding.

The figures below are all based on the actual costs in 2020. The number of paid stipends is going down each year, meaning that the total costs are also reducing. However, the total of contributions from local churches to the Ministry and Mission Fund is also reducing. So, it makes sense to focus on the current actual numbers.

<u>Future service contributions</u>	<u>Percentage of stipend</u> %	<u>Total cost</u> £
Pensionable stipends in 2020 (approx.)		9,440,000
2020 ministers at 2010 contribution rate	12.35	1,166,000
(This rate followed the 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent change to benefits.)		
<u>Actual contributions in 2020</u>	21.95	<u>2,072,000</u>
(Percentage from 2018 valuation, cost from Chief Finance Officer)		
2020 ministers at estimated 2022 rate	31.0	2,926,000

(This rate was estimated by the MPF actuary in June 2020. The increase is partly due to low interest rates and partly due to the increased prudence expected by the Regulator.)

2020 ministers at estimated 2030 rate	38.2	3,606,000
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(This rate was estimated by the actuary in June 2020. It assumes that the assets of the MPF will have been substantially de-risked by 2030.)

The issue here is not just about affordability, although that is clearly significant. If DC schemes are free to invest in growth assets and DB schemes are more restricted then there is an increasingly important issue of value for money – certainly for the employer and possibly for the members also.

7.2 Risks that further deficit funding will be required

For many, the biggest concern about the DB scheme, especially given the current discussions focused on dealing with the expected significant deficit on the MPF in 2021, is the risk that the planned level of employer contributions may prove to be inadequate resulting in further deficits which would then require additional funding.

Moving to a DC scheme would not remove or reduce the risks associated with the pensions that have already been earned. However, it would stop adding to the potential problem.

The trustee of the MPF is increasingly concerned to ensure that the Church is able to meet any such challenges in the future and may well ask the Church for stronger guarantees against such eventualities.

7.3 Costs of moving to the DC scheme suggested above with a 17.5% employer contribution rate

The following figures are all rough estimates at this stage, either because they are dependent on the contribution level which has yet to be decided, or because we do not yet have enough information.

One-off costs of setting up the new DC scheme

A very rough estimate of these one-off costs is £50,000 to £100,000.

Costs of operating the suggested DC scheme alongside the DB scheme

<u>Employer contributions</u>	<u>Percentage of stipend</u>	<u>Total cost</u>
	%	£
2020 ministers	17.5	1,652,000
Governance costs (assuming the use of a managing trust) (Investment management fees are borne by the members.)		20,000
Death in service benefits	1.0 (approx..)	120,000
Ill health early retirement	5.0 (approx..)	500,000
Ongoing in-house administration of URC pension schemes (Admin costs in 2019 MPF accounts = £340k.) (Assumed no significant increase in hours required in house.)		400,000
<u>Estimated total annual costs</u>		<u>2,692,000</u>

7.4 Costs of moving to the DC scheme suggested above with a 12.5% employer contribution rate

The following figures are all rough estimates at this stage, either because they are dependent on the contribution level which has yet to be decided, or because we do not yet have enough information.

One-off costs of setting up the new DC scheme

A very rough estimate of these one-off costs is £50,000 to £100,000.

Costs of operating the suggested DC scheme alongside the DB scheme

<u>Employer contributions</u>	<u>Percentage of stipend</u> %	<u>Total cost</u> £
2020 ministers	12.5	1,180,000
Governance costs (assuming the use of a managing trust) (Investment management fees are borne by the members.)		20,000
Death in service benefits	1.0	120,000
Ill health early retirement	5.0	500,000
Ongoing in-house administration of URC pension schemes (Admin costs in 2019 MPF accounts = £340k.) (Assumed no significant increase in hours required in house.)		400,000
<u>Estimated total annual costs</u>		<u>2,220,000</u>

7.5 Observations

This paper is intended to facilitate a discussion and it does not make a recommendation.

Some of the figures in 7.3 and 7.4 are rough estimates at the moment and these need to be refined before any decisions are taken.

It will be noted that the calculations show that, with a DC employer contribution rate of 17.5%, the estimated annual cost of moving to a DC scheme is about £600k above the current cost of the existing DB scheme (excluding deficit funding), but £200k less than that cost is expected to be from 2022. With an employer contribution rate of 12.5%, the estimated annual cost of the DC scheme is just above the current cost of the DB scheme.

The questions for members of Mission Council are set out in 1.3 above. The most important of these is how can we best prepare the members of General Assembly for the discussions that will be needed in July, given that many of them will not have had as much exposure to these pensions issues over the last couple of years as members of Mission Council.

Paper H1

The United Reformed Church Ministerial Capability Process

Ministries Committee

Basic information

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

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To tidy the outstanding issues with the process agreed at Mission Council.
Main points	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To report that the consultation with the Methodist Church has taken place.2. To report that that the consultation with the Moderator of the South West Synod has taken place.3. To report the change to the wording in 9.1.
Previous relevant documents	The United Reformed Church Ministerial Capability Process (November 2020).
Consultation has taken place with...	The Methodist Church The Moderator of the South Western Synod.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

1. The United Reformed Church Ministerial Capability Process was agreed by Mission Council in November 2020 subject to consultation with the Methodist Church, the Moderator of the South Western Synod, and others and to submit any resulting adjustments to the Process to a future meeting of Mission Council.
2. Consultation with the Methodist Church was held on 29 January 2021 at a Zoom meeting with the Revd Dr. John Bradbury, General Secretary, the Revd Paul Whittle, Convener of Ministries Committee, Mr Andrew Middleton, URC legal Adviser, the Revd Kenneth Howcroft, Methodist Church and the Revd Nicola Furley-Smith, Secretary for Ministries. The outcome of the meeting was that no further revisions of the process were required.
3. Consultation in the form of a telephone conversation took place between the Revd Ruth Whitehead, Moderator of the South West Synod and the Revd Nicola Furley-Smith, Secretary for Ministries on 8 February 2021, where it was agreed to change the word 'likely' in 9.1 to the word 'possible'. The clause now reads:

If the Elders or congregation of a local church, or those responsible for the work of a synod post, have more serious concerns with a minister's level of performance over a period of time, or do not believe that an earlier informal discussion has resulted in satisfactory improvement, they may request the Synod Pastoral Committee to appoint a panel to hold a formal capability hearing. This [the Synod Pastoral Committee Capability Panel or SPCCP) will inform the minister that it has been appointed, providing a written statement of the concerns reported to it regarding the minister's performance, the reasons for those concerns, and the **possible** outcome if the Committee decides after the hearing that the minister's performance has been unsatisfactory. The notification will also include the following where appropriate:

- a) A summary of relevant information gathered as part of any investigation
- b) A copy of any relevant documents which will be used at the capability hearing
- c) A copy of any relevant witness statements, except where a witness's identity is to be kept confidential, in which case the SPCCP will give the minister as much information as possible while maintaining confidentiality.

Paper I1

Update on current work

Mission Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Ms Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of Mission Committee slanecawte@gmail.com Francis Brienen, Deputy General Secretary (Mission) francis.brienen@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Update on the work of the Mission Committee.
Main points	Updates on Legacies of Slavery task group work, resolution on becoming an anti-racist church, Partners in Mission, Beirut emergency appeal, Commitment for Life, Church and Society/JPIT work, Ecumenical and Interfaith matters, review of the National Rural Officer post.
Previous relevant documents	Paper G1 to Mission Council, November 2020.
Consultation has taken place with...	Legacies of Slavery task group, Commitment for Life reference group, NRO review group.

Summary of impact

Financial	Costs to Assembly of the various items in the paper are covered by the Mission Committee budget.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

1. Global and Intercultural Ministries

- 1.1. Autumn 2020 saw the successful launch of the **Legacies of Slavery** webpage with materials geared towards Black History Month (October). The page will shortly be revamped, featured resources being placed under the headings originally agreed for the task group's work – Apology, Reparations / Restorative Justice, White Privilege, plus Anti-Racist Living – emphasising the commitment made by Mission Council in November 2020. The task group has devised a new initiative proposed to be launched in February: Black History Monthly will aim to keep issues on the agenda throughout the year, rather than having an October focus only. The task group membership has also been under discussion. Following the resignation of Alan Yates as convenor conversations are being held with a potential new convenor, while two more members are sought from the Mission Committee and the Racial Justice network respectively. Victoria Turner has agreed to represent URC Youth.

- 1.2. Following the November Mission Council's acceptance of the **resolution on anti-racism**, work has started to implement the actions proposed. An overview of the follow up to the resolution is given in a separate paper.
- 1.3. The Global and Intercultural Ministries team continues to support the ministries of three formal **Partners in Mission**: Alison Gibbs (Zambia), Yufen Chen (Lumen, London), and So Young Jung (Kingston and New Malden, London), as well as Selena Tai (Manchester). Particular focus has been given to the unfolding situation regarding Yufen Chen. With the closure of Lumen URC as a worshipping community, conversations have taken place with Thames North Synod to understand how / where the project might continue, as well as with the Partner in Mission, the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan and CWM.
- 1.4. A number of **global partnership** relationships have been solidified in the past few months, with the Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries attending online meetings of NESSL Partners (National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon) and the TEF (Taiwan Ecumenical Forum). The URC appeal to support the **Beirut Hope project** following the explosion in August 2020 raised over £15,000 (including match-funding from the World Church and Mission Fund). Considerable time was spent responding to a funding request for a women's project in Myanmar, which unexpectedly gave rise to conversations with the Presbyterian Church in New Zealand.

2. Commitment for Life

- 2.1. **Visibility** is a key focus identified for 2021. We aim to widen the visibility of *Commitment for Life* to the two-thirds of URC congregations that are not yet active supporters. Efforts include an all-church mailing, with a contact card containing useful information; running a series of adverts in *Reform*; a Zoom-to-Zimbabwe event on 9 March 2021, and a Zoom meet-up with Helen Howe (National Church Liaison Officer at Christian Aid) for all URC members with an interest in Christian Aid.
- 2.2. There was concern earlier in the year that lockdown might reduce the 2020 **income** by 50% (compared with the 2019 income of £329,000). We are pleased to report, however, that around half our *Commitment for Life* congregations managed to donate and together raised approximately £253,000 – over 75%.
- 2.3. Research into the question of potentially reducing the **number of regions** supported by *Commitment for Life* has shown a strong preference for a reduction to three regions – that is, to withdraw from Central America in light of Christian Aid's restructuring in the region, and possible further withdrawal in the future. Mission Committee supports this and staff are currently considering how this will be implemented.

3. Church and Society / Joint Public Issues Team

- 3.1. **International Development budget**: Following the emergency resolution at the November Mission Council, the Assembly Moderators wrote to the Prime Minister objecting to proposed cuts in the UK's commitment to devote 0.7% of national income to addressing global poverty. The URC's Secretary for Church and Society has been working with a broad group of ecumenical colleagues to make our concerns about this known in advance of the decision coming before parliament. A briefing to help church members raise the issue with MPs has been issued through CTBI, and is available at www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/aid
- 3.2. **Reset the Debt**: Since its launch in October, this major Joint Public Issues Team campaign has continued to highlight the crisis facing millions of families in Britain who have been forced into unavoidable debt as a result of Covid-19, and to call for a 'jubilee' debt write-off to be part of the solution. The campaign has generated significant national media coverage and engagement by church members. Over 1000 emails have been sent to MPs, and 500 church leaders signed an open letter to the Chancellor during Advent.

A roundtable event hosted by the Bishop of Durham in January indicated that there is a growing alliance around the issue and increasing interest in parliament, though we need to keep up the pressure for action. To read the report, watch video stories, access small group and prayer resources, and add your support, visit www.ResetTheDebt.uk

4. Ecumenical and Interfaith matters

4.1. At the October **Enabling Group of Churches Together** in England, Victoria Turner from URC Youth Executive was elected a Trustee of CTE. She is also part of CTE's working group relating to the issue of the fourth presidency, where Quaker Hannah Brock-Womack is still unable to take up her role as one of the Presidents because of her same sex marriage.

4.2. We now have updated **model constitutions** available for Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs). Unfortunately, the model documents for Methodist / URC Ecumenical Areas have been delayed because the Charity Commission have raised some objections about trusteeship in these settings.

4.3. The **Free Churches Group** (FCG) has just launched its report, *The Church and Social Cohesion*, produced in partnership with the Theos think tank. It looks at the churches' grass roots contribution to social cohesion, offering several practical recommendations for how churches can maximise their potential to foster social cohesion in the community. (<https://www.freechurches.org.uk/commission-report>)

The Revd Canon Helen Cameron, Chair of the Northampton Methodist District has been elected as FCG Moderator-Elect and will take over from the current moderator in April 2022.

4.4. The **international Reformed-Anglican Dialogue** has just published a major report on its work: *Koinonia: God's Gift and Calling* (<http://wrcr.ch/news/dialogue-report-sees-koinonia-as-gods-gift-and-calling>). In partnership with CTE, the Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations and his Church of England counterpart are planning an online 'residential' for May 2021 to look at the report and consider its application at local level.

4.5. Following on from the 2016 General Assembly resolution 37, the United Reformed Church has developed its work around the issues of the **Israel / Palestine** situation under the remit of the Mission Committee. The work in response to Resolution 37 has been extensive and one major aspect was the educational visit to Israel and Palestine in September 2019. Close links were made with members of indigenous churches and these have continued even during the extensive lockdowns of 2020-2021.

4.6. Resolution 37 calls for 'Synods, local churches and individuals to respond with informed prayer, grace and solidarity'. As the situation has worsened for the Palestinian people since 2016 and informed by the denomination's subsequent work and direct experience, the Mission Committee agreed a number of resolutions which will enable the Church to express its solidarity more strongly. The resolutions need further work in conversation and consultation with other committees and will be brought to General Assembly in July 2021.

5. Review of the National Rural Officer post

5.1. The Methodist Conference has approved the creation of a full time National Rural Officer post, starting in the summer of 2021. This effectively means the end of a shared post with the United Reformed Church. Mission Committee expressed strong support for the continuation of a National Rural Officer post in the URC and encouraged further exploration and conversation as to how this might be put into effect. Aware of the current financial challenges to the Church the committee accepted the proposal that following the retirement of the Revd Elizabeth Clark in August 2021 recruitment for a new post is put

on hold until early 2022; that an evaluation is carried out into the impact of the post on the URC, which will shape the future resourcing of rural mission and ministry in the URC; that options for joint staffing with the Arthur Rank Centre are explored further; and that a proposal for resourcing rural ministry is brought to the Mission Committee in February 2022.

Paper 12

Anti-Racism update

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	None.
Draft resolution(s)	

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Report on progress following Resolution G2 adopted on behalf of General Assembly by Mission Council November 2020.
Main points	This paper summarises the actions taken since the adoption of resolution G2, including work on a template letter and FAQ document, conversations about a racial justice audit, work with the racial justice networks, development of legacies of slavery webpages, and further ecumenical collaboration.
Previous relevant documents	Resolution G2, Mission Council November 2020.
Consultation has taken place with...	Ecumenical partners, including the Baptist Union of Great Britain, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Churches Together in England; CWM; Christian Aid.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Increased collaboration with the Baptist Union of Great Britain, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Churches Together in England.

1. These are very early days since Mission Council November 2020 adopted Resolution G2, committing the URC to a journey towards being an actively anti-racist Church. The resolution was written to be deliberately wide reaching, with scope to address and effect change in every aspect of the Church's life. This will necessarily take time. Indeed, it can be regarded as a journey which has no end; our commitment must be ongoing if significant and lasting change is to take place.
2. Resolution G2 speaks of identifying barriers within all parts of the United Reformed Church's life, initiating strategies to combat racism within its own body and in the wider community / society. It instructs the mission committee to explore and develop initiatives

to address the barriers within our structures, and to develop resources to equip and empower the United Reformed Church to begin the process of education and change in all parts of its life. The resolution also instructs the mission committee to report on progress of this work to subsequent meetings of Mission Council and General Assembly. This paper is the first such feedback.

3. As expected, the Mission Council resolution has received some pushback. Some members of the Church question the need for the resolution, wishing to reject or question the idea of the URC being in any way racist. In other quarters, it has initiated heated conversations and frustration – ‘Haven’t we been here before?’ and ‘Doesn’t this just repeat previous commitments which have not been acted upon?’ There is a real sense that this time, we MUST make it count!

Mission Committee is listening – an important step in the Church’s journey – and seeking to respond sensitively to its Mission Council remit in light of what is being heard.

Progress to date includes:

a. Template letter

Recognising that some members of the URC are unfamiliar with the issues underpinning the Mission Council resolution, and / or some of the terms used in the text of the resolution, a template letter has been prepared, enabling Mission Committee / global and intercultural ministries to offer a quick and informed response to any queries received.

b. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document

Closely linked to the template letter, an FAQ document is being prepared, responding to the most commonly heard queries and concerns, e.g. ‘Why “Black Lives Matter” rather than “All Lives Matter”?’ and ‘What is the difference between “not racist” and “anti-racist”?’ It is intended that this will be a ‘living document’, being updated as necessary in response to ongoing conversations, and will be made available online in a printable format for wide and easy access.

c. Racial justice audit

Mission Committee is exploring the practicalities of a racial justice audit of the Church, to be undertaken by an independent, external body. Such an audit is important to enable an unbiased picture of the status quo to be established and inform the specific initiatives to be developed in response. Christian Aid has recently undertaken such an audit and is working through its responses. Mission Committee is in conversation with partners at Christian Aid to learn more about the potential scope, expectations and related costs of the audit process.

d. Racial justice networks in the URC

Global and intercultural ministries is supporting the work of the Racial Justice Advocates and Cascades of Grace, two URC networks engaged in different aspects of racial justice work. The aim is to join the dots, so that the two networks complement each other and support the overarching anti-racist journey of the denomination. The networks will be resourced and strengthened, including relevant training, to enable them to play an active role in engaging local churches and individuals in conversations, learning and the shift from ‘not racist’ to ‘anti-racist’.

e. Legacies of Slavery

Legacies of Slavery (LoS) remains an ongoing initiative in the URC, with clear links to the anti-racist commitment. Autumn 2020 saw the successful launch of the LoS webpage with materials geared towards Black History Month. The page

is now being revamped, with resources placed under the headings originally agreed for the LoS task group's work – Apology, Reparations / Restorative Justice, White Privilege, plus Anti-Racist Living – emphasising the commitment made by Mission Council in November 2020. The task group has devised a new (Zoom) initiative being launched in February 2021: Black History Monthly will focus on various aspects of Black History throughout the coming year using a variety of approaches (e.g. conversations ensuing from film, articles, poetry by Black writers), keeping issues on the agenda and inviting wide engagement across the URC and beyond.

f. Ecumenical relationships

Collaborative working relationships have been developed with partners in the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) and in Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). In January 2021, Karen Campbell, Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries, participated in the first gathering of the new Racial Justice Advocacy Forum arising from the BUGB / CTBI contacts, seeking to enable more effective and prophetic action by the Churches regarding racial injustice. She has accepted an invitation to be part of a small core group taking this work forward. Karen is also representing the URC on a new Churches Together in England (CTE) Racial Justice Working Group, which had its first meeting in early February. Through her participation, mission committee is seeking to ensure the URC has a presence in relevant ecumenical conversations which may contribute to the URC's own anti-racist journey, learning from our partners, and supporting them in their journeys too.

Paper 13

URC 50th Jubilee: Not long now...

Walking the Way Steering Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Francis Brien francis.brienen@urc.org.uk Andy Jackson andy.jackson@urc.org.uk
Action required	For discussion only.
Draft resolution(s)	N/A

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This paper provides an update on planning for the URC's 50 th Jubilee in 2022.
Main points	Planning for this important milestone continues. It is hoped that a mix of local, regional and denominational activities will be united through theming, messaging, branding and merchandise options, which are being considered. Two specific denominational events are being planned, along with some denominational resources to support celebrations.
Previous relevant documents	Mission Council 03/21, Paper I4 Mission Council 11/20, Paper O1.
Consultation has taken place with...	Ministries Education and Learning Children's and Youth Work Ecumenical and Interfaith Global and Intercultural Ministries.

Summary of impact

Financial	Potential costs and sources of existing, internal funding are being considered.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	The support of our ecumenical partners has been crucial to the denomination's life. It is imperative that they be involved in these celebrations. Methodist friends are willing to arrange a significant discount on the use of Westminster Methodist Central Hall for an event, as well as organise a worship service in St Mary Undercroft (Palace of Westminster). A joint resource is being pursued with the Congregational Federation, which shares the same milestone in 2022.

1. General update

- 1.1 Following discussions at the November 2020 meeting of Mission Council, including in small groups, the URC 50th Jubilee Planning Group, acting on behalf of the Walking the

Way Steering Group, has continued exploring possibilities for the celebration of this important milestone in the denomination's life.

- 1.2 Feedback from the Mission Council discussions mentioned above has been central to the group's further planning. A clear desire was expressed for united celebrations which bring people from across the denomination together, but which are also outward-looking, taking into account the vibrant heritage and continuing life of the United Reformed Church contextually and locally, as well as focussing on our strong tradition of social justice and missional engagement.
- 1.3 To help achieve this, it is still hoped that celebrations will come in a mix of local, regional and denominational events, resources and opportunities. Theming, messaging and branding will be vital in holding all of these contributions together under a single banner. Discussions continue on how best to proceed with this, but it is already clear that with a number of celebrations taking place in the same year, including the 50th Jubilee of the Congregational Federation and the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, that Jubilee itself will be an important theme.
- 1.4 Merchandising is also being explored as a possibility, as this too can be a good means of promoting a single theme in a range of ways and settings.
- 1.5 Within the planning group, smaller groups are working on plans for worship, supporting the organisation of regional and local events, and sharing the story of the URC in drama form.

2. Events

- 2.1 The planning group feels that it is especially important to mark the debate and passing of the legislation, as well as the signing of the agreement document, both of which brought the United Reformed Church formally into existence. Central to these are the Palace of Westminster, where legislation was debated and, ultimately, passed, and Westminster Methodist Central Hall where the agreement document itself was signed.
- 2.2 As such, the planning group intends to organise an event at Westminster Central Hall on Saturday 1 October 2022 offering a mix of workshops, stalls and activities culminating in an act of worship. Our friends in the Methodist Church are prepared to offer a significant discount on the use of this venue, should this event go ahead. It is hoped that as many people as possible will be able to come together physically from across the United Reformed Church, but streaming options are being considered for those unable to do so, as well as how this event can link in with regional and local events. Given the inability of people to meet physically for most of 2020 and a significant part of 2021, it is hoped that a great effort can be made to bring everyone together physically for this important milestone.
- 2.3 It is also hoped that an evening service of worship could be organised in the chapel of St Mary Undercroft, located in the Palace of Westminster. Such an event would require cross-party support. Our Methodist friends can help us to build this, based on their existing experience of organising covenant services in the chapel, and there are already a number of MPs who have expressed an interest in such a service. It is important to note, however, that due to the low amount of space available, attendance at such a service would need to be limited.
- 2.4 It will be important to mark the jubilee at General Assembly in 2022. Ideas for this are being considered, alongside existing plans to celebrate the jubilee at the URC Youth Assembly, the Ministers Gathering, Greenbelt, and hopefully through synod meetings and events.

3. Resources

- 3.1 Progress with new books on the denomination's history is going well, but Covid-19 and refurbishment plans have seriously affected access to libraries, people and other sources of key materials, which could bring some delays.
- 3.2 A piece of work exploring the hymnody of the URC is being developed, which could perhaps be linked to a hymn writing competition. We might even be able to sing together physically!
- 3.3 The idea of a calendar competition to share photos and artwork depicting the life of the denomination is also being explored.
- 3.3 It is important to note that the Congregational Federation shares its jubilee year with us in 2022, so there is an opportunity, amongst other things, to produce a joint resource. A collection of reflections will be launched in June 2021.
- 3.4 The URC Prayer Handbook, Diary and Yearbook for 2022 will all have a focus on the jubilee, providing more opportunities to engage people in celebration and reflection.

4. Finance

- 4.1 As celebrations will be a mix of local, regional and denominational events, it is hoped that much of the costs will fit naturally into existing plans and budgets. However, various avenues of opening up more of the denomination's existing funds to assist our celebrations and use them to help prepare the United Reformed Church for the future, are being explored.
- 4.2 The planning group expresses warmest gratitude, especially to our friends in the Methodist Church, for the support, discounts and other assistance which is being offered. This helps to reduce pressure and increase possibilities for us in this important time of celebration.

Paper I4

Walking Forward: Still much to do

Walking the Way Steering Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Francis Brien francis.brienen@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information only.
Draft resolution(s)	N/A

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This paper provides a general summary of feedback from across the denomination on the work of the Walking the Way steering group, and contains a summary of the steering group's work since Mission Council met in November 2020.
Main points	Patterns have emerged in feedback gathered by the steering group on its work. As well as using this to shape its short-term work, the steering group has split into two task groups looking, respectively, at long-term strategy and long-term communications / resourcing needs. The steering group hopes to bring proposals to General Assembly in July 2021 to assist the Church in deciding how to proceed.
Previous relevant documents	Mission Council 11/15 papers M1 and M2 Mission Council 3/16 paper M1 General Assembly reports 2016, p.11 Mission Council 11/18 paper I2 Mission Council 11/19 paper I3 Mission Council 03/20 paper I3 General Assembly reports 2020, p.195 Mission Council 11/20 paper M1.
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission Education and Learning Communications Children's and Youth Work Finance.

Summary of impact

Financial	Funding for Walking the Way is currently secured until the end of the calendar year 2021. Further deliberation will be needed by General Assembly in July 2021 on how to proceed.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	The ecumenical and interfaith implications of our work, especially in planning for the URC's 50th anniversary, are being considered.

1. Feedback

- 1.1 In approving the budget proposed at its November 2020 meeting, Mission Council secured funding for Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today until the end of the calendar year 2021. The Walking the Way Steering Group extends its warmest thanks to everyone involved in securing this outcome.
- 1.2 In the short term, this has allowed the Walking the Way work to continue, but there are still major questions for the Church to consider about the long-term future of whole-of-life discipleship as a focus within the denomination.
- 1.3 To help answer these questions, the steering group collected a wide range of feedback from across the denomination ahead of its January 2021 meeting, including from synod teams (moderators, training and development officers, children's and youth development officers, mission enablers and their equivalents) and listed contacts, children's and youth work, education and learning, global and intercultural ministries, and a general call for feedback from readers of the Walking the Way all-church e-newsletter.
- 1.4 In analysing the feedback, the steering group recognised a number of patterns emerging, including:
- a) An integration gap in which some have engaged with Walking the Way, but many have not
 - b) As a body, people in authorised ministries of the URC have not fully engaged with Walking the Way, meaning that the local communities they serve are often unaware of what it is, or how they can engage.
 - c) Confusion about the fact that Walking the Way is not an initiative or programme, yet has programmatic elements, such as Stepwise. We need to define Walking the Way more clearly, by what it is rather than what it is not.
 - d) Awareness that, in many cases, the values of Walking the Way are not yet embedded in the everyday reality of people's lives, either because they are not aware of what Walking the Way is or have not fully understood it
 - e) A desire for fewer resources to be produced by the Steering Group, and more content to be included in resources produced across the denomination which emphasises discipleship. There is a need for fewer worship materials and, instead, more materials which look at discipleship in everyday life.
 - f) If others in the URC can produce something, the Steering Group should not do so. In all new work, the question should be asked 'Is it needed, and if so, what about it is uniquely URC?'
 - g) The need for a branding refresh which makes Walking the Way's connection with all areas of URC life more visible.
 - h) The need for Synod Moderators to be active in engaging with and promoting Walking the Way, as leaders in their respective regions.
 - i) The need for Walking the Way to be included explicitly in committee agendas, job descriptions and strategy documents across the denomination.
 - j) The need to have a truly intergenerational focus in all that we do, such as the recent Advent and Lent packs do.
 - k) Learn the lessons which lockdown has taught us. Those who have engaged online during this time must not be lost. Churches need to re-gather intentionally, not exclusively.
- 1.5 It is clear from the feedback that there is still much work to be done on whole-of-life discipleship as a focus within the life of the denomination. To assist Mission Council and General Assembly in exploring what, when and how this should happen, the steering group has split into two task groups, looking respectively at long-term strategy and long-term communications / resourcing needs. These tasks groups will report back to the March 2021 meeting of the steering group which will, in time, bring proposals to General Assembly in July 2021 to assist the Church in deciding how it wishes to proceed.

2. General Update

- 2.1 *New Reality, Same Mission* – These materials continue to be promoted as a good resource for local churches in looking outwards into their local neighbourhoods to identify and deal with growing and changing needs in these strange times. This may seem counterintuitive when many local churches are focussing on survival, but this is precisely the nature of God's mission. It is to be engaged in precisely when things are difficult, not when we have everything in order. The main document is being kept up to date, and a general summary provided, along with a supporting document to help local churches navigate sources of mission funding.
- 2.2 *Lent* – In light of feedback that the steering group should avoid creating new materials by itself, wherever possible, the steering group has sought to promote the Bible Reading Fellowship's new *Holy Habits: Following Jesus* resource. The steering group has also worked collaboratively with children's and youth work, education and learning and others to produce *Walking towards Lent together*, an intergenerational pack of resources to support households and families on their Lent journey, building on the success of the Advent packs in 2020. Early feedback on these resources has been positive.
- 2.3 *Communications* – It is clear from the feedback received that real-life stories of individuals and churches living out their faith continue to be crucial as sources of inspiration and encouragement, especially in these times. Work is being carried out with colleagues in the communications office to improve the steering group's social media strategy to produce better content more suited to the platforms we use ([Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#)), as well as make use of some simple web tools on the webpages which the steering group is responsible for, whilst we wait for a new website. Update e-mails, e-newsletters and other direct communications with networks and local churches will increase to ensure that everyone across the denomination feels connected and able to contribute to, as well as gain from, the work of the steering group.
- 2.4 *Online discipleship* – The steering group remains clear that its contribution to the continuing growth of online faith development must be firmly in the field of discipleship. The fact that worship, fellowship and other attributes of faith are being developed online is to be celebrated. However, the steering group is concerned with how this trend might strengthen people in living out their everyday lives as followers of Jesus. The steering group is organising a series of online events to bring together groups and individuals from across the denomination with previous involvement or experience in this field to build up a network for sharing wisdom and good practice. It is hoped that this, in turn, will help the Church to address wider questions about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, and what that looks like in online environments.
- 2.5 *Accompaniment / mentoring* – Feedback, particularly from synod teams and contacts, reveals an increased need in local churches, as well as individuals, for accompaniment and mentoring support as they unpack what it means to truly live as disciples of Jesus in every aspect of everyday life. Work on the pilot accompaniment programme with the [London Institute for Contemporary Christianity](#) continues, with participating churches in Southern Synod offering positive feedback on their involvement, and online envisioning events in Mersey Synod resulting in ten to fifteen local churches expressing a significant interest in participating when the programme (hopefully) begins in May 2021. Analysis of the pilot accompaniment programme, as well as the development of mentoring within Stepwise, and work with education and learning on the Discipleship Development Strategy / Fund, continue to influence deliberations on how local churches might be supported to participate in such accompaniment / mentoring activities in future.

Paper J1

List of nominations

Nominations committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Ray Adams ray.adams12@btinternet.com George Faris nominations.secretary@urc.org.uk
Action required	
Draft resolution(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Mission Council notes the changes set out in Section 1 of the report to the list of nominations agreed at the November 2020 meeting of Mission Council.2) Mission Council appoints according to the nominations in Section 2 of the report.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) To clarify various details of the nominations list.2) To appoint and reappoint members of various committees and representatives of the Church.3) To note proposed appointments to be made at General Assembly 2021.4) To note the creation of a nominating group.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Nominations list as at December 2020: https://urc.org.uk/images/Yearbook/Nominations-List.pdf
Consultation has taken place with...	All synods are represented on the committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Some roles involve ecumenical contact and collaboration.

1. Amendments to published list of nominations to be noted

Mission Council is asked to note the following amendments to the nominations list that was agreed at the November 2020 meeting of Mission Council.

4.2.2 Stepwise Task and Finish Group

The Revd Stuart Radcliffe represents the Synod Mission Enablers Network rather than the Mission Committee.

9.2 Westminster College: board of governors

The Revd Samantha White has succeeded the Revd Neil Thorogood as Principal.

2. New appointments

Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council makes the following appointments:

Ref	Committee / Group	Name	Role	From	To
1.2	Law & Polity Advisory Group	The Revd Steven Manders**	Member	Mar21	GA25
1.5	Environmental Task Group	The Revd Dr Rosalind Selby**	Member	Mar21	
2.1	Faith and Order Committee	The Revd Tessa Henry-Robinson**	Member	Mar21	GA27

Key: ** = new appointment

3. Appointments to be made at General Assembly 2021

The Nominations Committee advises that those listed below have accepted invitations to serve from the end of this year's General Assembly, which will be asked to appoint them. This is a provisional list – there will be further nominations for consideration at Assembly.

Ref	Committee / Group	Name	Role	From	To
2.2.1	Panel for General Assembly Appointments	The Revd Reginald Mudenda (11)	Member ^{††}	GA21	GA26
2.4	Disciplinary Process Commission Panel	The Revd Nigel Adkinson (2)	Member [†]	GA21	GA26
2.4	Disciplinary Process Commission Panel	Mr Ian Corless (9)	Member [†]	GA21	GA26
2.4	Disciplinary Process Commission Panel	Dr David Jones (5)	Deputy Convenor [†]	GA21	GA26
2.4	Disciplinary Process Commission Panel	Dr David Jones (5)	Member [†]	GA21	GA26
2.4	Disciplinary Process Commission Panel	The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe (2)	Member [†]	GA21	GA26
2.4	Disciplinary Process Commission Panel	Mrs Janet Virr (4)	Member [†]	GA21	GA26
4.1	Ministries Committee	Chris Kellett	Member**	GA21	GA25
4.3	Children's and Youth Work Committee	The Revd Julian Sanders	Member	GA21	GA25
5.4	Finance Committee	Mr Vaughan Griffiths	Deputy Treasurer**	GA21	GA25
5.4	Finance Committee	Mr Gordon Wanless	Member [†]	GA21	GA25
8.1	Methodist/URC Liaison Group	The Revd Geoffrey Clarke	Co-Convenor**	GA21	GA26
11.4	Congregational Memorial Hall Trust	The Revd Derek Wales	Representative [†]	GA21	GA25

Key: ** = new appointment, † = extension of term of service, †† further term of service

4. Nominating group

Eastern Synod Moderator Nominating Group

The Nominations Committee advises that a nominating group has been created to seek a new moderator for the Eastern Synod. The group will be convened by Mrs Val Morrison.

Paper M1

The Daily Devotions and Daily Devotions Sunday Service

The General Secretariat

Enabling resolution to initiate work on the future of the Daily Devotions Sunday Service

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The General Secretary: The Revd Dr John P Bradbury john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council instructs the General Secretariat to consult widely and bring costed proposals to General Assembly 2021 with a view to making the Daily Devotions and the Daily Devotions Sunday Service a continuing feature of the life of the United Reformed Church.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To explore the future of the Daily Devotions and the Daily Devotions Sunday Service.
Main points	To invite the General Secretariat to explore possible options for the future of the Daily Devotions Sunday Service.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	The Secretary for Ministries; the Walking the Way Project Manager; The Revd Andy Braunston.

Summary of impact

Financial	None – potential cost of ministry and / or staff time in the future.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

The Daily Devotions have become a treasured part of the life of the United Reformed Church. It emerged as a personal initiative of the Revd Andy Braunston and the United Reformed Church owes Andy a debt of thanks for his vision and commitment to this piece of work. Around four thousand people receive the Daily Devotions every day, and around one and a half thousand people are accessing the Daily Devotions Sunday Service. The Sunday service began at the start of lockdown in 2020, and has become a key means by which many members of the United Reformed Church have been able to continue whilst in-person worship is suspended.

As lockdown extended, the pressure of time became such that it was increasingly difficult for Andy to maintain the level of output. Whilst a wide range of people from the diversity of the life of the United Reformed Church write devotions and lead worship, the editing is time-consuming. The General Secretariat has made available some resources to allow for some of the editing work to be contracted out.

It still remains unclear when in-person worship will resume for many, and Sunday services have now been commissioned until the end of 2021.

We propose that it is time to consider making the Daily Devotions and Daily Devotions Sunday Service an integral part of the life of the United Reformed Church in an on-going fashion.

There are a variety of ways in which the Daily Devotions and the Sunday service might be extended in ways that help support and develop people in their lives of discipleship. For example, the Daily Devotions could become Bible Study material for local use in small groups. A Zoom Bible Study group based on the material might also be possible - creating a sense of community in a disconnected world. The recordings of each Daily Devotion have recently been added to a range of Podcast providers making it easier for people to access them. These Podcasts could be promoted and developed further allowing people within and without the URC to make use of them.

The Daily Devotions Sunday Worship could serve the wide life of the United Reformed Church in a future where we anticipate the closure of many congregations following the pandemic.

There are a variety of ways in which the Sunday Service could be developed and used, including:

- for the housebound
- for those who wish to supplement, for whatever reason, local church worship
- for those who have moved away from a URC and wish to continue in some sort of fellowship with us (maybe as a supplement to their local non-URC or maybe instead of a local expression of church)
- where a church finds it hard to get pulpit supply but can operate either a DVD player / memory stick / CD player into the church's sound / AV system
- those whose church has closed but wish to form a fellowship group
- those in the "Wider Fold".

The emphasis has deliberately been on the 'low-tech' end of the possibilities that technology offers us, particularly with the thought to support those who find engaging with complex new technology challenging, but who can click a link, play a podcast, or listen to a CD that someone has 'burnt' for them. The services could, however, be offered in a video format making them a more attractive pulpit supply resource for some more technically enabled churches.

Consultation would be needed with a wide variety of stakeholders, and there would be a range of questions that would need addressing, such as (but by no means exclusively):

- Who would benefit from on-going Daily Devotions and the Daily Devotions Sunday Service?
- What sort of human resources would be necessary? Would this include a role for an ordained minister of Word and Sacraments? What proportion of someone's time might be necessary to develop the possibilities?
- What would the costs be?
- How might this development fit with the continuing felt need for extended membership of the URC, or emerging forms of virtual church life?
- What might a longer term vision for the possible extensions of this piece of ministry be?

Paper 01

Report on recent work

Human resources advisory group (HRAG)

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Geoff Shaw, Convenor geoffshaw2810@sky.com Jane Baird, Secretary jane.baird@urc.org.uk
Action required	Take note.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To update Mission Council on the recent work of the group.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Previous HRAG reports to Mission Council.
Consultation has taken place with...	The General Secretary.

Summary of impact

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

1. Membership.

Geoff Shaw (Convenor), Alastair Forsyth, Bridget Fosten, Barbara Ellis, Revd. John Bradbury, General Secretary (ex officio), Jane Baird, Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources) (ex officio).

Mike Gould, who had served the group for many years, had come to the end of his latest term of office in March 2020 and had been replaced by Barbara Ellis. Mike's service to the group was recognized and he was thanked for his support and valuable contribution both within the meetings and the supplementary roles he had performed.

The members bring to the group a wide range of HR and management experience within the Church, the Public Sector and in Industry.

2. Remit

HRAG was established in 2012. The remit is to provide a unified reference point on HR matters for Mission Council/General Assembly / URC Trust and Church House staff. Its remit was reviewed in 2015 and again in 2018. At the latter review Mission Council agreed to amendments to the Terms of Reference of the group and clarification of the length of service of its members.

3. Meetings

HRAG has two regular meetings per annum and supplements these with email consultation and / or video or telephone calls as the need arises. Recent meetings have taken place by video conference. At each meeting the group receives a comprehensive report from Church House HR team detailing the staffing level and the team's activities.

4. Routine work

4.1 Safeguarding. The necessary changes requested to support the team had been reviewed by HRAG in October 2019 and March 2020. It was agreed that additional support from both temporary and permanent resources was necessary along with changes to hours of work. Some of the workload was caused by the need to 'digitize' all records and it was uncertain at this stage the long-term impact of this work. HRAG requested that any future needs be presented once the longer-term requirements had become clear.

4.2 Communications. HRAG reviewed the proposals to reorganise some of the work within the Communications team. This included a new role of 'Digital Content Officer' and changes to the role of the Graphic Designer. HRAG endorsed the proposed changes but noted the considerable number of revisions to roles within the team and hoped that overall longer term organisation objectives were now being achieved.

HRAG also received early notice of the proposal to bring 'in-house' the administration of 'Reform' subscriptions.

Whilst endorsing the headline needs and objectives of the proposal HRAG wished to review Job Descriptions and other supporting information as soon as these were available.

4.3 Payroll system. The need to change the system had not been expected. However, the initial parallel runs of the old and new systems had balanced. There are now five separate but linked payrolls (Ministers, Pensioners, Church House, synods, Westminster College) and it was noted that the Church House Payroll would have linked HR functionality.

4.4 Staff Survey Feedback. A summary of the results of the staff survey carried out as part of the main General Secretary recruitment / role survey had been presented to the Staff Association and had also been placed on the Church House 'public' drive which is available to all Church House staff.

4.5 Development Worker (CRCW). A number of changes to the Job Description were proposed following the merger of the Church Related Community Work (CRCW) and Special Category Minister (SCM) Sub Committees. The Job Description was reviewed and agreed by HRAG with the addition of the standard line management paragraph which would ensure consistency.

The change had also resulted in a need to amend the Job Description of the Programme Administrator and increase the contracted hours of work.

HRAG endorsed the changes outlined above following clarification of a number of issues.

4. Westminster College. Mission Council in November 2019 had agreed to the proposal that the position of Principal, Westminster College, could be renewed for a period of five years following the initial seven-year term of office. However, a query had been raised as to who would make the decision to renew. Following consultation with the Chair of Governors and others, HRAG recommended that this should be the responsibility of a group of the college governors supplemented by a member of the General Assembly

appointments panel. A paper regarding this was presented to and approved by Mission Council in November 2020.

- 5. Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship).** The recruitment for this position had been discussed in detail at the HRAG meeting in March 2020. Following that meeting two unsuccessful recruitment campaigns had taken place and a paper on the current situation had been produced by the General Secretary, the Revd John Bradbury. This outlined a number of concerns including management of the department while the recruitment situation was reviewed. The HRAG meeting in October discussed the paper and agreed to the proposal that a temporary appointment should be made from within the denomination to cover some of the key elements of the role, with the remainder covered by the General Secretariat. HRAG also confirmed that the permanent recruitment process should be suspended until there was a much clearer understanding as to why it had failed. It was agreed to call an additional meeting of HRAG to agree the way forward. This meeting was held in December 2020. It was suggested that one of the issues potential candidates faced was the difficulty of grasping the full scope of the role and the balance of accountabilities which resulted from this. This would be a particular obstacle for those candidates who had not had close involvement with Church House or the role itself. It was agreed that whilst the Job Description correctly described the main elements of the role some of the wording should be updated to aid understanding. It was also agreed to revise the wording of the Job Advertisement to better position the role. This revision would be the one to be published in Reform in February 2021. Given the difficulties being encountered the matter would be kept under constant review.
- 6. Movement of Ministers.** The paper on this, written by the Revd Paul Whittle (Convenor of the Ministries Committee) was reviewed by HRAG. The group welcomed the report and requested that a number of areas which had been highlighted as needing attention should be formalized to avoid misunderstanding and future issues. Examples of this were the taking up of references at an appropriate time in the recruitment / appointments process and the need to review information held in applicant files.
- 7. Coronavirus.** HRAG noted the extra work that had been generated as a result of the pandemic and the impact that this had had on all staff. In particular the impact on HR was noted, most notably related to the difficulty in remote working while dealing with issues such as the furloughing of staff and recruitment via video conferencing. The IT systems in place had facilitated working from home and HR had maintained telephone contact with staff throughout the lockdown. HRAG wished to recognize the contribution that had been made by so many in what had been a very difficult time.

Paper P1

Changes to the Appeals Process

Law and Polity Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Michael Hopkins clerk@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council resolves: (a) to update the Appeals process in the Rules of procedure, as set out in paper P1 of Mission Council March 2021. (b) delegates to the Officers of Assembly to decide a date upon which this becomes effective, as soon as adjudicators have been recruited and trained.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Feedback has indicated that it would be helpful to add a 'triage' element to the Appeals process in order to build in more opportunity for mediation, and to allow for the option of dealing with simpler appeals without a hearing.
Main points	LPAG is proposing a number of amendments to the Appeals process. Most are minor changes to clarify the existing principles. The change of substance is the introduction of an Adjudicator selected from a panel appointed by General Assembly. Their role is to carry out an initial assessment of the merits of an Appeal, consider whether there should be mediation between the parties and if so to appoint a mediator, and to make a recommendation as to whether an appeal should proceed on the papers alone or with a hearing at which parties attend. The decisions of the Adjudicator can be reviewed.
Previous relevant documents	N/A
Consultation has taken place with...	Those who offered feedback on the Appeals process.

Summary of impact

Financial	Negligible.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Lessens risk of reputational damage.

This is the current text of the Appeals Process – section 9 of the Rules of Procedure:

9. Appeal, Reference and Constitutional Review (structure, paragraph 5)

9.0 Limit of applicability.

In single congregational Local Ecumenical Partnerships and Union Churches, these rules shall only apply to business that clearly comes under the jurisdiction of the United Reformed Church, or when it has been agreed by the participating denominations that these rules be used. In such a case, ecumenical representatives may serve on a Commission, as agreed by all parties.

I – Appeals

9.1 The right to appeal from a decision of a Church Meeting belongs to

- (a) the Elders' Meeting of the local church concerned and
- (b) any dissident.

9.2 The right to appeal from a decision of an ecumenical area meeting belongs: 9.2.1 In the case of a decision in appeal proceedings, to

- (a) the appellant in those proceedings,
- (b) the respondent council in those proceedings and
- (c) any dissident;

9.2.2 In the case of any other decision, to

- (a) the Church Meeting of any local church of the URC subject to the oversight of the area meeting and
- (b) any dissident.

9.3 The right to appeal from a decision of a synod belongs:

9.3.1 In the case of a decision in appeal proceedings, to

- (a) the appellant in those proceedings,
- (b) the respondent council in those proceedings and
- (c) any dissident;

9.3.2 In the case of any other decision, to

- (a) the Church Meeting of any local church subject to the oversight of the synod, (b) any ecumenical area meeting subject to the oversight of the synod and
- (c) any dissident.

9.4 The following time limits apply to appeals governed by rules 9.1 to 9.3:

9.4.1 The potential appellant must, within fourteen days of the decision, request the Clerk of the respondent council, in writing, to supply a copy of the minute of the decision.

9.4.2 This copy minute must be supplied within fourteen days of the request.

9.4.3 Within fourteen days of receiving such copy minute, the appellant must notify his or her desire to appeal, in writing, to the Clerk of the council with jurisdiction.

9.4.4 For the purpose of rule 9.4.1, the date of a decision shall be

- (i) in the case of decisions taken at a plenary meeting of the synod, the date of that meeting;
- (ii) in the case of decisions taken by officers or committees under powers delegated by the synod, the earliest of the following:
 - (a) the date on which the decision is communicated in writing to the appellant (or to Church Secretaries, if the appellant is a local church);
 - (b) the date of the next plenary meeting of the synod after the decision.

9.4.5 An appellant may appeal out of time, giving reasons for the delay, but such an appeal shall only be entertained if the Moderator and Clerk of the council with jurisdiction, after considering the reasons given for the delay and (if they think fit) inviting comments on behalf of the respondent council, so directs in the interests of the Church or of fairness.

9.5 On receiving due notice of a desire to appeal, the Clerk of the council with jurisdiction must forthwith notify the Clerk of the respondent council. The effect of this shall be to stay the action of the respondent council pending the decision in the appeal proceedings, unless the council with jurisdiction, on the application of the respondent council, lifts the stay.

II – References

- 9.6 A council of the church wishing to refer a dispute or difference for resolution by a wider council under paragraph 5.2 of the structure may do so either without taking any decision of its own on the subject matter, or by submitting a decision it has already taken to the wider council's judgment.
- 9.7 The effect of a resolution to refer shall be to stay any action or further decision of the referring council on the subject matter of the reference pending a decision on that reference, unless the council with jurisdiction, on the application of the referring council, lifts the stay.
- 9.8 In either case the Clerk of the referring council must, within fourteen days of the resolution to refer, transmit to the Clerk of the council with jurisdiction a copy minute of the resolution and the names of any members of the referring council who appear willing and able to present the issues to the council with jurisdiction.

III – Constitutional review

- 9.9 A decision of a synod or any more local council of the church which seems to be in contravention of the Basis of Union or the structure of the URC, the Rules of Procedure, or a binding resolution of the General Assembly, and which is not already the subject of an appeal or reference may be considered for constitutional review on the application of
- 9.9.1 In the case of a synod decision,
(a) any three members of the General Assembly or
(b) a majority decision of the Assembly Officers
(c) the resolution of any two Church Meetings within the synod taking the decision.
- 9.9.2 In the case of any other decision,
(a) any three members of the synod having oversight of the council taking the decision who are not also members of the council taking the decision or
- 9.9.3 in any case, of a council or person who would be entitled to appeal from the decision.
- 9.10 A council or person wishing to apply for constitutional review of a decision must request the Clerk of the respondent council, in writing, to supply a copy of the minute of the decision. This must be done within fourteen days after the applicant has become aware of the decision. The copy minute must be supplied within fourteen days of the request. Within fourteen days of receiving such copy minute, the applicant must notify his or her request for a review, in writing setting out their reasons, to the Clerk of the council with jurisdiction. In case of urgency the request may be notified in advance of receiving the copy minute.
- 9.11 The Clerk of the council with jurisdiction must forthwith notify the Clerk of the respondent council of the application, and the effect of this shall be to stay the action of the respondent council pending the decision on the review.

IV – Commissions, their procedure and their reports

- 9.12 As soon as the Clerk of the council with jurisdiction has received due notice of an appeal or reference the Officers of Assembly (in the case of the General Assembly), the executive committee or other body charged with the synod's business between sessions (in the case of a synod), or the corresponding organ of an ecumenical area meeting (in the case of such meeting) shall appoint a commission to hear the case and report to the full council. The commission shall consist of five members of the council with jurisdiction representing at least three different churches within that council, except that one person who is not such a member may be appointed in respect of some particular relevant expertise. That person must be a member of the United Reformed Church or, in the case of an ecumenical area meeting only, of one of the other denominations represented on the meeting. No individual personally concerned with the case may serve on the commission. The commission shall proceed as it sees fit subject to the following principles.

- 9.13 An appellant, or the applicants for constitutional review, shall have the right and may be required to appear at a meeting of the commission. A council referring a dispute or difference for resolution must also appear, unless the individuals named under rule 9.8 appear and the commission considers itself adequately informed regarding the issues in dispute. A respondent council must also appear in support of its decision.
- 9.14 Individual parties appear in person; a council of the church appears by two or more members authorised by the council to represent it.
- 9.15 Appeals, references and applications for constitutional review shall be accompanied by all relevant records and papers. Appellants and applicants shall be entitled to see such papers as they deem necessary in order to bring their case before the commission.
- 9.16 Commissions proceed in the matter in the following order:
- (a) call for and read minutes and papers relevant to the case
 - (b) hear and question the parties
 - (c) consider and decide upon their report in the absence of the parties
 - (d) the parties being recalled, intimate the decision to them
 - (e) report in writing to the council with jurisdiction through its Clerk, who supplies copies of the report to the parties.
- 9.17 The decision of the commission shall have effect as a decision of the full council that commissioned it. The commission's report shall be presented to the council with jurisdiction for information only, at the council's next meeting.
- 9.18 Decisions of the council in 9.17 may be appealed to the next wider council according to 9.1 above.
- 9.19 If a decision of any council of the church is reversed or declared a nullity on appeal or constitutional review, or the decision of a wider council substituted for it, the Clerk of the respondent council must annotate accordingly the record of the decision in that council's minute book, and enter in the minute book a copy of the wider council's decision.

V – Definitions

- 9.20 Throughout rule 9:

'appellant' means the person or council appealing to a wider council of the church

'Clerk', in relation to a Church Meeting, means the Church Secretary, and in relation to an ecumenical area meeting, means its secretary.

'constitutional review' has the meaning ascribed in paragraph 5.3 of the structure of the URC.

'council with jurisdiction' means the council competent to hear a particular appeal, reference or constitutional review.

'days' means days absolutely.

'decision' of a council of the church includes an express decision not to take any action, or the refusal by any council (or by the person presiding at its meeting) to consider a proposal for such action.

'decision in appeal proceedings' means the decision of a wider council of the church on appeal from a more local council.

'dissentient', in relation to any decision of a council of the church, means a member of that council, or a person directly affected by a decision of that council, who dissents from the decision.

'ecumenical area meeting' means an area of ecumenical cooperation as defined under paragraph 2(5) of the structure.

'general decision' means any decision of a council of the church except a decision in appeal proceedings.

'minute' of a decision includes, where no formal minute was made, a record of the decision made by the Clerk of the respondent council at the request of an appellant or a person applying for constitutional review

'Moderator', in relation to a council with jurisdiction, includes the presiding member, by whatever title, of an ecumenical area meeting. In relation to the General Assembly, the Moderators shall agree between themselves which one is to act in relation to a particular appeal as soon as it is notified, and the term 'Moderator' in this rule shall thereafter apply only to the Moderator so acting. A Moderator in the sense of this rule may however appoint a deputy to act under the rule throughout a particular appeal.

'respondent council' means the council of the church whose decision is currently under appeal to a wider council or has been referred for constitutional review.

This is the proposed new text of the Appeals Process – section 9 of the Rules of Procedure:

9. Appeal, Reference and Constitutional Review (structure, paragraph 5)

9.0 Limit of applicability. In single congregational Local Ecumenical Partnerships and Union Churches, these rules shall only apply to business that clearly comes under the jurisdiction of the United Reformed Church, or when it has been agreed by the participating denominations that these rules be used. In such a case, ecumenical representatives may serve on a Commission, as agreed by all parties.

I – Appeals

9.1 The right to appeal from a decision / action of a Church Meeting belongs to:

- (a) the elders 'meeting of the local church concerned and
- (b) any dissentient.

9.2 The right to appeal from a decision / action of an ecumenical area meeting belongs:

9.2.1 In the case of a decision in appeal proceedings, to:

- (a) the appellant in those proceedings,
- (b) the respondent council in those proceedings and
- (c) any dissentient;

9.2.2 In the case of any other decision, to:

- (a) the Church Meeting of any local church of the URC subject to the oversight of the area meeting and
- (b) any dissentient.

9.3 The right to appeal from a decision / action of a synod belongs:

9.3.1 In the case of a decision in appeal proceedings, to

- (a) the appellant in those proceedings,
- (b) the respondent council in those proceedings and

- (c) any dissident;
- 9.3.2 In the case of any other decision / action, to (a) the Church Meeting of any local church subject to the oversight of the synod,
 - (b) any ecumenical area meeting subject to the oversight of the synod and
 - (c) any dissident.
- 9.4 The following time limits apply to appeals governed by rules 9.1 to 9.3:
 - 9.4.1 The potential appellant must, within fourteen days of the decision / action, request the Clerk of the respondent council, in writing, to supply a copy of the minute of the decision or if there is no minute of the decision a statement which explains the nature of the decision which has led to the actions which support the appeal.
 - 9.4.2 This copy minute / statement must be supplied within fourteen days of the request.
 - 9.4.3 Within fourteen days of receiving such copy minute / statement, the appellant must notify his or her desire to appeal setting out the grounds of appeal in writing, to the Clerk of the council with jurisdiction together with confirmation of whether they are prepared to enter mediation.
 - 9.4.4 For the purpose of rule 9.4.1, the date of a decision shall be:
 - (i) in the case of decisions that have been taken at a plenary meeting of the synod, the date of that meeting;
 - (ii) in the case of decisions taken by officers or committees under powers delegated by the synod, the earliest of the following:
 - (a) the date on which the decision is communicated in writing to the appellant (or to Church Secretaries, if the appellant is a local church);
 - (b) the date of the next plenary meeting of the synod after the decision.
 - (iii) In the case of an action, the date upon which it reasonably became known that the action was as a result of a decision or apparent decision that has been made.
 - 9.4.5 An appellant may appeal out of time, giving reasons for the delay, but such an appeal shall only be entertained if, the Moderator and Clerk of the council with jurisdiction, after considering the reasons given for the delay and, (if they think fit) inviting comments on behalf of the respondent council, so directs it is in the interests of the Church or of fairness.
- 9.5 On receiving due notice of a desire to appeal, the Clerk of the council with jurisdiction must forthwith notify the Clerk of the respondent council. The effect of this shall be to stay the action of the respondent council pending the decision in the appeal proceedings, unless the council with jurisdiction, on the application of the respondent council, lifts the stay.

II – References

- 9.6 A council of the church wishing to refer a dispute or difference for resolution by a wider council under paragraph 5.2 of the structure, may do so, either without taking any decision of its own on the subject matter, or by submitting a decision it has already taken to the wider council's judgment.
- 9.7 The effect of a resolution to refer shall be to stay any action or further decision of the referring council on the subject matter of the reference pending a decision on that reference, unless the council with jurisdiction, on the application of the referring council, lifts the stay.
- 9.8 In either case the Clerk of the referring council must, within fourteen days of the resolution to refer, transmit to the Clerk of the council with jurisdiction a copy minute of the resolution and the names of any members of the referring council who appear willing and able to present the issues to the council with jurisdiction.

III – Constitutional review

- 9.9 A decision / action of a synod or any local council of the church which seems to be in

- contravention of the Basis of Union or the structure of the URC, the Rules of Procedure, or a binding resolution of the General Assembly, and which is not already the subject of an appeal or reference may be considered for constitutional review on the application of ;
- 9.9.1 in the case of a synod decision / action:
- (a) any three members of the General Assembly or
 - (b) a majority decision of the Assembly Officers
 - (c) the resolution of any two Church Meetings within the synod taking the decision
- 9.9.2 in the case of any other decision / action,
- (a) any three members of the synod having oversight of the council taking the decision who are not also members of the council taking the decision or
- 9.9.3 in any case, of a council or person who would be entitled to appeal from the decision.
- 9.10 A council or person wishing to apply for constitutional review of a decision / action must request the Clerk of the respondent council, in writing, to supply a copy of the minute of the decision. This must be done within fourteen days after the applicant has become aware of the decision. The copy minute must be supplied within fourteen days of the request. Within fourteen days of receiving such copy minute, the applicant must notify his or her request for a review in writing, setting out their reasons, to the Clerk of the council with jurisdiction. In case of urgency the request may be notified in advance of receiving the copy minute.
- 9.11 The Clerk of the council with jurisdiction must forthwith notify the Clerk of the respondent council of the application, the effect of which shall be to stay the action of the respondent council pending the decision on the review.

IV – Appeal Adjudication, commissions, their procedures and their decisions and reports

- 9.12 As soon as the Clerk of the council with jurisdiction has received due notice of an appeal or reference they shall within 14 days appoint a single adjudicator from the standing panel of Appeal Adjudicators to carry out a preliminary assessment of the appeal on the papers in order to adjudge its merits. Subject to 9.17 the review will normally be concluded within 14 days after the appointment of the Adjudicator.
- 9.13 The Appeal Adjudicators Standing Panel is appointed by General Assembly and consists of five people with appropriate skills.
- 9.14 When considering the merits of an appeal the Adjudicator will consider issues such as, but not limited to, whether the appeal is malicious, vexatious, amounts to harassment or is specious or otherwise shows no arguable case for interfering with the decision which is the subject of the appeal.
- 9.15 The Adjudicator shall within seven days of their appointment request the Respondent to the appeal to provide their response to the appeal within 14 days of the request and, to indicate their willingness or otherwise to enter into mediation.
- 9.16 The Adjudicator may issue such directions to the parties to the appeal, as considered necessary, if it is considered that an early resolution of the dispute may be achieved or, if additional material is required, to assist the adjudicator obtain a better understanding of the issues.
- 9.17 If both parties agree, the Adjudicator may, within 14 days of receipt of the respondent's response, refer the parties to a Mediator. Mediation shall be for an initial period of up to one month, with the facility to extend for a second period of one month. The Adjudicator may also conclude the mediation at any stage on acceptance of advice from the Mediator. If the parties reach agreement regarding the subject of the appeal within the mediation, the details shall be recorded in writing by the Mediator and signed by both parties and sent to the Adjudicator. On the receipt of the signed agreement by the

Adjudicator the appeal will be at an end. If agreement is not reached between the parties the appeal will proceed in accordance with 9.18.

- 9.18 If the appeal has not been concluded by mediation, the matter will proceed to be considered by a Commission unless the Adjudicator considers that it has no merit. The Adjudicator's decision with supporting reasons shall be sent to the parties and to the Clerk to the Council with Jurisdiction within 14 days of the decision being made. Within 14 days of receipt of the decision the Clerk to the Council with Jurisdiction will appoint a Commission to hear the appeal.
- 9.19 The decision of the Adjudicator may also include a recommendation to the Commission that the appeal is suitable to be heard on the consideration of the papers alone without the need for the attendance of the parties. It will be for the Commission to decide whether to proceed in this way. Should it decide to do so its reasons in support should be included as part of its decision on the appeal.
- 9.20 If the Adjudicator decides that the grounds advanced for the appeal are without merit, do not show an arguable case for interference with the decision that is the subject of the appeal and that the appeal should be dismissed their decision with written reasons in support shall be sent to the parties and to the Clerk of the council with jurisdiction within 14 days of the decision.
- 9.21 Should the appellant not accept the adjudicator's decision in 9.18 or 9.20 or one of the parties objects to the recommendation in 9.19, an application can be made for the decision or recommendation to be reviewed. To initiate a review the appellant or respondent must send a written request with accompanying reasons in support together with a copy of the decision or recommendation of the Adjudicator to the Clerk of the Council with Jurisdiction within 14 days of receiving the Adjudicator's decision.
- 9.22 On receipt of a written request for a review the Clerk to the Council with Jurisdiction or the corresponding officer of an ecumenical area meeting (in the case of such meeting) shall within 14 days of receipt of the request appoint two Adjudicators from the Appeal Adjudicators standing panel to act as the Appeal Review Panel to review the adjudicator's decision.
- 9.23 The Review shall be concluded within 14 days and will consider the papers available to the Adjudicator along with their decision, reasons and the request for the review from the Appellant or party. The Review decision shall be sent to the appellant and the Clerk to the Council with Jurisdiction within 14 days of it being reached.
- 9.24 On completion of the review the written decision of the Appeal Review Panel with accompanying reasons shall be that:
- The decision of the Adjudicator is overturned as the appeal shows an arguable case which should be remitted to a Commission for hearing or;
 - The decision of the Appeal Adjudicator is upheld, there being no arguable case for interfering with the decision of the Adjudicator, the appeal is dismissed.
 - The recommendation to the Appeal Commission that the appeal proceeds upon the papers remains or is removed.
- 9.25 A decision of the Appeal Review Panel to uphold the decision of the Adjudicator to dismiss the appeal must be unanimous and if not the appeal will be referred by the Clerk to the Council with Jurisdiction for consideration at a hearing by an Assembly Commission in accordance with 9.19.
- 9.26 The decision of the Appeal review Panel is final and not subject to appeal.

V - Commission hearings

- 9.27 As soon as the Clerk of the council with jurisdiction or the corresponding officer of an ecumenical area meeting (in the case of such meeting) receives a decision with supporting reasons from the Appeal Adjudicator or the Appeal Review Panel that the appeal should be referred to a Commission for a hearing they will appoint within 14 days of receipt of the decision a Commission to hear the appeal and to report to the wider council.
- 9.28 The Commission shall consist of three members of the council with jurisdiction representing at least two different churches within that council, except that one person who is not such a member may be appointed in respect of some particular relevant expertise. That person must be a member of the United Reformed Church or, in the case of an ecumenical area meeting only, of one of the other denominations represented on the meeting. No individual personally concerned with the case may serve on the commission. The commission shall proceed as it sees fit subject to the following principles.
- 9.29 An appellant, or the applicants for constitutional review, shall have the right and may be required to appear at a meeting of the commission. A council referring a dispute or difference for resolution must also appear, unless the individuals named under rule 9.8 appear and the commission considers itself adequately informed regarding the issues in dispute. A respondent council must also appear in support of its decision.
- 9.30 Individual parties appear in person; a council of the church appears by two or more members authorised by the council to represent it.
- 9.31 Appeals, references and applications for constitutional review shall be accompanied by all relevant records and papers. Appellants and applicants shall be entitled to see such papers as they deem necessary in order to bring their case before the commission.
- 9.32 Commissions proceed in the matter in the following order:
- (a) call for and read minutes, papers, and any additional material relevant to the appeal.
 - (b) hear submissions from and question the parties.
 - (c) consider and decide upon the appeal in the absence of the parties. Subject to the discretion of the Commission the parties may be recalled and receive its decision with reasons on the appeal.
 - (d) If the parties are not recalled in accordance with paragraph (c) above then within 14 days of the appeal hearing it shall send its written decision with reasons to the council with jurisdiction through its Clerk, who copies of the report to the parties.
- 9.33 The decision of the commission shall have effect as a decision of the full council that commissioned it. The commission's report shall be presented to the council with jurisdiction for information only, at the council's next meeting.
- 9.34 Decisions of the council in 9.33 may be appealed to the next wider council according to 9.1 ,9.2 and 9.3.
- 9.35 If a decision of any council of the church is reversed or declared a nullity on appeal or constitutional review, or the decision of a wider council substituted for it, the Clerk of the respondent council must annotate accordingly the record of the decision in that council's minute book, and enter in the minute book a copy of the wider council's decision.

VI – Service of documents

- 9.36
- 9.36.1 The parties must provide a postal address and/or an email address for the service of papers and correspondence, indicating their preferred method of service on the Notice of

Appeal and the Response to the Appeal. If this information is not provided by the appellant the appeal will not be accepted.

- 9.36.2 If service is indicated to be by post this shall be by first class post and takes place two clear days after the date of posting to the postal address given by the party. This period excludes the day of posting, Saturday, Sunday and public holidays.
- 9.36.3 Where service is indicated by e mail, service will be on the same day that the e mail is sent if it is sent before 4.00pm and after this time the next day.

Definitions

9.37 Throughout rule 9:

‘action’: means any action/inaction or consequence of a decision or apparent decision. .

‘appellant’: means the person or council appealing to a wider council of the church

‘Clerk’, in relation to a Church Meeting, means the Church Secretary, and in relation to an ecumenical area meeting, means its secretary.

‘Clerk of the council with jurisdiction’ : means the Clerk of the appropriate council or the officer of an ecumenical area or their appointed deputy.

‘constitutional review’ :has the meaning ascribed in paragraph 5.3 of the structure of the URC.

‘council with jurisdiction’: means the council competent to hear a particular appeal, reference or constitutional review.

‘days’ :means calendar days.

‘decision’ of a council of the church includes an express decision not to take any action, or the refusal by any council (or by the person presiding at its meeting) to consider a proposal for such action.

‘decision in appeal proceedings’ :means the decision of a wider council of the church on appeal from a more local council.

‘dissentient’: in relation to any decision of a council of the church, means a member of that council, or a person directly affected by a decision of that council, who dissents from the decision.

‘ecumenical area meeting’: means an area of ecumenical cooperation as defined under paragraph 2(5) of the structure.

‘general decision’: means any decision of a council of the church except a decision in appeal proceedings. ‘minute’ of a decision includes, where no formal minute was made, a record of the decision made by the Clerk of the respondent council at the request of an appellant or a person applying for constitutional review

‘Moderator’, in relation to a council with jurisdiction, includes the presiding member, by whatever title, of an ecumenical area meeting. In relation to the General Assembly, the Moderators shall agree between themselves which one is to act in relation to a particular appeal as soon as it is notified, and the term ‘Moderator’ in this rule shall thereafter apply only to the Moderator so acting. A Moderator in the sense of this rule may however appoint a deputy to act under the rule throughout a particular appeal.

‘respondent council’: means the council of the church whose decision is currently under appeal to a wider council or has been referred for constitutional review.

Paper T1

Safeguarding Strategic Plan – end of year one

Safeguarding Advisory Group

Basic information

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

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Paper L1 Mission Council, November 2020. Resolution 29 and its two appendices, General Assembly, Book of Reports 2020 (pages 227-254). Paper R3 Mission Council, March 2020. Paper R2 Mission Council, November 2019. Paper R2 Mission Council, May 2019. Paper R2 Mission Council, November 2018.
Consultation has taken place with...	Members of SAG All Synod Safeguarding Officers through the Synod Safeguarding Practice Group (SSPG) Synod Moderators.

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

- 11 In November 2019, Mission Council directed the Safeguarding Advisory Group to oversee the development, implementation, review, and monitoring of the safeguarding strategic plan (2020-2025), and to advise the Mission Council and the General Assembly on its progress. The adoption of the plan has reflected the continuing awareness of the need to protect adults at risk and vulnerable children in any aspect of life in the Church. The Safeguarding Advisory Group has managed this enormous task with the support of the General Assembly safeguarding team at Church House and the commitment of Synod Safeguarding Officers and Advisors to serving local churches throughout a very challenging first year due to pandemic. Led by God's grace, members of the Safeguarding Advisory Group share the first-year report with the members of Mission Council (Appendix I).

- 12 To deliver the plan in fuller and more holistic ways, the Safeguarding Advisory Group decided to fill its vacant co-opted member positions with two representatives from Synod Moderators' Group and Synod Safeguarding Practice Group and invited the safeguarding training and development coordinator to join the group. Revd. Ruth Whitehead, moderator of the South Western Synod, has agreed to serve as SAG member. Her membership brings a wise and experienced moderator into the group and an important link with other moderators. Sharon Barr, synod safeguarding officer in Wessex Synod, and Penny McGee, our Safeguarding Training Coordinator, enhance the safeguarding expertise of the group with their social work ethics, frontline experience, and specialist knowledge.
- 13 The Clerk of the Synod of Wales has also been a great asset to safeguarding work in the Church. Adrian Bulley joined the General Secretariat team, on secondment from the Synod of Wales bringing a wealth of experience of the United Reformed Church. On behalf of General Secretariat, Adrian took responsibility for safeguarding and is working closely with the denomination's safeguarding adviser and the safeguarding team to continue the implementation of the strategic plan and embed safeguarding more clearly within the URC governance structures.
- 14 In addition to work mentioned in the first-year report, members of the Safeguarding Advisory Group (SAG) and Synod Safeguarding Officers (SSO) met in December 2020 to address the feedback related to the Safeguarding Training Framework received from Mission Council. Since this meeting there have been the following changes and updates to this document.

15 Content

- 15.1 The basic training module has been renamed to Foundation Training. All training levels contain discussion of writing risk assessments and advanced training refers directly to writing and reviewing risk assessments for others to complete. All levels of training contain information about support agencies available for participants as well as reference to the need to keep ourselves safe and to recognise subjects that may be more difficult to learn about. Content of the training for the foundation module and the intermediate module currently being used across the denomination is robust and is in line with ecumenical partners training. Feedback from participants suggests they have found the training valuable in embedding safeguarding knowledge.

16 Monitoring of training

- 16.1 As part of the Past Case Review Learning Group report, the URC has made a commitment to ensuring that training and its recording are standardised across the denomination to prevent records being lost, incomplete or inaccurate. SAG will ensure a consistent approach to the recording of training records on the central database in line with the appropriate data privacy policy.

17 Smaller congregations

- 17.1 Mission Council expressed a concern that the safeguarding training framework may not cater for the needs of smaller congregations. The Training Framework has been designed so that the message of safeguarding is universal across the denomination and caters for the congregations that the URC could have rather than the ones that they do have currently. We trust our synod safeguarding officers who know their synods and local churches well and they understand how to tailor their delivery to suit the needs of any church community and deliver a consistent message about safe practices across the URC.

- 17.2 The Training Framework is currently being developed to address concerns that smaller congregations may have and to help this group to understand how the safeguarding training programme is designed to work alongside them, not against them.

18 Participants of training

- 18.1 The recommendations for those who should undertake certain levels of training is largely unchanged with the exception of a clearer distinction being made between youth volunteers and paid employees and which training this group is expected to undertake.
- 18.2 At present it is recognized that mandatory training for volunteers cannot be enforced. However, there is a clear desire to train as many people in safeguarding as possible and to ensure that those in leadership roles have a robust and clear understanding of their responsibilities.

19 Further consultations and ecumenical work

- 19.1 As per the recommendations from Mission Council in November, the Training Framework has been shared with the Youth Moderator for comment as well as Safeguarding Officers and Synod Moderators for updated comments.
- 19.2 We also plan to join forces with the Methodist Church and other denominations in conversations about developing an interdenominational safeguarding information protocol and inform the Mission Council accordingly. Moreover, alongside other denominations, we expect from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) to publish its report on the investigation on Faith Settings and Organisations, in which the United Reformed Church is a core participant. It is important to keep an eye on this statutory inquiry and their next report which is expected in early summer. Their reports from the investigations in the Church of England and Church in Wales, and the Catholic Church already published last autumn bringing into the public realm important issues regarding the effectiveness of current child protection policies, practices and procedures in religious institutions in England and Wales to protect children from child sexual abuse.

20 Concluding remarks

- 20.1 The importance of safeguarding is such that it is vital to address all the identified issues before returning to Mission Council. Therefore, the decision has been made not to bring the Training Framework back to Mission Council until such a time as the above considerations can be ensured across the denomination. It is important to note that all levels of safeguarding are currently being used across the denomination and this has not been impacted by the delay in approving the Training Framework.

Appendix 1

Report for mission council on the first year of implementation of the URC Safeguarding Strategic Plan

1. Executive Summary

1.1 URC mandate on safeguarding responsibilities

Mission Council passed by a two-thirds majority, Resolution 29 in July 2020 which is a mandate for further internal work and developments to acknowledge that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility in the United Reformed Church.

On behalf of the General Assembly, Mission Council directed all local churches and synods and those who oversee safeguarding arrangements in the Church, to implement the Safeguarding Strategic Plan in ways that promote welfare in the URC, the well-being of the community and the individuals with whom the Church comes into contact.

1.2 Launch of Safeguarding Strategic Plan

The URC Safeguarding Strategic Plan, with its six key overarching objectives designed to imbed the principle that “Safeguarding is Everyone’s Business” was wholehearted welcomed by the two hundred and ten participants who attended the online Safeguarding Strategic Plan symposium in October 2020. Participants attended the online launch from every region of the UK and from every discipline within the church, including Synod Officers, Ministers, Elders and Church Safeguarding Coordinators. Momentum from the symposium led to a series of webinars to be coordinated to further the strategic objectives of the plan, namely “the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Mental health,” “Domestic Violence” and “Spiritual abuse”. The first webinar is scheduled for March 2021 with nearly one hundred bookings to date, with the expectation of many others to follow.

1.3 Communication

An internal communication network has been established which includes a quarterly safeguarding newsletter with national and regional news, a new URC central website, and events following the publication and distribution of the URC safeguarding policy and guidance document, Good Practice 5. This ensures that research-based changes to policy or practice are communicated throughout the URC quickly and effectively by the denominational safeguarding team.

1.4 Monitoring and review

Monitoring and review of delivery of the key tasks of the Strategic Plan is being undertaken within the Safeguarding Advisory Group, based on data supplied by the Church Safeguarding Coordinators in the Annual Safeguarding Returns. Following receipt of 2020 returns, the monitoring format is being modified to further reflect and flush out the key targets within the Strategic plan and to reflect percentages of compliance of the tasks across the denomination. Two additional tasks to deliver the strategy had been identified as essential and a priority namely, a process for the management of offenders known to pose a risk, and a standardised central case management system. These tasks are well under way with the former to be completed in March 2021 and the latter by the end of 2021.

1.5 Survivors of church based abuse

A URC Reference group for those who have experienced abuse is an important development which has been initiated in 2020, inclusive of support to facilitate the healing process for survivors. It is hoped that the URC will be able to work with specialist charities to understand how to support those who have experienced abuse to engage in conversations in a safe and meaningful way. The URC are currently developing a safe process and protocol before inviting survivors to be part of the process.

The inclusion of safeguarding expertise within the Ministerial Disciplinary process is an important step to further embed good safeguarding ideology and practices within the URC. This step is also reflective of the learning from the IICSA reports into the conduct of the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church.

1.6 URC’s first Annual Safeguarding Report

Compiled from the data in the Annual Church Safeguarding Returns, the first denominational Annual Safeguarding Report was presented to General Assembly in July 2020 and as such provided the first snapshot of safeguarding in practice in the URC. This is the basis upon which future safeguarding practice can be compared and contrasted, trends identified, and training programmes adjusted.

Concerningly, the report identified several churches without a safeguarding policy in place while others were not adhering to Good Practice 5. Notably, LEPs were generally trusting and using other denominations' safeguarding policies.

A key lesson learned was the weakness of the Church to manage safeguarding risks and allow offenders to worship if safe to do so. This indicates that managing that risk is a number one priority for the URC. A risk assessment form to assess offenders and those who may pose a risk was approved by the Safeguarding Advisory Group and a Good Practice 5 appendix to support this is underdevelopment. The URC are also looking into sourcing specialist training for Synod Safeguarding Officers to equip them with the necessary skills to manage conduct these assessments.

1.7 Synod Safeguarding Development Plan

In July 2020, £34K funding within a Synod Safeguarding Development Plan (SSDP) was made available to synods on application to support the implementation of the Strategic Plan. Eleven synods who applied had their applications agreed while a further synod request was achieved through a different funding route. Full details of the applications are contained in Appendix 3.

1.8 URC Safeguarding team

Crucial to the delivery of the URC Strategic plan, is the availability of a fully staffed denominational safeguarding Team, supporting the fully trained and competent Safeguarding Officer in each synod. They, in turn, support and advise the Church Safeguarding Coordinator within each church in the URC. The Safeguarding Advisory Group then review evidence of the delivery of the plan through the Safeguarding Strategic Plan Monitoring process.

2. Summary of implementation of Safeguarding Strategic Plan

Plans are under way within the denominational and synod safeguarding teams to progress each of the 29 key tasks within the six overarching objectives, with seven of these tasks prioritised for particular action in 2020 (see below). Due to the global pandemic, it is recognised that these tasks might not necessarily come to fruition in this calendar year, but a coherent safeguarding foundation has nevertheless been created.

Task No	Task	Planning stage	Ongoing	Partially Complete	Complete
4.5	Ensure people in positions of leadership and accountability are aware of any changes to safeguarding policy and practice				√
4.1	Update URC's safeguarding policy every two years following the publication of Good Practice 5 (annually for each local church)			√	
4.1	Connect safeguarding policy and procedures with URC's disciplinary processes, especially those related to ministers/CRCWs			√	
2.3	Consult and engage with survivors and relevant groups and organisations in all safeguarding developments		√		

2.4	Use internal or external specialists to support local congregations affected by serious incidents of abuse		√		
5.5.	Value the expertise of and contribute to continuous development of Synod Safeguarding Officers		√		
6.4	Endorse close partnership and knowledge exchange of best practice with other denominations to support LEP's and church communities		√		

A full analysis of these tasks are included in the Appendix 2.

Appendix 2

An analysis of the delivery of seven key tasks:

Key Task	Actions	Ongoing	Partially Complete	Complete
4.5. Ensure people in positions of leadership and accountability are aware of any changes to safeguarding policy and Practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quarterly Safeguarding Newsletter created Newsletter includes denominational and synod safeguarding information Communication team are updating safeguarding webpages with space for safeguarding news, and a new section entitled "Safeguarding Resources" to provide additional advice and guidance for synods and local churches. 			√ √ √
4.3 Update URC's safeguarding policy every two years following the publication of Good Practice 5 (annually for each local church).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good Practice 5 was produced in January 2020 following a whole church consultation Good Practice 5 was circulated to all churches by the end of February 2020 Good Practice 5 has 35 Appendices, 30 which are now available online with three still being developed and two being finalised by the Graphics Team Joined up working with the Equalities Committee to develop guidance and training related to Bullying and Harassment 		√	√ √ √

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New resources created include the Modern Slavery Awareness Guidance and Training and Lone Working Guidance. 			√
4.4 Connect safeguarding policy and procedures with URC's disciplinary processes, especially those related to ministers / CRCWs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safeguarding advice from the Synod Safeguarding Officer is incorporated into initial Ministerial Disciplinary Process Safeguarding advice from Denominational Safeguarding Adviser to Ministerial Hearing and Panel recommended to MIND for consideration within the Ministerial Disciplinary Process Disciplinary Process for Office Holders in process with Secretary for Ministries Pastoral Supervision to take into account safeguarding considerations within its remit. 		√	√
2.3 Consult and engage with survivors, relevant groups, and organisations in all safeguarding developments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation and direct engagement with survivors regarding the development of the safeguarding training framework that seeks to standardise safeguarding training across the denomination A draft project plan has been prepared by working group of Synod Safeguarding Officers and Safeguarding Advisory Group members and shared for review with survivors who expressed interest in this work Work commenced on creating reference group to consult and engage regarding safeguarding policies, procedures, and processes in relation to survivors Liaison with other denominations and relevant organisations namely SCIE (Social Care Institute of Excellence), NAPAC (the National Association for People Abused in Childhood), Church of England and the Baptist Church. Publicised SCIE Training on effectively engaging with survivors of abuse in faith-based organisations. Several URC staff attended, and the 	√	√	√

	Denominational Safeguarding Adviser was a panel speaker.			
2.4. Use internal or external specialists to support local congregations affected by serious incidents of abuse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Revd Carla Grosch-Miller's expertise in Congregational Trauma was utilised at the online symposium to launch the Safeguarding Strategic Plan where 212 people were in attendance. The Revd Carla Grosch-Miller also completed two further training sessions to Synod Safeguarding Officers and Church House staff respectively. 			<p>√</p> <p>√</p>
5.5 Value the expertise of and contribute to continuous development of Synod Safeguarding Officers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mission Council approved the terms of reference for the Synod Safeguarding Practice Group (SSPG) in March 2020 SSPG as subgroup of the Safeguarding Advisory Group, are an important step in valuing the expertise and work undertaken by Synod Safeguarding Officers at a synod and local level A series of briefings and online meetings in addition to three scheduled SSPG meetings per annum on account of safeguarding needs during the pandemic The SSPG offers some peer support and the opportunity to share safeguarding practice throughout the Church in alignment with Good Practice 5 Members of the SSPG have developed several Good Practice 5 appendices and guidelines The SSPG provides opportunity for continuous professional development, including training by Dr Carla Grosch Miller. 			<p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p>

<p>6.4. Endorse close partnership and knowledge exchange of best practice with other denominations to support LEP's and church communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denominational Safeguarding Advisor represents URC at Christian Forum for Safeguarding (CFS) • Denominational Safeguarding Adviser elected as Vice Chair of CFS in June 2020 • Denominational Safeguarding Adviser is part of an inter-denominational working group with Baptists and Methodists to conduct a survey regarding safeguarding needs in Local Ecumenical Partnerships • Denominational Safeguarding Adviser is working with Methodists and Church of England to review lessons from the national delivery of safeguarding training • Denominational Safeguarding Adviser is part of consortium of eight denominations working with the NSPCC to establish an online safety project for young people. 	<p>√</p> <p>√</p> <p>√</p>		<p>√</p> <p>√</p>

Appendix 3

Synod Safeguarding Development Plan:

Synod	Amount	Purpose	Target Key Tasks
Northern Yorkshire North Western Mersey Scotland	£10,000 (£2,000 per synod)	Additional working hours for part-time Synod Safeguarding Officers to deliver safeguarding training (refresher and initial) and address a large back log.	1.4, 3.2, 3.4, 4.1, 4.5, 5.1, 5.2, 6.1
Thames North Southern	£2,000	To organise a two-day training session that will bring together all Safeguarding Coordinators and deputies in both synods to help improve understanding of abuse, create relationships and to assist in the implementation of the strategic plan.	1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5
West Midlands	£1,300	For a certified training qualification for the Synod Safeguarding Officer and for the purchase of resources (portable screen, projector and one-year subscription to Zoom) for face-to-face and online training.	1.3, 5
Wales	£15,000	The appointment of a Synod Safeguarding Officer.	1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 4.5, 5.2, 5.4, 5.6
South West	£5,700	An independent review of a serious disciplinary case.	4.4
	£34,000		



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