

Paper A

Factual background on
General Assembly
Assembly Arrangements Committee

Church 2014
United
Church **2014**
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Church **Church** 2014



Paper A

Assembly Arrangements Committee: Factual background on General Assembly

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Dr David Robinson drobinson3@virginmedia.com
Action required	None
Draft resolution(s)	None
Alternative options to consider, if any	n/a

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	This paper should be read alongside Papers Y1 and Y2. It offers further information to help Mission Council to consider the two synod resolutions concerning General Assembly.
Main points	Financial and other practical information made explicit
Previous relevant documents	Paper G of Mission Council October 2012, resolutions 43 and 44 of 2005 General Assembly, and resolutions 51 and 52 of 2006 General Assembly.
Consultation has taken place with...	No one, because this paper is only giving information.

Summary of Impact

Financial	None from this paper, but significant additional expenditure if some of the resolutions which this paper informs are passed.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	n/a

Factual background on General Assembly

N.B.: This paper should be read alongside Papers Y1 and Y2. It offers further information to help Mission Council to consider the two synod resolutions concerning General Assembly.

1 This paper does not seek to address the substance of the issues raised by the Wessex and Wales Synods. Indeed, individual members of the Assembly Arrangements committee have different views on them. Rather, it provides factual information to the Church to enable it to make an informed decision. We are aware that the Medium Term Strategy Group recommended to Mission Council that one more biennial Assembly should be held in 2014 before there is a review on the future arrangements for, and frequency of, meetings of General Assembly.

2 Children's Assembly

The decision not to hold a Children's Assembly was made by Mission Council in October 2012. The 2012 General Assembly decided to cut the budget for General Assembly by one third, and asked Mission Council to agree the shape and form of the 2014 General Assembly. The Assembly Arrangements committee is a servant of the Church and arranges General Assembly as the Church instructs it. If the Church wishes to hold a Children's Assembly in 2016 the Assembly Arrangements committee will be very happy to organise one, providing the Church gives us the money with which to do that. The Church may wish to know that the venue provisionally booked for the 2016 General Assembly (Southport) has more than adequate space suitably and safely to accommodate a Children's Assembly, if that is requested. Costs of the Children's Assembly were £25,000 in 2008 and £33,000 in 2010, in both cases for about 50 children. In 2012 there were only 27 children and the cost was around £20,000.

3 Other matters cut from the General Assembly

The same principles apply to other matters cut from Assembly, such as the greeting of Jubilee Ministers. In 2012 travel and accommodation costs for 25 Jubilee Ministers and their spouses totalled around £3,000, and 2010 for 42 was around £5,000.

4 Move to biennial smaller Assemblies

These decisions were made by the General Assembly within the Catch the Vision process. The factors below provide further information to enable the Church to consider how it responds to the resolution from Wessex Synod.

5 Finance

5a One of the biggest issues is financial. Currently each General Assembly has a budget of £200,000. As members will find in 2014, this has not been spent profligately; indeed, those who have been to previous Assemblies will feel a distinct atmosphere of austerity in the arrangements.

5b For 2014, travel costs will be paid by Assembly members. The major elements in the Assembly budget are:

Accommodation and Meals	£70,000
Hall and Facilities	£60,000
Printing, Preparations, Equipment, Admin	£40,000

5c There may be scope for further savings. For example, reducing substantially the subsistence allowance would save around £40,000. However, given the unpopularity of such moves so far it cannot be assumed that proposals for further cuts would be passed.

5d Mission Council's decision was simply that accommodation would not be booked and paid for centrally. Synods which have chosen to make block bookings for their representatives did so on their own initiative.

5e A shorter Assembly would reduce the accommodation and hall hire costs, but not all other costs.

5f Because Assembly meets every two years, but the Church runs an annual budget, the £200,000 budget for General Assembly is spread across two years in the accounts, meaning that the figure shown is £100,000 per year. Those who read a budget showing this should not be under the erroneous illusion that an Assembly can be delivered for £100,000. In essence, a return to annual Assemblies means the Church will need to find about £100,000 per year by cutting that from other areas of the budget.

6 Staffing

6a Up to, and including the 2004 General Assembly, four paid staff were responsible for organising the Assembly, namely the office and personnel manager, his PA, the facilities manager, and the general secretary's PA. The office and personnel manager's post was reorganised and the Assembly lost the services of his successor (solely responsible for HR) and PA. The general secretary and deputy general secretary came to share a PA, who also worked for the Assembly moderators, and so did not have time for General Assembly work. Thus we have moved from four staff members responsible for General Assembly to one, whose primary responsibilities are in other areas.

6b One reason for the move to biennial Assemblies was precisely because of staff pressures. Indeed, even now we have had to recruit a temporary member of staff for part of each Assembly year, funded from within our budget. Were the Church to return to annual Assemblies, staffing would have to be addressed as part of that decision. We are blessed with a very able Assembly organiser, but it is worth bearing in mind that were we to be in the position of needing a new staff member (something we hope not to be for a long time) the skills for event organisation do not automatically go with those for facilities management.

7 Numbers attending

7a Were Assembly to become annual, consideration would need to be given to the numbers attending. If there were fewer representatives, this would increase the range of venues possible, and hence should decrease venue hire costs. It is worth noting that some synods appear to be struggling to fill their places while others have a waiting list.

7b A number of costs are fixed, regardless of the number of people attending, so a reduction in costs would not be proportional to the decrease in number of representatives. For instance, the cost of microphones and projection systems, and venue hire, is the same whether 300 or 400 people are in the room. If the Church does not wish to cut numbers attending, it needs to be aware that it will be hard to reduce the cost.

8 The role of Assembly moderators

The Church will need to consider how many moderators serve and for what term.

9 The “work cycle”

One criticism of annual Assemblies was that committees felt their work could only really begin after the summer in September and had to be finished by March for presentation to Assembly. This led to some committees reporting only in alternate years. The Church would need to consider what it expected of its committees.