

# Paper M3

Consensus Decision Making  
Mission Council Advisory Group

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



# Paper M3

## Mission Council Advisory Group: Consensus Decision Making

### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Roberta Rominger roberta.rominger@urc.org.uk
<b>Action required</b>	Discussion and decision
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>Alternative options to consider, if any</b>	

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	The current consensus adviser's post finishes in 2014. Mission Council is asked to consider how the URC's ongoing development in consensus decision making can be ensured.
<b>Main points</b>	There is nothing in Assembly or Mission Council decisions that requires the appointment of a Consensus Adviser. Various options, formal and informal, are possible to take the work forward.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	May 2009 Mission Council paper
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Assembly officers and present and previous consensus advisers.

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	Formal reflection and training would incur costs; some money would be saved by not having a dedicated consensus adviser at Mission Council and Assembly.
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	

# Consensus Decision Making: the way forward

There was warm affirmation following the November 2013 Mission Council meeting for how well consensus decision-making had operated and what it had contributed to the spirit and outcomes of the meeting. As the current consensus adviser completes her term in July 2014, Mission Council is invited to consider how the United Reformed Church's development in consensus decision-making might best be taken forward.

One option is the appointment of a new consensus adviser. The clerk has researched the origins of the post. Here are her findings:

- Neither the documents in support of the adoption of Consensus Decision Making nor the Standing Orders which implemented it make any mention of a consensus adviser.
- In December 2008 Mission Council passed a resolution from MCAG which appointed Elizabeth Nash as consensus adviser "until General Assembly 2010 in the first instance".
- In May 2009 proposals were brought to Mission Council (see the first item of Session 2) which included at 1.10 "A consensus adviser be nominated by Nominations to both General Assembly and Mission Council, and four consensus facilitators be nominated by Nominations to General Assembly". The minutes record the decisions reached for many of these proposals, but do not record what was decided concerning this one. There is no reference to it in subsequent minutes. No resolution in these terms was presented to Assembly.
- In 2010 Assembly appointed Pauline Barnes as consensus Adviser until Assembly 2014.
- The Standing Orders include in the remit of the facilitation group "help and support the Moderator". (see SO 2c.(b))

The clerk concludes from this that Assembly, although it has appointed a consensus adviser, has not resolved that there should always be one. The previous clerk, James Breslin, treated the post as transitional in anticipation of the day when all procedural advice would once again lie with the clerk. If Mission Council decides that the appointment should not be filled from July onwards, there is no need for a resolution to rescind the post: it simply ends.

The Assembly officers have conferred about this and believe that it is no longer necessary to have a consensus adviser at the Moderator's elbow giving procedural advice, especially when there is a clerk at the other elbow speaking into the other ear. The clerk is confident that she can give appropriate procedural advice as required.

It is appropriate in consensus decision-making for an issue to be presented without any pre-determined recommendations as to the way forward. Mission Council is therefore asked to consider:

Should another consensus adviser be appointed? What would his/her remit be?

Alternatively, are there other mechanisms that could be put in place to enable the URC to continue to develop in its use of consensus? The best learning happens through reflection following each council meeting. Is it sufficient to leave it to the Assembly officers to ensure that this happens, encouraging them to include other people in their reflection sessions as appropriate to offer insight and challenge? Or should this responsibility be given explicitly to some group (e.g. Mission Council Advisory Group, Assembly Arrangements Committee)? Might we have designated process observers at each meeting?

If “reflection” is one crucial component in the ongoing development of consensus, “facilitation” is another. How might all Mission Council and Assembly members be encouraged to engage confidently in the decision making of the councils, putting energy, creativity and commitment into process as well as outcomes?