

Paper D2

Education and learning committee

Walking the Way of
Jesus as disciples:
“They who learn as they follow”

United Church 2017
Church 2018
Reformed Church 2018
Church

Paper D2

Education and learning

Walking the way of Jesus as disciples: “they who learn as they follow”

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Professor Neil Messer, Convenor The Revd Fiona Thomas, Secretary fiona.thomas@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Mission Council</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. commends the work done by the education and learning committee towards producing a viable, costed strategy for lay training and congregational development as requested in May 2017 b. endorses the plans for further financial work by the education and learning committee and resource-sharing task group in conjunction with the synods c. and anticipates receiving and adopting the criteria and scoping for a Discipleship Development Fund at its meeting in May 2019.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	The paper uses the results of the information gathering and consultation processes since May 2017 as the basis of a strategy for lay training and congregational development. The first nine pages of the paper describes the strategy. The short Appendix A gives financial detail, and the longer Appendix B provides background information, particularly for people who may be coming to this discussion for the first time.
Main points	<p>Set within the overall vision of the United Reformed Church’s focus on missional discipleship expressed as <i>Walking the Way. Living the life of Jesus today</i>, and incorporating the significant undertaking for the <i>Stepwise</i> programme which Mission Council endorsed in November 2017, the paper puts forward a strategy which connects the vision and the programme. The main points are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the importance of a congregationally-driven needs analysis for discipleship development • the completion of a resource mapping process instigated by the education and learning committee in September 2017 • close financial work to be carried out between the synods by the resource-sharing task group.
Previous relevant documents	Resolution 6, Mission Council May 2017.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synods and Resource Centres for Learning. The Secretary of the resource sharing task group has been co-opted to the education and learning committee for 18 to 24 months from 2017.

Summary of Impact

Financial	One of the outcomes of the strategy is expected to be a clear proposal for using the income from the proceeds of the disposal of the Windermere Centre building for discipleship development.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	No direct impact.

Walking the Way of Jesus as disciples: “They who learn as they follow”

Strategy summary

As God has loved you,
so love the world and its people as you encounter them,
with all the imagination, energy, wisdom and resources available to you.

1. Origins of the strategy

- 1.1 This strategy for individual and congregational development across the United Reformed Church was commissioned from the education and learning committee by Mission Council in May 2017. The appendix to the current paper provides relevant background information and thinking which is summarized in points 1.2-1.6 here.
- 1.2 The education and learning committee has developed a draft strategy through consultation with synods by e-mail and two face to face meetings.
- 1.3 The starting point for the strategy is the URC’s participation in God’s mission to the world as most recently expressed by General Assembly 2010 in relation to Vision2020. The ten statements of Vision2020 indicate the destination and means of journeying for the church’s ongoing pilgrimage.
- 1.4 The strategy is intended to be the connective tissue between the United Reformed Church’s overall approach to missional discipleship embodied in *Walking the Way. Living the life of Jesus today* and programmatic strands of that approach. These include *Stepwise*, the whole church discipleship programme which will become available from September 2018 and the regional offerings developed within individual synods.
- 1.5 Mission Council requested a strategy for lay training and congregational development. Taking heed of unhappiness with the term “lay” which emerged during the consultations with synods, this paper refers to a discipleship development strategy. One of its outcomes will be a discipleship development fund.
- 1.6 The sources for the proposed discipleship development fund will become clearer during the implementation of the strategy during 2018. One of the potential sources identified so far is the annual income from the proceeds of the disposal of the Windermere Centre building.

2. Walking with a purpose

- 2.1 The goal of the discipleship development strategy is that the people of the United Reformed Church are equipped to:
 - a. participate joyfully and generously in the mission of God to the world

- b. take the challenges, resources and responses to mission seriously
- c. walk the way of Jesus and live the life of discipleship.

2.2 This strategy seeks to help individuals, congregations, and the Councils of the church to 'Walk the Way' and 'Live the life of Jesus today'. It is developed mindful of a variety of contexts, including the lived reality of the URC today with its challenges and opportunities, the variety of communities and settings (geographical and network based) within which congregations and individuals live, the changing place of religion in society, the faith passed on to us and the hope which is within us as disciples of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The United Reformed Church's dynamic response to these realities currently includes the encouragement of congregations to engage in *Holy Habits* and other discipleship experiences, the design and development of *Stepwise*, active collaboration between Resource Centres for Learning, and significant human, financial and technical other resources devoted to individual and congregational development in synods. These are all part of existing strategies for individual and congregational development.

2.3 There are four intertwined aspects to this strategy:

- Accounting for hope
- All are pilgrims on the journey
- Ask, seek, knock: God-given senses in the service of learning
- Bread for the journey, shared and replenished

Each of these is described below, and followed by action points which express the what, the how, the who, and the timing for each action.

3. Accounting for hope

Disciples will be equipped to 'give an account of the hope that is in them' with gentleness and reverence (1 Peter 3.15-16a)

- 3.1 Gospel becomes good news when it is passed on by word of mouth and lived experience. The Bible becomes a living document when it informs the loving service of followers of Jesus. The Kingdom is glimpsed when Christians take their faith onto the frontline of their daily lives. What connects all these is the conversations and stories that believers shape, tell and act upon.
- 3.2 For people of the Way, story-telling is how we encounter truth(s): not in crisp propositions, but in messy tales of encounters between people and people, between people and creation, between people and God. It is in the collision and re-fashioning of stories that we learn and grow. Story-telling and story-living is a community activity: nurturing relationships; breaking down barriers; enabling us to recognize the commonality of our experience; offering us possibilities of imagining a different way of being and living; sharing the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed. Our search for confidence and purpose, for mission and meaning, for life lived with God's active presence, can only be a shared, ongoing encounter between our stories and God's stories. Our church strategies must enable this.
- 3.3 Time and again, discussion of mission in the URC has brought us back to the centrality of prayer, in all its many forms, which roots us individually and collectively in God.

3.4 The starting point for growing disciples is the lived experience of the people of the church and the communities around them. People in leadership are expected to develop the confidence of existing disciples to evangelise in ways that love, liberate and lead.

3.5 Action points:

What	How	Who	Timing
Create opportunities for people to encounter the living God, whether they already identify themselves as followers of Christ or not.	Every URC congregation to have had access to a Holy Habits group (or similar).	Congregational leaders with the support of synods.	By December 2020
Encourage every member and adherent in their prayer life and relationship with God.	Double the number of subscribers to <i>Daily Devotions</i> .	Ministers of Word and Sacraments, CRCWs, elders, Lay Preachers, Youth and children's workers to advocate.	By December 2020
Conversation with members and adherents about how they are accessing support for learning about and through their faith.	Holy Habits groups (or similar).	Congregational leaders, supported by synods.	As part of Walking the Way.

4. All are pilgrims on the journey

- 4.1 The use of the word “all” in this case means “all the people involved in each congregation and its communities, whether at the core of activities or on the fringes of the church’s attention who express curiosity about God.” This strategy seeks to support their development as followers of Jesus through their personal, spiritual, intellectual, and physical growth.
- 4.2 This aspect of the discipleship development strategy is intended to address the realities of inequality by emphasising equitable access to resources and opportunities. Asking six people to buy and read the same book in English, which is only available to them in printed form in a small font, assumes that they are all equally at ease with the language, cost, format, and visual ability. Similarly, providing the material only in a free downloadable podcast assumes that they all have access to the internet and can communicate through hearing. Treating everyone from an unconsciously biased assumption of “the norm” tends to perpetuate inequalities. Being equitable takes the different strengths, experiences, abilities and needs of people into account.
- 4.3 Within a strategy for individual and congregational development across the URC the tendency should be towards openness and responding to opportunities for growth rather than rationing or restricting opportunities. The sower sows abundantly never knowing which seeds will produce a harvest (Matthew 13, Mark 4, Luke 8) rather than precision drilling (one seed per pre-sited hole).
- 4.4 Life-long learning is a part of a disciple’s journey. From the youngest to the oldest we need to be open to hear the voice of God and to act upon it. There are many ways

that God speaks and many forms for learning to take. What is important is that opportunities are provided for people to have the chance to deepen faith and discipleship in a variety of ways and learning styles.

- 4.5 The United Reformed Church is committed to providing these opportunities in both online and face to face forms to ensure that all have the chance to develop their faith whatever their age, ability, circumstance, cultural background, and gender.

4.6 Action points

What	How	Who	Timing
Preparation of criteria for eligibility for support through the Discipleship Development Fund.	As a starting point, use work already done on eligibility for membership of General Assembly by young people.	Education and learning committee and relevant bodies in synods.	End of December 2018.
The <i>Stepwise</i> programme to be inter-generational and owned by people of all abilities and cultural backgrounds.	The design of the programme to be intentional in these aspects.	Task and finish group to give clear criteria to the design groups having consulted with practitioners.	Already started; first stream from September 2018.
Ensure that <i>Stepwise</i> material is age appropriate and has been trialled by practitioners.	Connection with CYDO team.	Education and learning and task and finish group.	During initial design phases, 2018 to 2020.
Ensure that <i>Stepwise</i> material is vocation appropriate and has been trialled by practitioners.	Active connection with reference groups and practitioners as relevant.	Task and finish group.	During initial design phases, 2018 to 2020.
Possibility of funding for Specific Learning Differences assessments to be explored.	Include in Discipleship Development Fund criteria.	Education and learning committee and relevant bodies in synods.	March 2019
Work on financial equality and equity with reference to childcare (costs and availability).	Survey and snapshots to feed into criteria for Discipleship Development Fund.	Education and learning, finance and equalities committees, with synods.	March 2019
Address geographical constraints by offering more across synod boundaries – possibly by compiling an Assembly Training Calendar. With open invitations.	Synods to send info regularly to Education and learning to collate via URCLC.	Education and learning and TDOs to coordinate, in collaboration with synod offices.	Start date September 2018 to give time to collate.
Better access to, and use of Resource Centre for Learning tutors through deepened	Continued collaboration on one-to-one basis. Collaboration	Synod Moderator identified to attend education and learning	Synod Moderator attending education and

conversations between RCLs and synods. Initiated by the stakeholders (RCLs and synods) with outcomes collated at the education and learning committee to provide overview.	with synod clusters where possible. Synod Moderators to be represented at education and learning committee.	committee. Discussions with Nominations about permanent membership or co-option.	learning committee from May 2018.
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5. Ask, seek, knock: God-given senses in the service of learning

5.1 Active learning happens by reflection on practice, as has been shown in many places and times. People grow in discipleship through mentoring, accompaniment, trying things out and reflecting on the experience, mutuality in giving and receiving, learning together. The individual disciple’s relationship with Jesus is lived out in community (Mark 6.7, Luke 10.1, I Thessalonians 1.1). Our understanding of ourselves as people of faith and action deepens through prayer, study, and interaction with other people. Individuals and congregations grow as they experience, explore, and express God’s love for the world in ways that are contextual, creative, and authentic.

5.2 The Blended Learning Framework commended by the education and learning Committee in 2017 discusses at some length how a variety of methodologies can be brought together so that contemporary technologies serve the learning needs of groups and individuals: www.blgtreporturc.org.uk/

5.3 The church needs disciples who are committed to long lasting relationship building. It is in these relationships that we as Christians invest in the ongoing development of others and in ourselves. Within this we affirm the vital importance of mentoring and mutual encouragement to develop good practice, provide support and encouragement and build up individual and common life:

“Research has shown that, while knowledge can be transmitted in a variety of forms and media, learning occurs in interactive relationships. Mentoring is an interactive learning relationship, providing a significant point of connection in an increasingly fragmented world.” ¹(‘Relational Leadership’ by Walter Wright IVP 2009 edition).

As part of our ongoing strategy, we will look at how to increase the awareness and confidence of our members and lay leaders in the role of mentoring others, give encouragement for all to identify mentors for themselves, and provide the appropriate resources to develop the necessary gifts, skills and aptitudes, in order that we all continue to grow in our own vocation and discipleship.

5.4 Action points

What	How	Who	Timing
The <i>Stepwise</i> programme will encourage a wide diversity of learning	The framework to be included in the guidance given to the design groups.	<i>Stepwise</i> task and finish group.	Already started; first stream available from September 2018.

¹ *Relational Leadership* by Walter Wright, IVP (2009 edition).

methodologies for individuals and congregations, through supported blended learning.			
Develop on-line learning through <i>Stepwise</i> which is robust, accessible and user-friendly.	Ongoing technical and design support to ensure accessibility, with training for users and deliverers to gain best value.	Dedicated professional staff, using an existing well-supported platform.	From the start of <i>Stepwise</i> , so that support is available immediately and habits are formed.
Form a regional community of face-to-face learners, responding to geographic spread and personal demand.	Centrally and regionally co-ordinated, with RCLs involved in flexible ways.	<i>Stepwise</i> team, RCLs, existing synod field staff, and people in ministry.	As <i>Stepwise</i> launched, so people are not isolated.
Encouragement of local and informal learning – e.g. in families, to help the formation of disciples of all ages.	Setting up champions /ambassadors for discipleship regionally and with focus on specific areas (e.g. families; youth; different workplaces). TDOs, CYDOs, MEs, mentoring and preparing materials. Regional/ denominational gatherings to provide coherence, share good practice etc.	Synods, education and learning committee.	As part of <i>Walking the Way</i> , to fit best with the whole approach. First gatherings in Autumn 2018.
Help local churches to explore new ways of learning and doing theology together with an intentional focus on missional discipleship.	Develop existing base; Ministers Gathering 2018; synod schools; through the processes used in Church Life Reviews.	Synod field staff (TDOs, CYDOs, MEs); Ministers of Word and Sacraments; CRCWs. RCLs to provide support.	Ongoing, with fresh focus as part of <i>Walking the Way</i> .
Encourage Ministers of Word and Sacraments, CRCWs and other authorised leaders as they lead, facilitate, grow confidence in new ideas and approaches, and manage conflict and disagreement in healthy,	Best done within synods sharing good ideas and practice across and between regions. Encourage what already exists and focus on what works.	Synods - Moderators and field officers, drawing in resource people as appropriate.	Ongoing

life-giving and diverse ways.			
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6. Bread for the journey, shared and replenished

- 6.1 God's grace and overflowing generosity are at the heart of mission. Therefore our strategizing about developing people and congregations is rightly informed by sharing resources in a spirit of generosity. Such a spirit should go right through every part of the church, and we should have confidence that people will respond to that.
- 6.2 It is important to draw on the strengths and prioritise the needs of the people who tend to be marginalised, whether they are within the church or are found and encountered outside congregations. The context of each congregation or pastorate will be an important factor in the local shape that discipleship development takes.
- 6.3 Sustainable development is built on a realistic assessment of resources (both human and financial) and by managing the expectations of individuals and congregations. Discipleship is costly (Luke 14. 25-33). The church acting collectively will seek to ensure that access to resources is available to all parts of the United Reformed Church, overcoming obstacles of geography and the inherited unequal distribution of personnel and funds across the synods.
- 6.4 We arrive at the point we are today with the inheritance from our independency and diversity in which synods function individually and inequality exists. This fact needs to be acknowledged as a reality. The choices which we make as a body are therefore about moving towards equity in both human and financial resources.
- 6.5 Whilst there is concern about lack of capacity/connection on the ground, our strategy should take into account the resources that we already have. A positive vision will release the resources we don't realise we already have, acknowledging that the 'we' belongs to different levels of governance within the church.
- 6.6 The starting point is the premise that this strategy is a 'bottom up' model, where the expectations, desires, dreams and requirements of individuals and congregations are sought, heard and taken seriously.
- 6.7 Decisions made by a conciliar church are necessarily taken in different places, and our structures may not always allow us to liberate human and financial resources in ways that seem desirable, as quickly as we would wish. Developing courses in an integrated, coherent yet flexible way across the UK means rethinking the way we've done things up until now.
- 6.8 "Resources" include: people who can facilitate, enable, train and teach; buildings; materials, e.g. *Holy Habits*, *Stepwise*; money. The sharing and the shortages are possibly more about people (staff and volunteers) than money, plant, materials, etc. Synods rich in human resources might be asked to invest staff time in designing resources which people in other synods can deliver, or inter synod resource sharing could include people as well as funds.
- 6.9 Action points:

What	How	Who	Timing
Produce an overall picture of human, financial and other resources currently being invested by synods, RCLs and General Assembly in discipleship development.	Mapping exercise which started in September 2017.	Education and learning committee to pursue those synods which have not yet responded.	End March 2018.
Analyse the results identifying areas of commonality and variation; gaps in resources in synods, churches, individuals.	Individual conversations with synods to fully understand the responses.	Secretary for education and learning and Secretary for RSTG.	End June 2018.
State clearly the budget needed for <i>Stepwise</i> from 2019 onwards, showing where this uses funding previously committed to TLS and the Windermere Centre.	Make projections from known costs in 2018.	Education and learning finance sub-committee (which includes the Treasurer) and resource sharing task group (RSTG).	Autumn 2018.
Conduct a “needs analysis” of what is required overall for discipleship development including and beyond <i>Stepwise</i> .	Augment the mapping of what synods, education and learning and RCLs are doing with a SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Resources/Results) assessment.	Education and learning committee team and RSTG to take the lead, drawing on synods and other relevant bodies.	End December 2018.
Establish the budget that is required to deliver this strategy.	Costing the results of the needs analysis.	Education and learning finance sub-committee (inc Treasurer) and Secretary of RSTG.	End Feb 2019.
Work towards guidelines for financial support to which people in each synod should have access.	Continued dialogue between relevant bodies.	Education and learning committee and RSTG.	End Dec 2018.
Prepare guidance on how inequalities in financial resources should be addressed.	Work with synods and inter synod Resource Sharing.	RSTG.	End February 2019.

Prepare guidance on how inequalities in human resources might be addressed.	Work with synods and inter synod Resource Sharing.	Joint synod meetings (annual group meetings), Education and learning committee and RSTG.	End February 2019.
Emphasise the role of ministers and authorised leaders as encouragers of discipleship and facilitators of learning.	An appreciative inquiry into “What makes a minister effective at discipling?”	Up to two synods with education and learning to work on this initially.	To start in early 2019.
Identify and equip Ministers of Word and Sacraments, CRCWs, and other authorised leaders with the appropriate gifts, motivation and skills to recognise and release the gifts of the people with whom they minister.	Through synods, RCLs and Church House team.	Synod networks, especially EM2/3 Officers.	Ongoing.
Establish and adopt the scope, objectives, eligibility criteria, disbursement mechanism, and monitoring process for a discipleship development fund.	Joint consultation in March 2019 between education and learning committee and RSTG drawing together relevant preparatory work described in action points above.	Education and learning committee and RSTG in conversation with URC Trust and Treasurer and other relevant individuals and bodies.	Agreement by May 2019 Mission Council.

7.0 Distance and pacing

- 7.1 There are a number of specific and measurable targets in this strategy, in tune with the expectation that one function of a strategy is to achieve measurable outcomes. When discussing participation in God’s mission it’s not always easy to measure impact quantitatively but more fruitful to look for qualitative measures of process, e.g. whether it was a positive or negative journey. It’s about walking alongside people and supporting a process, rather than seeking a specific product. God will use people we might not choose, and God’s foolishness is wiser than the wisdom of the world. The progress of the strategy will be assessed and kept under review through qualitative review methodologies such as social audit, and the generative approaches being used in appreciative accountability.

7.2 Action points:

What	How	Who	Timing
Monitor uptake of <i>Holy Habits</i> groups, or equivalent by URC congregations.	Include a question in annual returns 2018 to 2021.	Communications, prompted by education and learning	Start for 2018 return if possible.
Monitor the number of subscribers to <i>Daily Devotions</i> , starting from when it became part of <i>Walking the Way</i> .	Provide six monthly numbers.	Daily Devotions coordinator	From 1 January 2018.
Periodic review of progress of the strategy.	Report to Mission Council.	Education and learning committee.	May 2019.
Review the adoption and implementation of a Discipleship Development Fund.	Report to General Assembly.	Synod Moderators.	July 2020.

Glossary of acronyms used in this paper

E&LC Education and learning committee

RSTG Resource sharing task group – established by Mission Council

RCL Resource centre for learning

TDO Training and development officer (generic term covering various post titles)

CYDO Children and Youth Development Officer

ME Mission Enabler (generic term covering various post titles)

EM2/3 Education for Ministry phase 2/3

Appendix A: Financial clarifications

1. It is still to be known what the proceeds will be from the eventual disposal of the Windermere Centre building. Therefore it is not yet possible to predict the eventual size of any Discipleship Development Fund, but it is possible to work out the principles on which such a fund would operate. It is also possible to estimate existing funds which could be earmarked for 'kickstarting' the fund. Early work done on mapping resources, principles for equity in support, and strengthening connections between existing mechanisms for resource-sharing will bear fruit once the figures from the disposal of the Windermere Centre building become clear.
2. There is wording in Mission Council Resolution 6 May 2017 which needs explanation. It is the understanding of education and learning committee Convenor and Secretary who were at the Mission Council meeting that "proceeds from any disposal" means that only the annual income on any capital obtained would be assigned to a Lay Development Fund [now to be called a Discipleship Development Fund to be consistent with section 5 above], not the capital itself. This is the consistent understanding given by the previous URC Treasurer when speaking to the matter at Mission Council and in conversations with the education and learning finance sub-committee.
3. Of the almost £125,000 which would otherwise have been allocated in the education and learning committee budget for 2018 to support for the Windermere Centre:
 - 3.1 £20,000 has been re-assigned to the communications committee for the staffing of the iChurch project which emerged from the Windermere Centre and is now managed within the work of the communications committee;
 - 3.2 £85,000 has been allocated to three posts related to discipleship development (Lay Development Coordinator, Lay Development Assistant, Instructional Designer), and redundancy costs for two TLS posts. From August 2018 the Lay Development Coordinator and Lay Development Assistant posts will be supported by funds previously allocated to the staffing of TLS.
 - 3.3 £20,000 has been provisionally set aside in 2018 to be put towards the Discipleship Development Fund. This whole amount will be available for disbursement in this year once clear principles and criteria for the use of the fund have been agreed.
 - 3.4 The above figures were included in the URC budget for 2018, and the areas concerned were mentioned in paragraph 8 of Paper G1, as agreed by Mission Council in November 2017.
4. At the present time the inter-disciplinary *Stepwise* task and finish group are exploring the principle that there will be no more than a nominal participation charge for engagement in each of the *Stepwise* streams. This is because:

- 4.1 The development cost for *Stepwise*, as a URC-wide programme and relying on the involvement of a wide range of people, is being borne for the whole of the URC through the education and learning committee budget.
- 4.2 *Stepwise* is being designed for flexible delivery which draws on existing ecumenical courses and materials where relevant. There will be charges for purchasing materials external to the URC, or where synods decide that residential events are desirable and feasible. In such cases it is expected that the Discipleship Development Fund would be a source of help where necessary to enable individuals or congregations to participate in *Stepwise*.

Appendix B:

Background – how we got here

1. Background

- 1.1 One of the outcomes of the discussions of the future of the Windermere Centre at Mission Council in October 2016 and May 2017 was the request for a coherent strategy for lay development in the United Reformed Church expressed in Resolution 6, May 2017:

Mission Council supports in principle the use of the proceeds of any disposal [of the Windermere Centre] for lay development, and

- a) believes that there is an increasingly apparent and urgent need for a viable, costed strategy for lay training and congregational development across the URC, and calls for the development of such a strategy;
- b) agrees that this strategy needs to take account of existing lay training and development resources and opportunities available within and beyond the URC and needs to be sensitive to the varied geography and the uneven distribution of financial and human resources across the synods;
- c) asks the education and learning committee to facilitate the development of this strategy, with the active involvement of relevant people from the synods and the URC Resource Centres for Learning;
- d) recognises that such training and development needs to be delivered in a variety of ways which are likely to include online, face to face and residential components; it must be easily accessible to all in the URC.
- e) therefore instructs the education and learning committee to bring to Mission Council in March 2018 proposals for these proceeds to be used as a designated Lay Development Fund which will enable an outworking of the developed strategy.

Extract from report of Mission Council meeting, May 2017

2. Towards preparing a strategy

- 2.1 A strategy is a high level plan to achieve one or more goals under conditions of uncertainty. It describes how the ends (goals) will be achieved by the means (resources).
- 2.2 Responding to Mission Council's instructions, the education and learning committee discussed in depth taking forward the resolution when it met in June 2017. This was in the light of outcomes from consultations on whole church learning carried out by the committee from 2013 to 2016 (*Learning Church, Next Chapter, two Big Picture meetings and the Roundtable to Enable Learning*). The committee set aside a small group to work towards the strategy commissioned by Mission Council. The group initiated a mapping process to find out from synods and Resource Centres for

Learning what financial and human resources they currently make available for lay development. This took the form of questions which were sent to synods on 1 September, along with an invitation to send representatives to a consultative gathering on 6 October, and a background brief for the gathering. The outline of a possible strategy emerged from that meeting, with individuals volunteering to write specific paragraphs. These were received and shaped into a draft strategy which was discussed in detail by the reconvened consultation on 9 January 2018. Comments from small groups and plenary sessions were gathered and fed into the next draft which was further worked on by the education and learning committee at a special meeting for the purpose on 29 January 2018. The external facilitator for the two consultative gatherings was the Revd Dr Stephen Heap, a Baptist minister with a background in congregational development and adult learning who currently works at Winchester University.

3. A starting point: the URC's participation in God's mission (John 3.16 God so loved the world...)

“God makes disciples, not us. We share the Gospel, we walk alongside, we encourage, raise awareness etc but it is ultimately that they open their hearts to God and allow God to do what God does. I have anxiety about a strategy that says: do this and you will make disciples.”

Participant in strategy consultation, 9 January

The consultative gatherings were of the strong view that any strategy for lay training and congregational development must start from an understanding that the church is participating in God's mission to the world. Disciples of Christ are co-workers with God.

A place to start (and using the paragraph numbering from that document) is the theological basis for a URC mission framework which was included in the reports to General Assembly 2010 in relation to vision2020:

- 3.1 The Basis of Union of the United Reformed Church speaks of the church's responsibility to offer itself and the world to God in worship; to receive and express the renewing life of the Holy Spirit in each place and in its total fellowship; to declare the reconciling and saving power of Jesus Christ, to live out Christ's ministry of caring, forgiving and healing love; and to bear witness to Christ's rule over the nations. Though not explicitly mentioned, it is clear that mission is fundamental to the existence of the church.
- 3.2 A much stronger focus on mission is visible in the *Growing Up* report, adopted by the 1999 General Assembly. The United Reformed Church was expressing its intention to focus on faithful participation in God's mission, rather than on the future of the URC as a Church. “Growing Up” attempted to reawaken the Church to the fact that it is mission-shaped and that in the words of Emil Brunner, it ‘exists by mission as fire exists by burning’. This found further expression in the strapline of the Catch the Vision process in 2004: ‘called to be God's people, transformed by the Gospel, making a difference for Christ's sake’.

- 3.3 Vision2020 builds on this understanding of mission and the church's role in it. It takes as its fundamental starting point that mission is God's activity and entails all that God is doing to transform this world into the reign of God. It is a mission that finds its ultimate expression in Jesus and continues throughout history through the Spirit. The focus and scope of God's mission is the transformation of all created reality into what God intended in creation.
- 3.4 The Church is called, sent and empowered by God, through the Holy Spirit, to join in God's mission of transformation. It is the Church-in-mission that is recognisably the community of the followers of Jesus.
- 3.5 God's mission is to be understood as all that God is doing to transform the world into God's reign. Therefore mission has a comprehensive character. The Growing Up report expressed this in the Five Marks of Mission. Vision2020 builds on these in its ten statements of mission and purpose.
- 3.6 If mission is God's mission and is all that God is doing to transform this world, then mission is contextual. It is the Holy Spirit who helps us discern how God is at work in each place. It is in the power of the Holy Spirit and through constant reflection and prayer that we are enabled to give shape to the Good News in ways that address directly the lives of the people around us.

4. *Walking the Way, Living the Life of Jesus today*

- 4.1 Paper M2 to Mission Council, May 2017 laid out a number of objectives for a missional discipleship task group which in due course became the *Walking the Way* steering group. These objectives included that it should devise a discipleship scheme for the United Reformed Church which reflects the Church's commitment to participation in the *Missio Dei* as described in the mission framework in paragraph 3. In November 2017 Mission Council endorsed the work being done on the *Stepwise* programme, which is an intentionally programmatic strand of *Walking the Way*.
- 4.2 One source for the URC's current emphasis on missional discipleship is the mission committee's experiences through vision2020 and its ongoing exploration of ways of encouraging evangelism. It can be argued that the URC's current understanding of mission is encapsulated in the approaches encouraged through *Walking the Way, Living the life of Jesus today*. The lay training and congregational development strategy commissioned by Mission Council clearly needs to be a part of *Walking the Way, Living the life of Jesus today*.
- 4.3 Since being designated as Resource Centres for Learning by General Assembly in 2006, the three Colleges serving the United Reformed Church and the 13 synods have persisted in seeking ways to work together for the benefit of congregations. Appointment to new staff posts from their own resources by Northern College and Westminster College in 2017 has helped this, with the Scottish College already working closely with the Synod of Scotland and Northern Synod. The focus on missional discipleship expressed in *Walking the Way, Living the life of Jesus today*

is shared by Colleges, synods, and Assembly committees who are all separately and collectively exploring what this means for them.

5. Moving beyond the terminology of “lay training”

- 5.1 Almost all of the synods and the RCLs were represented at one or the other of the consultative gatherings on 9 October and 6 January, and a significant number of participants were able to be present at both. One consistent emphasis was the inadequacy of the term “lay training” to represent what the gatherings felt should be the focus of the strategy. For some people the term is too closely associated with equipping elders and Lay Preachers, and therefore narrower than what is intended in the strategy. Other people feel that exactly those ministries risk being overlooked in the general use of the word “lay”. Using “lay” raises other questions, for are not elders ordained, and are not Ministers of Word and Sacraments members of the *laos*? The United Reformed Church does not tend to refer to “the laity”. Suggestions included replacing “lay training” with “missional discipleship”, although the latter is already intended to cover both individual and collective development, thus repeating what is meant by “congregational development”. “Personal development” was considered in place of “lay training” but that phrase does not quite capture what is intended either.
- 5.2 It was therefore suggested during the consultation on 6 January 2018 that the commission from Mission Council be rephrased as “To develop a viable, costed strategy for individual and congregational development across the United Reformed Church.”
- 5.3 The education and learning committee meeting on 29 January revisited the terminology, accepting the disquiet about the word “lay” but recognising that it is important to use language which resonates with people of faith in subtle dimensions which go beyond what they might hear from public life and engagement. *Walking the Way* is about wholelife missional discipleship, expressed in the term “faith on the front line” used by the London Institute on Contemporary Christianity. *Stepwise* is a significant programmatic strand within *Walking the Way* which is being designed to take disciples of Jesus further on their journey with God and their communities of all shapes and sizes. Therefore discipleship is a key word and there is an argument to be made for calling this a “discipleship development strategy”.
- 5.4 The parallel risks in attaching the word “discipleship” to the strategy are that people throughout the URC may:
- 5.4.1 Reduce the vision of *Walking the Way* to the strategy, and in so doing be disappointed that the vision is not practical enough and the strategy is not visionary enough
 - 5.4.2 Limit the outworkings of the strategy to support only for *Stepwise*
 - 5.4.3 Treat the strategy as something separate to, or in competition with, *Walking the Way* and *Stepwise*

5.4.4 Be confused by the apparent proliferation of variety of ways in which the United Reformed Church is encouraging one another to be outward looking, missional, and evangelistic.

5.5 It was agreed that these risks will be lessened if Mission Council accepts that the discipleship development strategy is essentially a means of knitting together the various resources which already exist or may exist in future within the United Reformed Church in synods and General Assembly Committees for releasing discipleship energy. The shape of the knitting will emerge from continued close collaboration between General Assembly Committee and synods.

5.6 The main outcome of the strategy is a clear, user-friendly, and equitable means of answering key questions from individuals and pastorates:

- Where do I/we go for the support which will help me/us to follow Jesus in the direction that I/we are being challenged and inspired to take?
- How do I/we access such support?

5.7 Taking considerations of the use of language into account, the education and learning committee concluded that it is worth proceeding with calling this a “discipleship development strategy”. Such a title does not overcome the existing converging/diverging/parallel lines between “mission development” and “discipleship development” which is seen in many places in the URC, but perhaps no strategy can be expected to solve everything by itself. It is a step towards greater coherence in resourcing disciples of Christ in their participation in God’s mission to the world.