

Paper N1

Task group on the future of General Assembly

Report to Mission Council

United Church 2017
Church 2018
Reformed Church 2018
Church 2018

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Basic Information

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| Contact name and email address | Val Morrison valmorrison7@btinternet.com |
| Action required | The task group would welcome advice from Mission Council about the content and clarity of this draft report. |
| Draft resolution(s) | None |

Summary of Content

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|---|--|
| Subject and aim(s) | Updated draft report to General Assembly, in the light of feedback received at and since the last meeting of Mission Council |
| Main points | |
| Previous relevant documents | AAC supplementary report to GA 2016. Mission Council Paper U1 of May 2017, and Paper N1 of November 2017. |
| Consultation has taken place with... | Mission Council. URC Youth. |

Summary of Impact

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Financial | Possible modest increases in required funds what we do. |
| External (e.g. ecumenical) | Improvements in the efficiency of our governance processes will reduce the risk of reputational damage. |

Task group on the future of General Assembly: report to Mission Council

March 2018

Note to Mission Council

Mission Council has already discussed much of the content of this report. The task group now asks for advice on presenting the material to Assembly. Many people in the Assembly at Nottingham will not have been at Southport in 2016, when the task group was set to work, nor in recent meetings of Mission Council, where various important issues have been aired. Is this a paper these people will be able to understand and engage with? Will it enable them to take responsible decisions?

If you have questions about points of detail, please let the convenor know of these before we come to High Leigh. If you have broader concerns, it will be possible to discuss these within our Mission Council meeting.

Part one – how we reached our recommendations

1. The task group's Remit

- 1.1 In July 2016 General Assembly resolved to appoint a task group “to consider the documentation already available, to consult widely, particularly with synods and Assembly committees, and to bring to the General Assembly of 2018 proposals for the form, size, duration, location and funding of the Assembly in subsequent years from 2020 to 2030.”
- 1.2 The report also stated that:

“The task group of five people, including a former Moderator of General Assembly, a current or recent Synod Clerk, and the Clerk of the General Assembly, nominated by the nominations committee, and appointed by the Assembly Officers, to begin work immediately, and report to each meeting of Mission Council. A report to the autumn 2017 meeting of Mission Council should enable that meeting to make decisions that enable a venue to be firmly booked for the 2020 meeting of General Assembly.”
- 1.3 In the event, the Nominations process proved slower than the drafters of the Assembly resolution hoped, and the task group was not able to meet until late December 2016. The members of the group are Val Morrison (convenor) (former Assembly Moderator and a former Synod Clerk), Adrian Bulley (Synod Clerk), Dick Gray (former Deputy Treasurer and a current Synod Treasurer), Margaret Marshall (Synod Clerk), along with Michael Hopkins (Assembly Clerk), supported by John Proctor (General Secretary).
- 1.4 The task group notes that the current pattern of governance is a two-year cycle, which consists of one meeting of General Assembly and four meetings of Mission Council. The task group also noted that these meetings are costed at £200,000 and £20,000 each respectively, making a total budget of £280,000 over the two years of a cycle. [N.B. Although the Assembly budget for 2017 and 2018 was increased to

£230,000, this was not intended as a permanent change, and we expect the budget to revert to £200,000 for 2019 and 2020.]

- 1.5 Although Mission Council was not part of the remit, the task group are convinced that any serious changes considered to General Assembly cannot be considered in isolation from Mission Council.

2. Consideration of documentation already available

- 2.1 The task group considered a significant amount of documentation from discussions at Mission Councils over the last few years, including extensive notes from a session led by the General Secretary in March 2016, and the discussions at the 2016 General Assembly based upon the supplementary report of the Assembly arrangements committee.

3. Consultation

- 3.1 The task group members had good and wide connections across the synods, and we made extensive use of these contacts.
- 3.2 Early contact was made with Convenors of Assembly committees, in advance of the more general consultation.
- 3.3 Reflections from recent Moderators and their chaplains on their visits to the Assemblies of other churches were sought.
- 3.4 An open survey was undertaken in which there were 547 responses, from individuals, committees, synods, and other groups. We believe that this is a very high response rate for United Reformed Church surveys.
- 3.5 The results of all these consultations underpin all our recommendations. At every stage, we have consciously tried to make recommendations based upon evidence and theology, while having due regard to financial considerations.

4. Background

- 4.1 The current discussions result from General Assembly in 2012 resolving to make a significant reduction to the budget for Assembly, but failing to agree any ways to implement that cut. Mission Council did agree ways to implement that decision, but there has been a general dissatisfaction with aspects of the Assembly, voiced by members of the Assembly and by synods, since 2012.
- 4.2 The task group also noted that a freezing of the budget since 2012 amounted to a gradual cut in real terms because of inflation. Conference centres, railways, hotels, caterers, and technical services suppliers have all increased their charges each year. Nonetheless, the fall in URC membership over this period has meant that the cost of Assembly per member has actually increased, in cash terms, as well as in real terms.

5. Comparison with other denominations

5.1 As well as the observations from former Moderators and their chaplains, the task group considered how churches with similar sizes organised their equivalents to the General Assembly. This is what we discovered:

| Church | No. of members | Mem. of GA equiv. and frq. of meeting |
|---------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|
| Church in Wales | 84,000 | 143, two days twice a year |
| Presbyterian Ch of Wales | 24,000 | 150, three days once a year |
| Methodist Ch in Ireland | 50,000 | 260, five days once a year |
| Scottish Episcopal Church | 54,000 | 150, three days once a year |
| United Reformed Church | 48,000 | 315, four days every two years |

5.2 The task group also considered larger churches, including the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, and the Methodist Church in Great Britain. However, we discovered that these churches spend money and staff time on their equivalents to General Assembly at levels which would rapidly bankrupt the United Reformed Church.

6. Theology and ecclesiology of General Assembly

6.1 The Structure of the United Reformed Church [paragraph 2(6)] states that the General Assembly:
 “shall embody the unity of the United Reformed Church and act as the central organ of its life and the final authority, under the Word of God and the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, in all matters of doctrine and order and in all other concerns of its common life”.

6.2 The task group believes that there are theological ideas that shape the way that Reformed churches have historically made our decisions and ordered our structures, and wishes to highlight these:

6.2.1 A key principle for our tradition is conciliarity, that is, that we reach our decisions as representatives meeting together in council, guided by the Holy Spirit. Congregationalists and the Churches of Christ held the Church Meeting to be the central place of authority, while Presbyterians recognise the authority of the wider councils of Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly. Together these traditions, which are held in common with other Reformed churches, represent a view of the church that understands its authority under Christ to lie in a body of representatives acting in council, rather than in an appointed person or persons. We believe this is fundamental to the ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church.

6.2.2 Mission Council in March 2016 was asked to consider several ways that an Assembly’s effectiveness could be viewed. What matters most – the quality of its decisions, the sense of ownership and wide participation it engenders, or the inspiration it offers to those who attend? Clearly these aims need not be at odds with one another, but if one is more important to us than the others, this preference will tend to shape how we plan and deliver Assembly.

6.2.3 In this discussion members of Mission Council placed most stress on wide participation, ahead but not to the exclusion of the other two aims. The value of a broad membership, including many people whose primary church involvement is local, the opportunity to hear a balance of different voices, and the sense that the whole Church is overseeing the whole Church, were all attractive aspects of this way of viewing Assembly.

6.2.4 However, a problem with a broadly-based way of decision-making is that sometimes urgent administrative decisions are needed while the appropriate council is not in session. In such situations a smaller group is sometimes given executive power to act on behalf of the council. Where this practice is infrequent, or when the issues are of no great consequence, the principle of conciliarity is still upheld. However, when the 'executive' group becomes a regular and significant feature of the decision-making process, our historical understanding of conciliarity is significantly altered, particularly when the Assembly itself does not make the major decisions.

6.2.5 At least since 2006, there is evidence that the United Reformed Church, both at the level of synods and the General Assembly, has given significant and ongoing responsibility to various executive bodies. In the case of the General Assembly this body is the Mission Council.

6.3 The remit of Mission Council is:

"a co-ordinating committee...the purpose of the Mission Council is to enable the Church, in its General Assembly, to take a more comprehensive view of the activity and policy of the Church to decide more carefully about priorities and to encourage the outreach of the Church to the community. Its service is directly towards the Assembly, but its concern is with the whole Church and all its members, so it will seek to be aware of the pains and joys, the adventures and hopes of the whole body."¹

6.4 The Structure gives as one of the functions of the General Assembly that it:

"shall also appoint a Mission Council with power to act in its name between meetings of the General Assembly and to discharge such other functions as the General Assembly may from time to time direct"²

On this basis, many decisions of Mission Council carry the words "Acting on behalf of the General Assembly..." to indicate that the Mission Council does not carry such authority in its own right but only by delegation from the General Assembly. In practice, however, Mission Council looks very much like a council of the church rather than a committee.

6.5 The functions of General Assembly also include:

- (i) to oversee the total work of the church;
- (ii) to make decisions on reports and recommendations from its own committees, issue such directions and take such actions as it deems conducive to the propagation of the gospel, the welfare of the United Reformed Church, the interests of the Church of Christ as a whole and the well-being of the community in which the Church is placed;
- (iii) to conduct and foster the ecumenical relationships of the United Reformed Church;
- (iv) to support and share in the missionary work of the Church at home and abroad;
- (ix) to remit questions concerning the witness and judgement of the church for general discussion in Church Meetings, elders' meetings, and synods, and to call for reports from these councils;
- (x) to interpret all forms and expressions of the polity practice and doctrinal formulations of the United Reformed Church including the Basis and the Structure and to determine when rights of personal conviction are asserted to the injury of the unity and peace of the United Reformed Church;

¹ The Manual, section G

² Structure, paragraph 2(6)(o)

- (xi) to alter, add to, modify or supersede the Basis, Structure and any other form or expression of the polity and doctrinal formulations of the United Reformed Church;
- (xii) to make, alter or rescind rules for the conduct of its own proceedings and of those of other councils and commissions of the United Reformed Church and such other rules, bye-laws and standing orders as the General Assembly may from time to time think desirable for the performance of its functions and the carrying into effect of any of the provisions contained in the Basis and the Structure and for the conduct of the business and affairs of the General Assembly and of the other councils and commissions of the United Reformed Church;
- (xix) to provide for the raising of funds for the work of the United Reformed Church and to determine arrangements for payment of stipends and expenses to Ministers, Church Related Community Workers and officers of the United Reformed Church and for such other financial matters as the General Assembly may from time to time think desirable;
- (xx) to consider and decide upon issues and representations duly transmitted by other councils of the United Reformed Church;
- (xxix) to do such other things as may be necessary in pursuance of its responsibility for the common life of the church.

The task group believes that General Assembly can only do these things if it meets often enough to do so.

- 6.6 Moving further towards executive government may, of course, be a direction in which the United Reformed Church wishes to proceed, but this would be at the cost of our conciliar heritage, and a step away from how we have hitherto understood Reformed theology.
- 6.7 The task group has not therefore explored a way forward that would enlarge the role of Mission Council and shrink that of Assembly. If this were a path the Church wished to take, the group would ask for new briefing to that effect. Nonetheless, we note as a general point that the role of General Assembly is closely linked to that of Mission Council: any decrease of the responsibilities of the one would always increase those of the other, and vice versa.
- 6.8 By contrast, those who believe it is appropriate to recall and refresh our conciliar commitment might want the Church to consider:
 - 6.8.1 An annual meeting of General Assembly.
 - 6.8.2 A corresponding reduction in the meetings and powers of the Mission Council.
 - 6.8.3 Revising the membership of the General Assembly in a manner that attempts to return to the original egalitarian intent of Reformed conciliar structures. Everyone in the synod who desires to attend Assembly gets their fair turn.

7. Strategic and other questions

- 7.1 The questions raised by our explorations lead the task group to ask the Church to make some strategic choices:
 - 7.1.1 Should we return to an annual Assembly?
 - 7.1.2 Should the frequency and/or powers of Mission Council be reduced?

- 7.2 Less strategic – but nonetheless important – questions raised are:
- 7.2.1 Should there be one or two Moderators of General Assembly? Does the answer to this question change if the frequency of Assembly changes?
- 7.2.2 Should Moderators be inducted at the end of General Assembly, and then chair the General Assembly at the end of their period of office?

8. Criteria for making decisions

- 8.1 The task group believe that the United Reformed Church should make decisions on the basis of good theology, good governance, and good strategy.
- 8.2 However, we are aware that the funds are limited, and so decisions the Church makes based upon the grounds in paragraph 8.1 have to be affordable and workable. Because of this we have sought to make recommendations broadly in line with the current budget.

Part two – Recommendations

9. General recommendations

Having consulted extensively, the task group proposes a number of general recommendations, which we wish to make regardless of decisions to be made about the size and frequency:

- 9.1 Time of year: the General Assembly should continue to meet in late June or early July, preferably not clashing with the Methodist Conference, the Church of England General Synod, or the Presbyterian Church of Wales General Assembly. No evidence has been found to suggest that a different time of year would bring any practical, financial, theological, or governance advantages.
- 9.2 Meeting at tables can be helpful, but a preference for tables should not rule out an otherwise suitable and affordable venue. The task group also notes that a significant number of suitably sized breakout rooms can enable the small group conversation aspect of Consensus Decision making at least as well as meeting around tables. Indeed, this can be more effective because it allows those with impaired hearing to participate without background noise, and allows people to move closer than the width of a large circular table (which is what venues often provide, despite assurances to the contrary).
- 9.3 Whatever the number of synod representatives is, that number should be divided equally among the synods, and unfilled places (apart from youth reps) may not be transferred. Smaller synods have found it difficult to ensure fair representation from the breadth (theological, ecclesiological, demographic and geographical) of their synods on the current formula, while some larger synods have difficulty filling the places allocated to them. The task group observed that no-one thought an equal division of places among the synods at Mission Council, despite widely differing sizes of synods, was unfair. Therefore, the task group proposes that it would be simpler and fairer to divide the places at General Assembly equally among the synods.
- 9.4 Rather than a strict 50:50 division between Ministers of Word and Sacraments and CRCWs on the one hand, and “lay” members on the other, we recommend that a measure of flexibility be introduced, while retaining enough provision to prevent either

- group dominating. Therefore, we propose that at least one third of each synod's reps should be "lay", and at least one third "ministers", with the remaining third open to either category. Equality of representation between ministerial and "lay" has always been an important ecclesiological belief in the United Reformed Church. The task Group, however, notes that an exact division may not take into account the fact that some synods now have very few ministers. Nor does it take into account that a number of local churches are led by various forms of "lay" leaders. The task group propose that the most helpful way to address this situation is to introduce a measure of flexibility, while retaining safeguards for both ministerial and "lay" representation.
- 9.5 The task group propose that Synod Moderators should be included within the number of each synod's reps, rather than as a separate category. While the task group expect that most synods will wish their Moderator to represent them, this also adds a measure of flexibility because a synod whose Moderator was on sabbatical or close to retirement or on long term sick leave, for instance, might decide that this place was better used by another representative.
- 9.6 The survey made it clear that the only way of paying for Assembly that will be acceptable to the Church is from the Ministry and Mission Fund. Expecting payment from individuals or from synods would not find support. However, the task group recommend that those attending Assembly should be given a fuller explanation of its costs and a clearer invitation to donate than we presently offer. This possibility should be mentioned on the expenses form.
- 9.7 The results of the 2017 survey showed clear enthusiasm for wide participation, within the context of a strongly held view that General Assembly is first and foremost a business meeting. In our tradition a business meeting is always held within the context of worship. The task group also notes that General Assembly being primarily a business meeting does not preclude there being other events and activities, but business is the primary purpose.
- 9.8 The task group noted from past accounts that some General Assembly Moderators had not been given guidance on discretionary spending, and recommend that the current practice that Moderators should be guided that discretionary spending is limited, and budget figures must be adhered to, is maintained.
- 9.9 The task group noted that many people now use electronic devices as their primary means of receiving documents, and prefer this to paper copies. Therefore, the task group recommend that, as a default, papers will be supplied electronically. The requirements form will allow people to opt into receiving paper copies, as well or instead, at the expense of the Assembly, if they wish.
- 9.10 Evidence from several Moderators of General Assembly, serving and former, showed a widespread desire among Moderators that they chair the General Assembly at the end of their term of office, when they had built up practice in chairing Mission Council and gained a greater familiarity with the business of the Assembly. The task group also noted that the Presbyterian Church of Wales successfully followed this practice. The task group therefore recommend that Moderators should be inducted at the end of the General Assembly at which they take up office, rather than the beginning, and then chair the meeting at the end of their term of office. Were this proposal adopted, then on a one-off basis the Moderators of the 2018 Assembly, Derek Estill and Nigel Uden, would also chair the 2020 Assembly, and their successors would chair the Assembly at the end of their term of office.
- 9.11 Experience at Assembly is that some members speak more than others, and by the end of a three-day meeting some faces and voices have become very familiar indeed at the microphone. A response made very strongly in the survey was that a significant

majority of the 547 respondents respectfully suggested that this does not always help Assembly to do its business as well as it might. General Assembly works best when a wide range of voices are heard. The task group considered how to respond to this, and decided to recommend that:

- a) Members be reminded by the Moderator at the start of the first piece of business that Assembly works best when a wide range of voices is heard. So those members who feel led to speak frequently should also consider leaving space for others;
- b) The Moderators be reminded that they are not required to invite people to speak in the order in which interest is expressed, so it is in order to choose speakers in any order, encourage particular people to speak, and to invite speeches from those who have not yet spoken etc.
- c) "Maiden speech" cards are issued to everyone attending General Assembly for the first time, and that such speakers will be given priority in being called to speak - at least on the first occasion that they approach the microphone.

Draft Resolution 1

General Assembly resolves that:

- a) it prefers to meet in a venue either around tables or with significant breakout rooms if possible;
- b) General Assembly should primarily be funded from the Ministry and Mission Fund, rather than by synods or individuals;
- c) members of General Assembly be given fuller information on the costs of General Assembly, and a clearer invitation to consider making a donation, including the option of donating by Gift Aid;
- d) all papers shall be issued electronically as the primary means of dissemination, but those who wish may choose to receive paper copies at the expense of the Assembly budget;
- e) from the close of General Assembly 2018, Moderators should be inducted at the close of the Assembly which begins their term of office, and should therefore chair the General Assembly at the end of their term of office.
- f) every effort be made to encourage a variety of voices to speak, including those who have not spoken before.

Draft Resolution 2

General Assembly resolves to make the following changes to the Structure of the United Reformed Church:

- 2(6) (a) ~~Such number of representatives of synods (Ministerial and lay in equal numbers) as the General Assembly shall from time to time determine. These numbers shall be calculated proportionately to the total membership of each Synod, as recorded in the year book of the United Reformed Church (at present this calculation shall be such as to produce a total of Synod representatives not exceeding 250);~~
- 2(6) (c) – delete the words “and of the synods”
- 2(6) (d) – delete this clause completely, and re-number succeeding clauses

If this resolution is passed, the General Secretary will move that it be referred to synods under paragraph 3(1) of the Structure, with responses to be made to him by 29 March 2019.

10. Options the Task Group is not recommending

Before we present options for the location, size and frequency of General Assembly, we need to lay out some options which we are not offering:

- 10.1 Despite requests from some sections of the Church, the task group does not find any evidence that it is realistically possible for the Assembly to meet more often than it currently does yet with the same or a greater number of people attending. Both income to the M&M fund and total church membership numbers have been gradually falling. We simply cannot afford the current or a larger Assembly more often, nor does this seem appropriate in a Church of our size.

- 10.2 Indeed, if the budget goes back from 230k to 200k after Nottingham, then we cannot afford a biennial Assembly of the same size and length as Nottingham on a regular basis. We should have to consider at least a modest reduction in numbers, if we were to stay with the biennial pattern.
- 10.3 Despite possible cost savings, the task group does not recommend that the Assembly meets less frequently than now. The evidence we gathered showed that both the sense of detachment from decision-making that currently exists, and the departure from the ecclesiology of conciliarity, would both be exacerbated by this.

11. Location

- 11.1 The task group recommend abandoning the current pattern of rotation of venue around the UK. This pattern was agreed some years ago between the Assembly and the synods, and involves meeting in the nations of the UK in the sequence Wales, England, England, Scotland, England, England, Wales...
- 11.2 The current pattern of rotation has been largely successful in ensuring that General Assembly visits all locations, however the task group question the extent to which the Assembly reflects the flavour of the place where it is meeting. The task group also received evidence that some synods view hosting the Assembly as a burden rather than a pleasure.
- 11.3 The evidence the task group saw showed that the pattern of rotating venues is expensive in both finance and staff time. More site visits are needed to a new venue than to one where we return regularly. Venue hire is also more expensive, because suitable venues in some locations are limited. Travel expenses for Assemblies further from the centre of the UK are higher than more central ones.
- 11.4 The task group therefore proposes to General Assembly that the current pattern of rotation be abandoned, and that instead the Church seeks a venue in the central part of the UK (which we define as being roughly Yorkshire and Lancashire, down to the southern edge of the English Midlands). The task group further propose that if a good enough venue can be found in this central part of the UK, then Assembly should return to it regularly. Even if we met consistently in one place, other synods could be involved in hosting and in shaping the ethos and flavour of the event, if they so wished.

Draft Resolution 3

General Assembly resolves to cease the current pattern of rotation of venue, previously informally agreed, and to meet regularly in the centre of the UK, as outlined in pages XX of the Book of Reports 2018, with immediate effect.

12. Reverting to an annual Assembly

- 12.1 One motivation for Assembly's setting up the task group was a desire to explore the possibility of reverting to an annual Assembly. This might appear to be a step backwards. However, the task group believes that no Church need fear to admit that something hasn't worked as well as was hoped, and if that is the case, we should look to make changes.

12.2 The task group has seen some evidence that an increase in the number of decisions made by Mission Council has created difficulties in their acceptance, because the authority of Mission Council is challenged. (The termination of the ZI campaign, and the closure of the Windermere Centre would be two examples.) The group believes that reversing the current trend, and making more decisions at General Assembly, would increase confidence in and support of such decisions, and reduce challenge, thereby improving the unity and peace of the United Reformed Church. We cite as additional evidence that the 2014 Assembly came close to calling for the special meeting of Assembly that was eventually held in 2015 because it believed that the registration of buildings (in Scotland of celebrants) for the marriage of same sex couples needed to be based on decisions of the General Assembly itself.

12.3 The task group therefore believes that the Church should consider seriously the chance to revert to an annual pattern, and that this would have a variety of benefits for our common life. We put four options before Assembly, one of these corresponding roughly to our present practice, and the other three exploring an annual pattern.

13. The frequency and size of General Assembly

The four options we put before Assembly are these:

- 13.1 Option A: roughly what we do at the moment. A biennial Assembly, about 20% smaller in size than at present, in the sort of conference centre we have used in recent years, plus four meetings of Mission Council in a two-year cycle. This option is costed at £204,000, with £20,000 for each Mission Council, i.e. **a total of £284,000** over a two-year cycle (the current budget over a two-year cycle is £280,000).
- 13.2 Option B: an annual meeting, again in the sort of venue we have used in recent years. As para 10.1 above indicates, this would have to be smaller or shorter than at present, if it is not to cost more. This option shrinks the size of Assembly by about 20% and shortens it by a day, from 72 hours to 48. There would be one meeting of Mission Council per year. This would cost at £136,000 for the General Assembly, with £20,000 for each Mission Council, i.e. **a total cost of £312,000** over a two-year cycle (the current budget being £280,000).
- 13.3 Option C: an annual meeting, as in B above, but we keep the length of Assembly at 72 hours, and shrink its membership by close to 50%. Again there would be one meeting of Mission Council per year. Assembly would cost £134,000, with £20,000 for Mission Council, i.e. **a total of £308,000** over a two-year cycle (the current budget being £280,000).
- 13.4 Option D: we would go The Hayes, Swanwick, Derbyshire, and would be the sole users of their site for the period of Assembly. This would allow us to combine the membership numbers from B above (20% shrinkage), with a 72-hour Assembly as in C above. Again there would be one meeting of Mission Council per year. The cost would be £103,000 for the Assembly, with £20,000 for Mission Council, i.e. **a total of £246,000** over a two-year cycle (the current budget being £280,000).

14. A recommended option

Option D is our preference. Here are the reasons.

- 14.1 It would enable General Assembly to continue to meet for 72 hours, without reducing the number of representatives very much. This is because the charges at The Hayes, which include use of the full facilities, all catering, and AV equipment, are close to the costs for accommodation alone in other centres. The accommodation at The Hayes has improved in recent years so that it now compares with the kinds of hotels used for recent Assemblies, far ahead of university accommodation. The food quality has also improved significantly in recent times, to a level comparable with any other facility that we could afford. Should the bedroom numbers at The Hayes prove insufficient (there are just enough rooms if no-one at all shares), there is a Travelodge one and half miles away, which could accommodate a few members of GA who travelled by car, with all meals taken at The Hayes.
- 14.2 The AV equipment does not allow for live streaming. However, we understand that there are URC members with the skills and equipment to provide basic live streaming at a very low cost.
- 14.3 It may be necessary to arrange a coach to/from Derby station, which will be cheaper than a large number of taxis, as the local train service to Alfreton station and associated taxis may not cope with the peak volume of traffic. The cost of this is low within the overall costs.
- 14.4 Even the largest hall at The Hayes may not be big enough for us to meet around tables. However, there are many breakout rooms, and as noted in paragraph 9.2, we believe that these do have some advantages over table top conversations.
- 14.5 The task group feels that what we could get for our money at The Hayes is significantly more than at any other venue, and it is our considered view that the disadvantages are considerably outweighed by the many advantages.

15. Numbers and costs

All of the schemes above have been worked through in detail. The proposed membership numbers and the estimated costs are given in tables at the end of this paper. To illustrate within the body of the report some of the detailed work tabulated there, these figures are outlined now for the preferred Option D.

- 15.1 The detailed and underlying assumptions:
- A Duration 72 hours (three nights)
 - B Representatives reduced to 16 per synod including Moderators (reducing the total from 269 to 208)
 - C Other members of Assembly total 39 (currently 46)
 - D Cost is £60,000 for accommodation; catering is included.
 - E Travel costs average £80
 - F Venue and audio-visual: included.
 - G. Transportation (of equipment and materials, from London) £1,500
 - H Additional programme costs: £2,500 for Moderators' specials
 - I £3,300 for *What do you think?* (URC Youth event, linked to GA)
 - J Set-up costs:
 - Printing £3,000 (based on papers requested) remainder by internet
 - Staff £5,000 (contribution to other Church House budgets for use of staff)
 - Committee costs £1,250 (no site visits needed)
 - K Contingency £5,000
- 15.2 While the task group has confidence that these figures are as realistic and achievable as any figures could be this far in advance, they are offered to demonstrate that the

task group has undertaken proper research, not to provide a firm budget against which account can be held with suppliers that have not yet been identified, let alone negotiations begun.

- 15.3 Work of similar detail has been done for the other Options, where catering, audio-visual costs and venue costs also needed to be counted as lines of their own, as we could not expect them to be included as part of accommodation costs.

Draft Resolution 4

General Assembly wishes its future of meeting to be that set out in Option A/B/C/D as amended.

Draft Resolution 5

The number of synod representatives shall be 208/130, who shall be divided between the synods equally. Within each synod, at least one third of its representatives shall be either Ministers of Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Workers, and at least one third shall be lay.

Draft Resolution 6

The number of representatives of churches outside Britain and Ireland, and of partner churches within Britain and Ireland shall each be *four/five*.

Draft Resolution 7

The number of representatives of URC Youth, in addition to the twenty-six youth places available for appointment by synods, shall be *two/three*.

Draft Resolution 8

Noting that all synods now have equal representation in the General Assembly, the General Assembly rescinds its decision to grant six additional representatives to the synod of Scotland.

16. Number of Moderators

- 16.1 The task group's consultations have revealed that in general terms an Assembly Moderatorship which requires a six year commitment places a very significant limitation upon the number of people who can offer themselves for this service.
- 16.2 The task group has also observed that the pool of such people available for this role is not great, and is shrinking, so it is reasonable to suppose that, while there have been no difficulties hitherto, there might be difficulties in finding the right person in the future.

- 16.3 How many Moderators should there then be? One Moderator provides greater clarity for governance, and avoids the issue of what the Church would do if two Moderators disagreed upon a question that required a Moderatorial decision.
- 16.4 Two Moderators offer the advantages of sharing the work, covering more things than one Moderator could do, being able to consult one another about difficult decisions, and increasing the profile of our Church through greater exposure.
- 16.5 While there might be some small financial savings in only having one Moderator at a time, these are not significant enough to be a driving factor.
- 16.6 The task group recommends that if the Assembly returns to being annual, it should revert to one Moderator who could be a Minister of Word and Sacrament, a CRCW, or an Elder. If the Assembly remains biennial, then the case for two Moderators remains.
- 16.7 Resolutions 9. 10 and 11 will only be moved if appropriate in the light of a form of Resolution 4 being passed.

Draft Resolution 9

General Assembly resolves to amend the Structure of the United Reformed Church such that all references to serving or elect Moderators of the General Assembly shall be converted from the plural to the singular.

If this resolution is passed, the General Secretary will move that it be referred to synods under paragraph 3(1) of the Structure, with responses to be made to him by 29 March 2019

Draft Resolution 10

Those elected as Moderator of General Assembly at the 2018 General Assembly shall serve from 2020-2022, chairing the Assemblies of 2021 and 2022 in whatever manner they shall determine.

The General Assembly of 2021 shall be asked to elect a Moderator (either a Minister of Word and Sacraments, a Church Related Community Worker, or an Elder), who shall serve from 2022-2023, chairing the 2023 General Assembly. This pattern shall then be repeated each year. Synods shall continue to be allowed to make two nominations, one of a Minister of Word and Sacraments or a Church Related Community Worker, and one of an Elder, so as to maximize the pool of people available, and maximize opportunities for Elders to serve as Moderator, while retaining maximum flexibility.

Draft Resolution 11

General Assembly instructs the Mission Council to make detailed alterations to sections 1, 2, and 3 of the Rules of Procedure, upon the advice of the Clerk, to bring into effect the decisions of principle that it has made.

17. Mission Council

- 17.1 If the Assembly were to opt for Options B, C or D, the Task Group's response to the evidence and theology is to suggest that there would be less need for Mission Council to act as it does now, which would mean that Mission Council had a smaller and more focused task, which would then merit a smaller and more focused membership.
- 17.2 Therefore, the task group propose that if Assembly were annual, Mission Council would only need to meet either for one residential meeting, or for two one-day meetings. The group's view is that more is achieved in one residential meeting at smaller travel costs, although two one-day meetings may be better for disposing of minor business more expeditiously.
- 17.3 At the moment it is possible for members of Mission Council not to be members of the General Assembly. It is unusual, if not unique, for people to be members of an executive body without being members of the body of which they are an executive. This could be resolved if synods were asked to nominate which of their reps to General Assembly were to be members of Mission Council in the forthcoming year.
- 17.4 Unintended consequences of reducing Mission Council's work might be a weakening of the relationships within that body that help it to handle controversial and complex matters, and a weakening of the support given to the small number of Advisory Groups (for example, Law and Polity, or Safeguarding) that report to Mission Council. Whether we think that Mission Council undermines our conciliar theology, or expresses it in a manner that complements the work of Assembly, there do seem to be a few things that a body of under 100 people does better than an Assembly of 300. These factors do not suggest that change cannot be considered, but that the implications of change ought to be considered too, and remind us that any change we make may still have unexpected consequences.
- 17.5 If one of Options B, C or D is chosen, more work needs to be done on the consequent changes to Mission Council, and therefore draft resolution 12 will be moved:

Draft Resolution 12

General Assembly extends the remit of the task group on the future of General Assembly to consider changes to Mission Council in the light of decisions made by the General Assembly, instructs the task group to report to each meeting of Mission Council, and instructs Mission Council to make appropriate changes to its size, composition, and meeting pattern if these are ready to be made before the next meeting of General Assembly.

18. Staffing

- 18.1 The bulk of the organisation of Assembly is currently handled by staff at Church House, with assistance from volunteers. In the future this could be handled either by URC staff, or by using an events management company. There would be an inevitable trade-off between in-house management of Assembly and a professional company. It is likely that professionals would manage the task more efficiently, and perhaps more cheaply. Whereas if we took some of the task away from Church House staff, the event would lose something of its family feel; members would place

their bookings with strangers rather than with URC people, and some may feel that they are not as well understood as they would like to be. We have gathered some data on the potential costs of using an events management company, to assist those in Church House who are charged with making operational decisions. If General Assembly chooses Option D, the task group's preferred option, it is likely that Assembly could be largely organised from within existing staff resources. If General Assembly chooses Option A, B or C, this might strengthen the case for considering the use of external professional help.

Appendix one

Comparison of the numbers of members of General Assembly in different categories under the various options.

| Category | The current position | Option A | Option B | Option C | Option D |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Synods representatives and Moderators | 269 | 208 | 208 | 130 | 208 |
| Serving Assembly Moderator(s) | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Clerk | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| General Secretary | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Deputy General Secretaries | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Committee Convenors | 11 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 |
| URC Trust Convenor | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Immediate Past Moderators | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Former Moderators (elected from all former Moderators) | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Resource Cen for Learning | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| URC Youth | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Forces Chaplain | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Ecumenical and CWM reps | 13 | 11 | 11 | 8 | 11 |
| TOTAL | 315 | 250 | 247 | 166 | 247 |

Appendix two

Summary Budget for General Assembly 2018

| | Option A | Option B | Option C | Option D |
|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Accommodation | | | | |
| Nights | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| Synods | 208 | 208 | 130 | 208 |
| Others | 42 | 39 | 36 | 39 |
| Non members | 21 | 21 | 21 | 21 |
| Avg cost | 80 | 80 | 80 | |
| Total accom | 65,040 | 42,880 | 44,880 | 60,000 |
| Catering | | | | |
| Lunches | 9 | 9 | 9 | |
| dinners | 15 | 15 | 15 | |
| Snacks | 2 | 2 | 2 | |
| Misc | 600 | 250 | 250 | |
| Total | 21,738 | 14,186 | 14,836 | Included |
| Travel costs | | | | |
| Avg cost | 80 | 80 | 80 | 80 |
| Venue costs | 21,680 | 21,440 | 14,960 | 21,440 |
| Total | 26,808 | | | |
| Total | 25,200 | | | |

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|------------------------|
| Hall hire | 20,000 | 22,000 | 12,500 | 15,000 | Included |
| AV | 36,000 | 25,000 | 15,000 | 15,000 | Free |
| Transport | 6,000 | 4,000 | 3,000 | 3,000 | 1,500 |
| Program costs | 62,000 | 51,000 | 30,500 | 33,000 | 1,500 |
| Main What do you think | 6,000 | 2,500 | 2,500 | 2,500 | 2,500 |
| | 3,000 | 3,300 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 3,300 |
| Set up costs | 9,000 | 5,800 | 4,500 | 4,500 | 5,800 |
| Printing | 12,000 | 5,000 | 3,000 | 2,000 | 3,000 |
| Staff | 12,000 | 20,000 | 12,000 | 12,000 | 5,000 |
| Committee | 5,000 | 2,500 | 1,250 | 1,250 | 1,250 not needed |
| Site visits | 5,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | |
| contingency | 10,000 | 10,000 | 5,000 | 5,000 | 5,000 |
| Donations | 10,000 | 10,000 | 5,000 | 5,000 | 5,000 |
| Grand total | 242,608 | 203,758 | 135,756 | 133,426 | 102,990 |