

Paper Y1

Private Members' resolution: Mr Dan Morrell and Ms Hannah Jones

Changes to the Rules of Procedure
for the conduct of the United
Reformed Church

United Church 2017
Church 2018
Reformed Church 2018

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Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Dan Morrell dmorrell96@gmail.com
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, adopts the changes proposed to the rules of procedure in: a) 3.5 to 3.8 inclusive b) 3.9 and 3.15.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To bring clarity to the current process for the election of the Moderators of General Assembly. • To provide greater fairness amongst all nominees for the role. • To mirror closely the procedure for electing the Moderator of Youth Assembly, as this has been proven to be fair and useful in determining, with prayer and guidance from the Holy Spirit, the most suitable Moderator.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current procedure is flawed: it shows bias towards nominees who are incumbent members of Assembly; it does little to help voting members of Assembly discern who may be best suited for the role; it near-guarantees election for anyone who is a sole nominee. • All nominees will be invited, and expected, to attend the Assembly at which they will be voted on, they will read their biography (or have it read) to the Assembly, and will be asked a question by the Moderator in the chair and have the opportunity to respond. • The introduction of a 'Re-Open Nominations' option to ensure that the Assembly's voice is truly heard. • Other, minor, amendments to bring the remaining rules in line with the proposed amendments.
Previous relevant documents	Rules of Procedure, Youth Assembly Standing Orders, Mission Council November 2017 Paper Y1.
Consultation has taken place with...	Assembly Clerk, General Secretary, children's and youth work committee, URC Youth Executive, Mission Council (November 2017).

Summary of Impact

Financial	None
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Invariably any change to Rules of Procedure brings us closer to some ecumenical partners and further away from others.

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Note from the paper author:

“Following the feedback received from Mission Council during and after the meeting in November 2017, the changes proposed to the Rules of Procedure, as outlined in Paper Y1 from that meeting, have been split into two resolutions. Minor spelling and clarity errors have also been rectified. URC Youth still feels that the inclusion of a RON (Re-Open Nominations) option is appropriate, but are aware that this was not the mind of all Mission Council members. So in order not to lose the remainder of the changes, which gained more significant support, the resolution has been split into two parts, which can be decided on separately. Paper Y1 as it was presented in November 2017, read as follows.”

1. URC Youth Executive felt that the current procedure for the election of the Moderators of General Assembly is unfair and not in line with what we, as the URC, believe.
2. The procedure at URC Youth Assembly for the election of the Moderator gives those standing an opportunity to read out their ‘pen portrait’ and answer a question posed to them by the current Moderator. This question is not aimed to encourage the candidate to produce a manifesto of what they intend to do, but rather to ascertain what skills they possess and how they feel called to the role of Moderator. This question is normally written by the Moderator-Elect (who is inducted at the end of Youth Assembly). In the case of General Assembly, it would be put by the serving and chairing Moderator; it would therefore be for the Moderator to arrange for the drafting of the question (or to draft it personally) and to be satisfied as to its suitability.
3. The option to ‘Re-Open Nominations’ has also been found important, to represent the voices of those who may not feel there is yet a suitable candidate.
4. Ensuring the candidates are invited to General Assembly gives an equal opportunity for them.
5. These concerns would be reflected by changing the relevant section of the Rules of Procedure, as follows.

Proposed wording for part 3 of the Rules of Procedure

3. Moderators of the General Assembly

- 3.1 The Moderators of the General Assembly shall be elected by ballot in accordance with these Rules. Each Moderator shall serve for two years commencing at the Assembly following the Meeting at which the report of the election is received in accordance with Rule 3.40~~11~~. The period of office shall be deemed to begin with the induction of each Moderator and shall continue until that Moderator's successor is inducted into office. A Moderator will continue as immediate past Moderator until their successor ceases to be Moderator and therefore replaces them as immediate past Moderator.

- 3.2 The Moderators of the General Assembly shall be two in number, a minister or a Church Related Community Worker and an elder. The elder may be serving or non-serving but in all cases the names of those persons nominated to serve as Moderator must be included on the membership roll of a local church for that person to be eligible for nomination.
- 3.3 A nomination for election as Moderator of the General Assembly shall be made by a synod, the consent of the nominee not being required. The nomination shall be in writing under the hand of the Clerk of the Synod and received by the General Secretary not later than the 31 March immediately preceding the Annual Meeting of the Assembly.
- 3.4 The General Secretary shall forthwith send to each person nominated a list of the nominations. Any nominee may, within ten days of the receipt of this list, withdraw from nomination by notice in writing to the General Secretary.
- 3.5 If after 31 March or after the period for withdrawal there shall be no nominations, in either or both categories, the General Secretary shall forthwith notify the Clerks of the Synods and invite them to request nominations from the executive committees or equivalent of their synods. Such nominations, accompanied in each case by a note of the consent of the person nominated, **and a brief biography, and brief indications of the reason for nomination by the Synod,** must be in the hands of the General Secretary by 15 May. **Those who have accepted nomination shall be invited to attend the Assembly if they are not already doing so.**
- 3.6 In either category if after the period for withdrawal there is only one nomination, this nomination shall be placed before the Assembly and voted upon by secret ballot.
- 3.7 If the number of those who have been nominated in either category and have not withdrawn is or exceeds two, the election shall be by a secret ballot according to the principle of the single transferable vote. All members of the Assembly shall be entitled to vote. They shall vote by indicating their preference by figures 1, 2, 3 and so forth, but no voting paper shall be invalidated by the absence of alternative choices. If the tellers find that no **name option** has an absolute majority of first choices, the second choices of those who gave as their first choice the **name option** securing the smallest number of such choices shall be added to the first choices for other names. If necessary this process shall continue until one of the **names options** has an absolute majority of votes cast. If the process continues until only two **names options** remain, the **person who option that** then has the larger number of votes shall be elected.
- 3.8 **At a point in the Assembly prior to the commencement of the vote, each nominee will be given a fair and equal opportunity to present their biography and to answer a question put to them by the Moderator (who shall be responsible for its content and wording). The response to this question shall not exceed three minutes. No nominees shall be in the room in which Assembly is meeting during this process, save the nominee presenting at the time. Each nominee will be asked the same question.**
- 3.9 Members of the Assembly shall vote by means of a voting paper containing the name, the usual designation and the church of membership, of each of those accepting nomination which shall be sent by the General Secretary by ordinary post to each such member before the commencement of the Ordinary Meeting of the Assembly. **The voting paper shall include an option to 'Re-Open Nominations' (RON), which is a vote to seek another candidate in preference to anyone currently on the ballot paper.** Brief indication of the reasons for the nomination, as supplied by the synod, **along with the candidates' biography, will** be circulated with the ballot paper.

- The General Assembly may, in any case, authorise further means of informing the members about those accepting nomination.
- 3.10 Normally, the General Assembly shall vote to elect the Moderators of the Assembly by secret ballot as an item of business following prayer during the meeting of the Assembly. The ballot boxes shall be delivered to the tellers by whom alone they shall be opened. They shall report the result of the ballot to the Assembly at a later session.
- 3.11 As soon as the voting papers have been examined and the result of the poll ascertained, the voting papers shall be closed up under the seal of the tellers or any two of them, and shall be retained by the General Secretary for one month after the election, and shall then be destroyed.
- 3.12 At each Ordinary Meeting the Assembly shall appoint, upon the nomination of the nominations committee, three tellers to be responsible for the ballot for that year. The counting of the votes cast shall take place in secret under their supervision and control and they shall:
- 3.12.1 inform the General Secretary of the names of the persons elected and the General Secretary shall thereupon individually inform those nominated whether or not they have been elected.
- 3.12.2 report to the Assembly the names of the persons elected, the number of papers received and the number of papers which were invalid.
- 3.13 If any of the tellers appointed by the Assembly shall become incapable of acting the Moderator shall fill any such vacancy or vacancies and report that action to the Assembly.
- 3.14 Upon receipt of the report of the tellers by the Assembly the persons elected shall thereupon become the duly elected Moderators for the two years commencing at the next Ordinary Meeting of the Assembly.
- 3.15 Where the previous General Assembly at its ordinary meeting has failed to elect¹, or in the event of either or both of the persons elected to serve as Moderator becoming unable to serve more than 120 days before the first day of the meeting of the General Assembly at which they were to have been inducted, then the General Secretary shall seek nominations from synods in the manner prescribed in clauses 3.3 to 3.5 for persons available to serve as Moderator for the coming Assembly. On receipt of those names, the General Secretary will inform all those whose names appeared on the roll of the previous Assembly of the nominations and send them a ballot paper. Those ballot papers shall be returned by post within five working days of receipt. Thereafter, the General Secretary shall deliver these ballot papers unopened to the tellers for the election of the Moderator who shall open and count the votes cast and report the result of this election to the General Secretary in the same form as would have been reported to the General Assembly had this election been held during the Assembly.
- 3.16 If a Moderator is unable to take office fewer than 120 days and more than 60 days before the first day of the meeting of the General Assembly at which they were to have been inducted, then the Moderator currently in office shall continue in office until a successor is inducted. The General Secretary shall seek nominations from synods

¹ For the avoidance of doubt, if the Assembly votes to re-open nominations, this is a failure to elect, and the procedure in this paragraph shall be followed.

in the manner prescribed in clauses 3.3 to 3.5, and an election shall be held at the General Assembly in the manner prescribed in clauses 3.7 and 3.9, and the Moderator so elected shall be inducted during that meeting of Assembly.

- 3.18 If a Moderator is unable to take office fewer than 60 days before the first day of the meeting of the General Assembly, or resigns from office after induction, or is removed from office after induction, then the General Secretary shall forthwith initiate a postal ballot as described in clause 3.15, and the person so elected shall be inducted at the next meeting of the Mission Council, save that if this clause comes into effect less than nine months before the planned meeting of General Assembly, then the remaining Moderator shall serve alone until the next meeting of General Assembly.
- 3.19 During the temporary absence of a Moderator, the other Moderator may serve alone. In the event of a conflict of interest with the business under discussion, the most recent former Moderator without such conflict of interest, who is present and willing to serve, shall serve. If neither Moderator is present, the most recent former Moderator present and willing to serve shall serve.