

Paper N1

Moderators, clerks and councils

General Assembly task group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Mrs Val Morrison, Convenor valmorrison7@btinternet.com
Action required	Discussion.
Draft resolution(s)	See foot of report.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Exploring the number, tenure and duties of Moderators of Assembly. Considering the succession in the Clerk's post. Some issues around Mission Council.
Main points	All of these subjects present various possible ways forward, and the task group thinks some of these are better than others. Yet its resolutions are a way into the issues rather than in every case a strongly focused recommendation.
Previous relevant documents	Report of task group to General Assembly, July 2018.
Consultation has taken place with...	All former Moderators of Assembly.

Summary of impact

Financial	Limited to expenses, as the Moderators and Clerk are presently voluntary posts.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	The Assembly Moderators have a representative ecumenical role, and this paper discusses it, among other issues.

1. The Moderator of the General Assembly

- 1.1 The General Assembly clearly expressed a desire for further work to be done on the role of Moderator of General Assembly, and the task group has endeavoured to do that.
- 1.2 In preparing this report, the task group undertook a survey of all former Moderators of General Assembly. This was not so that they could exercise any influence, but so that the task group had as clear an idea as possible of the nature and scope of the role.

1.3 What is the Moderator for?

- 1.3.1 The office of Moderator of the General Assembly is not at present clearly defined, but it is recognised that election is a call by the Church to give leadership, both inspirationally and in the chair of the General Assembly and the Mission Council.
- 1.3.2 Every discussion of the Assembly Moderatorship in the United Reformed Church reveals a variety of understandings of the nature and extent of the role. Probably the drafters of the Scheme of Union operated with an understanding more akin to that which operated in the Presbyterian Church of England before 1972, but most in the United Reformed Church have no familiarity with that, and have formed their own image of the office, influenced by experiences of presidential leadership in a variety of ecclesiastical and secular contexts, and indeed the pragmatic experience of the office since the URC was formed.
- 1.3.3 There seems to be two chief 'models' for the Moderatorship. One of these is based on the view that the link between individual and corporate leadership is strengthened by emphasising that a Moderator 'moderates' a council by regularly occupying its chair. While past holders of the office may preside on occasions, e.g. when the Moderator has some other role to perform, such as Committee Convenor, continuance in the chair is a recognition of the importance of all the business of the Assembly and enables a leadership akin to that of the orchestral conductor. This model applies also to the chairing of synod meetings, elders' meetings, and church meetings. Some of us believe it to be a creative opportunity, not lightly to be set aside, which holds together the inspirational and the administrative.
- 1.3.4 Others advocate another 'model'; this would see the chief role of the Moderator as inspirational, ceremonial, and representative, on occasion prophetic and visionary. Some could exercise the office in this way who would not be good at presiding over the business of the General Assembly; and those who combine both kinds of gifts are sometimes constrained in the use of some of them by occupying the chair, with the necessary restriction on individual intervention. This style of leadership could be explored and developed in a variety of ways, e.g. by releasing Synod Moderators and local ministers from the chair of meetings so that they could present items of business, and offer more leadership over the substance of the issues under discussion.
- 1.3.5 On reflection, we believe that the present system can do justice to both 'models' of Moderatorship, provided that more use is made of former Moderators. This would:
- a) give the Moderator freedom not only to take a period of rest but also to leave the chair to participate in a discussion
 - b) free the Assembly to elect someone whose gifts are such that he or she would not wish to be continuously in the chair on the first 'model' above
 - c) provide for the availability of skilled and experienced chairing, since the list of former Moderators is acknowledged to contain those with that particular gift.

- 1.3.6 Bearing this in mind, those former Moderators elected to be members of the General Assembly are likely to be expected to chair sessions of General Assembly, and therefore the former Moderators might wish to bear this in mind when they elect their representatives.
- 1.3.7 It is the belief of the task group that within the present structures of the United Reformed Church there is ample room and opportunity for the kind of leadership that the Church needs. Whether it will in fact be offered depends on the insight, hard work, dedication, and prayerful seeking of every member and every Council.
- 1.3.8 The task group gladly acknowledges that much of section 1.3 is heavily indebted to a report from a previous task group on leadership, presented to the 1986 General Assembly, largely written by the late Revd Principal Martin Cressey.

1.4 What does the Moderator do?

- 1.4.1 Moderate, also described as chairing, the General Assembly, the Mission Council, and some Commissions. The Moderator need not personally chair all business. However, it is essential for the Moderator to chair at least the formal and ceremonial parts of the Assembly, even if others chair the debate of routine business.
- 1.4.2 Represent – the Moderator needs occasionally to represent the United Reformed Church at public occasions such as the ceremony of Remembrance at the Cenotaph, visits of Popes, and such like. Likewise, the Moderator needs to represent the United Reformed Church by visiting local churches on behalf of the Assembly at least twelve times per year. Visiting need not include leading worship or preaching if that is not something the Moderator is able and willing to do. The task group regard these representations as essential.
- 1.4.3 Beyond these essentials, the task group regards it as desirable if the Moderator is able to offer more, according to gifts and availability, including leading worship and preaching when visiting churches, and representing the URC at various UK and international ecumenical events.
- 1.4.4 The task group note that in recent years Moderators of General Assembly have become drawn into attending many of the Assembly's committees. While this has happened with the best intentions of the Moderator being fully immersed in this aspect of the life of the United Reformed Church, the task group recommend that this is no longer a priority for the Moderator. While the Moderator remains an ex officio member of every committee, receives the agenda, papers, and minutes, and is entitled to attend, the task group recommends that the expectation that the Moderator, or Moderator-elect, or immediate past-Moderator, attend all the committees is discontinued. This would not prevent a Moderator who had the time and inclination from becoming involved, but it would remove a significant burden from many which we believe does not bring the greatest benefit to the church.

1.4.5 The task group presents this summary of the immediately preceding paragraphs:

Essential tasks for all Moderators of General Assembly	
Attending all & chairing some of General Assembly	3 weekdays, 2 weekend days per yr
Attending all & chairing some of Mission Council	1 weekday, 2 weekend days per yr
Attending the proposed Business Committee	4 weekdays per year
Representing the URC on Remembrance Sunday	1 weekend day per year
Visiting local churches	12 weekend days per year
Total	8 weekdays and 17 weekend days

Desirable and/or beneficial tasks for all Moderators of General Assembly, but not strictly essential	
International visits	Useful, but not strictly essential
Committees	Useful, but not strictly essential
URC Trust	May not require the Moderator, as represented by the Clerk and the General Secretary ¹
General Assemblies of partner churches	Useful, but not strictly essential
Visiting Resource Centres for Learning	Useful, but not strictly essential

Sporadic representations at occasional events
In recent years, these have included things like: a visit from the Pope, inductions of senior leaders in partner denominations, various 500 th anniversaries of the Reformation, the bicentenary of the arrival of LMS missionaries in Madagascar, the 100 th anniversary of the ordination of Constance Coltman, and many other similar things.
The task group propose that these invitations continue to be received by the General Secretary on behalf of the General Assembly. First refusal should normally be offered to a Moderator. Then the General Secretary shall use their discretion to find an appropriate representative of the Assembly from among the General Secretariat, the Assembly Officers, the college of former Moderators of Assembly and Synod Moderators.

¹The task group is aware that this will require a change to the constitution of the United Reformed Church Trust, if it is agreed.

- 1.4.6 The task group was particularly struck by a personal comment from a former Moderator about their sense of responsibility to moderatorial commitments in their diary when a family crisis arose. The task group wish the General Assembly to say unequivocally that the General Assembly does not expect the Moderator always to do whatever they feel the Moderatorship requires, even at the expense of family emergencies.
- 1.4.7 The task group believe that within the essential parameters set out above, each and every Moderator must, upon their election, meet with the General Secretary and the Clerk for an opportunity to discern where their particular gifts do and do not lie; the General Secretary focussing upon the wider life of the church, and the Clerk focussing on the business of the councils of the church. The purpose of such a meeting would be to:
- a) free the Moderator to best exercise the strongest of their gifts
 - b) allow the church to make appropriate alternative arrangements to cover those matters which have not been discerned as the greatest strengths of the Moderator within the time that they have available.
- 1.4.8 The task group notes that there may need to be minor adjustments to the pool of current/former Moderators from whom the Line Manager of the General Secretary is drawn in order to enable a line manager to continue to serve for a worthwhile term.
- 1.4.9 The task group is aware that during any year a number of commissions of Assembly to hear appeals/constitutional reviews/references and disciplinary process appeals, could arise. The skills and availability of a Moderator to chair these should also be discussed in the initial meeting, so that the Assembly Officers know the extent to which a Moderator would be able and willing to chair these personally, or if a former Moderator should be asked.
- 1.4.10 It is clear that arrangements for covering the day-to-day duties of the Moderator were in times past more formalised than they are today. While the United Reformed Church cannot easily work with another employer, it can and should make the best arrangements possible for those who are employed by the United Reformed Church, or those who serve the United Reformed Church as stipendiary ministers, in the same way as it would, for instance, for those on parental leave or long term sick leave. These should be agreed between the pastorate (where relevant), synod (where relevant), and the General Secretariat on behalf of the Assembly, including appropriate financial arrangements.

Draft resolution one

Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly affirms the vision, nature, scope, and responsibilities of the Moderator of General Assembly, as set out in sections 1.1 to 1.4.10 of this report.²

1.5 Possibilities for the number of Moderators and the length of time that they might serve

² The reference will be to the pages in the eventual published format.

- 1.5.1 The task group has listened very carefully to all the discussion in the United Reformed Church on possibilities for the number of Moderators and the length of time they serve. We set them all out below, with our best efforts to assess them.
- 1.5.2 *Option A* – Two Moderators serving for three or more years. This option would give a huge amount of continuity to the United Reformed Church and its relationships with ecumenical partners. However, there have been difficulties in securing nominations of people to serve a two-year term, and the task group is unconvinced that increasing the term would make the securing of nominations easier. Furthermore, the task group concluded that such an option would really need to become an employed post, which would have huge implications legally, ecclesiological, financially, and practically. As with all options involving two Moderators, it prevents an elder serving alone. When the system changed to prevent elders serving alone as Moderator it took away one specific and very important thing in the United Reformed Church that an elder could do alone. The task group believe that this option precludes too many people who clearly possess the gifts and calling to serve as Moderator from doing so, and we believe that to be a restriction upon the action of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the task group does not recommend this option.
- 1.5.3 *Option B* – One Moderator to serve for three or more years. The task group does not recommend this option for the same reasons as it does not recommend option A, with the additional factor that this places even more power in the hands of one person.
- 1.5.4 *Option C* – Two Moderators to serve for two years. Initially the status quo has much to commend it, allowing ministers and elders to serve together, modelling collaboration, and providing two heads to think things through. However, the task group is continually drawn back to the fact that it is becoming very difficult indeed to secure nominations, especially of elders, of people willing to serve for a two-year term. As with all options involving two Moderators, it prevents an elder serving alone. The task group therefore does not recommend this option.
- 1.5.5 *Option D* – One Moderator to serve for two years. The advantage of this option is that it offers some of the continuity sought under options A and B, but it remains the case that it is still difficult to secure nominations, and that it could increase the power of one individual. The task group therefore also does not recommend this option.
- 1.5.6 *Option E* – Two Moderators to serve for two years on a staggered system, whereby each General Assembly elects a Moderator to serve for two years, alternately an elder and a Minister of Word and Sacraments/CRCW, so that the pairing changes every year. This has the advantage of one Moderator building experience, while the other Moderator is more experienced. However, this will destroy any sense of continuity, and the Moderatorial team will continually need to be rebuilt. As with all options involving two Moderators, it prevents an elder serving alone. The task group therefore does not recommend this option.

- 1.5.7 *Option F* – Two Moderators to serve for one year. This option has much the same reasons to commend it as option C. As with all options involving two Moderators, it prevents an elder serving alone. The task group therefore does not recommend this option.
- 1.5.8 *Option G* – a different option has been suggested that the Assembly elect a panel of three Chairs to share between them chairing of the meetings, leaving the Moderator free to undertake other aspects of the role. As this proposal separates the two aspects of the Moderatorship that the task group believes it right to hold together, as outlined in section 1.3, the task group therefore does not recommend this option.
- 1.5.9 *Option H* – one Moderator serving for one year. The task group recommend this option for these reasons:
- a) it is most appropriate for an annual Assembly to have a Moderator serving until the close of the next Assembly
 - b) it allows elders to serve alone, thus avoiding any possibility of the perception that they cannot serve without the accompaniment of a Minister
 - c) it is likely to secure the widest and most inclusive pool of nominees
 - d) when there are two Moderators they look on each other as close working partners and may develop a very strong collegueship. If this yoking were unavailable because the Moderator were working solo, it is at least possible in that situation that the Moderator would develop a closer working relationship with the General Secretary, and perhaps also with the Clerk, than is necessary currently. It is therefore possible that electing one Moderator would give the Church an even closer co-ordination between the ongoing service of Church House and the representative work of the Moderator than our present system promotes.
- 1.5.10 In order to make this system as helpful as possible, the task group propose that:
- i) each synod be permitted to nominate one minister and one elder each year, to allow elders the greatest chance of getting onto the ballot paper at General Assembly
 - ii) that every year the ballot be open to both elders and ministers for election. To restrict a particular year to either candidate may result in the Church telling a very good candidate, potentially in the absence of other candidates, that they are not able to stand this year, which seems to the task group to be an attempt to restrict the Holy Spirit
 - iii) that a “college” of former Moderators be developed, so that the gifts of former Moderators can be utilised to fulfil needs identified in paragraph 1.4.5 above in a more systematic way. Such a college may wish to meet together occasionally in order that the wisdom of former Moderators is not lost.
- 1.5.11 The balance between the option presented in 1.5.10 and a possible alternative 1.5.11 is finely balanced. There is a very genuine question of whether the complementarity and parity of ministers and elders is better represented by a ballot paper open to both each year or having the office restricted to alternate years for each ministry, i.e. alternating

one elder and one minister each year. If the General Assembly feels that the balance lies better with alternation that may be moved as an alternative motion.

Draft resolution two

Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly agrees that there shall be one Moderator of General Assembly serving for one year, as set out in paragraphs 1.5.9 and 1.5.10, and instructs the Clerk to prepare amendments to the Rules of Procedure to effect this, to be presented to a future meeting of Mission Council or General Assembly.

The task group is not moving an alternative, but has set out a possible alternative resolution if members of Mission Council wish to so move:

Draft resolution 2A

Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly agrees that there shall be one Moderator of General Assembly serving for one year, as set out in paragraphs 1.5.9 and 1.5.11, and instructs the Clerk to prepare amendments to the Rules of Procedure to effect this, to be presented to a future meeting of Mission Council or General Assembly.

2. Mission Council

- 2.1 Given that the General Assembly is now meeting more often, the tasks that fall to Mission Council will be smaller and more focused. Therefore, Mission Council can become a smaller and more focused group. The task group propose that each synod should have three representatives, with the option of their Moderator as one of them. This means that a synod whose Moderator is ill, on sabbatical, close to retirement, or serving in some other capacity that makes them a member of Mission Council need not lose out in its representation.
- 2.2 The United Reformed Church now has a well-established and highly effective General Secretariat, which undertakes a strategic overview of the work of the whole United Reformed Church. This means that there is less need for a Mission Council to 'check the homework' of committees. We also live in an age more digital than ever before, allowing considerable ease of electronic communications. We also remind readers that the General Assembly has already agreed to a future budget predicated upon one meeting of Mission Council.
- 2.3 It is concerning that members of Mission Council are not always members of General Assembly, making it unusual governance for someone to be a member of an executive body, but not a member of the wider body. Therefore, the task group proposes that each year the synods indicate which of their representatives to General Assembly will also represent them on the Mission Council, and any alternates be from their General Assembly representatives. So that there is continuity, synods are encouraged to send some people to General Assembly for more than one year in succession.

- 2.4 The task group reminds readers of its comments in section 17 of our report to the General Assembly 2018 (Reports to Assembly 2018, page 66).
- 2.5 In line with the decision already made by General Assembly, the task group propose that the Convenor of the pastoral reference and welfare committee should not be a member of Mission Council.
- 2.6 As a commitment to efficient use of time and money, the task group propose that Committee Convenors be given explicit permission to send their apologies to Mission Council if they feel the business does not merit their presence.
- 2.7 The United Reformed Church has no wish to demotivate staff in positions of significant responsibility by excluding them from Mission Council. However, the United Reformed Church also has no desire to make staff travel hundreds of miles and use several working days when there is little on the agenda of much obvious relevance to their work. Therefore, the task group proposes that the three Deputy General Secretaries, who are members of Mission Council, are expected to attend, and that they may direct other staff members to attend when the business so requires.
- 2.8 The task group considered recommending that Mission Council meets in the Lumen United Reformed Church, adjacent to Church House. However, this is a costly option because accommodation is expensive in central London. The task group would also wish to avoid the impression that the United Reformed Church is entirely London-centric.
- 2.9 The task group notes that the General Assembly will now meet routinely at The Hayes, Swanwick, Derbyshire, and that the alternation of Mission Council meetings between Swanwick and High Leigh was broadly acceptable. Therefore, the task group recommends that Mission Council meet routinely at High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire. This is less than an hour's travel from London, and is therefore much easier for Church House staff to attend for particular business (see paragraph 2.7).
- 2.10 Mission Council might meet for one 48 hour meeting, or for two shorter time periods. Assuming reduced numbers, our best estimates of the costs of one 48 hour meeting are £17,250, and two 24 hour meetings of a total of £24,500. We believe either figure is of the order of the revised budget. The task group believes that two 24 hour meetings, one in October and one in February, would be the most efficient way to expedite business.
- 2.11 The agenda of the Mission Council will need to encompass opportunities for smaller and more technical pieces of less contentious business, urgent business, and offer committees a chance to test their ideas on a smaller audience than General Assembly.
- 2.12 When Mission Council was first set up, there was a broad vision of coordinating various aspects of the work of the church. However, in recent years Mission Council has not managed to achieve these overarching aims, and the task group notes that the General Secretariat team now undertakes the work of coordination and strategy, and does so far more effectively than anything else in recent memory. Therefore, the task group recommends that Mission Council's remit be to undertake urgent work between meetings of General Assembly, to enable the business of General

Assembly to be undertaken efficiently, and to undertake detailed work on technical matters that is better done in a smaller group.

- 2.13 The task group has returned again to the question of the name of Mission Council. There is still considerable confusion with the mission committee, and the title of Mission Council does not obviously relate closely to the Assembly. Therefore, the task group recommends that the name be changed. We have considered some possibilities:
- a) Council of Assembly
 - b) Assembly Executive
 - c) Executive Council

The task group recommend that Mission Council consider selecting one of these.

Draft resolution three

Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly agrees that, from the close of General Assembly 2020:

- a) **Mission Council shall normally meet for two 24 hour meetings, normally in October and February**
- b) **Mission Council shall normally meet at High Leigh Conference Centre**
- c) **the membership of Mission Council shall be as set out in paragraphs 2.1 to 2.7**
- d) **the name of Mission Council shall be changed to Council of Assembly/Assembly Executive/Executive Council.**

3. The future of the Mission Council advisory group and the Assembly arrangements committee

- 3.1 The Assembly arrangements committee's meetings are largely focused upon logistics, often related to the venue, and less upon the order of business. When we are using one venue every time for General Assembly, these logistical concerns will not need the same work. The equivalent logistical work for Mission Council is largely handled within the General Secretariat.
- 3.2 The Mission Council advisory group's most important contribution is the filtering, preparation, and ordering of business and planning for Mission Council.
- 3.3 The task group notes that the Assembly Officers do not all belong to any meeting other than Mission Council or General Assembly. The Assembly Officers have significant responsibility, even if it seldom needs to be exercised. Therefore, it seems to be a curious and unhelpful disjunction that there is no opportunity for them to meet together without creating an extra meeting.

- 3.4 Taking all of this into account, the task group proposes that from the close of General Assembly 2020 both the Assembly arrangements committee and the Mission Council advisory group be abolished, and replaced with a new committee. This new committee shall be a standing committee of the General Assembly, to be known as the business committee.
- 3.5 The remit of the business committee shall be to:
- a) address such logistical questions as arise which the General Secretariat cannot resolve
 - b) supervise the practical and business arrangements for the General Assembly and the Mission Council
 - c) prepare an order of business embracing all the business known to be arising
 - d) to advise the Moderator(s) on their official duties where required.
- 3.6 The composition of the business committee shall be:
- a) an independent convenor (i.e. someone other than the Moderator or General Secretary) nominated by the nominations committee, to serve for a normal four-year term
 - b) The General Secretary
 - c) the Clerk of the General Assembly
 - d) the Moderator(s) of the General Assembly
 - e) the Treasurer
 - f) the Moderator(s)-elect
 - g) the immediate past Moderator(s)
 - h) Two other people nominated by the nominations committee to represent something of the breadth and diversity of the United Reformed Church. One for two years in first instance, the other for three years in first instance, then on normal four-year terms.

The Officers of Assembly shall retain their existing responsibilities, even though they happen to meet within the business committee.

The General Secretary shall be the Secretary of the business committee and may be assisted in this task by such officers and/or support staff as they deem fit.

The Convenor of the business committee shall be an officer of the General Assembly, as the Convenor of the Assembly arrangements committee is at present, because urgent work between meetings often relates to the General Assembly itself.

- 3.7 All committees shall be asked to bring a report on the previous twelve months' work to each Assembly as a retrospective matter of formal report. Each committee shall be encouraged to bring resolutions about new work as and when these are ready. Committees should be encouraged not to bring resolutions which simply reaffirm existing work, because these can take valuable time for little gain. Therefore, the task group proposes a change to the Standing Orders, namely that under Standing Order 5.6 an additional sentence be added:

'5.6.6 simply reaffirms existing work'

Draft resolution four

Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly agrees that, from the close of General Assembly 2020:

- a) the Assembly arrangements committee and the Mission Council advisory group shall be discharged and abolished
- b) General Assembly offers its thanks to all who have served on these two bodies
- c) A new standing committee of General Assembly, to be known as the business committee, shall be established, with a membership and remit as set out in paragraphs 3.5 and 3.6.

Draft resolution five

Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly agrees that, from the close of this meeting an additional sentence be added to the Standing Orders:

'5.6.6 simply reaffirms existing work'

4. Possible options for the future of the role of Clerk of General Assembly

4.1 Background

- 4.1.1 The role comes into the United Reformed Church from the Presbyterian Church of England tradition, where the Clerk (an honorary post) dealt with procedural matters, and the full-time General Secretary dealt with operational and managerial matters. In the discussions to form the United Reformed Church it was agreed, against the advice of then office-holders, that the two roles should be combined in the General Secretaryship. However, the United Reformed Church came to separate out the two once more, seeing the wisdom of separating the roles of offering procedural advice, and of making operational, managerial, and pastoral decisions; not least because the pastoral decisions may at times conflict with the procedural advice.
- 4.1.2 It is also important to be aware that each Clerk and each General Secretary will always shape the role to suit their particular gifts, skills, and calling. The Clerk and the General Secretary's terms of office normally overlap in such a way that they do not both change post holder at the same time. The General Secretary is also the permanent Deputy Clerk. We also note that when the present Clerk was appointed in 2014, there were not a large number of candidates keen to take on the role.
- 4.1.3 Michael Hopkins' term as Clerk is due to end at the end of General Assembly 2024, so while a search for a successor need not begin until 2022/3, the issues raised here indicate that the matter requires significant consideration before then.

4.2 Issues

4.2.1 The Clerk is routinely a member of or in attendance at:

United Reformed Church Trust
Assembly arrangements committee
Mission Council advisory group
Law and polity advisory group
MIND (disciplinary and incapacity processes advisory group)
Mission Council
General Assembly

4.2.2 Some of these meetings, especially Mission Council and General Assembly, carry a heavy workload in the preparation of material.

4.2.3 In addition, the Clerk may be involved in particular pieces of work, such as the task group on the future of General Assembly.

4.2.4 The Clerk also has a significant role in appeals, constitutional reviews, and references. These are sporadic in nature. Four have arisen within a six month period recently, while before that they arose at intervals of one every year or two. The time required can vary enormously, depending upon the nature of the case.

4.2.5 All of this means that the Clerk's role is necessarily one of the Church's most demanding roles upon a volunteer. It should also be noted that in a small and numerically shrinking Church, the number of people able and willing to undertake the role is rapidly diminishing, and hence the current pattern may not be sustainable *ad infinitum*.

4.3 Options for the future

Option one – A job-share between two people

Pro: would lessen the workload on any individual, and therefore may be easier to recruit.

Con: having two people who offer advice may result in different advice being given on the same issue, or an excessive delay while there was always consultation, which could of itself become inefficient. Moving towards clerkship by committee would be a disaster for the Church; the role requires one person to be able to offer definitive advice quickly.

Option two – Making it a part-time scoped/employed role

Pro: would be a realistic expectation of the current work involved.

Con: would involve expense. If it was a stipendiary minister, it would create difficulties for them being able to move to another pastorate, as they would be restricted to a certain percentage of time.

Option three – Making it a full-time role

Pro: would also bring relief on a number of other administrative pinch points, not least administrative work falling to the General Secretary.

Con: would be very expensive, and would not be good use of another ordained minister, if it is a minister, given shortages thereof. It could become a loose cannon kind of job if it became full-time – and one would run into issues about the roles of the General Secretariat and the Clerk.

Option four – Removing the limit to the number of terms a post-holder could serve

Pro: would give greater flexibility, would increase possibilities for a very specialist role, and would bring into line with Assembly appointed ministerial posts. There can be much wisdom in termed posts, but that need not imply an arbitrary limit to the number of terms.

Con: would be unusual for a volunteer role, and could result in making it harder to replace someone by them holding office for a longer time.

Option five – Merging the role with that of the General Secretary

Pro: would remove the difficulty of finding an able and willing volunteer.

Con: would remove the separation of procedural and operational/pastoral, and would add considerably to the workload of the General Secretary. It would recreate an experience that turned out not to work. It could also put too much power in the hands of one individual. There is probably good discipline, as well as at its best very good support, in having the two separate roles to support one another and act as a check and balance against one another. A dictatorial General Secretary who was also the Clerk and got to determine procedural matters as they saw fit, could become quite a dangerous character.

Option six – Creating the role of Assistant Clerk

Pro: would be clearer demarcation than a job share, and may give people experience of the role to help create a pool of possible successors if done for a year or two at a time. It would need to be for particular events or meetings, and would need to provide demonstrable reduction in workload. It might also provide sickness/holiday cover.

Con: as in option one, there are some risks of conflicting advice, although this is lessened; it also adds an additional person to General Assembly and Mission Council. It would also need careful handling with the very good Minutes Secretary, who was recently recruited and to whom care should be taken not to give offence.

Believing that option six presents few difficulties, the task group commends this as a path that the Church could test, with the following resolution:

Draft resolution six

Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly asks the nominations committee to seek an Assistant Clerk, who would serve in the first instance for two years from January 2020.

As another way forward, the task group proposes a resolution that embodies option four.

Draft resolution 6A

Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly resolves that the Clerk may serve for an initial term of up to six years, renewable for further terms of up to four years [without any ceiling on the number of such terms].

Draft resolutions

Draft resolution one

Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly affirms the vision, nature, scope, and responsibilities of the Moderator of General Assembly, as set out in sections 1.1 to 1.4.10 of this report.³

Draft resolution two

Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly agrees that there shall be one Moderator of General Assembly serving for one year, as set out in paragraphs 1.5.9 and 1.5.10, and instructs the Clerk to prepare amendments to the Rules of Procedure to effect this, to be presented to a future meeting of Mission Council or General Assembly.

Draft resolution 2A

Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly agrees that there shall be one Moderator of General Assembly serving for one year, as set out in paragraphs 1.5.9 and 1.5.11, and instructs the Clerk to prepare amendments to the Rules of Procedure to effect this, to be presented to a future meeting of Mission Council or General Assembly.

Draft resolution three

Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly agrees that, from the close of General Assembly 2020:

- a) Mission Council shall normally meet for two 24 hour meetings, normally in October and February**
- b) Mission Council shall normally meet at High Leigh Conference Centre**
- c) the membership of Mission Council shall be as set out in paragraphs 2.1 to 2.7**

³ The reference will be to the pages in the eventual published format.

- d) the name of Mission Council shall be changed to Council of Assembly/Assembly Executive/Executive Council.

Draft resolution four

Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly agrees that, from the close of General Assembly 2020:

- a) the Assembly arrangements committee and the Mission Council advisory group shall be discharged and abolished
- b) General Assembly offers its thanks to all who have served on these two bodies
- c) A new standing committee of General Assembly, to be known as the business committee, shall be established, with a membership and remit as set out in paragraphs 3.5 and 3.6.

Draft resolution five

Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly agrees that, from the close of this meeting an additional sentence be added to the Standing Orders:

'5.6.6 simply reaffirms existing work'

Draft resolution six

Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly asks the nominations committee to seek an Assistant Clerk, who would serve in the first instance for two years from January 2020.

Draft resolution 6A

Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly resolves that the Clerk may serve for an initial term of up to six years, renewable for further terms of up to four years [without any ceiling on the number of such terms].

Guidance for group discussion

Groups A and B to start with resolutions one, two (including 2A) and three in that order.

Groups C and D to start with resolutions three, one and two (including 2A) in that order.

Groups E and F to start with resolutions four, five and six (including 6A) in that order.

Groups G and H to start with resolutions six (including 6A), four and five in that order.

Any group that has addressed the questions assigned may go on to consider the rest of the list in any order they wish.