

Paper N2

Matters referred to synods

Task Group on General Assembly

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Convenor valmorrison7@btinternet.com General Secretary john.proctor@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, gives final approval to four matters referred from General Assembly to synods: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To make the number of synod representatives at General Assembly equal – to be, for the present, sixteen for each synod.2. To introduce some flexibility to the 50 to 50 ministerial/lay divide – requiring at least a third of each synod’s representation to be ministerial (this term includes CRCWs) and at least a third to be elders or lay.3. To include the synod moderators in the synod figures above, if their synods so wish, rather than giving them a place in Assembly in their own right.4. To excuse the Convenor of pastoral reference and welfare from membership of Assembly.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Arrangements for General Assembly from 2020 onwards.
Main points	As resolution.
Previous documents	Task group report to General Assembly, Nottingham, 2018.
Consultation has taken place with...	All synods

Summary of impact

Financial	Part of the reason for the task group’s work was to manage the General Assembly within budget.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	No direct impact from these changes.

1. General Assembly, meeting in Nottingham in July 2018, resolved to adopt the following amendments to the structure of the URC:

1.1 To make the number of synod representatives at General Assembly equal – to be, for the present, 16 for each synod.

1.2 To introduce some flexibility to the 50 to 50 ministerial/lay divide – requiring at least a third of each synod’s representation to be ministerial (this term includes CRCWs) and at least a third to be elders or lay.

Current version of section two (6)(a) of the structure:

The General Assembly ... shall consist of:

(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).

Proposed new version of section two (6)(a):

The General Assembly ... shall consist of:

(a) **Such number of representatives of synods as the General Assembly shall from time to time determine. (At present this number shall be 16 per synod, to produce a total of 208 synod representatives). Within each synod’s representation, at least one third shall be ministerial and at least one third elders or lay;**

1.3 To include the synod moderators in the synod figures above, if their synods so wish, rather than giving them a place in Assembly in their own right.

Current version of section two (6)(c and d):

The General Assembly ... shall consist of:

(c) The Moderators of the General Assembly and of the synods, and such other officers of the General Assembly as the General Assembly shall from time to time determine (The Assembly has determined that the Clerk of Assembly and the General Secretary shall be members of Assembly);

(d) Where the Moderator of synod is an officer of the Assembly, the synod concerned shall appoint a substitute as its representative;

Proposed new version of section two (6)(c and d):

The General Assembly ... shall consist of:

(c) **As above, without the words ‘and of the synods’;**

(d) **To be dropped.**

Comment: Synod Moderators may be included in the synod representation, if their synods wish. If a Moderator were on sabbatical, for example, or unwell, a synod would be free to appoint someone else. Thus Moderators are no longer to be mentioned in (c). Then (d) becomes unnecessary, because a synod could simply appoint someone else, if its Moderator were coming to Assembly in another role.

N.B. There will need to be some relabelling of paragraphs if (d) disappears. This does not need a vote. It will be sorted out once the substance of any changes has been agreed.

1.4 To excuse the Convenor of pastoral reference and welfare from membership of Assembly.

Current version of section two (6)(e):

The General Assembly ... shall consist of:

(e) The convenor of each of the standing committees of the General Assembly;

Proposed new version of section two (6)(e):

The General Assembly ... shall consist of:

(e) The convenor of each of the standing committees of the General Assembly, apart from the pastoral reference and welfare committee;

2. These changes to the structure of the URC were referred to the synods, with a response date of 31 March 2019.
3. No synods have asked that any of these changes 'be not proceeded with'.
4. One synod, Wessex, spent much time talking about the first of these four changes, and eventually decided not to resist it, as that might appear to indicate support for the status quo. They did, however, resolve in the following terms, and if requested, the Synod Clerk would be willing to explain their concern to Mission Council.

“Wessex Synod recognises the imperfections of the current system of allocating numbers of representatives to General Assembly between the Synods, but is not convinced that the proposed solution is the best way of addressing the issue. Wessex Synod therefore requests General Assembly to consider alternative proposals to address this matter.”
5. Since the above was the response of only one synod, the task group adheres to its original recommendation and presents the four changes for formal approval, so that clear arrangements for 2020 may be made.
6. The task group would be willing, if so directed by Mission Council, “to consider alternative proposals to address the matter”, and it would hope to report back in the autumn of this year. Any further changes to these clauses of the structure could not then take effect before the 2021 Assembly.