

Paper 02

Tenure of Assembly appointed stipendiary Ministers of Word and Sacraments

Human resources advisory group

Basic information

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Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Stipendiary Ministers of Word and Sacraments serving in 'Assembly appointed' roles at Church House shall be appointed for a period not exceeding seven years renewable for successive terms of not more than five years each.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To clarify the number of terms a stipendiary Minister of Word and Sacraments occupying an Assembly appointed role may serve.
Main points	The existing rules are unclear.
Previous relevant documents	Paper U2 Mission Council November 2018.
Consultation has taken place with...	The Clerk Deputy General Secretary (mission).

Summary of impact

Financial	Possible reduction in recruitment costs.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

1. The time is long past when all the 'Assembly appointed' roles at Church House were held by Ministers of Word and Sacraments. The majority are now occupied by lay staff in an employment relationship with the URC.
2. Employment legislation means that, in most cases, employment cannot be ended just because a 'term' has ended. This fact was acknowledged at Mission Council in September 2000.
3. This creates an anomaly whereby a lay person may continue indefinitely in a role but a stipendiary minister is subject to a 'termed' appointment which normally comes to an end not later than the end of the second term.
4. This can be problematic when that minister is deeply involved in a particular piece of work or programme and continuity is desired; when that minister is doing a particularly fine job in their role; and sometimes when a minister comes close to retirement and may be unlikely to secure a new role for a matter of a year or two.
5. However, the practice is subject to some variation and appointments have, on occasion, been extended beyond the end of the second term.
6. This paper seeks to clarify the position.
7. Paper U2 Mission Council November 2018 addressed the tenure of the General Secretary. This paper was drafted in good faith, but it is now clear that the terms for other Assembly appointed ministers are not as clear as its author understood at the time.
8. In November 2018 Mission Council (paper U2) passed the resolution:
'Mission Council amends paragraph 5.1 of the Rules of Procedure to read as follows: The General Secretary, who shall be a minister of the United Reformed Church, shall be appointed for a period of seven years renewable for successive terms of not more than seven years each.'
9. Paper U2 (Mission Council November 2018) rehearses the reasons why it may be desirable to renew the General Secretary's appointment successively.
 - a) The pool of people available to be General Secretary is limited, and is diminishing as the number of ministers (and members) continues to decrease.
 - b) Given the increased retirement age, and the likelihood that this will further increase, it is more likely than it once was that someone would be appointed General Secretary at an age when they would be able to offer longer service than two seven year terms, if they and the church both wanted to.
 - c) Were someone to finish two terms less than five years before their retirement date, perhaps significantly less than five years before, it would put them in an awkward position for seeking a pastorate for only a very short time.
 - d) Some synods are now moving away from fixed terms for URC Ministers serving in LEPs, even where this causes difficulties with our ecumenical partners;
 - e) It is now regarded as bad employment practice to limit the length of time a post holder can serve when both the post and the funding are continuing, and all parties are happy with the performance of the post holder. The General Secretary is not an employee, but that should not be a reason not to follow best practice.

10. Those reasons are equally valid for all stipendiary ministers serving at Church House.
11. Synod Moderators are appointed for an initial term of up to seven years with the possibility of renewal for successive terms of not more than five years.
12. The resolution offered here seeks to clarify the position regarding the renewal of fixed term appointments for stipendiary Ministers of Word and Sacraments serving in Assembly appointed roles.