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General Assembly 2012

Consultation on the Book of Reports

The Assembly Arrangements Committee and Mission Council indicated earlier in the year that they would be grateful for comments from individuals, churches and synods regarding the contents and distribution of the Book of Reports on the basis of the options set out below. In 2010 the Book of Reports was circulated to churches on a CD-rom, with hard copies sent only to the members of Assembly, and the Committee received many complaints, including resolutions from two Synods. These complaints have been heard. This paper sets out some options and invites further suggestions and responses.

Crucial to this discussion is the question, what is the Book of Reports for? Traditionally, the United Reformed Church has answered the question in this way:

- It is a vital tool for communication between the Assembly and the churches.
- It is a vehicle for accountability, containing a report of the activities of all committees and groups since the previous Assembly.
- It fulfils constitutional and statutory requirements, giving notice of new policies and procedures, proposed amendments to existing governing documents, and the Trustees' Report and Annual Accounts.
- It contains proposals for the future, including the background materials necessary to enable the Assembly to make good decisions.

It is important that all of this material should be easily obtainable to anyone who wants it. It is essential that it be provided to every member of Assembly. But does the Book in its familiar form really serve the needs of the local churches? How might we improve our communications and enable churches and Synods to grapple with Assembly issues in advance, so that lively discussion can take place across the denomination in preparation for Assembly? Here are some options for your consideration, together with their cost implications. The list is not exhaustive and your further ideas would be most welcome.

Option 1 (cost £33,330) (N.B. the total budget for Assembly is £300,000)

All of the material is published in a single Book of Reports which is sent to all churches and Assembly members. The contents are also posted on the URC website.

Option 2 (£27,300 – does not include the cost of additional staff time required)

A complete hard copy of the Book of Reports is sent to all Assembly members. The contents are posted on the URC website. Anyone else wishing to have a hard copy may order one (£30). A user-friendly booklet outlining the major items coming for Assembly decision is prepared and sent to every church in February as a discussion tool for church meeting and Synods.

Option 3 (Also around £27,300 plus the same amount of staff time, reduced postage costs)

A slimmer Book of Reports contains the forward-looking documents: programme development, strategy and new policies and procedures. It is sent to all Assembly members. Its contents are posted on the URC website. Copies are available to anyone else at cost (£15). A second volume

contains things like the standing orders, the Trustee's Report and Accounts, the Nominations report, and amendments to the disciplinary process. This too is sent to every Assembly member, posted on the website, and offered for sale (£15), in the expectation that many local churches would wish to have a copy of Part I but would be content to access Part II online, thus reducing costs. As in Option 2, a user-friendly booklet outlining the major items coming for Assembly decision is prepared and sent to every church in February as a discussion tool for church meetings and Synods.

Option 4 (£19,500)

As in 2010, a hard copy of the Book of Reports is sent to all Assembly members with the contents posted on the URC website. A CD-rom is sent to the churches.

In September 2011 the Assembly Arrangements Committee noted that consultation with Synods was being undertaken on the above basis. AAC also noted that the Finance Committee had indicated that it did not favour the issue of hard copy Book of Reports to all local churches at a cost of about £35k. The Assembly Arrangements Committee agreed to indicate to Mission Council that such expenditure could not be met from within the existing Assembly budget. A report will be made to Mission Council on proposals that have come forward from Synods. On that basis a proposal will be put to Mission Council as how best to proceed.