

# Paper M3

General Secretariat

Hearing God more clearly

United Church 2015  
Church 2015  
Reformed Church 2015  
Church 2015



# Paper M3

## General Secretariat Hearing God More Clearly

### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	John Proctor, General Secretary <a href="mailto:john.proctor@urc.org.uk">john.proctor@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Take note
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None at present</b>

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	The work of the Church's committees; reflecting on what it costs and what it achieves.
<b>Main points</b>	Convenors seem ready to make limited savings, but see no great prospect of radical change.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Mission Council, May 2015: Paper S2, and draft Minute 15/24.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Committee convenors, who have in some cases consulted their members. Medium Term Strategy Group (which includes the treasurer).

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	See the paper itself.
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	Very little.

# Hearing God More Clearly

1. Following discussion at Mission Council in May 2015, the General Secretary sent the following note to committee convenors:

“I am writing to ask how your committee might be able to save money, in the hope that savings could be directed to supporting the Assembly. Here are some things we might want to consider ...

- hold fewer meetings, especially of big committees
- shorten meetings, especially of committees that regularly meet overnight
- gather smaller numbers of people around committee tables
- merge programme committees. Could we compress our work into three main committees?
- hold some meetings by video-conferencing or conference phone-call
- do more of our business by email circulation rather than by meeting
- make more use of task groups, which would conclude when their work was done
- allow more responsibility to be carried by individuals, rather than depend so heavily on meeting

“There are many positives in a committee system, and we have learned to make it work pretty well. But Mission Council has asked us to think how many of the current benefits we can keep, within the context of a tighter committee budget.”

2. The responses can be summarised as follows:

- 2.1 There is no clear case for Discipleship mutating into a single large committee, in the way that Mission did a few years ago. There is some resistance too to Admin and Resources doing this.
- 2.2 There is some readiness to shrink the membership of a number of committees. If numbers shrink, we shall rely, of course, on people attending well.
- 2.3 Some committees would be willing to reduce the number or extent of their meetings.
- 2.4 There may be scope for some restructuring in the handling of ministerial welfare – the area where Pensions meets Maintenance of the Ministry and Pastoral Reference; also in the general area of Finance, Investment and Trusteeship.
- 2.5 There is a general drift towards increasing use of email. The people who think this method will never work are gradually being outnumbered by those who find that it can work very well for tasks of a certain kind.
- 2.6 All of this feels like a fractional saving – perhaps a quarter of the overall outlay – rather than a dramatic and immediate shrinking of costs.

3. If we want major and immediate saving, we must challenge some of the above. On the other hand, if we accept all the above for now, we may still have started a process that will continue for a while. New attitudes and opportunities may yet emerge within a year or two, and if we are alert for savings, we may find there are many to make.
4. There is therefore a case for supporting the suggestions that convenors have already made, and encouraging committees to follow them through. Meanwhile, if the development of Church House brings new potential for virtual meeting, we may find that much time and travel can be saved by some committees on some occasions.
5. So, as a next stage, we invite committees to reflect on the following:
  - are we there to get work done, or to be representative;
  - if the former, can we work smarter? If the latter, what are we representing and does it need to be represented in this particular way;
  - does our pattern of working foster agility and creativity? If not, how can we change it so that it does;
  - how do we look on the staff who work with our committee – mainly with trust or mainly with caution? Is the committee more of a support group for the work they do or a protection against our relying too heavily on them;
  - and if our committee were to stop entirely, what pieces of its work would need to be done, and who would get them done? What difference would it make if the committee did stop, and if these people then took up the tasks?
6. Further, we wonder whether there is a case for doing without the spring Mission Council in Assembly years.
7. The report back to Mission Council on this matter is not due until 2016. We suggest that a discussion needs to be held then, rather than now.